



# JUTLP

Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice

## Editorial: Two Decades of Open Access, Practice-Led Learning and Teaching Research

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### Abstract

The rate of survival of community-led open access journals are not well known or documented, but the resourcing challenges of journals that rely on institutional goodwill to fund platforms and volunteer editors and reviewers is real. The constraints of these systems – diamond open access – often lead to sporadic publication cycles, inconsistencies in publishing quality, and can struggle to achieve high impact factors. The Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice has been no exception to the perils of balancing volunteer and paid commitments and finding money when institutions change their financial commitments to those enterprises. In the JUTLP context, we are equally challenged by a second force; the pursuit of practice-led research. Practice papers, in my experience, tend to have higher rates of reading and applicability to direct change in the way universities and educators engage in learning and teaching, but lead to less research onflows. Despite these forces, the Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice continues to provide scholarly leadership to researchers and practitioners and this has been well recognised through metrics as well as evidence of genuine impact. This Two Decade review is an entry into allowing members of our academic community to be evaluative of our publishing practices and help ask the question of what should continue, and what ought to change, over the next decade of JUTLP. Most importantly, this issue is a celebratory note of the endurance and persistence of the journal's academic community and not least to the close to 100 editors who have supported the last 20 years of open publishing.

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## Introduction

The rate of survival of community-led open access journals are not well known or documented, but the resourcing challenges of journals that rely on institutional goodwill to fund platforms and volunteer editors and reviewers is real. The constraints of these systems – diamond open access – often lead to sporadic publication cycles, inconsistencies in publishing quality, and can struggle to achieve high impact factors. The Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice has been no exception to the perils of balancing volunteer and paid commitments and finding money when institutions change their financial commitments to those enterprises. In the JUTLP context, we are equally challenged by a second force; the pursuit of practice-led research. Practice papers, in my experience, tend to have higher rates of reading and applicability to direct change in the way universities and educators engage in learning and teaching, but lead to less research onflows. Despite these forces, the Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice continues to provide scholarly leadership to researchers and practitioners and this has been well recognised through metrics as well as evidence of genuine impact. This Two Decade review is an entry into allowing members of our academic community to be evaluative of our publishing practices and help ask the question of what should continue, and what ought to change, over the next decade of JUTLP. Most importantly, this issue is a celebratory note of the endurance and persistence of the journal's academic community and not least to the close to 100 editors who have supported the last 20 years of open publishing.

In a journal like ours, tracking early data has been a difficult task. The purpose of this editorial is to collect a few artefacts from our journey inside this editorial, with the hope that the Editor in Chief of 2034 might do the same for the coming decade. In this editorial, I break from citation convention to provide a clearer narrative of the journal. In the following, I draw heavily on editorial commentary from past editors, and do so inline to my writing and signify quotes in italics.

The first editorial by the then-Senior Editor Helen Carter (2004) was a single page, and comprised the following text followed by a paragraph summarising the opening articles:

*Since the release of the Australian Government's White Paper in 1988 there have been significant changes occurring in the Australian Higher Education sector. Worldwide there is growing acknowledgement that teaching and learning at University has undergone a transformation.*

*Students entering University now come from a much broader range of backgrounds. Many are having to work to support their study and all are expected to develop lifelong learning skills.*

*The intensity of these changes has led University Teachers to develop a range of teaching skills that encompass supporting student diversity, flexible methods of delivery, particularly use of different technologies and more varied approaches to assessment.*

*A search of journal titles revealed a lack of publications that cover learning and teaching practice at university level. There has often been an assumption that the well developed principles that underpin school-based education could be equally applied to university education. However, for most practitioners their experience has shown that they have had to develop new approaches to teaching and learning because of the type and pace of changes that have taken place in the higher education sector.*

*The Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice (JUTLP) is an attempt to address this gap in publications in the higher education sector. This first issue contains all University of Wollongong based authors, although the Board and Reviewers are from institutions throughout*

*the world. In future editions submissions will be encouraged from authors based at any higher education institution in the world.*

In the first guest-led issue, Craig McInnis (2004) offered a complementary remark as to the readership of the journal at the time,

*This issue keeps JUTLP on track in its desire to meet the needs of its readers: practitioners looking for good ideas based soundly on a body of accessible theory and research*

Carter and colleagues went on to support the open access publication of more than 100 articles between 2004 and the time that the Journal joined Scopus in 2016. Alisa Percy and associate editors (2021) commented that this time was quite different to the present:

*JUTLP was established in the Australian context at a time when promoting excellence in teaching and learning was regarded as an important government agenda to improve the student experience, and not accidentally, coincided with the creation of the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (later the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, and later again the Office for Learning and Teaching). The Carrick Institute supported national cross-institutional grants and fellowship schemes, and promoted national networks of educational research into practice to support the mission of the then Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) to ensure all 'Australian higher education institutions provide high quality teaching and learning for all students'. How times have changed.*

*In this period in history, engaging, resourcing and supporting disciplinary academics in the scholarship of teaching and learning was seen as a primary means for capacity building and promoting evidence-based approaches to teaching practice. The intention was to foster sector-wide innovation in teaching and learning to lead higher education out of the dark ages of its more didactic educational approaches and encourage educators to explore new ways, new modes, and new ideas in student learning through national networks of scholarship in educational practice. JUTLP, then, was established primarily as a publication outlet for educators of all disciplinary backgrounds to showcase their scholarly work in the educational space, share their reflections and insights about innovations in practice, and encourage others to engage in experimental evidence-based work to enhance their own teaching practices to improve the student learning experience. In many ways, JUTLP has fulfilled this aim -in the fifteen years the Journal has been running, it has published 417 articles with 590,437 downloads, showcasing a wide range of teaching and learning practices in a broad range of disciplines from across the world.*

As part of a response to COVID-19, but also a different journal than in its start-up phase, the editors proposed to restructure to better meet the needs of a growing community, and a system better equipped for days where submissions were lower (Crawford et al., 2021), but also with an aim to transparently communicate intended practice:

*The aims and scope statements of the Journal have existed in largely the same form since their inception. On reflection, these tended to enable almost any manuscript related to teaching in the university setting to be accepted as within the aims and scope of JUTLP. To support a stronger conversation across our collection of works, we have identified four specific, yet broad, areas of work for the future of learning and teaching practice. We recognise that each manuscript submitted will likely have multiple areas of focus (e.g. student evaluations of technology integration based on a strong pedagogical framework). However, we ask authors to explicitly focus their attention within one of the areas of focus. The Senior Editor responsible for this*

*particular section will assess articles against that aim and scoping statement for a preliminary decision. This is to support a far more timely desk-rejection period, to enable authors to find an alternate home, rather than sending a manuscript to review to only have it rejected in three months from poor scope alignment.*

It was in 2020 that we began what would be quite a change to the fabric of the journal. In 2018, following two years of Scopus inclusion and then Web of Science among other indexing bodies, the journal began to receive sustained growth in attention. From two Senior Editors handling less than 100 submissions per year with around 1 in 4 being published, 2018-2019 saw 334 papers submitted (up from 168 in the previous two years). And the resilience required of my predecessors to handle such growth cannot be understated. Year-on-year since 2019, we have received more articles annually than previous, with 647 papers last year (see Crawford, 2024 for all statistics).

Percy et al. (2021) go on to comment that *in 2020, however, against the backdrop of our entry into the twenty first century and the information age, the digital transformation of education, the massive disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic, the changing nature of the higher education sector, a large financial restructuring of Australian government support for teaching and learning (largely a reduction or elimination of funds), and the plethora of discourses and agendas surrounding what higher education is and should be, we took the opportunity to renew our focus on what we hope to stand for as a Journal. We have sought to take stock of how we are contributing to the conversations that surround the past, present, and future of teaching and learning practice in higher education.*

In an early editorial during my tenure (Crawford et al., 2020) we proposed the division of four scholarly sections with more significant leadership and accountability expected of Associate Editors. Where Associate Editors were once responsible for managing reviewer recruitment only, they went on to be given the ability to register major revisions decisions and to propose acceptance of articles to their Senior Editor. The profile of Associate Editors since has grown significantly, and our training practices more rigorous. In Crawford (2023), I introduced on behalf of the Senior Editors two additional sections to extend across the breadth of knowledge needed in effective learning and teaching practice. In the last quarterly issue editorial (Crawford, 2024), I wrote of the change in our publishing location and the move from the University of Wollongong to the Open Access Publishing Association. The decision was initially made in response to changing funding – a common problem of open access journals – but also with the aim to develop a more robust home for journals like ours to ensure community-led open access publishing became a normal practice not an exception.

With hundreds of articles published since 2004, I distributed an open call to all editors and those who had published top papers in our journal in recent years asking them to propose a review of a component of the journal's history. The rules were simply put: it must be a systematic review or similar, it must only have one editor involved in the review, and it must focus on proposing change in the journal based on the evidence found. I received more than a dozen proposals, and seven made it to final print. While a future decade review might open the call to anyone and have a drawn out multi-year review process, akin to the *Leadership Quarterly*, asking individuals to review two decades of a specific topic in a journal was a complex task. The next iteration in 2034 may have greater capacity to learn from this process. I did, however, foster a trial of open peer review, through alerting authors and reviewers of each others' names as part of the review sequence. This led to quite robust reviews, and I can see a place for it in the Journal's future.

In closing though, we offer seven critical pieces that draw on systematic approaches to literature reviews that are aimed at spurring on the next decade of research in learning and teaching practice. And, as a Journal we will look for manuscripts that adequately address gaps identified in the research corpus so far. Onward, and upward, for this journal and its community.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The author disclose that they have no actual or perceived conflicts of interest and have not received any funding for this manuscript beyond resourcing for academic time at their university. The author produced this manuscript without artificial intelligence support.

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