

# HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICES IN ONLINE EDUCATION

Research and Best Practices

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*Edited by*

*Kathryn E. Linder and*

*Chrysanthemum Mattison Hayes*

*Foreword by Kelvin Thompson*

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## INTRODUCTION

*Kathryn E. Linder and Chrysanthemum Mattison Hayes*

In 2008, George Kuh coined the term *high-impact educational practices* (HIPs) and defined them as the following 10 components of undergraduate education: first-year seminars and experiences, common intellectual experiences, learning communities (LCs), writing-intensive courses, collaborative assignments and projects, undergraduate research, diversity and global learning, service-learning and community-based learning, internships, and capstone courses and projects (Kuh, 2008). In 2016, ePortfolios were added as the eleventh HIP. Since they were identified, HIPs have become a foundational strategy to increase student retention and completion rates in institutions of higher education and have been used as a variable to study student success (McGlynn, 2014) and engagement (Sweat, Jones, Han, & Wolfgram, 2013). HIPs have also been used to explore the needs of specific student populations such as first-year students (Tukibayeva & Gonyea, 2014) and students from traditionally underserved or underrepresented backgrounds (Sweat et al., 2013). Frequently discussed across a range of disciplines including university libraries (Murray, 2015), the presence of embedded HIPs during a student's academic career is now considered to be a fundamental metric for an institution's dedication to student success (Kilgo, Sheets, & Pascarella, 2015) and campus cultures that promote and support high-quality and effective educational practices (Laird, BrckaLorenz, Zilvinskis, & Lambert, 2014).

Although HIPs have been in the higher education lexicon for almost a decade, the literature on each practice, and how they interrelate with one another, is continuing to develop (Gagliardi, Martin, Wise, & Blaich, 2015; Landy, 2015). The current literature on HIP is often dedicated to looking at one specific practice (e.g., see Barkley, Major, & Cross, 2014; Hauhart & Grahe, 2015) and often primarily focuses on traditional undergraduate courses and programs that take place in face-to-face environments on residential campuses. Scholars are also starting to explore how HIPs relate to different types of higher education environments, such as community colleges (Price & Tovar, 2014). However, although some scholars have explored a particular HIP online (see Strait & Nordyke, 2015), no books are currently available that share comprehensive research and best practices for

implementing all of the HIPs in the online environment. Moreover, no texts comprehensively explore the differences that should be taken into account for effective online implementation of HIPs.

A primary goal of *High-Impact Practices in Online Education* is to highlight the necessity of leveraging and expanding HIPs for distance-learning environments. The approaches and examples shared in this volume offer insights and recommendations on how utilizing HIPs in the online learning environment may help address key challenges that extend from several large shifts occurring in higher education. We explore just a few of them here.

*The demand for high-quality college degrees is increasing.* Carnevale, Smith, and Strohl (2013) estimate that by 2020, 65% of the jobs in the United States will require a postsecondary education and that skills such as decision-making, critical thinking, and communication will be the most in-demand competencies for the labor market. It is increasingly relevant and important that students are provided with the opportunities that help them build and practice these critical skills, especially in applied or real-world settings.

*The demographic profile of the degree-seeking student is becoming more diverse.* The 2012 Digest of Education Statistics reports that college enrollment among low-income, Black, and Hispanic students has increased over the last few decades. Simultaneously, the rate of Black and Hispanic high school graduates who attend a two- or four-year institution has nearly converged, at 67%, with the rate of White high school graduates pursuing a secondary degree (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Additionally, many nontraditionally aged, veteran, and returning students are enrolling to advance their job prospects. Although historical disparities in enrollment have gradually declined, significant differences across student demographic groups in terms of progression and degree attainment have persisted, signifying that work still needs to be done to satisfactorily meet the needs of the fastest growing segments of the student population. It is imperative that educators and institutions provide and expand access and support to the types of transformative educational experiences that help all students to be successful both in and beyond their academic pursuits.

*Over the last 13 years, the number of students taking distance courses has steadily increased.* In 2015, more than 5.8 million students representing 28% of the total higher education population reported taking at least one course online, which is an increase of 3.9% from the previous year (Allen, Seaman, Poulin, & Straut, 2015). As the landscape of higher education shifts to one where we must graduate more students from diverse backgrounds while responding to the demand for access to high-quality online and distance

programs, intentional design and adoption of traditional and emerging high-impact practices becomes a critical strategy for student success.

*Online students are expecting more.* A recent study by Aslanian Market Research and Learning House found that students are asking for increased options for distance education via mobile devices, more career services options, and better information about whether their transfer credits can be used for different degree programs (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2017).

In response to these changes and the growing complexity of the higher education environment, this volume presents HIPs as a constellation of opportunities that, when thought of cohesively, can provide a series of milestones that support the development of distance students throughout their entire academic journey (see Figure I.1). This premise echoes the claim of Kuh and others who consider the “cumulative effect” of the collective set of HIPs (Finley & McNair, 2013). This effect starts as students transition into college, acquire fundamental and transferable skills, gain hands-on experiences, synthesize their learning, apply their knowledge in real-world applications, and demonstrate mastery of skills that are highly valued in today’s graduates.

**Figure I.1.** The constellation of high-impact practices.



Each chapter of *High-Impact Practices in Online Education: Research and Best Practices* provides readers with concrete strategies for transitioning HIPs to the online environment that can be utilized across a range of disciplines and institution types. The authors share the value they have found in expanding HIPs to the online environment and also reference the most recent and relevant literature for each HIP. In addition to summarizing the research-based principles for what make online HIPs successful, each chapter also references the challenges that frequently arise when transitioning HIPs online, and the authors offer advice for how to overcome them. Some of the common considerations mentioned throughout the collection include: how and when to use technology effectively (rather than for novelty), leveraging HIPs in both synchronous and asynchronous courses, how to ensure high-impact and meaningful interactions, how to manage the growth and scalability of time-intensive HIPs, questions of equity and access for traditionally underserved student populations, faculty development needs related to HIPs, and considerations for new or different assessments of learning online. After reading *High-Impact Practices in Online Education*, we hope that readers will have a comprehensive overview of the current research and emerging practices for scaling HIPs to an online environment as well as a greater understanding of the value and role HIPs can play in proactively responding to the demands being placed, especially on online and distance segments of higher education.

## Structure of the Volume

*High-Impact Practices in Online Education* is structured so that each chapter covers a specific high-impact educational practice. The chapters begin with a theoretically grounded discussion of the HIP, including a literature review of the most current research on the topic. The latter part of each chapter offers specific examples, practical suggestions for implementation, or a case study of that particular practice in online environments.

In chapter 1 “First-Year Seminars,” Jennifer R. Keup of the National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, explores the potential implications and impacts of transitioning first-year experiences (FYEs) into the online environment. Rooted in a decades-long history of FYEs in the United States, Keup’s analysis also draws on recent data that illustrate the growing trend of online and technology-enhanced first-year seminars in a range of institution types. Keup discusses the opportunities that online FYEs provide as well as the faculty development needs to ensure the success of transitioning these programs online. She also demonstrates the varied ways that institutions of higher education can leverage technology for

successful FYE seminars and experiences, including opportunities for creative and even more frequent interaction than face-to-face FYE courses.

Chapter 2 “Common Intellectual Experience” by Jason D. Baker and Michael Pregitzer utilizes a case study from Regent University where the authors have instituted a Narrative, Engagement, Transformation (NET) model across their undergraduate curriculum to help students learn how to ask and answer “big questions.” After introducing the need for common intellectual practices and highlighting the imperative to support and foster learner-to-learner, learner-to-content, and learner-to-instructor interaction and connection in the online environment, the authors provide a theoretical framework of this HIP through the NET model. Baker and Pregitzer illustrate how their flexible NET model can be used to guide online course development and delivery. The authors also share retention and engagement benefits from their own online programs and conclude with practical implementation tips for faculty, administrators, and instructional designers.

In chapter 3 “Learning Communities,” Kathy E. Johnson, Amy A. Powell, and Sarah S. Baker provide an overview of the purpose and value of LCs as a HIP and consider how key elements of this HIP, such as social integration and integrated learning, become even more critical for the diverse and rapidly expanding community of distance learners. The contributors also share how, through creating the digital space and leveraging common online tools such as threaded discussions, this HIP can be readily translated to distance-learning environments. Johnson, Powell, and Baker go on to describe a “Themed Learning Community High-Impact Practice Taxonomy” that has emerged from work in the California State University System and at Indiana University–Purdue University Indianapolis, and they share preliminary evidence regarding its use and efficacy to guide faculty teams. The authors close their chapter by suggesting ways of adapting this taxonomy to ensure that LCs offered through distance education are maximally effective at supporting student success.

June Griffin, in chapter 4 “Writing-Intensive Classes,” addresses the challenges of offering writing-intensive courses online and offers suggestions for mitigating the impact of the *literacy load* for both students and instructors. Specifically, she advocates the use of screencast technology to give students feedback on their writing. This chapter draws from the work of the Conference on College Composition and Communication’s Committee for Effective Practices in Online Writing Instruction, the Meaningful Writing Project, and recent research on screencasting feedback to offer readers practical tips on how to focus on quality over quantity in the writing-intensive online classroom.

In chapter 5 “Collaborative Assignments and Projects,” Robert John Robertson and Shannon Riggs discuss some of the common roadblocks of designing and facilitating collaborative assignments and projects in an online, asynchronous course. Collaborative work in online courses can be especially problematic because online students may seek out asynchronous online learning opportunities due to schedule demands that make synchronous class attendance and group work undesirable. In addition, many instructors are resistant to the concept for several reasons: a lack of design expertise; an aversion to the many conflicts that can arise, especially in the asynchronous environment; and a desire to meet the needs and preferences of online students. With students and instructors at least somewhat naturally predisposed against collaboration, it is crucial to articulate the benefits of collaborative work and identify and overcome the risk factors unique to the online asynchronous classes. The authors explore research which indicates that collaboration and the opportunities created by implementing this HIP in an online space are particularly valuable for students from traditionally underserved backgrounds. Throughout the chapter, Robertson and Riggs offer practical guidance for instructors looking to create collaborative assignments and projects in online courses.

Chapter 6 “Undergraduate Research in the Humanities” by Ellen Holmes Pearson and Jeffrey W. McClurken offers an in-depth exploration of a Teagle and Mellon Foundation grant-funded initiative called “Century America.” This Council of Public Liberal Arts Colleges initiative involved team-taught seminars with faculty and undergraduate student researchers from campuses in 13 states and 1 Canadian province. The multicampus seminars, taught synchronously through distance-learning technology, combine the virtual and local by engaging undergraduates in conducting archival research on the histories of their campuses and communities while also collaborating across campuses to build major digital projects available to the public on the web. The authors share how this program has enabled students at public liberal arts institutions to develop research, production, and communications skills applicable to a wide variety of twenty-first-century professions and discuss broadly applicable best practices for online undergraduate research initiatives focused on the humanities.

Chapter 7 “Undergraduate Research in the Sciences” by Kevin F. Downing and Jennifer K. Holtz serves as a “sister” chapter to chapter 6 and focuses on the HIP of undergraduate research in the sciences. In this chapter, the authors offer a conceptual framework that bridges the nexus between customary undergraduate research in the sciences and online learning principles and techniques. These techniques include how undergraduate research in the sciences should be implemented, as well as instructional design considerations



such as quality, student engagement, learning formats, timeframes, scaffolding, dissemination, communities of practice, mentoring, and institutional support. These guidelines serve as a roadmap for transitioning a face-to-face undergraduate research experience in the sciences into a fully distance environment.

In chapter 8 “Diversity and Global Learning,” Jesse Nelson and Nelson Soto explore the interaction between two of higher education’s most prominent themes: diversity and online education. Attention is given to the meaningful application of diversity and global learning within the context of online teaching and learning. Specifically, the chapter provides innovative instructional strategies addressing curriculum development, inclusive pedagogy, and assessment of student learning. Additionally, it addresses the role of faculty in creating diverse and inclusive experiences. The chapter concludes by considering some of the most salient emerging issues associated with diversity and online education.

Jean Strait and Katherine Nordyke, authors of chapter 9 “eService-Learning,” outline the practices and structures for a range of eService-learning models that are complementary to distance education. This instructor-focused chapter is full of insight, practical strategies, and thought-provoking ideas about how to incorporate service-learning into online courses. Strait and Nordyke highlight the “how-tos” and various models currently in practice across the United States. In particular, the authors report on a model for eService-learning created by a national team, sharing their research studies and providing models for readers interested in incorporating eService-learning into their own online classrooms or programs.

In chapter “10 Internships,” Pamela D. Pike explores several approaches and functions of online or remote internships. Although the outward-facing structure of online internships may vary based on factors such as whether students attend their internship in person or remotely, the best practices for internships around preparation, communication, and reflection for integrated learning remain central and vital. This chapter also emphasizes and illustrates the value of providing distance internships within the context of teacher education programs. Teaching internships provide students with opportunities to interact with others, practice concepts presented in class, and make greater meaning of the material than would otherwise be possible in either a typical class or face-to-face setting. Best practices from research and interviews with experts in this emerging online field are discussed, and practical tips for implementation are provided throughout the chapter.

Chapter 11 “Capstone Courses and Projects,” by Zapoura Newton-Calvert and Deborah Smith Arthur, describes the development and instruction as well as mentoring and facilitation practices needed for effective capstone projects

in undergraduate degrees and certificates in distance-education programs. The authors describe Portland State University's capstone program and the critical role that institutional support plays in its longevity and success. Newton-Calvert and Arthur share best practices in the areas of social presence and teaching presence as well as experience-based examples of the challenges for both students and instructors in online capstone courses and strategies to address them. In considering capstone courses through an equity lens, this chapter explores the ways in which this HIP offers a powerful mechanism to encourage students to synthesize, communicate, and demonstrate high-level learning. The value and benefits of this type of experience may be amplified for nontraditional and underrepresented students.

Representing the most recent HIP, chapter 12 "ePortfolios," by Jennifer Sparrow and Judit Török, illustrates how ePortfolios act as a nexus for other HIPs. The authors describe three categories of ePortfolios that may be used to that end. As a space outside of the learning management system in which students in online programs curate and reflect on a collection of artifacts documenting their educational journeys, ePortfolios connect learners with cocurricular activities such as experiential learning, project-based learning, and career exploration. Throughout the chapter, Sparrow and Török explore the benefits of ePortfolios, including increased levels of student engagement, a holistic view of students' progress toward degree completion, and the opportunity for authentic assessment of learning.

Although not a HIP in itself, use of library resources is fundamental to the success of many HIPs. In chapter 13 "High-Impact Practices and Library and Information Resources", Stefanie Buck provides an overview of the kinds of information resources and pedagogical support services libraries provide to faculty and instructors in support of HIPs in the distance-education environment. Buck reviews the current literature on HIPs and libraries and offers examples of successful library integration into activities and programs that support these practices. In addition, Buck discusses how improving student information literacy skills can increase the success of HIPs in the online learning environment.

To conclude this volume, in "Future Directions for High-Impact Practices Online," the editors discuss the common themes across the volume's chapters around opportunities and challenges for successful implementation of HIPs in the online environment and present a practical guide of several best practice principles. We also explore what it means to transition HIPs across modalities as well as review the principles relevant to all HIPs, regardless of delivery mode. As technology use in all classrooms increases, we argue that faculty development models that focus on modality first and best practices second may need to be flipped, and that significant opportunities are

available to learn from the advances and creative approaches that emerge consequentially from transitioning HIPs online. Finally, we conclude by offering some ideas of HIPs that may need to be added to the list with the advent of adaptive and personalized learning and the rising use of learning analytics across the university landscape.

## Conclusion

*High-Impact Practices in Online Education: Research and Best Practices* offers the first comprehensive guide to how HIPs are being implemented in online environments and how HIPs can be adjusted to meet the needs of online learners. As a collection, *High-Impact Practices in Online Education* is a multidisciplinary response to the phenomenon of online HIPs that can, ultimately, assist faculty and administrators in better implementing HIPs in distance-education courses and programs.

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