In this issue of Learning and Teaching: The International Journal of Higher Education in the Social Sciences, authors from New Zealand, Canada, the United States, Malaysia, the United Kingdom, Denmark and Australia write about women as doctoral supervisors, white academics as anti-racist allies, what creates a sense of belonging amongst distance education students and the experiences of students and staff during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the first article, Barbara M. Grant outlines the history of the modern PhD in anglophone countries and explores the ways in which doctoral supervision, once an almost exclusively male preserve, has changed as a result of many more women becoming doctoral students and supervisors from the 1990s onwards. Through a close analysis of sources in which women academics from the arts, humanities and social sciences reflect on the supervisory relationship, she identifies four central themes: power, relationships, care and embodiment. Most of the writers take a feminist perspective but differ in how they approach these issues. What they do share is a commitment to supervisory practice that is better than the traditional model.

In the second article, Phoebe S. Lin, Lynne N. Kennette and Lisa R. Van Havermaet argue that white academics can and should become allies to Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) in the struggle against racism. Using a range of social science and activist sources, they show how white faculty can support and encourage students of colour in the classroom and in the university more generally without falling into the trap of posing as a white saviour. They analyse how white privilege works in white-dominated societies to perpetuate inequality and injustice, and, instead, they advocate ways in which it can be used positively by white faculty so as to be good white allies.

In the third article, Guat Im Bok considers how undergraduate students enrolled in social science and management programmes at a distance-learning university in Malaysia experience isolation and the extent to which they feel a sense of belonging. The students interviewed had chosen to study remotely because of employment and/or family commitments and took it for granted that for most of the year they would not meet their classmates or lecturers. The annual campus meeting, consisting of two or three
weeks of classes, did make many of them feel that they belonged to the course, as did the e-Learning platform and the peer support they received through their social media group.

In the fourth article, Marc Turu, Tom van Rossum and Nicole Gridley report on the experiences of students who started their degrees in a School of Education during the COVID-19 pandemic. All their classes were online, lectures being asynchronous and all seminars and tutorials being synchronous. Individual online meetings with academic and professional staff were also available. In interviews, students were very positive about recorded lectures and about the willingness of academic and professional staff to provide advice and support. They wished they had been told explicitly how their courses would be taught and for teaching staff to be more proactive in facilitating peer interaction in online seminars.

In the fifth article, Jesper Aagaard, Maria Hvid Stenalt and Neil Selwyn analyse the pedagogical challenges of the switch to online (and later hybrid) teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. They surveyed university teachers in Denmark, asking for the worst examples of digital elements in teaching. Five main themes emerged in the responses: inept use of technologies, technical failures, the stress of teaching on-campus and online students in the same session, the difficulty of sensing how online students are responding to a given topic and students being unable or unwilling to switch on their cameras. Even when students feel comfortable using their cameras in digital classrooms, it is a matter of concern that the everyday interactions that help everyone get to know each other in physical classrooms cannot be replicated easily online.

The issue concludes with a review of Matt Brim’s Poor Queer Studies: Confronting Elitism in the University by Andrew G. Gibson.

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Penny Welch and Susan Wright