

# Introduction

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There are a number of changes as of this volume. Firstly, the title of the journal has changed from the *Journal of Distance Learning* to the *Journal of Open, Flexible, and Distance Learning*. More than anything, this change reflects the various interests of DEANZ members—many of whom are likely to identify with *flexible* learning more than *distance* learning. This is not the time to go into definitions; however, I am certain that readers will appreciate the inclusiveness of the new title. Another change is the appointment of Dr Ben Kehrwald of Massey University as co-editor. Ben and I will now share the role, though I have taken the lead for this volume. Ben will provide the additional energy and expertise required for the third adjustment to the journal; from 2011 the *Journal of Open, Flexible, and Distance Learning* will be open access and online. We hope that, with this shift in format, we will move to two issues a year—the second being a special issue on a particular topic. Finally, so far the *Journal of Distance Learning* has not seriously pursued its status as a *ranking* journal. We hope that these new initiatives will result in a publication that goes from strength to strength in the volumes ahead.

As the journal moves into a new phase, it is timely to provide some insight into its workings and to indicate how members of the DEANZ community can provide support. Over the past 4 years, we have received 58 submissions. Of these, 16 have been published; 22 were declined editorially (not sent for review); 8 were deemed unfit for publication by reviewers; and 12 were either withdrawn by their authors following a reviewer decision to revise and resubmit, or are still in progress. These figures need some context. A journal can only be as full and as useful as its submissions permit. While there are no benchmarks for how many submissions ought to be accepted for publication, our rate of about 27 percent is comparable to the *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology* (AJET, the journal of ASCILITE) (Atkinson and McLoughlin, 2009), which published more than 100 articles to our 16 in the same timeframe. Our acceptance rates are similar but the number of articles we publish is far lower. Simply put, the *Journal of Open, Flexible, and Distance Learning* needs more submissions if it is to advance beyond the interests of DEANZ.

Lest there be any confusion, the odds of publication in the *Journal of Open, Flexible, and Distance Learning* are not 27 percent. The chance of a submission being published depends entirely on that submission's merits and is not at the mercy of a process governed by a faceless and self-interested group of gatekeepers, nor of an editor eager to maintain a certain rate of rejection. This may seem too loaded; however, it is a reflection of my thinking in the early days of my own efforts to seek publication. The substance of this journal, as with all scholarly publications, depends entirely on the quality and quantity of work submitted. In the case of the *Journal of Open, Flexible, and Distance Learning*, both quality and quantity are major factors. Submissions have been declined editorially for this journal because they lack the sort of rigour expected by DEANZ members and the wider scholarly community. There is a tension here: naturally DEANZ wants to encourage research in the area of open, flexible, and distance learning, and to provide an outlet for scholarly conversation in the Pacific. However, the conversation is, by definition, *scholarly*. Certain conventions, standards, and genre of discourse must be in place for a publication to appear in this journal.

Much of the time, the submissions rejected editorially lack one or more of three core elements:

1. poor appreciation or representation of the greater conversation already taking place
2. flawed methodology (a small sample, or an ad hoc or simple instrument that reveals nothing of significance)
3. poor standards of written expression (not always in overseas submissions!) and/or not following the APA style required for the journal.

Clearly it is not possible for us to publish an article that has any one of these flaws—both for the journal's reputation and, ultimately, the author's. Ensuring a thorough literature review (drawing from other scholarly literature), ensuring your study has followed a careful methodology (it's too late at the end of the process), and careful editing and proofreading are the best ways to ensure a submission makes it to review.

For those papers that do make it to review, the process toward publication continues. The *Journal of Open, Flexible, and Distance Learning* uses a double-blind peer-review process. Submissions are sent to a selection of reviewers (whose names are on the inside cover of this issue), each of whom are in touch with the wider conversation, have experience with research

methodologies, and have a significant publication history. All are dedicated to prompt and thorough feedback to authors. I am proud that, with very few exceptions, our editorial board meets a 3-week turnaround time for review. Submissions are sent to reviewers who have a specific interest and expertise in the subject. These reviewers add significant value to the process: they carefully read the submission; they suggest areas of improvement; and they recommend that the paper be accepted, accepted after adjustment, revised and resubmitted, or rejected. From experience, I know that the term 'blind review' might have a double meaning: on the one hand indicating a system of refereeing and, on the other, suggesting that the reviewer lacks a certain enlightenment. Reviewers often disagree, and may occasionally fail to appreciate the genius of an earnest submission (I am writing from experience here!). However, I also know from experience that there is fundamental value in the process of blind review. Reviewers are not *self*-interested; they are *discipline* interested. Their comments and decisions do not reflect a personal standard so much as the standard they perceive to be required for conversation within their discipline. Their comments give some insight into how the broader scholarly community might react to the submission, and are always constructive.

It is the quality and number of submissions that provides scope for multiple issues per volume, and on this point I would like to appeal to readers. Given our transparent process, and given the journal's planned expansion, I would like to warmly invite researchers in the field of open, flexible, and distance education (broadly defined) to consider publishing with us. Research is a demanding and challenging activity. It is work. It is hard. There can be times when one's work does not seem to be appreciated (one of the withdrawn submissions over the last 4 years was my own). But work of this kind furthers the conversation. The editorial board works hard to ensure that submissions are promptly evaluated and given fair assessment, and I commend the process to you.

The work published in this volume represents those submissions that the DEANZ community recognises and authenticates as furthering the conversation. I trust you find them stimulating and relevant.

Our opening piece by Tim Winkelmanns, Barry Anderson, and Michael Barbour traces the development of distributed learning in British Columbia. Readers will find that the context of the article is very similar to New Zealand's own, and parallels will also be seen in those external factors that manipulate supply and demand for distance education. Given the claim that British

Columbia has the most supportive legislation for K–12 distance education in Canada, and its similarity to New Zealand in terms of population density and geography, the British Columbian situation is one to learn from.

In Volume 13 of the *Journal of Distance Learning* we featured a piece by Gary Mersham: “Reflections on E-Learning from a Communications Perspective” (Mersham, 2009). In my introduction to that volume I remarked that Mersham’s article “invites a critical response”. That response has been provided by Ben Kehrwald in his article: “Online Communication: A Response to Mersham”. Kehrwald draws on the considerable research in the area of Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) in his rebuttal of Mersham’s claims. Kehrwald’s apologia is a window into the considerable progress that has been made in understanding the dynamics of online presence.

The third article in this volume is a case study from John Milne, Eva Heinrich, and Isabelle Lys; it considers the challenges of e-portfolio implementation within a single course. While it is not surprising that such a small-scale implementation within a single course would face difficulties, Milne et al. provide solid insight into the issues, and reinforce the importance of sound implementation. Their guiding questions formed the basis for a successful case study, which in turn will lead to a broader use of e-portfolios across a programme.

Finally, Marcia Bolton reports on using teleconferencing to supervise student teachers. While the approach is not intended to replace in-person supervision, applying technology does provide an opportunity for distance educators. Feedback from the student teachers involved indicates that supervising student teachers via teleconference holds some promise.

So this is our last printed journal, and our first with a new name and co-editorship. What hasn’t changed is the quality of the scholarly conversation taking place.

Welcome to a volume of significance.

## References

- Atkinson, R., & McLoughlin, C. (2009). Editorial. *Australasian Journal of Educational Technology*, 25(2), iii–vi.
- Mersham, G. (2009). Reflections on E-Learning from a Communications Perspective. *Journal of Distance Learning*, 13(1), 51–70.