

September 2014

Letter from the Editor

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Recommended Citation

Layne, Melissa (2014) "Letter from the Editor," *Internet Learning*: Vol. 3: Iss. 2, Article 1.
Available at: <http://digitalcommons.apus.edu/internetlearning/vol3/iss2/1>

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Letter from the Editor

Dr. Melissa Layne

When our editorial staff posted the call for papers in early spring for this special issue, I certainly did not expect the overwhelming number of submissions we received. However, I suppose when you request articles around two highly-regarded annual reports, *Grade Change: Tracking Online Education in the United States, 2013* (Allen & Seaman, 2014) and the *NMC Horizon Report 2014 Higher Education Edition* (NMC & EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, 2014), you are bound to receive a positive response! We had a difficult time paring down to the final seven, but believe we have included an exemplary compilation of work from experts in both education and industry.

This special issue is “special” for a number of reasons. First, as previously mentioned, it is based upon two reports that are invaluable resources to those involved in the field of online teaching and learning, *Grade Change: Tracking Online Education in the United States, 2013* (Allen & Seaman, 2014) and the *NMC Horizon Report 2014 Higher Education Edition* (NMC & EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, 2014). Both reports have core commonalities that lend to their long-held credibility and widespread global attention. These commonalities include:

- addressing questions and issues common to higher education;
- rigorous data collection and analysis by experts in the field of online teaching and learning;
- consistent methodologies that allow for the tracking of the growth and development of online learning and educational technologies;
- identifying challenges and trends that ultimately impact online higher education planning and decision-making; and
- disseminating results that are widely-cited by educational and industrial researchers for the development of further studies.

Secondly, this issue of *Internet Learning* marks the debut of interactive and device responsive issue versions in addition to the print version. To view these versions, please refer to the *Internet Learning* website <http://www.ipsonet.org/publications/open-access/internet-learning> for instructions on how to download this issue (and future issues) to your desktop and other various mobile devices. This bold move to digital scholarship and publishing demonstrates our commitment to provide our readers with not only an engaging encounter with the written word, it exemplifies our dedication to “practicing what we preach” by keeping current on innovative developments in the evolving field of scholarship and publication. Therefore, I would like to thank Nicole Lea of *Sorelle Design*, South Africa who has been invaluable and instrumental in the digital transformation of this issue, American Public University System’s Holly Henry Cooper, who designed, laid out, and integrated the transformed journal into Adobe’s InDesign software, the creative

multimedia team of J. Sean Geary and Jaime Goodman from American Public University System who created the four complex interactives in our featured article, and Ty Crawford for his design of the journal's new logo.

Lastly, the works written by the authors in this issue embody a more holistic approach to online teaching and learning topics. No longer should we isolate education and industry. No longer should we limit the inclusion of conceptual works and opinion pieces from academic journals. No longer can we afford to ignore the potential that partnerships between market-driven, student-centric companies and reputable, higher education institutions can provide to both entities. Therefore, the articles included in this issue cover topics such as MOOCs, new online learning business models, gamification, interactive and blended teaching environments, data visualization and online collaborative efforts on a global scale.

The first article, *Enter the Anti-MOOCs: Reinvention of Online Learning as Social Commentary*, by New Media Consortium's Larry Johnson and Samantha Adams-Becker, discusses in depth these "high-level experiments in online learning" (a.k.a, the Anti-MOOC) as virtual spaces created to promote social interaction and commentary. In the second article, *Positioning for Success in the Higher Education Online Learning Environment*, Jeff McCafferty presents an analysis of current online learning and higher education markets in terms of identifying factors that impact the development and expansion of online learning. Britt Carr's case study, *Gamifying Course Content with Smashfact* describes Smashfact—a recently-released study-game app for faculty that increases student engagement levels by "gamifying" basic course content, thereby reducing barriers to success. Students are able to use the app on any of their devices: phones, tablets or desktop computers. Our fourth article, *Problems And Possibilities of Gamifying Learning: A Conceptual Review* by Hannah Gerber continues the exciting discussion on gamification by providing a brief overview of the concept of gamification and examines and compares gamification with edutainment and game-based learning. Gerber asserts that in its current industry-driven conceptualization, gamification will not work when implemented in educational arenas, and that to be examined and used within educational frames, gamification must be re-examined and re-conceptualized. Our fifth article, *Using Early Warning Signs to Predict Academic Risk in Interactive, Blended Teaching Environments*, by Julie Schell, Brian Lukoff and Cassandre Alvarado offers an evidence-based process for identifying characteristics correlated with student academic underachievement at the course level in blended, interactive teaching environments. *Visualizing Knowledge Networks in Online Learning* by Marni Baker-Stein, Sean York and Brian Dashew introduces the development of a framework and methodology aimed to yield a better understanding of social interactions and knowledge construction in online courses that employ both formal and informal social and cooperative learning activities. In our final article, *Integrating Online Global Collaboration* authors Zhenlin Gao and Tom Green share their account of an online, collaborative project based upon the premise that students today are instinctively collaborative, innately cooperative, and

structurally wired for small-group interaction mediated by language and an awareness of the intentionality of others. This unique project involved collaboration between students from School of Media Studies and Information Technology at Humber College in Toronto and students from the School of Animation at Shenzhen Polytechnic (SZPT) in China. As evidenced in these articles, the field of online teaching and learning is undoubtedly giving rise to a variety of exciting possibilities to greatly improve student outcomes, and those of us at *Internet Learning* are thrilled to be able to share this knowledge with our readers.

Respectfully,
Dr. Melissa Layne, Editor-in-Chief for *Internet Learning*

Note: The figures labeled as *Interactive* may be viewed by downloading the *Internet Learning Journal* app from the iOS App Store.