# Introduction

On behalf of the Online Learning Consortium and our Editorial Board I invite you to read and enjoy the final issue of the journal under the name Journal of Asynchronous Networks (JALN). As you have probably noticed, Sloan-C , our sponsoring organization, very recently underwent a name change to become the Online Learning Consortium (OLC). With this organizational transition we also decided to take the opportunity to re-envision the identity of the flagship publication of OLC. Much has changed since the founding of Sloan-C and JALN but our focus on advancing the scholarship, theory, and practice of online learning remains. For those reasons and with the support of our Editorial Board and the board of OLC we are pleased to announce our new name: *"Online Learning."* Stay tuned for additional updates and news with the release of our next issue.

This final edition of JALN features a collection of articles on topics critical to advancing our understanding of online education. These papers apply a variety of methods to investigate important issues that shape how learning occurs online. The articles in this issue examine new environments such as massive open online courses, as well as traditional online and mobile learning formats and provide guidance on critical issues such as assessment, the design of online discussions, and the overall quality of online course dynamics.

As interest in new forms of online education continues to grow we are very pleased to present a cutting edge paper by Heng Luo, Anthony Robinson, and Kae-Young Park that investigates important questions around peer grading in massive open online courses. This article is one of the first of its kind to provide empirical evidence in relation to reliability, validity, and student attitudes toward peer-grading in MOOCs. Results are contrary to some of the popular perceptions that peer grading in MOOCs is unpopular or ineffective. Based on an analysis of more than 1800 peer graded assignments the authors conclude that the students in the course they investigated were able to provide feedback that was relatively reliable and consistent with that of the instructor. They also found that a majority of students felt that peer grading was fair and should continue to be used. The authors conclude with essential recommendations for the design and implementation of peer assessment in massive open online courses. This article will be of great value to researchers, MOOC instructors, as well as instructional designer working in these environments.

Understanding online learning hinges on better knowledge of the discursive practices that occur in mediated environments. A set of four articles provides us with new insights into the definition, roles, effects, and limitations of online discussion. William James Fear and Andrew Erikson-Brown contribute a narrative review that identifies areas of consensus within the literature on the key factors for successful asynchronous discussion concluding that the facilitation of peer-peer discussion is considered the key element with the caveat that online discussions are necessary but not sufficient to online education. Delving deeper into this topic

Martha Snyder and Laurie Dringus provide a multifaceted analysis of metacognition as evidenced in threaded discussion and conclude that student -led discussion facilitates the development of core components of meta-cognition when appropriately managed by online instructors. This article represents hard-won progress in our understanding of metacognition and how to support it in online environments.

Also in this line of inquiry Robert Jorczak and Danielle Dupuis investigated the effects of online discussion on learning outcomes and include findings that suggest asynchronous peer-to-peer discussion can be more effective than traditional classroom lecture-discussion. Looking more deeply into the design of such instructional dialogue Ginger Sue Howell, Autumn Sutherlin, Usen Akpanudo, Laura James, and Mengyi Chen examined the effects of structured divergent prompts on knowledge construction based in online discussion. They extend the general results that online discussion may be more effective and explain how certain kinds of prompts (focal and brainstorm) lead to higher levels of knowledge construction. Together, this collection of articles provides a useful contribution to the literature on dialogic approaches to learning in online environments.

Stepping back from the focus on discussion Leanne Dzubinski provides a qualitative analysis of a multi-national, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural online course in which she seeks to understand the elements of teaching presence necessary to support a diverse student population. As do Snyder and Dringus, Dzubinski also references the Community of Inquiry (and my own research into this analytic model) in an investigation that utilizes in-depth interviews to provide a richer and more nuanced understanding of course dynamics. Moving beyond evidence reflected in discussions activities alone the author provides an analysis of multiple forms of interaction and concludes that supporting student confidence, affirming student voice, and the strategic use of groups can help create a climate of safety conducive to effective learning. Dzubinski also provides a brief summary of effective instructor techniques that will be helpful to others designing, supporting, or teaching online in diverse cultural settings.

As mobile devices become increasing ubiquitous it is inevitable that online learning will be carried out "on the go" and with the affordances and constraints of these devices. Or final article in this issue presents an evaluative framework for considering mobile online learning and discusses the components of substitution, augmentation, modification, and redefinition (SAMR). The goal here is to advance our conceptual thinking and the article concludes with useful suggestions for instructional designers as they consider the technical, pedagogical, and management issues related to m-learning.

Once again we hope and trust that reader will find these articles of significant value in their efforts to build, further develop, and sustain high quality online educational environments. Enjoy!

Dr. Peter Shea, Editor-in-Chief, JALN