

The Online Teaching and Learning SIG Newsletter

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From the Editors

This inaugural edition of the Online Teaching and Learning (OTL) Newsletter is a joint effort by graduate students and researchers within the AERA OTL special interest group. Our goal for this newsletter is to broaden the scope of our network through continuing education and to foster a community beyond the AERA conference. This quarterly newsletter will include current news in OTL, address issues in online education, and provide the most recent updates within the field. We hope to provide a hub for innovative ideas, bringing our community together to share ideas, collaborate, and keep up-to-date with the research and practice in online teaching and learning. In each edition we plan to include current news, featured research articles, conference updates, and news from the Online Learning Consortium. We are excited to serve as your editorial team!

Thank you!

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If you have ideas or suggestions, please contact Tugce Aldemir or Denise Nadasen.

AERA 2017 Annual Meeting

San Antonio, Texas
Thursday April 27 – Monday May 1

This year's conference theme is **Knowledge to Action: Achieving the Promise of Equal Educational Opportunity**. The OTL SIG is proud to announce 14 sessions at the 2017 Annual Meeting with a full range of posters, papers and discussions every day.

Conference Portal: <https://goo.gl/HDh17p>

OTL SIG Business Meeting – Saturday April 29th, 6:30-8:00pm at the Grand Hyatt San Antonio, Fourth Floor, Republic C. Please join us at our 2017 annual business meeting!

Current Issues and News

Study on the Cost of Online Education Spurs Discussions

A recent study addressing the investment in online education, faced criticism from the online education community. The author, Caroline Hoxby, reported that online postsecondary education is not worth the cost in tuition for students and tax payers. The claims of the paper spurred discussions regarding the rigor in online education research and faced much criticism in terms of how the data were interpreted in the study. The online education community has been inspired to further elaborate how to ensure the quality of research in online teaching and learning. The publisher has since removed the paper from the website.

OLC Corner



Online Learning is the official journal of the Online Learning Consortium. The journal has been in publication for two decades and was formerly known as JALN, the Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks. The aim of Online Learning is to promote the development and dissemination of new knowledge at the intersection of pedagogy, emerging technology, policy, and practice in online environments. Get to know OLJ [here](#), including author guidelines, call for papers, and user registration instructions. We look forward to having you as an OLJ reader and reviewing your paper submissions to OLJ.



The March issue of the Online Learning Journal published in March. This issue includes 13 articles focused on teaching and learning, more specifically, in the areas of faculty and professional development, academic integrity, accessibility, and students and community in online learning. Learn more about the issue in the [introduction](#) written by Editor-in-Chief, Dr. Peter Shea.

OLC Emerging Scholar

The Online Learning Consortium is seeking four emerging scholars in the field of online learning to occupy two year positions in the OLC Research Center for Digital Learning and Leadership. This program represents a new model for involving emerging scholars interested in online teaching and learning and evolving into teaching and research roles in the field of online

learning. Under the supervision of the Senior Director of Research & Innovation, Dr. Jill Buban, the emerging scholars will work on a variety of projects in the research and publications areas. Members will also have the opportunity to be involved in preparations for

graduate student opportunities at OLC conferences. To apply for this position, please email your C.V. and a brief statement indicating why you are interested in being an OLC Emerging Scholar to Dr. Jill Buban at Jill.Buban@onlinelearning-c.org. The application deadline is April 15th.

Alternative Credentials Study

For contemporary learners, the path to higher education degree attainment frequently involves a myriad of credit alternatives—from MOOCs and micro credentialing (badges), to non-credit bearing certificate programs and various other opportunities. As these alternatives evolve, institutions are challenged with treating these experiential learning experiences as credit-bearing.

Within this environment, the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) and The Presidents' Forum partnered with the Online Learning Consortium (OLC) to conduct a study examining the state of alternative credentials at adult learning institutions. The result is "Alternative Credentials in Higher Education: PLA 2.0.". The study offers insights into how alternative credentials are defined and used at adult learning institutions.

For the research, OLC used a multiple-case study approach offering in-depth information about the state of alternative credentials at six adult-friendly institutions in the U.S. Through a cross-study analysis, five themes emerged, including competency-based education (CBE), prior learning assessment (PLA), alternative credentials, the importance of reliable data, and traditional vs. non-traditional learning.

This report is recommended for those working in higher education, including those who work directly at higher education institutions, those who work in accrediting bodies or the government-related agencies, organizations associated with higher education, the media, and

individuals who champion alternative ways of learning. The report is available for download from [the OLC Research Center](#).

Research Highlights

The following research articles cover different aspects of online learning and teaching.

1. Why online? Perspectives, attitudes, and behind the scenes of online learning and teaching:

Bhagat, K. K., Wu, L. Y., & Chang, C.Y. (2016). Development and Validation of the Perception of Students towards Online Learning (POSTOL). *Educational Technology & Society*, 19(1), 350-359.

How do students perceive online learning? Authors of this study created a tool measuring students' perceptions of distance learning: a scale consisting of four dimensions: instructor characteristics, social presence, instructional design, and trust. Results indicated, that the POSTOL scale is a valid and reliable instrument helping in developing effective courses and materials online.

2. Online learning and teaching tools:

Kuosa, K., Distante, D., Tervakari, A., Cerulo, L., Fernández, A., Koro, J., & Kailanto, M. (2016). Interactive visualization tools to improve learning and teaching in online learning environments. *International Journal of Distance Education Technologies*, 14(1), 1-21.

What are the better tools in the distance education field? The authors of this paper investigate two interactive visualization tools for learning management systems (LMS) in order to improve learning and teaching in online courses. These tools have a chance to take traditional discussion forums to a next level of engagement and effectiveness.

3. General research on field development:

Lack, K. A. (2013). Current status of research on online learning in postsecondary education. Retrieved from <http://www.sr.ithaka.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ithaka-sr-online-learning-postsecondary-education-may2012.pdf>.

Not the newest source of information but a very concrete and clear overview on the research in online learning and teaching in the postsecondary level, including a critical and reliable literature review as well as a table with all research gathered and compared. Great source of information for a quick as well as deep look into what was done in the field up until 2013.

Innovation, Technology, & Tools

Virtual Reality: The Future of Online Education?

The concept of virtual/augmented/mixed reality has gained tremendous popularity in the recent years. The immersive experience it provides brings a new meaning to human-computer interaction. The potential benefits and the current popularity of such systems have driven several companies with deep pockets such as Google, Sony, Microsoft, Apple and many more to invest in this new market, and online education is one of the targeted fields to implement virtual reality (VR). VR can provide experiential learning experiences, immersive social interaction and collaboration, creative and strategic experiences, and integration of a social-emotional element to learning. VR technologies are assumed to eliminate the possible limitations of online education such as the lack of physical interaction with teacher and other students. Jeremy Bailenson, the founding director of Stanford University's VR Lab, explains how VR can transform online learning in his talk: <https://goo.gl/oMjNwI>. Similarly, Harvard University streamed it's one of the most popular courses, CS50, in VR. The videos gained tremendous attention from the students. Go to YouTube: <https://goo.gl/g4Yv9T> to watch the videos.

On the other hand, the integration of VR in online education can be costly. However, the innovative progress in VR has been so fast that cheaper and more applicable technologies have been produced. For example, Samsung released a relatively affordable headset called Gear VR along with some interesting educational apps. (To learn more go to:

<https://goo.gl/MjgxxH>.) You can expect to see more VR technologies in online education.