

Editorial – Volume 20, Issue 5

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[See table of contents](#)

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December – 2019

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Dietmar Kennepohl
Interim Co-editor, Athabasca University

Welcome to our fifth and final issue of 2019. This year has been marked by our regular high-level of activity with the publication of 58 research articles in addition to assorted notes, literature reviews, and book reviews. We even managed a special issue entitled “Open Universities: Past, Present, and Future” and gratefully acknowledge the time and leadership of our two guest editors, **Ross Paul** and **Alan Tait**.

Journal productivity aside, this year has also been marked by transitions at IRRODL. As you know, operating with minimal staff we have become inundated with submissions (600+ per year) and a lengthening publication queue. From May through August 2019, we took a break from accepting new manuscripts to allow us to catch up and establish a regularized publication schedule going forward. We intend to publish quarterly with approximately 40 research articles per annum. We have adjusted our internal processes, which should also shorten the submission to publication timeframe. We have also chosen to remove MP3s from the forthcoming issues in acknowledgment of newer and more sophisticated technology that is now available to assist with accessibility needs of our readers. Because of these changes, I want to thank both authors and reviewers for their patience as we transition to these new organizational procedures.

While we are on the topic of positive transitions, we have also had a very fortunate and timely addition to our team. It is my privilege and pleasure to welcome **Constance Blomgren** who is joining IRRODL as Associate Editor. Dr. Constance Blomgren is an Assistant Professor in the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies, Athabasca University who researches and teaches about OER. As the project lead for the Blended and Online Learning and Teaching (BOLT) initiative, she oversaw the redesign of graduate courses into one-credit professional learning modules for K-12 teachers. This led to the creation of podcasts and videos that contribute to the current landscape of K12 OER awareness and provide opportunity for the thoughtful development of OER teaching and learning practices. She is currently researching OER as part of a Partnership Engagement Grant through Canada’s Social Science and Humanities Research Council and is a director with the Open Education Consortium.

In this closing issue of 2019, our first paper draws attention to the digital divide experienced by displaced people around the globe. To address the barriers of access and participation for refugees, **Shah** and **Calonge** propose a frugally-engineered MOOC model with a focus is on adaptability and contextualized content.

In the next study, **Westine, Oyarzun, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Casto, Okraski, Park, Person, and Steele** investigate online familiarity, course design use, and professional development interest regarding universal

design for learning (UDL) guidelines. Results suggested that faculty members desire UDL training and offers possibilities for planning and implementing professional development in areas targeted to best meet their needs.

Pozzi, Manganello, Passarelli, Persico, Brasher, Holmes, Whitelock, and Sangrà recognize that traditional ranking of institutions do not employ characteristics of online universities and have therefore defined a set of criteria and indicators suitable to reflect the specific nature of distance education. This study used a participatory approach and ascertained that teaching and student learning experience were among the most important criteria.

Despite freedom from the restrictions of geographic location of online learning, many students still choose to study at nearby colleges. **Yoon** explores this phenomenon by using a multiple regression technique to explain the relationship between institutional factors and localized distance student enrollment patterns in the United States.

Kayaduman and **Demirel** then examine the concerns of the instructors moving from traditional to distance education in the next article. The study provides insights that can facilitate the instructors' adoption to distance education through the development of specific interventions focused on the instructors' most intense concern stages.

Microcredentials and open digital badges have become increasingly popular in education, and so this case study by **Young, West, and Nylin**, describing implementation and its benefits and effects, is both useful and timely.

In his article, **Otto** presents findings of a meta-study which critically reviewed 25 state-funded open educational resource (OER) projects located in Germany. Although the results reveal that there are many paths to OER adoption, it is certainly becoming mainstream guided by both educational research and practice.

In our *Technical Notes* section, **McGreal** (UNESCO/ICDE Chair in OER) offers us a survey of OER implementation and analysis of 13 different higher educational institutions around the globe. Organizational contexts, logistical details, as well as benefits and challenges for faculty and students are described among the different implementations with the only common thread being cost savings provided by OER.

We then provide two literature reviews. The first overview by **Fermín-González** identifies emerging trends in research on inclusive virtual education (IVE) at the higher education level and how that inclusion is conceptualized. A systematic review of a decade of scientific publications indicates the need for inclusive e-learning educational designs with greater emphasis on diversity to facilitate educational opportunity and success. The second literature review examines technology-supported peer assessment research. Through an activity theory lens, **Zheng, Chen, Cui, and Zhang** report on a rich variety of approaches and provide valuable analysis.

Finally, in our *Notes From the Field*, **Lim, Covrig, Freed, De Oliveira, Ongo**, and **Newman** offer us three clusters of constructive strategies for consideration to assist distance doctoral students to complete their dissertations.

