EDITORIAL

Special Issue in Online Learning (JAEPR) – Editors' Introduction

We are pleased to publish this special issue in online learning in the second volume of the *Journal of Applied Educational and Policy Research* (*JAEPR*). There has been tremendous growth in online course delivery over the last decade. 7.1 million students enrolled in at least one online course in higher education institutions in 2013, compared to the 1.6 million in 2002. This tremendous growth in online learning, the need to offer the same level of quality in online learning in par with face to face learning, and the necessity to develop institutional policies and practices for online course delivery has established the need for research on online learning. The goal of this special issue is to advance our understanding of the particular topics involved in the context of online learning research and scholarly analysis of online learning educational policy. The request for proposals included call for manuscripts exploring asynchronous online learning, synchronous online learning, virtual schooling, massive open online courses (MOOCs), online learning technologies, pedagogical approaches in online learning, content designs in online learning, assessment approaches in online learning, and online learning implementation.

In this special issue, *JAEPR* is pleased to present four articles. Each submitted manuscript was held to rigorous standards of a double-blind, peer-review by at least three experts in the related content area before a decision was made about publication.

With online learning being such a broad field of study, in this special issue the articles focus on four specific areas: (1) Peer observation process in online teaching, (2) Online course design in teacher education, 3) Models of administration for online learning programs, and 4) Evaluation and approval constructs of K-12 online and blended courses.

Peer observation of online teaching has been an important discussion in several higher education institutions. *Cheryl Murphy* and *Elizabeth Stover*, from the University of Arkansas, describe the design process used to address barriers such as limitations of faculty, ambiguities concerning standards and processes, reviewer qualifications with peer evaluation process for online teaching, and changes in instructional practices that occur after implementation of the peer evaluation process. Results indicated that the new process adequately addressed the common concerns of time, ambiguity, and qualifications, as reviewers had favorable perceptions and reviewees were positively impacted by participation.

Drew Polly, from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, on his analysis of data from 90 elementary education undergraduate students in an online instructional design course investigated if elementary education teacher candidates were able to design effective lesson plans from this online course. While the quantitative data showed significant gains across three semesters this course was taught, the qualitative data reflected on the positive comments about the flexible nature of the course, the nature of feedback given, and the authenticity of assignments. This article has implications for the future design and research of online teacher education courses.

Phu Vu, Richard Meyer, and *Jude Cepero*, from the University of Nebraska at Kearney, investigated models of administration for online learning programs in 85 higher education institutions in the United States in their survey-based research. The authors found that the online

learning programs under the Centralized Administration model tended to be stronger than the programs under the Decentralized Administration model. The article provides recommendations for future studies related to the administration of online learning programs.

Michael Barbour, from the Sacred Heart University, *Tom Clark,* from the Clark Consulting, *Kristin DeBruler* and *Justin Bruno*, from the Michigan Virtual Learning Research Institute, reviewed existing literature related to the evaluation of online and blended learning programs and providers, and identified five dimensions for course and provider evaluation and approval which include: level of evaluation and approval, approval requirement, geographic reach, mode of instruction, and evaluation and approval procedures. In their case study, they found that there were no states that had fully developed regulations specific to blended or hybrid programs, and state policies provide limited formal measures of online learning quality.

We hope you enjoy reading this special issue, and we wish to thank the authors in this issue for their submissions and thoughtful revisions as they finalized their manuscripts for publication. We would not be able to publish this special issue without the dedicated service of the reviewers, editors, managing editor, and editor assistant. *JAEPR* welcomes dialog with prospective authors about your manuscript ideas. Please refer to our website for author guidelines as you prepare submissions. We look forward to working with you and continuing to provide rigorous scholarship in the field of education.

Sincerely,

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