

## EDITORIALS

# Cause Research Institute Seed Grants at National University

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This editorial introduces the special issue of the *Journal of Online Graduate Education (JOGE)*, developed in partnership with the Cause Research Institute at National University. The issue features research supported by the inaugural CRI Research Seed Grants, spotlighting innovative projects that advance evidence-informed practice in online graduate education. Key topics include the integration of artificial intelligence for teaching, learning, and research; scalable models for experiential learning; and initiatives that promote student well-being and holistic engagement. The issue also explores the transformative potential of extended reality technologies for fostering meaningful connection in digital environments. Collectively, these studies underscore a unified commitment to purposeful innovation, emphasizing the importance of improving learning outcomes, strengthening institutional capacity, and sustaining the human elements central to online graduate education.

Happy springtime, and thank you for engaging with the *Journal of Online Graduate Education (JOGE)*. As we welcome spring, we do so with deep gratitude for the authors whose work appears in this issue and for the opportunity to reflect on the evolving landscape of online graduate education through their scholarship.

We are especially grateful to the JOGE editorial team for partnering with the Cause Research Institute (CRI) at National University to publish this special issue highlighting projects supported through the inaugural CRI Research Seed Grants. This collaboration reflects a shared commitment to advancing evidence-informed innovation in online graduate education, particularly research that bridges theory, practice, and real-world impact.

The articles featured in this issue reflect both the breadth of emerging technologies shaping higher education and the intentional, human-centered approaches necessary to implement them effectively. Several projects explore the growing role of artificial intelligence in supporting teaching, learning, and research. Zimmer's work on developing a living AI resource repository demonstrates how institutional knowledge-building and faculty engagement can help universities responsibly and collaboratively respond to rapidly evolving technologies. Complementing this systems-level effort, Demeter's study examines the use of a generative AI-supported Dissertation Assistant for Research and Academia (DARA), illustrating how personalized AI-driven tools can strengthen doctoral student engagement, improve research alignment, and support dissertation success. Extending the conversation to

faculty scholarship, Nubla-Kung, Rankin, and Dereshiwsky evaluate the use of AI-assisted qualitative data analysis tools, highlighting both the promise and the practical challenges of integrating AI into faculty research workflows.

Beyond artificial intelligence, this issue highlights innovations designed to strengthen experiential learning and student development. Epp and Kaul's application of the Transformative Experiential Learning Model (TELM) offers a scalable framework for embedding authentic, work-based learning experiences into curriculum design. By supporting faculty in developing or enhancing experiential assignments, this work demonstrates how intentional instructional design can strengthen career alignment, engagement, and equitable student outcomes.

Equally important, several projects center the holistic needs of online learners. Bellin, Mazyck, Zaparowski, Espinoza, and Burgos's investigation into the Mindfulness Training Collective explores how structured virtual well-being communities can reduce student stress, strengthen academic mindset, and improve persistence. Their findings reinforce the critical role of community-building and mental wellness supports in sustaining student success in online environments.

Finally, Arnold, Otis, and Johnston's development of the Universel Conference highlights the transformative potential of extended reality (XR) and immersive technologies to create meaningful human connection in digital spaces. By leveraging virtual reality and avatar-based participation to foster collaboration, networking, and knowledge sharing, this initiative demonstrates how emerging technologies can enhance, not replace, the relational elements central to graduate education.

Collectively, these projects demonstrate how targeted seed funding can catalyze rigorous inquiry, pilot emerging practices, and generate insights with implications well beyond a single institution. More importantly, they highlight a unifying principle reflected across this issue: innovation in online graduate education must remain purpose-driven, focusing on improving learning outcomes, strengthening faculty and student capacity, and reinforcing the human elements within digital education.

It is our hope that this special issue not only informs best practices but also inspires continued research, cross-disciplinary collaboration, and thoughtful experimentation across the field. We invite readers to engage deeply with these studies, reflect on their applicability within their own institutional contexts, and continue advancing the scholarship of online graduate education.

With gratitude,

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