

**Reading Guide** to accompany *From Grassroots to the Highly-Orchestrated: Online Leaders Share Their Stories of the Evolving Online Organizational Landscape in Higher Ed*

The following reading guide provides both an overview of Grassroots' individual chapters along with guiding questions that we hope will spur your curiosity and encourage deep learning and reflection as you think through ways to apply it in your own context. The goal for this book was to create a place where other online leaders could find themselves in these stories, but also seek out new and innovative practice as we all rise together online. Accordingly, we encourage an attitude of *scholarly playfulness* when using this guide. There is no prescriptive order we recommend for this book or guide to be read in or definitive takeaways. Instead, we encourage you to start with sections and/or chapters that are most relevant and interesting to you, and explore from there!

Below are the introductions from each section of the book where the editors give a brief overview of the chapter. What sounds interesting, different, exciting to you?

### **SECTION I. Leadership**

In “**Leadership Lessons from the Pandemic**,” Tom Cavanagh from University of Central Florida (UCF) reflects on key online education leadership lessons learned during the COVID-19 pandemic, especially during the unsettling early weeks of the crisis. Although UCF forged these lessons during the crucible of a worldwide pandemic, they remain relevant and applicable for online education leaders going forward, as well as for anyone working in higher education.

Next, in “**Leading in an Online Environment through the Lens of Servant Leadership**,” Conna Bral from American College of Education and Stephanie Hinshaw from Butler University discuss how to lead using servant leadership principles in a virtual setting and with a remote workforce. Using real-life examples, the authors tell the story of what servant leadership looks like in a fully online organization with research embedded to support the organization’s leadership tenets, policies, and practices.

Finally, in “**Promoting Innovation Through Collaborative Leadership: Points of Distinction in the Move to Remote and Online Learning During the Pandemic**” from Academic Innovation at the University of Texas - San Antonio, Melissa Vito, Marcela Ramirez, and Claudia Arcolin outline emerging opportunities in online education and how to maintain momentum while reenvisioning organizational structure. They accomplish this reenvisioning through dynamic community pulse taking, collaborative networks, trust building, and nurturing individual team talents, bringing about a new model for higher education amid the disruptions created by the global pandemic.

#### *Guiding Questions*

1. How might these lessons on leadership be enduring and/or relevant outside the context of a pandemic?

2. How do these leadership lessons inform your ways of being (or ways you could be)?
3. The original study's four dimensions included administrative, academic, onboarding, and student supportive services. How does leadership fit in with these dimensions individually and/or exist as a stand alone topic?

## **SECTION II. Administrative Functions**

In **“Pivot, Pivot! Kennesaw State’s Online Learning Journey,”** Anissa Lokey-Vega, Julie Moore, Tammy Powell, and Justin Cochran of Kennesaw State University expound on the storied past of their institution’s distance education support systems. The authors share a detailed description of critical events in the institution’s distance education history including (a) the early years of support for online course development, (b) the disruptive loss of funding that caused the closure of the Distance Learning Center and centralized course quality management, (c) the support for online course development during the COVID-19 pandemic, and (d) current organizational changes and future outlooks.

Next, in **“A Centralized Online Campus Access Increases Student Success: The Case of the TCC Connect Campus,”** Carlos Morales introduces Tarrant County College - TCC Connect Campus, a distinct virtual campus with a centralized organizational structure. The college established it in response to student and community need for a more accessible and flexible educational experience. The author discusses how TCC Connect Campus continues to evolve by implementing strategies to widen access, create learning opportunities, and support student success.

In **“Survival to Success: University of Florida Online’s Birth and Rise to Preeminence,”** Melissa Allen shares her journey and lessons learned from establishing University of Florida (UF) Online, forming a partnership with an OPM for marketing and recruitment, and the transition of those functions to in-house three years later. The author highlights the 20/20 hindsight of opportunities and friction points in UF Online’s journey that may help other institutions successfully launch online programs and onboard students.

Finally, in **“Transitioning from an OPM: The Journey of Insourcing an Online Educational Unit After the Partnership Sunsets,”** Kimberly Boulden, Jeremiah Grabowski, Humberto Hernandez, and Jamie Tabone from D’Youville University articulate the rationale, internal factors, and processes senior leadership used when choosing to sign an OPM partnership deal. The authors also discuss what is necessary to bring those services in-house after the partnership sunsets.

### *Guiding Questions*

1. What specific elements of administration discussed in these chapters (i.e. strategic planning, operational tasks, and outcomes assessment) can you identify at your institution? Furthermore, how can lessons discussed in these chapters directly influence and improve the entire student life cycle experience at your institution?

2. Institutional culture, mission, resource utilization, talent management, and how to meet the needs of current and future students are each discussed in these chapters. Which area(s) can inform strategic planning and decision-making at your institution and what administrative challenges can they address?

### **SECTION III. Academic Functions**

In “**Forces for Change: Forming a New Online Education Unit**,” Shubha G. Kashyap, Gina Lipor, and Diane Landsiedel, leaders at the College of Engineering at University of Michigan Ann Arbor, detail their journey in creating a centralized unit for online and professional education in an institution with a long-standing focus on residential programming. The authors outline the complexities of their approach as they navigated the common intersection of academic affairs and administration of online programs, followed by discussion of the key institutional factors that contribute to the success of this approach and those that inhibit it, guiding other institutions as they navigate similar territory.

Next, in “**Innovation Underway**,” Valerie Kelly from the Office of Continuing and Distance Education, Kent State Online at Kent State University, uses the theory of disruptive innovation to contextualize how online education can transform an institution. The author further explains how Kent State Online responded to this positive disruption over time and offers a helpful roadmap to other institutions looking ahead at future disruptions that may impact teaching and learning in higher education.

In “**Shared Governance and Online Education: How Should They Work Together for a Shared Vision?**,” Murray State University’s Melony Shemberger discusses the unique intersection of online programming and faculty shared governance. The author contextualizes and then answers critical questions for institutional leaders looking to better understand how to incorporate and leverage shared governance in online programs. Moreover, she makes a compelling case for better integration of faculty voices in online programming and suggests practical ways to incorporate them for overall betterment.

Finally, in “**Designed, Aligned, and Ready to Shine: Lesson Learned Developing and Delivering Online Programs**,” Kalea Benner and Jason Johnston from the College of Social Work at University of Kentucky discuss their experiences rapidly launching three online programs across baccalaureate, graduate, and doctoral levels. The authors share their lessons learned by outlining a carefully designed conceptual model that other institutions interested in similar types of online program launches can adopt.

#### *Guiding Questions*

1. The academic dimensions discussed in these chapters include curriculum, programmatic oversight, teaching and learning, instructional design, quality assessment, faculty professional development and support, and learning management system oversight. Which of these are you directly involved with and what changes might be ahead for you?

2. How can you apply lessons from these chapters to create dynamic and engaging teaching and learning in the online classroom that connects a student not only to their academic program and its subject matter, but also to the institution as a whole?
3. Chapter authors discuss addressing challenges they have dealt with relating to the intersections of successful online program launches and faculty governance, as well as how an online organizational unit can help buffer against future educational disruption. Which specific examples are most relevant to your context, both in terms of challenges and opportunities?

## **SECTION IV: Student Onboarding & Support Services**

In “**Considerations for Scaling Online Graduate Programs**,” Ammar Dalal, an expert in enrollment management operations in higher education, presents the findings from recent research on what is driving university leaders’ thought processes in deciding whether to partner with an online program manager. This chapter ultimately details the perspective on how to scale up online graduate programs and effectively onboard students.

Next, in “**Now They’re 18?: Demographic Shifts and Directional Pivots in Online Education**,” Chelsea McNeely and Holly Sumner, online leaders from Southeast Missouri State University, discuss the changing nature of student demographics for online programs at their institution and more broadly. Since online education units have seen a considerable rise in younger students, this chapter explores the implications of this shift and suggests how online education units can help their institutions transition to serve more age-diverse populations.

In “**The Unintentional Student: Creating Support Networks Through Academic Coaching**,” Anne Nicole Scott, a leader in supporting nontraditional students to succeed in higher education, relays the development of a student coaching model specifically targeted to help the unintentional online student succeed. The chapter explores how online students need holistic support to successfully manage multiple role identities and college coursework to ultimately thrive in the online space.

Lastly, in “**Behavioral Health Issues in an Online Learning Environment**,” Carissa Fralin, a licensed clinical social worker and expert online instructor, delves into the intricacies of behavioral health issues that appear within online learning environments. The chapter outlines key definitions, connections between types of behavioral health issues, and provides insights for how these can be addressed at higher educational institutions both to address the health of our students and to help our students thrive.

### *Guiding Questions*

1. While the academic functions section of this book (section 4) pays attention to what happens within the classroom, this section looks at those functions that impact students outside of the online classroom experience. Specifically, online units thrive on the ability to move students through the onboarding process, which includes marketing, lead

acquisition, enrollment and admission, financial aid, and, hopefully, matriculation. Yet, once the student has matriculated, the work of retention, academic success, and student engagement and well-being begins. Given this focus, which challenges and opportunities discussed in these chapters can help inform how you support your students in a frictionless and meaningful way?

2. Marketing and onboarding initiatives, development of academic coaching programs, and awareness of students' behavioral and mental health are all discussed as topics in these chapters. Which resonate with you and your students? How can these lessons help inform how to support all of your students, including your most vulnerable?

## **SECTION V. Innovation**

In “**Leveraging Data in Higher Education: Lessons for Leaders**,” Ron Kishen and Marlaina Kloefer from the University of the Sciences delve into the importance of creating a culture of leveraging data and embracing the practice of “test and learn” to foster online divisions' growth and development. By continuously collecting and analyzing data throughout the student life cycle, online leaders can make more informed student-centered decisions and foster a successful model in both the delivery and measurement of their initiatives. They provide examples of how a variety of institutions have used predictive modeling and data analyses in marketing and enrollment, the onboarding of students, and student services and success.

Next, “**Interinstitutional Leadership for Collaborative Innovation: Competency-Based Education in the University of Wisconsin System**,” written by a team of leaders from the University of Wisconsin System (UW), Aaron Brower, Laura Kite, Kim Kostka, Ryan Specht-Boardman, Nicole Simonson, Laura Pedrick, and Suresh Chalasani, tells the story of solving several first-time problems in the creation and launch of a competency-based education program involving four different institutions and ten different degrees and certificates. This chapter focuses on the leadership approaches and best practices that fostered innovation in online program development excellence, as it tells the story of building the UW Flexible Option.

The final chapter, “**Embracing the Digital: Defining a New Strategic Approach to Learning**,” is by a group of online leaders in the Big Ten Academic Alliance. This team, Andrea Deau, Chris Foley, Reba-Anna Lee, Robert Rubinyi, and Mary E. Warneka, take the perspective that it is critical to be proactive and take action to position online divisions and institutions for success. Thus, they discuss critical external trends and recommended approaches to enhance institutional online learning initiatives post pandemic. The authors specifically focus on (a) the need for a student-focused services model, (b) high-quality technology-enhanced learning, and (c) the importance of clearly articulating and delivering value to learners, along with “Questions for Self-Assessment,” a series of items developed for on-the-ground use by higher education leaders.

### *Guiding Questions*

1. In the realm of online education, innovative programming and initiatives are what keep the industry evolving and growing. One might argue that every chapter in this book is a story of innovation—every story is one of leaders' hard work to create deeper purpose and raise their institutions' educational potential. The chapters in this section are bold stories of creativity and ingenuity that benefit the entire online student life cycle and online development at institutions. What innovations have you already created at your institution? How can your previous ingenuity spur further action?
2. Specific innovations discussed in these chapters include leveraging data, collaboration, and centering student support. Which of these have been implemented at your institution or would you like to see in the future?
3. What innovations would you like to share with other educators? If you have stories that you think can inform others, please feel free to reach out to us at the [OLC Press!](#)