

Editorial

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**International
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Research in Open
and Distance
Learning**

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Editorial

Terry Anderson
Editor, IRRODL

We are pleased to present another general issue of IRRODL to our research community, distance educators, and general readers throughout the world. This delightful general issue has a variety of themes, including instructional design for distance education, support for distributed adjunct faculty, and mobile learning.

The first research article by Simon Paul Atkinson presents a new and, I think, a very practical instructional design model for online education. His article, “Embodied and Embedded Theory in Practice: The Student-Owned Learning-Engagement (SOLE) Model,” describes the rationale for, and a good description of, a toolkit that is designed to help instructors and designers create online courses that make the most of both the technical and pedagogical affordances of the Web.

Our second research article challenges us to look beyond the hype and sales talk too often associated with online learning and to confront the challenges of high dropout and low prestige and lack of acceptance by mainstream academics. In “Head of Gold, Feet of Clay: The Online Learning Paradox,” researchers Thomas Michael Power and Anthony Morven-Gould propose a way out of John Daniel’s iron triangle of cost, accessibility, and quality by combining both synchronous and asynchronous models to create “blended” online learning design (BOLD).

Many models of distance education achieve their economy of scale and reduce costs by employing part-time adjunct faculty. Thus, they are a critical and arguably the most important component of any distance education system. However providing adequate training and support to these distributed educators has long been a challenge to distance education systems. We are pleased to publish two articles that investigate ways to support adjunct faculty. The first by Julie Shattuck, Bobbi Dubins, and Diana Zilberman is titled “Maryland Online’s Inter-Institutional Project to Train Higher Education Adjunct Faculty to Teach Online,” and it evaluates a program designed to help adjunct faculty become highly effective online teachers. The lessons learned and the interventions developed and piloted in Maryland and described in this article will be useful in guiding professional development and support units across the world. The second by Vera Dolan

is titled “The Isolation of Online Adjunct Faculty and its Impact on their Performance.” It presents the results of a grounded theory study of adjunct faculty with specific focus on the value of occasional face-to-face interactions with administrators and colleagues at the institution where they are employed. As noted above the study also reveals the need for quality professional development and support. The two articles together overview the need and present solutions to supporting these important workers in our distance education systems.

The fifth research article, “A Pedagogical Framework for Mobile Learning: Categorizing Educational Applications of Mobile Technologies into Four Types” by Yeonjeong Park, presents a pedagogical model for designing, developing, and marketing different types of mobile learning activities. The article picks up on Moore’s familiar transactional distance model and uses it to categorize the many different types of instructional activities that can be developed for mobile learning. I think all of us struggle with ways to meaningfully employ these increasingly ubiquitous tools in our work, and this article will help us develop applications that understand and maximize the technical affordances offered.

The final research article, “Delimiting the Prospect of Openness: An Examination of Initial Student Approaches to E-Learning” by Christopher Naughton, Juliette Smeed, and John Roder, reports on a study conducted in New Zealand, which shows the indifference of students to online forums when the assessment model remains individualistic and competitive. The article encourages us to consider new forms of assessment that demonstrate the value of student engagement in the learning process.

We have one Field Notes article in this edition that again focuses on mobile learning but this time with a geographic focus – Malaysia. Tina Lim, Mansor Fadzil, and Norziati Manso present a case study of the effective use of mobile learning to enhance programming in one of the world’s mega-universities. In “Mobile Learning via SMS at Open University Malaysia: Equitable, Effective, and Sustainable,” the authors demonstrate that SMS technologies have a critical role to play in the matrix of technologies and human resources needed to support effective and efficient distance education delivery.

The issue includes a book review by Wolfram Laaser of the *Economics of Distance and Online Learning: Theory, Practice and Research*, edited by W.J. Bramble & S. Panda. Economics and cost effectiveness have always been of concern to distance educators and thus this edited book is of special relevance. The summary and the critical review of the 15 chapters in this book highlight the variability and different models of distance education delivery that compete for our attention and funding in current times.

The issue concludes with two technical reviews by graduate students in Athabasca University’s Master’s of Distance Education program. The first by Tanya Elias overviews important “Universal Instructional Design Principles for Mobile Learning.” The second, “Online Videoconferencing Product Update” by Douglas Burton and Tim Kitchen updates earlier IRRODL reviews on online web conferencing products. Four new products are overviewed and

compared, thus providing invaluable information for those wishing to add a synchronous component to their distance delivery.

We trust you will enjoy these articles, pass the links and a free subscription suggestion to your colleagues, and have an opportunity to thank the many who bring you IRRODL without charge through their gifts and skills of sponsorship, scholarship, review, editing and production.

Athabasca University 

