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About This Issue

*By Kim Hales, Editor in Chief and Jason Olsen, Assistant Editor
Utah State University*

Hello, and welcome to this very exciting Spring 2021 issue of the *Journal on Empowering Teaching Excellence*. We extend a warm welcome to our new assistant editor, Jason Olsen. Having two editors working together ensures the continued quality of the journal and solidifies its mission of ever-increasing academic rigor and integrity.

We welcome inquiries and encourage readers to consider becoming a reviewer! Please send requests to join our review team to our editorial staff at empowerteaching@usu.edu. Be sure to include your home university and area of content so we can closely match you with articles in your area of expertise. From the journal homepage, <https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/jete>, click the *follow* button to receive updates on calls for articles and notifications of new issues. Share this link with your colleagues to help us build the best journal possible!

It is encouraging to hear from authors who are being so mindful and intentional with the way they are approaching the “new normal” of teaching pedagogy, brought on by the ever-changing landscape of new technology and the challenges of teaching under the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic. The work we are reading is inspiring. Please keep it coming! The deadline for the Spring 2022 issue is Sept. 15, 2021.

The articles in this issue are unified in offering valuable insight and actionable ideas about how to engage students in their own learning. Instructors can implement these strategies across many content areas and delivery methods.

The article by Greg Lucas et al., “The Value of Instructor Interactivity in the Online Classroom” discusses three “value” themes that emerged from a large survey of students and faculty. These themes, “instructor interactivity, instructor feedback on participation, and asynchronous interaction in discussion forums” are presented with very compelling results, data, and conclusions. Lucas et al. found that the need for instructor presence in an online course, particularly in these three areas, has not decreased with advanced technology. Findings showed that students value interactivity with instructors over other survey features offered. They also showed that students rated the value of surveyed experiences differently than instructors did, emphasizing the importance of student feedback.

The article by Joanna Weaver et. al., “Through the Eyes of the Mentor: Understanding the Adolescent Developing Reader,” deepens the discussion of involving students in their own learning. It provides an in-depth case study of pre-service teachers as they shift from “student” mode to “instructor/mentor” mode while mentoring developing readers. Shifting a student to the role of teacher takes strategic planning. By obtaining background training in specific mentoring tools and resources, pre-service teachers gain confidence and increase their perceived efficacy. By strengthening their skills in the area specifically targeting developing readers, pre-service teachers focus more on their student’s learning and how they can motivate beginning readers. Weaver et al. explain that this motivation can lead to increased scores on competency and fluency for developing readers which, in turn, leads them to deeper learning.

Alexander Romney and Mitchell Pound drive home the conversation of engaging students in their learning with their article, “Pivoting at the Midpoint: How Midpoint Course Adjustments Influence Student Engagement.” This article’s central focus is on finding ways to keep students engaged and, like other authors in this issue have asserted, Romney and Pound emphasize that this engagement enriches the learning process and increases the achievement of learning outcomes. They explain that a pivot is a change in strategy without a change in objectives, or vision. This is best accomplished by involving students in the decision-making process. Involving students by soliciting mid-course feedback increases the likelihood that they will become active participants, thus improving their learning outcomes.

Finally, Karin deJonge-Kannan provides an insightful review of the book, *Educating about religious diversity and interfaith engagement: A handbook for student affairs* by Goodman, Giess, and Patel (2019). The value of this book, she notes, lies in its focus on holistic student development. To involve students in their learning, we must engage their whole personal identity. To this end, the book “is filled with practical example of how to broaden religious understanding and promote interfaith engagement.” DeJonge-Kannan highlights the book’s use of a framework of cultural competency that will help us understand our students, develop professionally, and grow personally.

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