

THE HEART OF LEARNING: EMBRACING CHANGE IN EDUCATION WITH EMPATHY AND INNOVATION

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REFLECTION

The educational landscape is experiencing a period of transformation, shaped by advancements in technology, shifts in student demographics, and the ever-growing emphasis on well-being and inclusivity. As we navigate these changes, it is essential to reflect on the trends driving the evolution of pedagogy and institutional practices. According to Mowreader (2023) faculty and administrators are grappling with how to best implement technological tools while maintaining student engagement and academic integrity. One prominent example is the increased use of artificial intelligence (AI) in both administrative tasks and instructional design. While AI has the potential to streamline processes, it also brings challenges in ensuring ethical use and maintaining human-centered teaching. In an era where AI is rapidly transforming the educational landscape, one thing remains constant: good teaching, at its core is social. While AI offers new tools and possibilities, it does not replace the fundamental elements that define effective education.

The 2024 Higher Education Trend Watch (2024) highlights the significance of institutions attempting to improve online and hybrid learning by “serving the needs of diverse learners and promoting accessibility (para. 23)”. From hybrid learning models to mental health resources, these innovations aim to support students holistically. The emphasis on mental health and well-being is particularly relevant as institutions seek to address student stress and anxiety, especially in the wake of the pandemic. Mowreader (2023) shows a clear need for expanded mental health support, indicating that the holistic development of students must remain a core institutional priority.

This edition of *The Journal of Scholarly Engagement* reflects many of these pressing issues. The articles explore the integration of social media and new technologies in the classroom, the role of religious and spiritual support in alleviating student stress, and the

ongoing dialogue around effective teaching. They challenge us to think critically about how we can evolve as educators, not only in our methods but also in our understanding of student needs. Ultimately, the contributions in this issue are aligned with these larger conversations in education, and they offer practical insights into the challenges and opportunities ahead.

CURRENT ISSUE

The current issue of *The Journal of Scholarly Engagement* addresses several key themes relevant to today’s academic landscape: the integration of digital platforms into pedagogy, the support of students’ mental and emotional well-being, and the reflective practices of educators in navigating these changes. From social media projects that enhance learning to the role of religious support in reducing stress, the articles underscore the multifaceted nature of teaching in a rapidly changing educational environment.

The issue begins with an exploration of leveraging social media to create more engaging learning experiences. The articles that follow explore the psychological and emotional well-being of students, offering empirical insights into the role of religious support and alcohol use screening in promoting overall student health. Finally, reflections on effective teaching and character-based learning conclude this issue, reminding us of the importance of adaptability and intentionality in both K-12 and higher education.

West, Holbeck, and Archer Olson explore the potential of social media platforms like TikTok and blog posts to foster student engagement and collaboration. The authors examine several projects that integrate these platforms into higher education, addressing both the successes and challenges encountered, such as ethical concerns and alignment with course objectives. Through a reflective analysis, the study provides recommendations for educators seeking to integrate social media

effectively into their pedagogy.

Branham and Valenti focus on the impact of religious support during the critical college transition phase, this study finds a strong negative correlation between religious support and stress levels in college students. The authors argue that incorporating spiritual resources into university mental health services could improve overall student well-being and academic success, especially in faith-based institutions.

Maguire and Anderson explore how doctoral students who also teach define effective teaching. The qualitative study findings suggest that rapport, communication, and passion are the key characteristics of effective educators, offering practical insights for faculty development programs aimed at fostering these traits in emerging and established teachers alike.

Sutton details the implementation of the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test-Concise (AUDIT-C) screening on a Christian university campus. The reflective practice results demonstrated a significant improvement in the identification of students at risk for alcohol use disorders, highlighting the need for routine screening even in “dry” campus environments. Recommendations for policy and future research are provided.

Brandon and Farkas reflect on the planning and implementation of character education and virtue formation programs in higher education. The authors analyze the feedback and outcomes of these programs, offering insights into the challenges and successes encountered. They emphasize the importance of reflective practice and stakeholder engagement in creating meaningful professional learning opportunities.

Hallam, Young, and Koranda Grigg highlight the challenges faced by students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) in higher education, focusing on the need for increased educator awareness and institutional support. The authors argue that while accommodations are necessary, they are not sufficient for addressing the full range of challenges these students face. The literature review offers recommendations for creating more inclusive learning environments.

Lemster explores the challenges of transitioning between teaching in higher education and K-12 settings. In this reflective piece **Lemster** identifies key strategies for successfully navigating the

differences in student populations and instructional approaches, offering insights into how educators can adapt their practices in diverse teaching environments.

The articles featured in this issue of the *Journal of Scholarly Engagement* highlight the diverse challenges and opportunities educators face across various educational settings. From the integration of social media into college classrooms to promote engagement and collaboration, to the reflective practices that enhance teaching across K-12 and higher education, the articles presented collectively underscore the importance of flexibility, innovation, and empathy in teaching. The research on religious support for stress relief and the use of tools like AUDIT-C for early alcohol detection on college campuses reflects the growing need to address student well-being holistically. These studies remind us that student success is not just a matter of academic achievement but of mental, emotional, and social support.

As we continue to explore the intersection of pedagogy, technology, and student needs, it becomes increasingly clear that all stakeholders in education: students, educators, families, administrators, policymakers, and the community must evolve alongside the changing educational landscape. This collective effort is essential for fostering an environment that supports holistic student development and responds effectively to diverse learning needs. Whether through enhancing educator awareness for students with autism or refining professional learning opportunities for character development, this issue showcases the value of reflective practice. The themes discussed here point to a future where educators are not just content providers but compassionate guides, capable of adapting to the complex and dynamic needs of their students.

References

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