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Introduction to the Special Issue

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Introduction to the Special Issue

As American Public University System's Vice President of Research and Development, I attend over 20 conferences per year, with a twofold purpose. First, I speak on behalf of our University to showcase internal research and innovation. Second, and perhaps most important, I attend these conferences to acquire an understanding of what others are doing in the field of online learning. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected it is imperative that we understand how others are approaching the field and learn from their endeavors.

To provide a truly global education to students, we must move outside of the North American context and understand how the rest of the world views learning and the pathways they are exploring to optimize the student experience. As such, I typically attend six to eight international conferences per year, with as a diverse as possible geographic footprint. In fulfilling this goal I discovered the International Scientific Conference on eLearning and Software for Education (eLSE) in 2009. After having two proposals accepted, my friend and colleague, Jennifer Richardson, an Associate Professor at Purdue University, and I travelled to Bucharest, Romania to present our papers.

Having not previously read any works from Romanian scholars, I was quite interested to discover what the conference would hold. While very small in numbers, I discovered that the conference was extremely rich in knowledge. In fact, I was astounded at the quality of the work that was on display; particularly the spectacularly high-quality gaming and simulation work that was being used or in development.

Another factor that makes eLSE unique can be found in the conference's mission statement: "*The purpose of the annual international scientific conference on 'eLearning and software for education' is to enable the academia, research and corporate entities to boost the potential of the technology enhanced learning environments, by providing a forum for exchange of ideas, research outcomes, business case and technical achievements.*"

All too frequently I have witnessed a division between academic and corporate entities, with one side giving little attention to the contribution that one makes to the other. At eLSE all entities are viewed as valuable partners in creating rich, dynamic experiences for learners. In addition, there is a substantial military presence at the conference, helping create another bridge between the private, public, and governmental sectors. From my perspective there is much that other organizations and conferences could learn from adoption of this philosophical framework.

Since my first eLSE, I have looked forward to the next year's conference as much as any event that is on my calendar, and watched attendance grow dramatically year after year. Conversely, the eLSE organizers have been extraordinarily welcoming to me, by encouraging me to return each year and inviting me to join the Scientific Committee; an honor that I gladly accepted. Thus, it is with great pleasure that I have organized this special issue to introduce readers to the eLSE conference. In this publication, seven articles, from the 2012 conference, are presented in two different categories, with a forward by my friends and distinguished Romanian colleagues. It is my intent that another issue will be produced following this year's conference and hope that at least some readers will be able to join us in Bucharest on April 25th and 26th of 2013. <http://www.elseconference.eu>

Sincerely,
Phil Ice, Ed.D., Editor