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Letter from the Editor

Melissa Layne
American Public University System

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Letter from the Editor

Melissa Layne, Ed.D.

Spring 2015 Issue

Spring is here, and for many of us, the weather is getting warmer, the days are longer, and plants and flowers are beginning to emerge from Mother Earth. Following the cold, dreary winter season, spring is a welcome seasonal change symbolizing brightness, growth and new developments.

Our spring issue also captures the essence of newness, progress, and change. For example, we have officially reached our 2-year anniversary mark--which in the world of publishing, is a notable accomplishment, as this symbolizes potential longevity for the journal. Second, we have also added several new interactive components including drop-down boxes, accordions, slideshows and lightboxes. Third, we have incorporated a new section entitled, “*3 Questions for an Online Learning Leader*” whereby we interview an expert in the field of online learning by asking questions around current hot topics. Lastly, we have also designed a fresh, new website that reflects our mission and further models innovative thinking around online teaching, learning, and scholarship. We also continue to expand our editorial reviewer board with world-renowned experts who have proven themselves as leaders in online scholarly research.

Although this issue of the journal is not themed, as you peruse the articles within, you will certainly notice several commonalities. Before revealing these commonalities, allow me to take the opportunity to briefly highlight the contents of each exceptionally written and insightful article.

Our first article, *Strategies for Virtual Learning Environments: Focusing on Teaching Presence and Teaching Immediacy* is written by Misha Chakraborty and Fredrick Muyia Nafukho, Texas A & M University. The purpose of this study was to establish factors identified in previous studies that positively affect learners’ engagement in virtual learning environments. The literature review highlights teacher presence and teacher immediacy in online class settings, thereby providing practitioners with proven strategies and best practices on the importance of instructor involvement in an online environment.

The second article, *Students’ Perceptions of Online Course Quality: How Do They Measure Up to the Research?* is authored by Penny Ralston-Berg, Penn State World Campus, Janet Buckenmeyer, Coastal Carolina University, Casimir Barczyk, and Emily Hixon, Purdue University Calumet. The authors of this study investigated how students’ perceptions of online course quality compared to those put forth in the Quality Matters rubric. Three

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thousand one hundred sixty students currently taking an online college-level course completed a survey that asked them to rate the importance of each QM standard restated from the student perspective. Students' ratings of each item were compared to the ranking of each item received by QM (3-Essential, 2-Very Important, or 1-Important).

Our third article, *Faculty Training and Student Perceptions: Does Quality Matter?* authors Jun Sun and Ramiro de la Rosa, from the University of Texas – Pan American, explores the relationship between faculty training in Quality Matters standards and the online course quality as perceived by students. Interestingly, whether a faculty member has participated in Quality Matters training before teaching an online course was surveyed and furthered served as the independent variable in the study.

Next, authors João C. R. Caetano, of the University of Alberta, Lisbon Portugal, and Nicolas Lori, Faculty of Medicine, University of Coimbra, Coimbra, Portugal present *Digital Information Networks and the Future of Online Learning* whereby they reflect on the development possibilities for universities that offer online teaching opportunities in Europe. The authors specifically focus on the extent to which European universities address the developmental needs established by governmental and non-governmental agencies, international economic agencies (e.g. European Union (EU), Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)), and by European associations that are invested in education and skills-training (e.g., European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU)).

Next, we debut our new, recurring section, *3 Questions for an Online Learning Leader*. This regular section will showcase the responses from an online leader addressing current hot topics in the field of online teaching, learning and scholarship. In this issue, we feature President and CEO of American Public University System, Dr. Wally Boston.

Our Featured Article, *Assessing the Degree of Homogenous Online Teaching Textbook Infancy from 1999 to 2007 Using the Immediacy Principle*, by Erik Bean is a quantitative content analysis study aimed toward examining whether independently authored online education textbooks published in the infancy of online teaching development from 1999 to 2007 including scholarly studies including a teaching technique dubbed *immediacy*. Taking into account the burgeoning field of online education and its efficacy, a secondary purpose of the study was to examine the effective transformation of scholarly knowledge to practice.

Our final article written by Carmen Elena Cirnu, *The Shifting Paradigm: Learning to Unlearn*, poses important questions around data and the valuable knowledge we can gain if we choose to use it wisely. Cirnu poignantly asks, “in order to be able to fully benefit from the enormous amount of data openly available and also of the competitive advantages that new learning may provide, do we need to learn to unlearn in order to bypass the biases already acquired? Do we need to free our minds first to be able to go further? Cirnu further

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asserts that because the knowledge-learning-power paradigm is changing, the tendency is that it is the *unlearning* that aids in relevant knowledge-power extraction.

Any compilation of articles within an academic journal tends to embrace various ontological and epistemological beliefs and assumptions. For example, each article within this issue came to me in the form of a manuscript--along with other manuscripts representing personal and institutional studies and experiences. Were the commonalities easy to spot? Upon first receiving these articles in manuscript form, I immediately noticed keywords such as, *immediacy, faculty and student perceptions of quality, teacher/instructor presence, and transforming research into professional development*. These common threads seem to indicate a common denominator and a research focus on faculty. Perhaps this focus is the result of a shift in scholarly research that reflects the notion that now that we know more about *students'* perception of online learning, it's time to shift our focus to the *instructor*. Although I may receive input from colleagues that this implication is far too general, I do indeed notice patterns between all of the articles disseminating perceptions, outcomes, and experiences and shared on a global scale that continue to provide our respective societies with rich, much--needed knowledge.

Respectfully,

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

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

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