


2015

The Perceptions of Adults 35 and Older On Online Learning

Hector Alvarez Trujillo
Walden University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations>

 Part of the [Adult and Continuing Education Administration Commons](#), [Adult and Continuing Education and Teaching Commons](#), and the [Curriculum and Instruction Commons](#)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies Collection at ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact ScholarWorks@waldenu.edu.

Walden University

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Hector Alvarez-Trujillo

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee

Dr. Blue Robbins, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Sheila Goodwin, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Elsie Szecsy, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University

2015

Abstract

The Perceptions of Adults 35 and Older On Online Learning

by

Hector Alvarez Trujillo

MA, City College of the City of New York, 1997

BS, Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, 1993

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2015

Abstract

This qualitative case study examined the level of satisfaction among a group of adults ages 35 years and older enrolled in an online education program (OLEP) in a university in Puerto Rico. Although the current literature revealed that adult students 35 years and older are the fastest growing population enrolling in online college education programs in Puerto Rico, prior satisfaction studies conducted by this institution did not focus on this population. The theoretical framework of this study was guided by Holsapple and Lee's Post e-learning success model. The goal of this study was to understand students' satisfaction with the online program and determine if the program was helping them accomplish their goals. Data were collected through semi-structured individual interviews with 8 adult students, 35 years of age or older, who were currently enrolled at the institution. Data were analyzed using the category construction approach, open coding, and thematic analysis. Results indicated that the participants had a positive perception of the online program and its impact on their academic development and educational success. The data also revealed issues related to faculty-student communication and course design, which the participants believed needed to improve. The study's findings helped in the development of a best practice manual for the OLEP faculty. The manual will provide OLEP faculty with the tools needed to improve faculty-student communication and online course design, thereby increasing the student satisfaction among the fastest growing online student population. Improving its OLEP shows promise for the university to continue to be an agent of social change for Puerto Rico's economic growth and social progress.

The Perceptions of Adults 35 and Older On Online Learning

by

Hector Alvarez Trujillo

MA, City College of the City of New York, 1997

BS, Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, 1993

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2015

Dedication

I want to dedicate this project study to my God and Jesus, my Lord and savior, and my “Orishas”, because they made the impossible, possible and the unbearable endurable. I also dedicate it to my beloved family and to my son Hector Jr., my reason for being, doing, and enduring. I hope that this will show him that nothing in life comes easy, but that success is worth achieving through hard work. To my wife Gledys, for believing and supporting me, even in the darkest and hardest time. Without knowing you were in my corner, this could not have been possible. To my grandson JJ, whose daily struggles inspired and taught me that there are no dreams impossible to make true. Finally, to all the adult students that, like me, struggle to achieve their dreams; if I accomplish it, you can do it too.

Acknowledgments

This work was completed thanks to the help, effort, and support of many people, without whom this could not have been possible. If I happen to forget anyone, please accept my apologies in advance.

First, I like to acknowledge and thank in a very special way, Dr. Blue Robbins, my Committee Chair, for his unwavering help, support and understanding, throughout this challenging journey. Dr. Blue is greatly responsible for my success and one of the reasons that I did not give up during this process's darkest times. I once told him that there were not words to express my gratitude, and this does not begin to do it. Besides being a mentor, Dr. Blue became an example -one I will try to emulate.

My thanks go also to Dr. Sheila Goodwin, the second Committee Member, and to Dr. Elsie Szecsy, the URR, for their time and labor in supporting my efforts. My "compadre" Ray Petty- thanks for your advice and revisions (I hope my English improved thanks to you). Thanks also to my fellow students, some of whom were faithful companions in the final moments. I would also like to thank Marcos Torres Nazario for always supporting my work and providing me with his support and Maria Silvestrini, for her bibliographical advice. To Victor Torres, Lesley Gonzalez, Doel Lugo and JL Fernandez: My thanks for lending their technical hands and computer expertise to this endeavor.

Finally, I have to acknowledge and thank each and every one of the students, whom I cannot name for obvious reasons, who so graciously gave their time and knowledge and without whom this project could not have been possible.

Table of Contents

List of Figures	v
Section 1: The Problem.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Definition of the Problem	4
Rationale	6
Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level.....	6
Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature.....	8
Definitions.....	11
Significance.....	12
Guiding/Research Question	13
Review of the Literature	15
Adult education: a look from the beginning	16
Distance Education and Adult Learning: A Brief Historical Narrative	18
Student Perception	23
Students' perceptions: Online vs. face to face.. ..	24
Online Perceptions: Graduate Student's Perspectives	28
Implications.....	31
Summary.....	33
Section 2: The Methodology.....	35
Introduction.....	35
Qualitative Tradition.....	37
Participants.....	37

Data Collection	42
Role of the Researcher	44
Data Analysis	45
Timeline	48
Evidence of Quality	48
Qualitative Results	49
Interview Data Analysis.....	50
Theme 1: Motives to Enroll and Goals to Study.....	51
Theme 2: Choosing Online Education.....	53
Theme 3: Long-and short term-Academic Goals.....	55
Theme 4: Learning in Regards to Students’ Needs	56
Theme 5: Improvements and Overall Student’s perception of the Campus	
OLEP.....	61
Observation Analysis	64
Conclusion	66
Section 3: The Project.....	69
Introduction.....	69
Description and Goals.....	70
Rationale	72
Review of the Literature	74
Implementation	80
Potential Resources and Existing Supports.....	82
Potential Barriers	82

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable.....	83
Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others	83
Roles and Responsibilities of Administrators.....	83
Roles and Responsibilities of Faculty.....	84
Project Evaluation.....	85
Implications Including Social Change	85
Local Community	85
Far-Reaching.....	86
Conclusion	86
Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions.....	88
Introduction.....	88
Project Strengths	89
Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations.....	90
Scholarship.....	92
Project Development and Evaluation.....	94
Leadership and Change.....	97
Analysis of Self as Scholar	98
Analysis of Self as Practitioner.....	100
Analysis of Self as Project Developer	100
The Project’s Potential Impact on Social Change.....	102
Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research	103
Conclusion	104
References.....	108

Appendix A: The Project	127
Appendix B: University in Puerto Rico Enrollment statistics 2008-2010.....	160
Appendix C: University in Puerto Rico Student satisfaction Study-2009-2010.....	161
Appendix D: Walden’s conditional IRB approval.....	168
Appendix E: Chancellor’s cooperation letter.....	169
Appendix F: Walden IRB final approval	170
Appendix G: University in Puerto Rico IRB approval	171
Appendix H: Invitation letter-English	172
Appendix H1: Invitation letter-Spanish	173
Appendix I: Interview Guid.....	174
Appendix J: Observation table.....	175
Appendix K: Interview protocol	176
Appendix L: Informed Consent-English.....	177
Appendix M: Informed Consent-Spanish	179
Appendix N: List of Acronyms.....	181

List of Figures

<i>Figure 1.</i> A chart showing the distribution of the interview observations	66
<i>Figure 2.</i> The Holsapple and Lee-Post (2006) e-learning success model	75
<i>Figure 3.</i> A flowchart showing the ideal implementation process for the study	81

Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

This Puerto Rican university was founded at the beginning of the 20th century, and it was one of the higher education institutions and private four year colleges established in Puerto Rico. Today, this university has many campuses around the island (<http://www.inter.edu/conocenos/historia.asp>). In 1995, one of this university's campuses began offering online courses (OC) to its student population (Torres-Nazario, 2011). This decision placed it on track with the national trend in the United States in online education.

This campus Online Education Program (OLEP) was designed to offer an alternative educational method to its traditional student population, while also attracting new students from diverse populations, age groups, and geographical areas. It also gave the institution an effective and economical alternative to traditional education to reduce costs (Roach & Lemasters, 2006; Smart & Cappel, 2006; IAUPR, 2009b). The growth of the online (OL) student population has been pointed out in many studies (Fortune, Spielman, & Pangelinan, 2011; Mortagy & Boghikian-Whitby, 2010; Parker & Martin, 2010; Somenarain, Akkaraju, and Gharbaran, 2010). The OL student population at this campus increased steadily in the past few years, from 5,476 in 2008 to 6,094 in January 2010 (IAUPR, Ponce Campus, Distance Education Department, 2011). Another national educational trend is the constant rise in the adult population in higher learning institutions (Allen and Seaman, 2008; Chifwepa, 2008; DiMaria-Ghalili, Guittens, Rose & Ostrow, 2005; Donovan, 2009; Fenwick, 2008; Mortagy, et al., 2010). As the U.S. Department of

Education stated in its 2007 report, “Asynchronous course delivery is the most widely used teaching modality” (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, and Jones, as cited in Mortagy et al., 2010, p. 23). This Puerto Rican university campus has followed that trend. Today, adults 35 and older represent more than 25% of the total student population (Torres-Nazario, 2011 et al.).

Since this campus started its OLEP, its student population grew at a swift and steady pace. By January 2011, the percentage of students taking at least one online class exceeded 50% of the total student population, and 22% of all students took all of their courses online (IAUPR, PC, Distance Education Department, 2011). The OLEP developed at this campus, outgrew and outperformed, not only the rest of the university’s campuses, but also the entire higher education system in Puerto Rico. Currently, the site studied accounts for over 57% of all of the Island’s online higher education offer, outperforming not only the other its parent institution campuses but also the rest of the country’s colleges and universities (Torres-Nazario, 2011 et al.).

By the first semester of 2011 (January-May) over 3000, out of a total population of 6094 students, had taken at least one online course, and over 1300 students took their whole academic program online (IAUPR, PC, Distance Education Department, 2011, et al.). In response to this reality, the campus under study expanded its OLEP to accommodate the influx of students and their academic needs. Today, it offers over 22 programs (undergraduate and graduate level) totally online, and it has developed over 200 online courses (IAUPR, PC, Distance Education Department, 2011). A key element

in its OLEP growth is the rapid increase in its student population (IAUPR, PC, Distance Education Department, 2011).

The advances shown by this campus' OLEP required that a student satisfaction study be conducted in order to determine what the program has been doing correctly and what areas, if any, needed to be improved. Particular attention needed to be paid to the rising adult population. Despite the rapid growth in the its OLEP's student population, the satisfaction studies conducted both by the Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Systemic Planning (VAAPS) and The Resource Centre for Learning (RCL) did not address how the adult population, 35 year and older, perceives the campus' OLEP and their satisfaction level with it. At the time of this investigation, the most recent study conducted by the VAAPS regarding students' satisfaction with the OLEP, in the campus under study, was carried out in 2009-2010 (IAUPR, VAAPS, 2010).

This campus, on the other hand, conducts annual students' satisfaction surveys. These surveys take into account all offices and areas dealing with students services, including Orientation, Information Access Centre, Learning Resources Centre, Registrar, and Financial Aid offices, among others (RLC, 2010). These studies are limited in that the type of data collected is limited and previous offerings have not allowed participants to express their opinions or expand on their answers. Additionally, this survey is only used to assess undergraduate students. The sample of these studies has also been too small and they have not concentrated the institution adult population. The results of these previous studies cannot be generalized to the rest of the campus' OLEP population, especially the adult population that is the focus of this doctoral study. This campus needs

to perform several comprehensive and detailed studies in order to assess the satisfaction level of students 35 years and older, who have enrolled in its OLEP in recent years.

Definition of the Problem

There is a problem in a campus at a Puerto Rican university, associated with the lack of satisfaction studies regarding its OLEP (IAUPR, VAAPS, 2010). The problem is that this university has not conducted a study to evaluate the adult population's, 35 years and older, satisfaction with that campus OLEP. As stated, this university follows the United States' online education trend. Today, it is Puerto Rico's leading higher education institution offering online education programs. Students' satisfaction studies have been conducted, both at the central and local levels of the university. In 2009-2010, the VAAEPS conducted a student satisfaction study to measure the level of students' satisfaction with the OLEP, at this university's campus. This study did not focus on the students' population age; it also included students from nine campuses. The research performed was too narrow and did not allow the participants to expand on their answers about their satisfaction level; therefore, their findings were limited (IAUPR, PC, Distance Education Department, 2011, et al.; IAUPR, VAAEPS, 2010; RLC, et al., 2010). At the local level, the campus conducts yearly students' satisfaction surveys that include distance-learning students. Those surveys are too broad and they do not specifically address the study's chosen population (see Appendixes B and C). This doctoral study, principally, assesses 35 years of age and older students' satisfaction with the OLEP at this campus.

Online education (OLE) is a very important element of the educational offerings in major colleges and universities throughout the United States (Allen & Seaman, 2011). The US Department of Education's Office of Education Technology (2012) noted that at least 48 states offered some type of OLE in 2010. Allen and Seaman, et al. (2011), reported that "for the past eight years online enrollments have been growing substantially faster than overall higher education enrollments" (p.4). However, the amount of growth in 2011 has shown a decline compared to previous years (Allen and Seaman, et al., 2011).

It should be noted the online student population has grown steadily in the past years. The number of undergrad students grew by 4%, from 16 to 20 %, from 2008 to 2010 (NCES, 2011). Many authors agreed that OLE has become one of the preferred methods chosen by educators to educate today's growing student population (The NCES, 2011, et al.; Mansour & Mupinga, 2007; Palmer & Holt, 2009). Getzlaf, Perry, Toffner, Lamarche, & Edwards (2009) acknowledged that "Online education is a viable option for many students and an increasing number of courses are being offered over the Internet" (p. 2). Puerto Rico and this university in particular follow the national OLE trend. Currently, 11 Puerto Rican colleges and universities offer various degrees using OLE (Torres-Nazario, et al., 2011). Of those institutions, the university in this study is the leader offering close to 60% of all of the OL academic programs in Puerto Rico (Torres-Nazario, et al., 2011). OLE has become a central element of this university in Puerto Rico academic offering, developing 37 degrees, at the associates', bachelors', and masters'

levels. This study was designed to help this university's campus assess and improve its OLEP.

Rationale

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

As explained, OLE has become an important part of the educational development of Puerto Rico's higher education system, but more insightful satisfaction studies need to be conducted. There are several problems with existing literature on the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico's Ponce Campus's online programs. In the years 2009-2010, the university's VAAEPS conducted an OL student satisfaction study. This study was designed to evaluate some of the issues associated with functioning and implementation of the OLEP of the campus part of this study (UIAPR, VAAEPS, 2010, et al.). The scope of the study was very broad in some aspects and very narrow in others, which limited the findings of the study. The research method used also limited the study's findings. For that satisfaction study, the VAAEPS employed a survey of general questions, using a Likert Scale questionnaire. The survey questions were answered in scale from totally unsatisfied to completely satisfied. These types of surveys do not allow the participants to express their opinions, expand their answers, or elaborate on the alternative chosen. Also, a small number of the population selected participated in the study, only 15% of the sample completed the survey (IAUPR, VAAEPS, 2010, et al.). The age of the population sampled for the study was too wide. It ranged from 18 to 45 years and over, and the survey was administered only to a sample of undergraduate level students. Moreover, the

survey was offered to full time OL students and only 1190 students took part in the study (IAUPR, VAAEPS, 2010, et al.).

This doctoral study consisted of a more detailed investigation to determine the adult population's, 35 years and older, satisfaction with this Puerto Rican university's campus online education program. Also, a study of this nature needs to be conducted at the institutional level. Although this campus' OLEP grew to the point where today it is offering many degrees completely OL, from Associate's to Master's, this is the first qualitative study that evaluates how its OLEP is perceived by its adult student population, 35 years and older. While the issues surrounding students' satisfaction affects all of the student using the OLEP, the study focused on its impact on the adult student population, 35 years and older.

From 2008 to 2011 this site OL student population grew from 933 to 1403 students (IAUPR, Distance Education, et al.). An evaluation and assessment of how this population perceived the OLEP was necessary in order for the institution to guarantee that it is offering a product that fulfills learners' expectations. Without conducting a comprehensive student satisfaction study, the institution did not have access to the types of information it needs to comprehend its strengths and limitations and make the necessary changes or adjustments to its programs. Therefore, evaluating student satisfaction in this study with the OLEP is a serious and important issue. Students' satisfaction not only will have economic repercussions for the institution, but also a significant impact on educational issues, such as attrition. The information assembled in

this study will also help the institution to comply with the regulatory and licensing agencies while improving and expanding on its OLEP.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

This university's campus is not the only institution that has benefited from the online education boom. Many studies have confirmed that in the previous 10 years, OLE has become the fastest growing section in higher education, while at the same time, revealing that adult students, especially adults over the age of 35, are going back to school in record numbers (Allen & Seaman, et al., 2008; Chifwepa, et al., 2008; DiMaria-Ghalili, 2005, et al.; Donovan, 2009; Fenwick, 2008; Pusser, Breneman, Gansneder, Kohl, Levin, Milam, and Turner, 2007; Portland Community College Taskforce on Aging, 2007). The reasons that explain this steady growth are many and diverse. Some of the most prevalent reasons detailed in some studies presented above are:

- A rise on unemployment,
- family issues such as lack of time due to both parents working,
- increase time to study because children have grown and left the house,
- an increase in gas prices which makes transportation more expensive,
- a need for retraining or more training to learn a new work skill,
- setting an example for their children (Chifwepa, et al., 2008; Pusser, Breneman, Gansneder, et. al, 2007, DiMaria-Ghalili, et al., 2005; Donovan, 2009; Fenwick, 2008; St. Amant, 2007; Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006).

Because the phenomenon of OL has become such an important piece in the higher education puzzle, there is a real need to assess its results and how satisfied students are

with OLE as way of obtaining a trustworthy and viable education. Many scholars have conducted studies designed to evaluate how OLE is perceived among students who have chosen to use this tool to achieve their educational goals. Some authors cited the substantial monetary investment in the setup of all the necessary technology to make this tool available to students (Sahin & Shely, 2008; Selwyn, 2008). Universities view their students as customers (Moro-Egido and Panadés, 2008). Hence, conducting satisfaction studies that will gave these institutions the information needed to have a satisfied client, would be in their best interest.

The population that higher education institutions cater to is not as homogeneous as before. With OLE, geographical location is no longer an obstacle preventing anyone from attending to college (Roach & Lemasters, 2006). Although the available data clearly shows a massive growth in the OL students population, some studies asserted that more studies related to OL student satisfaction are needed because “the scarcity of systematic evaluative studies of web-based learning environments” (Sheard & Markham, as cited by Roach & Lemasters, 2006, p. 318). Additional studies acknowledged that more research and data related to OL students’ satisfaction is needed. (Jeffries & Hyde, 2009; Roach & Lemasters, et al., 2006). In that regard, Tandon and Gillman asserted, “universities are offering internet courses blindly without conducting needs assessments in order to keep up”. (as cited by Johnston, Killion, and Oomen, 2005, p. 1). Likewise, Palmer and Stuart (2009) stated, there is not an abundance of studies about students’ perception of their online studies experiences, also pointing the small number of participants in said studies.

The data will help shed light on how adult students, 35 years and older, perceived this educational tool and help to identify areas that need to be improved. The rationale for this study aligns with Tandon's assertion that more assessment is necessary to enhance any OLEP, and that information on students' satisfaction is the key to further this purpose. As affirmed by Jeffries and Hyde (2009), "We need to listen to people's views and ensure that technology meets their needs" (p. 119).

The campus in question has experienced many changes in past years that need critical examination. The student population has nearly doubled in the last ten years, especially in its OLEP, but no previous studies have critically assessed how adult students 35 years and older perceive the OLEP had not been conducted until now. I was especially familiar with this need for assessment due to having have taught at this campus for over 17 years and working in OLEP for over 14. I have also designed several of the online courses that I teach and evaluate my students' performance at the end of each semester. However, the information gathered by this assessment is superficial at best and limited to those students in my courses. This end-of-semester data does not provide an accurate view of how the student population at the campus performs as it relates to the adult population in particular, or their perception of the campus' OLEP in comparison to what I have observed as a long-time faculty member.

It was very important to conduct a study that would cover the entire OLEP population at the Ponce Campus and its adult population in particular. As expressed in a 2008 study by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), "There is a strong and growing argument for higher educational attainment in the United States....

Yet, not enough is known or publicized about the scope and potential of adult learning in the U.S. or about the barriers to adult participation” (p. 7). I believe that this study provides important evidence to fill the information gaps permeating the campus’ OLEP, especially those issues related to the adult population over 35.

Definitions

For the purpose of the study, the following terms are defined as follow:

Adult students. The students 35 years of age and older that participated in the study.

Adult education. “Activities intentionally designed for the purpose of bringing about learning among those whose age, social roles, or self-perception define them as adults” (Merriam & Brocket, 1999, as cited in <http://www.fsu.edu/~adult-ed/jenny/Definitions.html#Merriam>).

Distance education. An education transaction where the physical space is not completely shared by the instructor and students. (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2003; Southern Association of Colleges and Schools; Commission on Colleges, 2010).

Online education, online learning and e-learning. There are various definitions for these terms and are used interchangeably by some authors. Sacramento State College defined it as a form of education that is delivered online and where the physical presence of the students is not required (Sacramento States University, 2012). Conceição (2006) offered the definition that best sums up all of the previous descriptions, “Online

instruction refers to instruction in which learners and instructor are at a distance but connected to the Internet and Web” (p. 27).

Student perception. Students’ capacity to understand and handle the activities surrounding their education environment (Ahmad and Aziz, 2009).

Student satisfaction. The fulfillment of students’ needs in order to achieve their academic goals (Kotler & Clark, 1987, as cited by Malik, Danish, & Usman, 2010). In the study’s case, student satisfaction will be defined as the way the Campus’ students evaluate if the service received suits their education needs and other issues related to their academic endeavor.

Significance

The findings of this study will have a meaningful impact at the local level, at the Campus’ OLEP and in at the university at large. For the campus, understanding how its adult population perceives the OLEP will have a significant impact in all matters related to the academic transactions and performance of the adult population. The information provided by this study will help them attend to issues such as course design and content, educator-student relations, technical support, and more. Furthermore, it will also play an important factor in future course development, faculty training, and in deciding if a course needs adjustments, improvement, or terminated, according to the needs of that particular student population. This study is supported by the assertion made by Malik, Danish, and Usman (2010), that students’ satisfaction has a direct relation on program development and academic success.

To the larger community, the study's findings could be applied at the other OLEPs in the university, since all of the 11 campuses are part of the same academic system and should strive to provide a satisfactory education to all of its consumers. It would allow the institution to make sure its OL courses are in line with the needs of its population (Malik, Danish, & Usman, et al., 2010). As Malik, Danish, and Usman (2010) stated, "The students will be more satisfied and motivated for completing their studies if the institution provides an environment which facilitates learning... with essential parameters of professional and academic development" (p. 2).

Guiding/Research Question

The importance and benefits of conducting satisfaction studies among online students is supported by the available literature. These investigations provide ample evidence of how higher learning institutions have used the knowledge provided by students to improve their academic offerings and OLEP. Nevertheless, that same literature shows that studies with reference to adult students over 35 years old are scarce at best, which supported the necessity for performing this study.

The purpose of this study was to gather enough data in order to fully understand the adult student population, 35 years and older, satisfaction level with the campus' OLEP. In order to elicit the necessary information, I developed four research questions (RQ), each accompanied by two shadow questions to allow the informants to elaborate on their answers (See also Appendix I):

1. What reasons do the participants report for enrolling in college?
 - a. Explain which are your short and long term educational goals?

- b. Explain the reasons for choosing and what attracted you to this university in Puerto Rico Campus?
2. What motivations do participants report for selecting the online education program?
 - a. In your experience, does the campus' OELP help you in your academic endeavor? Explain.
 - b. According to your experiences in the OLEP, are you likely to continue online studies at this campus? Explain.
3. What do participants report regarding the online educational program's taking into account the needs of adult learners?
 - a. From your experience, explain which elements of the campus' OLEP have been the most helpful areas to your academic undertaking?
 - b. From your experience, explain which areas of the campus OLEP have been the least helpful areas to your academic undertaking?
4. What do participants report as areas for improvement in the online educational program?
 - a. From your experience, explain which OLEP's areas need to be improved?
 - b. From your experience, describe your perception of this university campus OLEP?

Review of the Literature

There is a problem in a Puerto Rican University, associated to its OLEP. The problem is that a study to evaluate the adult student's satisfaction with the OLEP had not been conducted, even though this campus began offering OL courses in the late 1990s. OLE has been around for three decades. It was first used by the corporate sector in the United States, back in the 80s (onlineeducation.org, 2011). The idea of providing students the opportunity to gain access to a good education at a reasonable price was born in 1982 at The Computer Assisted Learning Center (CALC), a small education institution. In 1996, in New Hampshire, CALC became the first education institution to offer a complete online degree (CALCampus, 2011). After that, there is ample literature that shows the swift growth of OLE. Since its inception the importance of OLE as an educational tool for higher learning has spread very rapidly. As of 2010, more than 60% of colleges in the United States stated their OLE was a very important part of their academic offering (Allen and Seaman, 2010). The importance of OLE could be seen in the growing number of students taking at least one OL course to complete their academic load. In 2008, over 4.5 million students used OLE. In 2010, that number increased by over 20% (Allen and Seaman, 2009, 2010). As a matter of fact, Allen and Seaman (2010) reported that "... Growth rate for online enrollment far exceeds the less than two percent growth of the overall higher education student population" (p. 2). The literature strongly supports that growth of adult education and higher learning are closely tied to the beginning, development, and progression of OLE (Allen & Seaman, et al., 2010; Casey, 2008; Olszewski-Kubilus & Corwith, 2010). To understand the importance of OLE in

adult education, it is necessary to have a better understanding of what is adult education and distance education or distance learning.

Adult education: a look from the beginning

Since it was first introduced in the education vocabulary of the United States, adult learning has been a topic of discussion and disagreement. The term (adult education), was introduced by Edward Lindeman back in 1926 in his book, *The Meaning of Adult Education* (Merriam, 2008, 2004; Reischmann, 2004; Brookfield, 1987; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). Many others followed in Lindeman's quest of exploring what became the basic issue of the time: Could adults learn or not? (Merriam, 2001). Lindeman's work and the other publications on the subject that followed, like Thorndike's *Adult Learning* (1928); Thorndike's *Adult Interest* (1935) and Bryson's *Adult Education* (1936), among others, gave a positive answer to it and set the foundations for what will be later known as Adult Learning Theory (Brookfield, 1987; Merriam, et al, 2004; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Krenner & Weinerman, 2011). Later, research conducted proved that adults could learn as well as younger people (Merriam, et al., 2004), "when time pressure was removed, adults up to age 70 did as well as younger adults" (Lorge, as cited by Merriam, et al., 2004).

Adult education took a new turn in the late 1960s when a new adult learning theory took center stage. Malcolm Knowles, a well-known scholar proposed a new theory he named Andragogy and promoted it as the best answer to the future of adult education (Clardy, 2005; Merriam, 2004). For decades, education scholars have argued about how adults learn and how to educate them, but they seem to agree that Malcolm Knowles was

the one who developed and introduced Andragogy as a viable adult learning theory. After reviewing and analyzing the assumption on which Knowles based his andragogy theory, I will present arguments in support and contrast of said premise.

Researchers associate the use of the term andragogy with the first organized attempt in adult education. Its use dates back to the 19th century, and the main reason that it was introduced was to offer a clear difference from the “pedagogy” label, a well-known term in education used to describe the methods used to teach children (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). As Merriam, Caffarella, and Baumgartner (2007) explained, andragogy was an education theory designed by Malcom Knowles in 1968, dedicated to how adults learn adult. One of the basic differences between pedagogy and andragogy can be seen in the role play by the teacher, in Clardy’s (2005) perspective, in the latter, the teacher facilitates learning, in contrast, in pedagogy, the teacher is the person who knows what’s being taught. In Knowles’ words, andragogy was, “... the art and science of teaching adults....”. (St. Clair, 2002, p. 2). Although Andragogy has not been discarded, the assumptions of Knowles’ learning theory have been challenged for different reasons, by various education scholars (Elias, 1979; Krenner & Weinerman, et al., 2011; Merriam, et al, 2004; Merriweather, 2004; Rachal, 2002; Reischmann, et al., 2004; St. Clair, 2002). Andragogy, concluded Merriam, et al., (2004) “It does not give us the total picture, nor is it a panacea for fixing adult learning practices. Rather, it constitutes one piece of the rich mosaic of adult learning” (p. 92). Together with Knowles andragogy, Togh and Knowles’s method of self-directed learning and Freire’s and Mezirow’s transformational learning became the pillars for adult education theory

(Merriam, et al., 2004). But as Hill (2002) explained, "... theories do not give us solutions.... They do direct our attention to those variables that are crucial in finding solutions." (Hill, as cited in Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, et al., 2007, pp. 277-278).

Today, in addition to the theories mentioned, adult learning is being addressed also by other approaches, "Context based learning, critical perspective and the emotions, body, and spirit in learning" or the "third period of adult learning theory", (Merriam, et al., 2004, p. 208). As Merriam (2004) so aptly put it, "Adult Learning.... is a work in progress" (p. 216). Later I will explain how the inception of technology also had a significant impact on adult education.

Distance Education and Adult Learning: A Brief Historical Narrative

Correspondence Education. In many of the research studies for this proposal, the authors traced the beginning of distance education (DE) to the late 19th century, including the United States Distance Learning Association (Edelson & Pittman, 2001; Casey, 2008; Larreamendys-Joens & Lienhardt, 2006; Whisher, Sabol & Moses, 2005). Others go as far as the beginning of the 18th century (Olszewski-Kubilus & Corwith, et al., 2010). However, most of the authors agreed on the types and methods used to promote DE: correspondence, radio, and television. They also agreed that this type of education was used almost solely by adults (Casey, 2008; Olszewski-Kubilus & Corwith, et al., 2010; Whisher, Sabol & Moses, 2005). There is no agreement on when DE first started. Authors, such as Larreamendys-Joens and Lienhardt, (2006), credited Anna Eliot Ticknor and the foundation of her Education Society, back in 1873. Others go even

earlier. Olszewski-Kubilus and Corwith, et al. (2010), stated "In the 1700s, the Church afforded religious education, through the use of correspondence, to "prospective clergymen" (p. 17). It is worth pointing out that Ticknor's Society was founded for the educational improvement of adult women. In 1883 in New York State, the Chautauqua Institution, known also as the Chautauqua Movement, launched the first correspondence programs in "liberal education for mature adults", which was imitated by others here in the United States and Canada (Scott, 2005). In 1892, one of the Chautauqua Movement founders, William Rainey Harper, became President of The University of Chicago. He instituted the Chautauqua Model at this university (Edelson & Pittman, et al., 2001; Scott, et al., 2005), by "allowing students living off campus to use the.... Postal Service to exchange lessons and submit assignments" (Olszewski-Kubilus & Corwith, et al., 2010, p. 17). Another form of DE for adults started in Pennsylvania after its Legislature passed the Mine Safety Act in 1885 (The University of Scranton, 2012). Due to a recurrence of mining accidents, a journal designed to provide miners with education, beyond what they learn in the mines, was published by Thomas J. Foster in 1891. This was the beginning of what became known as the International Correspondence School of Scranton, Pennsylvania (ICS). In 1895, over 500 miners enrolled in the ICS's first class. The ICS accounted for close to 200,000 adult students in less than 10 years (The University of Scranton, 2012). Correspondence institutions during the "Roaring Twenties" allowed adults to get a better education at a time of rising industrial development and employment opportunity. Such was the growth of correspondence school, Edelson and Pittman (et al, 2001) confirmed that by early 1920s, "four times as many people were enrolled in....

correspondence schools than in all resident colleges, universities, and professional schools combined” (p. 5).

Correspondence schools were not limited only to adult education. In 1906, DE education became available to youngsters when the Calvert School in Baltimore, an elementary school founded in 1899, began to offer correspondence courses (Calvert School, 2010 and Olszewski-Kubilus & Corwith, et al., 2010). Besides the University of Chicago, other prestigious higher education institutions also created and expanded their correspondence programs including the Universities of Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, North Carolina, and Pennsylvania State, among others (Edelson & Pittman, et al, 2001). Thanks to major technological advances in the early 20th century and the introduction of radio and television, DE experienced meaningful changes. The improvements in technology had an immediate impact in the way education was going to be disseminated. This was confirmed by the acceptance and growth of the use of radio and television (Olszewski-Kubilus & Corwith, et al., 2010; Casey, et al., 2008).

Radio. By the early 1920s, new technological inventions came to the aid and improvement of DE. The introduction of the telephone and the radio was seen as a new way to promote distance learning (Samans, 2004). The use of the telephone for DE was short lived. It was not available to a considerable number of people because of its cost and infrastructure (Distance-education.org, 2009 and Samans, et al., 2004). On the other hand, with the unveiling of radio in early 1900s, some educators saw in it a possibility of expanding the reach of education (Samans, et al., 2004; Soukup, 2011). In 1921, the US government granted the first educational radio station license to the Latter Days Saints

University (United States Distance Learning Association). Twenty-five years later, The Federal Communications Commission had issued over 200 radio licenses to as many colleges (Casay, et al, 2008; Nasseh, 1997; Plymouth University, 2007). By the early 1920s, radio was one of the most popular vehicles used to deliver education to a wide variety of students. The Public Broadcasting Service (2003) stated, “By 1923, 105 of all broadcast radio stations were owned by educational institutions that delivered educational programming” (As cited in Casey, et al, 2008, p. 46). Nevertheless, the impetus all but died by 1940, “There was only one college level credit course offered by radio” (Public Broadcasting Service, as cited in Casey, et al 2008, p. 46). Radio did not live up to the potential and expectations of both educators and institutions. Some of the reasons were, explained Samans (et al., 2004), that radio lessons, without the aid of some correspondence materials, could not deliver a complete education. “The need to provide supplemental materials for early courses by postal mail, made radio courses little more than enhanced correspondence courses” (Samans et al., 2004). However, Soukup et al. (2011) described that by 1960, some educational institutions were still using radio, “for in-classroom or at home supplements to learning” (p. 10). Authors like Casey et al (2008) and Soukup et al. (2011) agreed that television fundamentally substituted for radio, but acknowledge that radio was a big influence in the development of what later Diamond would call, “educational television” (Diamond, as cited in King, 2008, p. 59).

Television. The use of television as an instrument for educational purposes dates back to the mid-1940s, and as its predecessors, it was used to teach adults, such as soldiers training during World War II (WWII), (Casey, et al., 2008; Pearlman, 2011; The

Museum of Broadcast Communications, 2012). Some colleges and educators, all over the United States, saw television as the perfect vehicle to deliver a better education without having to worry about distance or face-to-face engagement between instructor and student (Hendry, 2001; Pearlman, et al., 2010; The Museum of Broadcast Communications, et al, 2012). By 1939, recounted Samans et al. (2004), well over 400 “educational programs” had been broadcasted. After WW II, the United States Congress passed laws protecting televised education. After that, some private sector institutions invested in “educational television” (Casey, et al., 2008; Samans, et al., 2004; The Museum of Broadcast Communications, et al, 2012). To illustrate how big that investment was, Samans et al. (2004) stated that after WWII, “Hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of grants from the Ford Foundation and other private investors poured into televised learning”. By early 1950s, the Federal Communication Commission had set aside over 200 “television channels for noncommercial educational use” (Pearlman, et al, 2010, p. 478). Television also had its detractors, as Pearlman et al., (2011) explained. Many educators were skeptical and doubted that television could compare or even replace qualified educators, or “whether schools could counter the alleged negative influence of... the arrival of television” (p. 478). Through the years, the use of television for educational purposes has evolved and still is an important component of today’s DE. Nevertheless, all of the technological advances did not confront the problem of a lack of real time communication between instructor and learner. This remained an obstacle that impeded delivering and obtaining a high quality education. Nipper (1989) alluded, “Communication with the learners has been marginal, and communication amongst the

learners has been more or less non-existent” (Nipper, as cited in Summer, 2000, p. 268). Some decades later, development of the personal computer, the Internet, and the World Wide Web (WWW) changed all that (Larreamendy-Joern & Leinhard, et al., 2006).

Student Perception

The data analyzed showed that since technology allowed for the delivery of knowledge, the inception of DE, conventional learning, or F2F education for adults in particular, began to move away from the traditional classroom to homes, churches, mines, workshops, among others educational outlets (Casey, 2008; Larreamendys-Joens & Lienhardt, et al., 2006; Olszewski-Kubilus & Corwith, et al., 2010; Pearlman, 2011; Soukup, et al., 2011; Whisher, Sabol & Moses, 2005). As with previous forms of DE, OL learning was first used for adult instruction. Its first use could be traced to corporate America, which used it to provide work training for their employees (onlineeducation.org). The conjugal relation developed between the Internet and the WWW would expand DE to new heights, by deleting the roadblocks that keep instructor and students away from each other. Some authors described how, thanks largely to the launch of the Internet, DE has turn out to be an essential part of higher learning and how the barriers between instructors and students have fallen. To emphasize this trend, Larreamendys-Joens and Lienhardt et al., (2006), explained:

Distance learning has become a ubiquitous practice as a result of the spread of the Internet. Students now learn informally as they navigate through virtual museums; seek advice from tutors who may be a few feet or a thousand miles away,

participate in asynchronous discussions, and enroll in online courses as regular resident students. (p. 570)

In nowadays DE has become an essential tool for adults seeking to obtain a higher education degree.

Students' perceptions: Online vs. face to face. The campus studied, at this Puerto Rican university had not conducted an investigation to study how the adult student population, 35 years and older, perceives its OLEP. As established, the growth of OLE has been remarkable. For an increased number of adult students, OLEPs have become one of the most convenient educational mediums because of the diverse academic offerings and its timetable flexibility (Fortune, et al., (2011); Getzlaf, Perry, Toffer, Lamarche, & Edwards (2009). The main goal of any education program, OLEP included, as Sommenarain, Akkaraju, and Gharbajan (2010) asserted, has to be to ensure that it delivers a proven good quality education to enable its students' success. In the case of OLE, examining students' perceptions, among others, is one of the principal ways to find out if this goal has been achieved. Sommenarain, Akkaraju, and Gharbajan et al., (2010) went on to say "One of the most important aspects of online education is how students themselves perceived the online experience" (p. 353).

Students' perceptions of online learning, as stated by Fortune, Spielman, and Pangelinan (2011), is a topic that has been under study for the last few years. Recent studies conducted to determine and understand students' satisfaction with OLE, have looked at this matter from many perspectives. Comparing OL students' perceptions to their F2F counterparts has become one of most popular points of reference used to

determine students' satisfaction with their educational experience. The bulk of the studies examined for this proposal, supports the previous assertion; that comparing F2F and OL students, enrolled in the same courses or program, is the preferred research method to measure their satisfaction level. That said, it is important to clarify that some of these studies did not discriminate based on the participants' ages, gender, and ethnicity. Therefore, these studies might offer limited information, but they are a good starting point (Fortune, et al., 2011; Mortagy & Boghikian-Whitby, et al., 2010; Mupinga, et al., 2007; Parker and Martin, et al., 2010; Sommenarain, et al., 2010).

The studies described in this section examined the reasons why some students selected the same OL course over F2F. In some of these studies, the reasons cited by students were, "convenience and ease of time and opportunity (Cuthrell & Lion, as cited in Fortune, et al., 2011). Goldsmith, Snider, and Hamm, (2010), stated, "Convenience and lack of constraints offered by online courses continues to be the chief attraction for many" (p. 2). In Fortune, et al., 2011, the authors found that over $\frac{3}{4}$ of the students selected the OL courses over F2F. It should be noted, that the students who choose to take the OL course worked at least part time. At the end of the study, the authors concluded that there were no noticeable differences in the perception between the OL and F2F. Both groups expressed a high level of satisfaction with their academic experience.

Mortagy & Boghikian-Whitby (2010) conducted a longitudinal study, over an eight year period, which compared OL and F2F students' perceptions and satisfaction. A distinctive fact is that the average age of the OL students in the study was 34 years, which is very similar to the age of the students in the study I conducted. This study not only

lasted eight years, but the number of participants was very high, 664 in total, making this a very reliable study. Although the same could not be said for its validity. Validity, in longitudinal studies has been questioned, because as the study's move forward it can run into issues, such as "selection, attrition," (Schmidt & Teti, p. 4), among others that might vary during the time of the study, which could undermine the study's validity. In contrast with other similar studies, Mortagy & Boghikian-Whitby tested eight assertions, which were based, among others, on "Chickering's Seven Principles of Good Practice" (p. 23). The Seven principles of an undergraduate education was a study conducted by Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson, in 1987. This study offered a blueprint for good practices in education, although online students were not included in the study. Nevertheless, it should be noted that other studies, such as Arbaugh, J. B. and Hornik, S. (2006), besides Mortagy and Boghikian-Whitby et al., (2010) have evaluated its application to the web-based environment. Mortagy and Boghikian-Whitby's study concluded OL students perceived their OL courses to be less complicated than F2F and their satisfaction was higher. Other issues addressed by the study were; instructors expectations, faculty availability, interaction between instructor and student, and feedback quality, among others.

In the end, the study found that, "There is no significant difference between face-to-face and online students' perception of faculty expectations of their performance" (p. 30). Even if the findings did not expose major differences between OL and F2F students' satisfaction and perceptions, some of them did share some important information about how OL students differ from their counterparts and had a higher perception of their OL

experience. For example, the results showed that “online students perceived that faculty had higher expectations compared to face-to-face students” (p. 31). Also, OL students perceived that their interaction with faculty was better than that of F2F students. The study’s findings revealed that, relating to students’ course activities, OL students had a higher degree of satisfaction than their F2F counterparts. Mortagy and Boghikian-Whitby et al., (2010) reacted by stating, “This is an interesting finding in light of the fact that course activities were the same in both classes” (p. 41). In my opinion, this particular study offers very useful information for those institutions looking to improve their OL programs, especially when Mortagy and Boghikian-Whitby et al., (2010) asserted that:

Consequently, to ensure a real return on a student’s online education investment, colleges and universities should consider following a research-based validated framework and benchmark for planning, designing, delivering, and assessing online education. The success of an online course depends on effective course design using student-centered model, delivery assessment. (p. 41))

In the study conducted by Sommenarain, Akkaraju, and Gharbajan, et al. (2010), the authors administered surveys at the beginning and the end of the semester to students taking OL and F2F biology courses. The study did not consider any particular aspects of the OLE or F2F programs. Its main purpose was to compare both groups’ learning experiences. The study did not find any noteworthy discrepancy between the levels of satisfaction between the two groups, although the degree of satisfaction for online students was a little higher. This study was significant because it showed that OL students were generally satisfied with the OLE experience “We believe that these

results.... support the evidence that distant education is achieving the goal of providing quality learning experience” (p. 355). These findings were supported by a similar study conducted with OL and F2F students taking courses in hospitality, recreation, and tourism programs (Fortune, et al., 2006). The authors also wanted to investigate how these students used social networks. This study corroborated the fact that many students take online courses because of time flexibility, “convenient, and gave them the chance of being innovative” (p. 6).

Parker and Martin et al. (2010) conducted another study comparing OL and F2F students in 2008. They piloted a research study with undergraduate students taking an instructional technology course to study their perceptions on the use of technology applied to the learning. These courses were fully online (OLC) or blended (BC). The study emphasized that those students taking BC “predominately met face to face” (p. 138). Similar to the previous studies, students OLC indicated a higher satisfaction at all levels, relative to those taking BC. These studies were conducted with undergraduate students, none older than 32 years of age and followed a quantitative approach.

Online Perceptions: Graduate Student’s Perspectives

As stated, OLE has transformed the way people today access education nowadays, making it easier, flexible, and convenient. Online learning removes the negative perception the created by the lack of extra time and traveling sometimes long distances, in order to go to school. To this issue, Goldsmith, Snider, and Ham (2010) concluded that because of that online learning is more accessible as “students have a growing selection of options in the online market” (p.2). In 2006, Goldsmith, Snider and

Ham et al. (2010) began a quantitative study to evaluate students learning perceptions of a newly designed OL graduate program, adapted from an existing F2F, for students pursuing a master's degree in education administration. The participants of this study were the first graduate students enrolled in said program. The study was designed to measure students' effectiveness perception in the following areas: course design, student interaction, and interaction between faculty and students, among others. In explaining the necessity for their study, Goldsmith, Snider and Ham et al, (2010) argued "much of the literature on the effectiveness of online learning is anecdotal in nature..." (p. 2). The authors also argued that "students experience and perception are vital to course design" (p. 5).

An important matter is the fact that the average age of the students in the study, "30-39" (p. 6), fits the profile of the study project proposal. Goldsmith, Snider and Ham et al. (2010) conducted a pre and posttest, to assess how students' perceptions change as the program developed. The findings showed that, overall, students had a very satisfactory experience. One of the most important issues assessed was the instructional design. At the beginning of the study, a high percentage of participants questioned if OLE could provide the same motivation found in F2F classes; or whether they could have the same learning experience. After the posttest, that negative perception dropped over 37% and the notion that it would be more difficult to get help in an OL course, as in than F2F, also plunged close to the same percentage. At the end of the study, the authors concluded that the participants' original perception of OLE increased during the course of the graduate program, "Students viewed the courses as academically rigorous, socially

satisfying and an environment in which they could.... access the teacher and.... assistance when needed” (p. 8).

Another study designed to assess students’ perceptions of OLE was conducted by Lee (2009). As in the previous study, the participants selected were graduate students enrolled in an education program (teacher’s program). For this study, the author chose students taking one course instead of choosing students from the entire program. The aim of the study was to obtain information that could be helpful in trying to meet graduate students’ needs. This exploratory research wanted to explore three areas, “(a) How effective were the online instructional activities.... (b) What were the graduate students’ perceptions of their ability to transfer the learned.... strategies.... (c) What were the characteristics of the graduate students...” (p. 76-77). The creators of the course selected by the author, like Mortagy and Boghikian-Whitby, et al., 2010, also incorporated Chickering’s seven principles in the course’s design. The study had only 17 participants, and their ages ranged from 24 to 49 years, which places this study close to the age being anticipated in this Project Proposal. As in previous studies, the participants were adults employed full or part-time. Lee also wanted to assess the level of satisfaction that the participants placed on their OL activities and how effectively these students could transmit what they learned to their F2F learners. To this end, the study provides important information related to the participants’ satisfaction and about which areas needed to be improved. Lee et al (2009) will use those findings to help her improve her expertise, thus enhancing the academic offering, “This valuable feedback will allow the investigator.... to modify this and future courses accordingly” (p. 81). All of the studies

in this review support the need to investigate students' satisfaction with OLE, some of them specifically addressing the need to do so for the benefit of adults 35 years and older.

Implications

This project study focused on the need to assess how the adult population, 35 year and older, at this Puerto Rican University campus perceives the OLEP. I conducted a qualitative research study which gathered the necessary data to have a robust sense of the 35 year and older population's perceptions and satisfaction with the campus' OLEP. These findings helped me form, develop, and propose strategies to help improve some areas in the OLEP that need to be adjusted. Since the studies conducted by this university are mostly quantitative and the population in this project was not the focus of the said studies, this investigation has meaningful significance.

The literature review demonstrated that OLE and adult students, 35 years and older, are the fastest growing segment in higher education and that it is being adopted by a great number of higher education institutions such as Michigan State, Princeton, Stanford, the University of Pennsylvania, Georgia Institute of Technology, Johns Hopkins University, the University of Illinois, and the University of Virginia, to mention a few (<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/17/education/consortium-of-colleges-takes-online-education-to-new-level.html?pagewanted=all>). It also supports the fact that the only way to enhance, renovate, improve, or create new and needed courses and programs, is learning about students' experiences, perceptions, and needs. Almost all the studies reviewed were quantitative, which supports the need for conducting a qualitative study, which delves into the students' feelings in order to learn from their experiences and to

allow them to express what they need or are having difficulties with. A majority of the students that participated in the studies presented, expressed a high level of satisfaction with OLE and perceived it to be a useful educational tool, which delivers high quality education and an acceptable level of social interaction. At the same time, a minority of them pointed out some inadequacies and the necessity to improve some areas. (Lee, et al., 2009). Based on the reviewed literature, the research proposed in this project study is of utmost importance for the Campus where the study will take place. This will be the first qualitative study conducted, and the type of data that will be gathered will help the Campus improve its OLEP and the services offered to this student population. This study focused on adult students, a student population which at this time is among the highest in enrollment numbers at this Campus. Three of the studies reviewed, Goldsmith, Snider, and Ham et al., 2010, Lee, et al., 2009, and Mortagy and Boghikian-Whitby, et al., 2010 researched students who come close to the adult population age profile suggested for this study, and all of them stressed the importance of finding out how adult students perceived OLE.

All of the authors studied agreed that these perception studies will provide higher education institutions with the information needed to improve the OLE program in order to provide quality services and better support for their students (Mortagy & Seta-Boghikian et al., 2010). As Abu Hasan, Abd Rahman, and abd Razak (2008) stated, “Service quality has been widely accepted as an antecedent of satisfaction and neglecting it may jeopardize the competitiveness of an organization”(p. 169). My fourteen years of experience teaching OL have brought me close to the Campus OL faculty members, and

many students. The anecdotal and casual information gathered from those contacts supports many of the findings in the reviewed literature that faculty and students are, for the most part, satisfied with the Campus' OLEP, while voicing dissatisfaction with some of its aspects. This project study collected students' perceptions and experiences in the OL academic world, in order to understand from their point of view what works, what does not, and what needs to be improved. Also, since adults are one of fastest growing student segments, this study concentrated only on adult students, 35 years and older. From the contact I had with OL students, I expected some of the information my participants could contribute to the study what would help understand the adult population's, 35 years and older, perception of the Campus' OLEP; this information could translate their needs into an effective project to help enhance the OLEP. This conclusion is supported by the literature reviewed for this project study. The measures taken, as a result of this project study, will help adult students, this Campus' OLEP and the faculty members responsible of their education.

Summary

This university Campus' OLEP, has been growing since its introduction back in 1996, and, as the data showed, the population represents one of the fastest growing segments of its population. Nonetheless, the studies to assess the students' perceptions and satisfaction with the program have been few, limited, and for the most part quantitative. The satisfaction studies conducted by the university, of all of its campuses OLEP, and those conducted by the Campus itself, have studied the OL student population as a whole. A study to assess the adult students', 35 years and older, perceptions and

satisfaction has never been conducted. The research examined in the literature review showed that it is very important to evaluate students' perceptions in order to improve the programs and services used by them (Fortune, et al., 2011; Lee, 2009; Russo and Benson, 2005). The literature reviewed also showed that studies conducted among adults, 35 years and older, are scarce, making this project study significant and important.

The purpose of this project study was to gather the necessary information to understand how this Campus' adult students, 35 years and older, perceive the OLEP and how satisfied they are with it, and to find out where, if anything, are the areas that might need to be improved or changed. The study will also assist in developing a teaching best practice manual to help the Campus' OLEP faculty help understand the needs of the studied population and how to better serve them. Its findings can also be used in developing and designing better courses for the campus' OLEP, and within the institution at large.

The methodology and the reasons for choosing it are explained in section two of this project study. Section two will also explain how the participants were chosen and describe the informed consent processes. Along with that information, section two will also explain in detail the data collection procedures and analysis. The project itself will be described in section 3 of the study, along with the literary review that defends the necessity for developing this project. The study's findings and project dissemination and application will be explained in section 3. In section 4, I will share the project study's reflections and conclusion and detail the project's strengths and limitations, its prospective impact on social change, and on myself as a scholar.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

This segment will detail all the relevant matters about the project study's methodology. In this section, I will describe the design and research methods chosen for the study and the tradition behind its use. This section will also explain the sampling procedures, participants' selection process, ethical procedures, participants' rights protection, and data collection procedures.

The core principle of this study was to assess how the OLEP at this Puerto Rican university campus has been perceived by the adults, 35 years and older, student population and to develop a best practice manual to help the Campus' OL faculty best serve and understand said population. An intrinsic case study qualitative research design was chosen to conduct this study since its primary goal was to, as defined by Hancock & Algozzine (2006), to have a better understanding of an specific group of individuals. This allowed me to interpret and understand a phenomenon and to be the vehicle this individuals the opportunity to expressed their perceptions and viewpoints (Lodico, Spaulding, and Voegtle, 2010). This study, as designed to improve understanding of social, personal experiences, and the interrelation between them matters as suggested by Glesne (2011). This study was not interested, as explained by Hancock & Algozzine, (2006) in proving or disproving a theory but rather to help understand the phenomena studied by providing a thick description of participants' "perceptions, attitudes, and processes" (Glesne, p. 39).

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

A case study design was chosen among the various qualitative research designs. It allows, as in this situation, the researcher to study particular personal experiences of a group or program. This is what several authors refer to as a bounded system (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2008; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). Also, the situations to be studied shared some similarities, such as the collective relation of the participants to the study and it has to be conducted in the same space and time (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). The case study offers an effective way of investigating, analyzing, and portraying research as explained by Merriam et al. (2009). A case study is the approach recommended if the researcher “explores a bounded system.... over time, through detail, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information” (Creswell, as cited in Merriam, et al., 2009, p.43.). Merriam et al. (2009) offered a robust defense of the use of case study for research that studies current situations. Merriam et al. (2009) based her defense on what she defined as a case study’s three special features (p.43). The generalization of the study’s findings is not the fundamental goal of a case study researcher; although each reader, as Merriam et al. (2009) pointed out, generalizes the study’s findings to a different population similar to that of the study, “reader interpretation.... lead to generalization....” (p. 45). In contrast, the researcher aims to explore, understand, and explain experiences, events, and trends associated with an individual or group (Hancock & Algozzine, et al., 2006).

Qualitative Tradition

There are similarities between the case study approach and other qualitative research methods. For example, the data needed for a case study, as is the case in the ethnographic, life history, and phenomenological approaches, will likely come from in-depth personal interviews and the researcher's observations. It is important to develop a close relationship between the researcher and the participants (Glesne, et al., 2011; Lodico, et al., 2010; Cresswell, et al., 2008). Many experts agree with the premise that the case study, among the other approaches referred to, is the one that will provide a more detailed and personal picture of the issues under study (Glesne, et al., 2011; Lodico, et al., 2010; Merriam, et al., 2009; Hancock and Algozzine, et al., 2006).

Participants

The participants of the study were selected from the Campus' OLEP entire student population, comprising both undergraduate and graduate students. The number of participants selected for this study was determined following Merriam et al. (2009). The sampling technique used to select the study's potential participants was purposeful random sampling. Various authors expressed that the participants selected for a case study have to echo many of the characteristics of the event, program, or incident under study; this sampling technique matched the study's needs and followed the definition given (Glesne, et al., 2011; Merriam, et al., 2009, Hancock and Algozzine, et al., 2006). Lodico, (2010), makes clear that people selected through this method, "... represent the norm and are in no way atypical" (p.141). Some of the participants' desired characteristics were as closely balanced as possible such as the distribution of female and

male students to gender balanced the data. Each of the students selected were active students at the camps at the time of the study, and had been enrolled for at least two consecutive semesters. Since the participants had been enrolled in this campus OLEP for a year, their perspectives increased the study's findings credibility. Besides being active enrolled students, participants also needed to fulfill the following requisites:

1. 35 years of age or older and could have previously taken courses taught by me.
2. not be enrolled in any of my courses at the time of the study, or in any of my future courses.
3. 30 or more credit hours approved.
4. and taken 3 or more OL courses.

The number of participants selected was 8; each was chosen from the Campus' OLEP full- or part-time registration list. None of the participants were contacted until all the necessary requirements and permissions were obtained. To conduct the study, both Walden University and the Puerto Rican university require that I obtained approval from their respective Institutional Review Boards (IRB). Receiving IRB approval guarantees that the researcher knows about the protections to be observed when dealing with human subjects and takes them into consideration before starting an investigation. It also, ensures that the researcher will conduct an ethical investigation that protects and safeguards the participant's rights to confidentiality and voluntary participation, among others. I sought Walden's University IRB approval first, and obtained a conditional approval, pending a letter of cooperation from the Campus' Chancellor (see Appendixes D & E). After Walden University received the chancellor's letter, full approval was

granted (see Appendix F). Later, the Puerto Rican university's IRB also granted its approval (see appendix G).

After both IRB's authorization were secured an invitation letter, in English and Spanish (see Appendix H & H1) , detailing the study's nature, purposes and my contact information, was posted on the Campus OLEP's institutional site, making all OL students aware of the study, and their participation in the study was requested. This guaranteed that all of the students selected had the same probability of being in the study (Creswell, et al., 2008, & Lodico, et al., 2010). It also safeguarded that only the participants that met the study's requirement were asked to be part of the investigation. After obtaining the necessary permission and posting the invitation letter, nine students communicated their interest in being part of the study; eight of them meet the study's requirements, four male and four female. The participant's average age was 44 years old; the youngest was 37 and the oldest 67. Over 87% were married and had children, 75% worked, and the remaining work in their household or are retired. Over 60% were working on their undergrad, 30% on their master, and the remaining on their associate degrees respectively; 75% were born in Puerto Rico; Spanish was the vernacular language of 100% of the participants, although 62% of them were fully bilingual.

After contacting the eight screened potential participants, an information kit, in English and Spanish, was made available to each one by me. The kit included information about the nature and importance of the study, its purpose, (covered in the invitation letter) and an informed consent letter, informing them of their rights and responsibilities. The participants were informed that their participation will be on a

voluntarily basis and that they will not receive any type of remuneration or incentives other than the desire to contribute their experiences to the study. All of them agreed to participate in the study.

To guarantee the appropriateness of the study, a protocol guaranteeing that all guidelines were observed was followed. Since publicizing the study's findings would open the door to expose individuals and/or organizations, the necessary safeguards to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of the study's participants were in place. This protocol was clearly delineated in document provided to every participant. Each participant signed an informed consent form, stating that they read, understood, and agreed with all the guidelines and/or documents that they received. The informed consent form also assured participants' that their rights will be respected, as well as their desire to participate in the study. To protect the participants during the study, three guidelines were put in place and strictly adhered to, here is a brief description of each guideline:

- **Informed and consent:** In any study, protecting participants from harm is an important element. Before beginning the study, I made sure that each participant understood the purpose of the study and his/her role in it. They were requested to sign an informed consent form; in this form included all information pertaining to the study. It explained matters such as: what will be the purpose of the study; the role the participant will have in the study; and that their rights will not be violated (Creswell, et al., 2008), among others. The participants' signatures will

guaranteed they feel confident that their rights will be protected, and their understanding of all procedures as well.

- Confidentiality: Participants were assured that their personal information will be kept confidential and, that no person, besides myself would have access to the information they provide. Also, to protect their identities, pseudonyms were used.
- Participation desire: All participants agreed to voluntarily participate in the study, without fear of retribution or promise of any compensation, and that they could stop participating in the study, if they so desire.

Conducting a successful research study hinges on how good of an interrelationship could be developed between the researcher and his/her participants. After the initial contact between researcher and participants has commenced, Lodico, et al., (2010) advised that “good field relations must be established and maintained” (p. 266). This can only be achieved, he insisted, when a relationship based on mutual trust and credibility is established. In order to develop trust and credibility, researchers need to successfully maintain ground relations with the participants. Creswell (2008) identified the three essential elements that researchers need to establish with the participants in order to conduct an objective investigation: rapport, fitting in, and building trust (p.141-144). Interpreting Creswell’s et al. (2008) explanations of each term, rapport could be defined as a cordial and agreeable relationship between two or more people, which allows them to feel comfortable around each other. Creswell et al., (2008) emphasized that while rapport could sometimes be “used interchangeably with trust” (p. 141), they do not have the same meaning and need to be used accurately. Fitting in could be defined as the

importance that the researcher's physical appearance, experiences, and even the lingo used, has a resemblance to that of its participants. This will help the participants identify with the researcher and feel more comfortable establishing a relationship. Finally, there is the issue of trust. Creswell et al. (2008) described it as the transformations that rapport goes through while the relationship between the researcher and the participants mature. It is the stage when the participant can fully believe in the researcher as "the sort of person who is reliable, honest, and willing to carefully listen...." (p. 144). Throughout the course of the study close attention was paid to each and every one of these three elements. The interviewees preferred that I conduct the interviews in Spanish.

Data Collection

Collecting data for a case study, as several authors confirmed, is not limited to one technique. In fact, they suggested that using a variety of techniques will enhance the quality of the information gathered (Glesne, et al., 2011; Lodico, et al., 2010; Merriam, et al., 2009; Creswell, 2008; Hancock & Algozzine, et al., 2006). In contrast, studies that use only one data collection method had been criticized, as Yin (2009) noted, "In fact, good case studies benefit from having multiple sources of evidence" (as cited in, A (very) brief refresher on the case study method. Sagepub.com p. 10). For this qualitative case study, the data were gathered through semi-structured personal interviews and direct observations; the interviews were conducted in Spanish, the participants' vernacular. The need for this type of qualitative study was based on the fact that the studies conducted by this Puerto Rican university, concerning its OLEP, do not offered enough information to assess the level of satisfaction of the student population 35 years and older with the

Campus' OLEP. This was supported by the documented information accumulated.

Finally, the information related to the issues to be investigated by the study will come from the participants' interviews and direct observations of their behavior documented by the researcher.

As of 2012, the total students enrollment was 5616, over 2700 students at this university's campus were taking at least one online course and over 1403 were fully enrolled in the OLEP (UIAPR, PC Distance Education, 2011). As stated before, the study's participants were selected from the existing OLEP's student population that satisfied all IRB requirements. The number of participants for a case study could range from one to a small group of participants (Merriam, et al., 2008; Writing@CSU, et al). For this study, the number of participants selected for the study followed the Merriam's criteria, et al. (2009). Eight were participants selected for the study, from the 10 that inquired, and, as stated by Patton (2002) the selection was, "based on expected reasonable coverage of the phenomenon..." (Cited by Merriam, et al., 2009. P. 80).

Merriam, et al. (2009) agreed that interviews are the best tool to gather information for a case study, especially when the researcher is not able to observe, firsthand, the experiences or behaviors being studied. Other authors concurred with her assessment (DeMarrais, 2004, and Dexter, 1970 as cited by Merriam, et al. 2008). For this case study, one-on-one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with open-ended questions. I selected this type of interview because the structure adheres perfectly to the study's needs. As Hancock and Algozzine, (2006) explained, semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to, "... ask predetermined but flexible.... questions". Semi-

structured interviews also allow for, "... follow-up questions to probe more deeply issues of interest to interviewees" (p. 40). But more importantly, these type of interviews give the participants room to explain their thoughts, experiences and feelings to their satisfaction, without feeling that they were being coached, rushed or manipulated (Hancock and Algozzine, 2006; MediaColleague.Com). These questions and observation tables were developed preceding the interview process, both in English and Spanish. Both the one-on-one interviews and behavior observation process lasted an average of 20 to 25 minutes. From previous experience, I learned that this is the amount of time needed to conduct a good interview. Each interview was recorded digitally, and the observation registered on a spreadsheet with the participants consent and stored at my home, for security reasons. All participants' information collected during the interview was kept in a diary which I used for the data analysis started. All interviews were conducted at a campus site, the familiarity of the place reassured the participants and made them feel more at ease. After the interview-observation process ended, the transcription process started.

Role of the Researcher

Explaining the role of the researcher during an investigation is necessary because it will describe to the participants and readers the researcher's interest and motivations. This understanding will help them value the study's findings (Merriam, et al., 2009.). As explained by Lodico, et al. (2010), a qualitative researcher "must to some degree become part of... that being investigated" (p. 265); both as an investigator and as a student of the matter under study (Glesne, et al., 2010). Besides being the principal researcher of the

study, I am also a full time, tenured associate professor of history at the campus where the study was conducted. I have been teaching online at this Campus since 1997 and OL since 1999. As the researcher, I believed this study to be of the utmost importance, since the documentation obtained from the university has shown that the OLEP's satisfaction studies conducted by the Institution have not produced enough qualitative data; none regarding adults, 35 years old and older, had been performed up to now. The study's outcomes are of a personal interest to me because I have been teaching using OLE for many years. Throughout my years working as an OL educator, the closeness and familiarity that has developed between myself and the issues investigated in the study might, as explained by Glessne et al. (2010), influence me to act as an advocate in support of the issues under study. Nevertheless, while conducting the study, I was very objective and effective in maintaining at bay any preconceptions on the matters being studied, being aware, at all times, of my role as the study's researcher in an unbiased fashion. In order to achieve the highest ethical standards possible, taking into account my position as an associate professor at this Campus, I was well aware that I had put in place some safeguards during my research; therefore, not having had any previous academic relationship with the participants, was set as one of the study requisites. I also made sure not to have had any previous contact with the study's participants.

Data Analysis

After being transcribed, the data (interviews and observations) were stored using Microsoft Word. The interviews were conducted in Spanish, the participants' vernacular language. After all the data were transcribed, it was printed, organized, coded, and then

translated into English. All the interviews were translated into English by me; this stage was very important, because I had to pay close attention, not only in the translation of their words, but in the translation of their meanings also (Filep, 2009). While translating, one has to understand that, “A broad cultural and societal knowledge is required in order to understand and to later communicate the.... Picture....” (Filep, 2009, p. 59). The translation process has to ensure that the participants’ feelings and experience are communicated. Being fluent in Spanish was paramount to understand the meaning of the interviewees’ feelings. I am from the Dominican Republic and Spanish is my first language. I have lived in Puerto Rico since 1987, where I obtained my BA degree, in Secondary Education with a minor in History, all in Spanish. Living in Puerto Rico for some many years has allowed me, besides the language aspects, to wholly understand the interviewees’ inklings, feelings and demeanor. I also lived and studied in New York City, where I obtained my MA degree, in the English language; therefore I am fully bilingual. All of this can corroborate that the translations fully captured the interviewees’ original meaning and feelings.

The data analysis, examining the interview transcripts and observations, started by conducting what Merriam et al. (2008) described as, “category construction” (p. 178), by identifying aspects of particular of interest. I also looked at issues that might not have been anticipated or predicted (Creswell, 2009). Next, these aspects were coded in order to identify themes that persisted and reappeared throughout the data. These codes were identified by different colors which will later help to connect similar codes. This approach is what Glesne et al., (2010) described as “the thematic analysis approach” (p.

187). Its advantage, "... provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can... provide a rich and detailed.... account of data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Given that a study is as credible as its researcher's ethical values (Merriam, et al., 2008), I made sure that all ethical safe guards were followed (Glesne, et al., 2010; Merriam, et al., 2008).

Coding was done manually and with computer assistance. All data were entered by hand, using pencil, paper and the Microsoft Word and Excel programs. This process provides a greater sense of closeness and understanding of the data, allowing me to become more familiar with the data as described by Saldaña (2012), "There is something about manipulating qualitative data on paper and writing codes in pencil that gives you more control over and ownership of the work" (p. 22). As recommended by various experts, I went through the data (transcripts), many times. This also strengthened my familiarity with the data (Creswell, 2009; Saldaña, 2012). There are several coding methods to choose from conditioned on the type of data and/or data analysis performed: attribute coding, descriptive coding, value coding, and open coding, among many more (Khandkar, n.d.; Saldaña, 2012). Coding is the process that allows the investigator not only to analyze data the data, but to look at the participants' experiences, beliefs, values, and so forth, and to segregate it (Corbin, n.d.). Revising and studying the data allowed me to become familiarize with its content and the participant's experiences, which allowed me to comprehend its meaning. Fittingly, I coded the date using the open coding process because it allowed me to, "To build concepts from a textual data source.... and expose the meaning, idea and thoughts in it (Khandkar, n.d.). It also allowed me to search for

repetitive codes or patterns; a descriptive phrase that describe the participants, feelings or beliefs, throughout the data (Saldaña, 2012).

Timeline

This project study was scheduled to be concluded and ready for presentation by the fall of 2014. As soon as the necessary project study and IRB approvals were obtained, by the end of 2013, the invitation process started; later the participants were selected, their approvals secured and observations and interviews conducted. The research study implementation process was concluded at the end of April 2014.

Evidence of Quality

One of the most significant aspects of qualitative research has to do with evidence of quality, since it guarantees the research conforms to the standards of a legitimate qualitative study and also follows the, “Standards of practice across qualitative research communities” (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, Roulston, and St. Pierre, 2007). Of late, the issue of evidence of quality, in qualitative research, has become a source of tension and an issue of disagreement among scholars, who claim that many qualitative researches do not present the necessary characteristics to assure its quality or a uniform set of criteria to judge them by (Freeman, deMarrais, Preissle, et. al., 2007; Hammersley, 2007). To ensure that the participants’ perspective is accurately reflected in the study and to reinforce the credibility of the study’s findings, the following strategies were observed. First, the data were compared to find out if there are any discrepancies in the participants’ statements. Second, the participants reviewed their statements (interviews) in order to

ensure its accuracy and my ethical handling of the data. Third, and finally, the process (except the raw data and observations, since that information is confidential) was peer reviewed; a faculty member was volunteered to review the study process. At the end, this verified, that and its findings are true to all stakeholders (Lodico, et al, 2011; Merriam, et al., 2008).

Qualitative Results

When Walden University and the Puerto Rican university granted IRB's authorization, I contacted the OLEP's Associate Dean or "gatekeeper", responsible for granting permission to access to the possible participant population (<http://srmo.sagepub.com/view/the-sage-dictionary-of-social-research-methods/n85.xml>). After she granted permission, the study's letter of invitation was posted in the OLEP web page. The invitation letter explained the overall objectives for conducting the study; it also offered information about what was to be expected from the participants, the interviews process and who to contact (via email or telephone) for additional information if they were interested. Nine possible candidates made contact and asked to be part of the study; one did not meet the study's requirements and was disqualified. An information kit containing the invitation letter, informed consent form, information about the interviews and a sample of the interviews RQ and observation table, was made available to the eight remaining eight candidates; also a request to meet in person to discuss the study's requirements. All eight agreed to meet and signed the informed consent form, in English and Spanish, agreeing to be part of the study; none of the participants selected had taken any of my courses or were known to me.

The next step was to contact each participant to arrange the interview place and schedule. Each participant decided on the date, and all agreed to be interviewed in my office. The average interview (and observation) time was between 20 to 25 minutes. All participants agreed to be contacted in case more information or clarification was needed. Each interview was recorded and the observations records taken on an observation table. Participants were encouraged to speak freely and to answer to the best of their ability. After all interviews were finished, the transcription process started. The transcription process was fundamental. It allowed me to go over the data several times which provided me the opportunity to fully understand what the participants were trying to communicate (Morrison, 2012). In order to maintain the study's ethical standards and to protect the participant's anonymity, their names were substituted with pseudonyms. This preserved the human features of the study, a characteristic something some readers look for in this type of research, while protecting the participant's identities (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006).

Interview Data Analysis

The data related to each RQ was coded separately and recurring patterns were identified. Since one of the main objectives was to identify the satisfaction level with the campus' OLEP by students 35 years and older, "It was essential to continuously review the research question developed for this study in order to use the results effectively..." (Morrison 2012). Therefore, the data was analyzed searching for the patterns that corresponded to the study's objectives. After several reviews, those patterns became apparent and identified. Each pattern selected satisfied the issues presented in the RQs

and the final purpose of measuring the overall participant's level of satisfaction with the campus' OLEP. At the end of the coding process, five patterns were identified and the findings were organized as follow: 1-Motives to enroll and goals to study (Mtes&g); 2- Choosing online education (Cole); 3-Academic goals, long and short term (Agl&st); 4- Online learning and regards to student's needs (OL&rsn), and 5- Overall student's perception of the campus'OLEP (Osp). The data analysis "... discusses the findings based on each of the questions...." (Gudewich, 2012), and also in comparison to the data available on related studies.

Theme 1: Motives to Enroll and Goals to Study

This theme relates to the study's first RQ. This question assessed the reasons why the participants enrolled in college and their reasons for selecting this particular Campus. The literature reviewed presented few examples that explained the reasons why adults 35 years and older are going back to college. The data collected bears a close resemblance to the studies examined.

When asked about the reasons for going or returning to college, the participants provided many reasons. Some returned to college because, their children are grown, some are retired, and yet others, wanted to serve as an example to their children. Serena, encompasses many of these reasons. She stated that she went back to the university because her children graduated from college and moved out of the house. She also retired and had the necessary time to study. She also wanted to show her children that she could be as educated as them,

Me matriculé porque ya mis hijos están grandes., ya están como adultos funcionando en la sociedad y me encontraba con mucho tiempo disponible y muchos deseos también, de tener un bachillerato, unos estudios profesionales, ya que mis hijos son profesionales. Y yo quería estar, más o menos, al mismo nivel de mis hijos. Esa fue la razón primordial, o sea, el motivo primordial para matricularme.

(I enrolled because my children are grown. They are as adults already working in society, thus I had too much time on my hands and the desire to earn a Bachelor's degree or professional studies since my kids are professionals. And I wanted to be, more or less, at the same level of my children. That was the primary reason).

Others, like Sofia and Walter, both had some college studies but needed to further their studies because of the competition they faced in the work place. At the same time, they were considering starting their own business. In Sofia's case she explained,

No, regresé, porque creo que ya hay muchas exigencias a nivel de empleo. Porque si una busca empleo como lo hice yo, pues exigen casi siempre una Maestría en mi caso como es contabilidad, CPA "track" o Maestría podría ser el equivalente. (No, I came back because I believe there are many demands at my employment level. Because if one seeks employment as I did, a master's degree is almost always required. In my case in accounting, a CPA "track" or masters could be the equivalent).

Walter, on the other hand, expressed that he returned to college, "Porque todavía siento que puedo dar más de mí a la comunidad y quiero tener una segunda profesión. A largo

plazo, quiero desarrollar mi propio negocio, haciendo programas de computadoras y vendiéndolos”. (Because I still feel that there’s more I could give to my community. I also want to have a second profession. In addition, I want to develop my own business, developing computer programs and selling them). Both Sofia’s and Walter’s testimonies support the reasons indicated by the participants, echoing those that appeared in the literature review and a study conducted in 2014 by the Pew Research Center. There are many adults “baby boomers” (CQ Research, 2007) that are in the retired age range and are opting to return to school, either to complete their study or to obtain a college degree (Portland Community College Taskforce on Aging, 2007). Eli put this in perspective when she explained her reason for trying to get an education,

Esta es la primera vez que asisto, para estudiar en la universidad, ese siempre fue mi sueño. Antes no pude, por los escasos recursos económicos que había en mi hogar, ya que mi papá había muerto y me tuve que conformar solamente con la escuela superior.

(This is the first time that I am attending a University, which was always my dream. Before I couldn’t because of scarce economic resources in my home since my father had died and I had to settle for a high school diploma).

Theme 2: Choosing Online Education

The issues examined in this theme are associated with the study’s second RQ and explore the reasons why these adults selected OLE as the vehicle for their education. Before the advances in technology, the personal computer, and the appearance of the Internet and the WWW became part of the daily life landscape, accessing higher

education was unobtainable for many adults. (Larreamendy-Joern & Leinhard, et al., 2006), Thanks to the Internet and the access provided by the WWW, a new education vehicle appeared: online education. This new tool tore down barriers such as, "... flexibility of time and space, physical disability, geographic isolated location, or lack of safe transportation..." (Mulenga & Liang, 2008), that prevented people from accessing an education. The data obtained offered reasons that reflect previous studies findings.

Flexibility of time and space was one of the reasons given by most of the participants. In Angel words,

Mi trabajo me requiere mucho... yo no tengo un horario estable. Yo puedo trabajar lo mismo de día, que de tarde, que de noche, porque todo es a decisión del servicio. Estudiar a distancia me permite, dentro del tiempo que tengo, después de mis horas laborables, tengo un tiempo que puedo hacerlo sin tener la preocupación de que no voy a llegar a tiempo a la universidad...

(My job demands a lot of me... I do not have a stable schedule. I can work day, afternoon or evening; whatever the job requires. Online education allows me to, within the time I have left after my working hours, to study without the worry that I won't make it on time...).

Besides the above mentioned obstacles, physical disabilities prevented people from studying. This changed in 1990 when The American with Disabilities Act (ADA) became the law, "... that prohibits discrimination and guarantees that people with disabilities have the same opportunities as everyone else to participate in the mainstream of American life..." (http://www.ada.gov/ada_intro.htm). The ADA allows students with

disabilities to enter higher education institutions in pursuit of an education, as was Eli's case,

Se me hace mucho más fácil estudiar en línea, porque tengo una limitación, en la mano derecha, por lo cual la universidad me provee un amanuense. Tomando los cursos en línea se me hace más fácil porque recibo toda la información, no tengo que estar copiando, puedo agrandar las letras en la computadora y en la computadora sí que yo puedo escribir...

(For me, it is much easier to study online because I have a limitation in my right hand for which the University provides me a scribe. Taking courses online is easier for me because I receive the information, I don't have to write, I can enlarge the letters on the computer and with the computer's keyboard I can also write...).

Theme 3: Long-and short term-Academic Goals

The study's third RQ looked for evidence that explained the main academic goals, short and long term, that these adults students wanted to obtain. Adults, 35 years and older, have many reasons for seeking an education, but there is a big difference between seeking and obtaining that education. The main element needed to reach an academic goal, many authors agree, is persistence (Comings, 2007). What is persistence and how is it linked to adult education? Comings defines persistence as, "... a continuous learning process that last until an adult student meets his or her educational goals..." (Comings, 2007, p. 24). Since adult's students, 35 years and older, needs may vary, so are their educational goals.

For Raphael, a retired public servant, his short and long term goals are: “Bueno, mi meta ahora mismo es, estoy enfocado en terminar el bachillerato y si el tiempo me lo permitiera, tengo 47 años, pero si el tiempo me lo permitiera y económicamente pudiera estudiar, seguiría estudiando leyes , sino haría la maestría” . (I'm focused on completing the Bachelor's degree. But, if time allows it, I am 47 years old, and could economically afford to continue studying, I would continue studying law or earn a master's degree, translation mine). Michel, on the other hand works and has a different view on why is he studying, “Diría yo que a largo plazo, ya yo no busqué intereses económicos, ya lo que deseo es seguir preparándome”. (I don't have specific short or long term goals, I did not seek economic interests, what I wish is to further my education). A study conducted by the Lumina Foundation for Education, 2007, concluded that, “Many adults need to secure jobs quickly and cannot afford long-term enrollment” (Pusser, Breneman, Gansneder, Kohl, Levin, Milam, and Turner, 2007). This findings support Roma's rationalization of her academic goals, “A corto plazo graduarme, si Dios quiere ahora en mayo. A largo plazo, encontrar un trabajo y estabilizarme económicamente”. (My short term goal, graduate, God willing, in May. In the long run, to find jobs and find economic stability). There are many examples in the data, but as it has been described in the previous examples, all of them are in agreement with what is found in current studies.

Theme 4: Learning in Regards to Students' Needs

The preponderance of the studies reviewed for this project study agreed that OL is an effective educational method, particularly for adults' students. Nevertheless, its effectiveness is predicated on a positive student's perception (Noel-Levitz, 2011;

Schwartz, n.d.). The chief objective of OL should be learning, as Yan & Durrington stated, “While the convenience of online courses attracts students, they are still interested in the learning opportunities associated with online courses” (As cited in Schwartz, n.d., p. 1).

The data gathered from RQ four assessed the participant’s perceptions. They were asked if they believed that the Campus’ OLEP took their needs into consideration. The participants were queried about what, within the OLEP, they regarded as helpful or not and what needed to be improved. On these issues, the data provided mixed results. 75% stated that the Campus’ OLEP was helping them achieved their academic goals. Walter has computer experience, but when asked if the Campus’ OLEP helped him obtain his academic goals, his answer was unequivocal, “No, tuve problemas desde el principio, entrando al curso, con el profesor y muchas dificultades tratando de hacer todo el trabajo. No era lo que yo me esperaba”. (No, I had problems early on, entering the course, with the professor, and many difficulties trying to do all the work. It was not what I expected). Angel, in contrast, when asked the same question, affirmed, “Pienso que sí... Como le dije, es más fácil tener la oportunidad por lo menos en mi caso, me ayuda a tener que leer con más calma... Y me ayuda a realizar los trabajos asignados con más calma”. (Yes, I think so, I believe so. As I said, it is easier to have the opportunity to read more calmly... And I have more time to do the work assigned by the professors more calmly). Furthermore, while over 62% of the participants stated that they believed that the OLEP took their needs into consideration, 50% of them expressed that there were things that need it to be improved. Some of the statements praised the Campus’ OLEP for helping

them obtain an education, while at the same time stating some unsatisfactory issues which I will detail. The chief complaint voiced by the participants had to do with faculty-student communication, what Schwartz, (n.d.) called, “constructive and timely feedback from instructors” (p.2). The participant’s perceptions were directly related to their individual experiences. Most participants were adamant when saying that the majority of the faculty responded on a timely manner, were helpful and attentive to their needs. But there were a few that did not. Roma’s statement explains what the majority believed, “En mi experiencia, como le dije, tuve profesores que estuvieron muy pendiente del curso y realizaban su trabajo adecuadamente. Hubo otros, que podemos decir eran los pocos, que no atendían sus cursos...” (In my experience, as I said, I had professors who were very aware of the course and performed their job properly. There were others, the very few, who did not attend their courses). These are two contrasting opinions reflecting on faculty-student communication. Michael’s experiences had been very positive as he praised the faculty’s dedication,

Cuando me comunico con ellos, me proveen todo lo que necesito para tomar un curso en línea. Inclusive, a veces proyectan y dan más de que les pides. Como por ejemplo, hay profesores que te dan su número de teléfono personal por si tienes alguna duda...

(When I communicate with them, they provided me with everything I needed to take a course online. Sometimes they give more than was asked of them. For example, there are professors who give you their personal phone number in case you have doubts...).

Walter, on the other hand, had a very different experience,

Mi relación con la facultad en línea, no fue muy buena en el sentido de que se tardaba mucho en contestar las preguntas, las dudas que yo tuviera. Si yo tenía una duda en una asignación y casi siempre la contestaba el día después que se entregaba la asignación o el mismo día y no me daba tiempo.

(My relationship with the online faculty was not very good in the sense that it took much time in answering my questions and the doubts that I had. If I had a doubt with an assignment, they almost always answered the same day or the day after the assignment was due giving me no time).

Walter concerns echoed the findings in a study by Nixon, Nixon and Siragusa (2007), “Although the majority felt that they had received satisfactory levels of feedback.... a small number indicated that.... was not as thorough and prompt as they had desired in order to assist them with upcoming assignments” (p. 217). However, the opinions expressed by Michael and Walter, were not the norm, still a high percentage of the participants perceived that faculty-student communications needs to be improve.

Effective communication is the key for an effective learning experience, “Feedback in online courses must be provided by instructors in a constructive and timely manner for online course to be successful” (Yang & Durrington, 2010, p. 345). An interesting incidence revealed by the data, which also relates to the communication issue, was the fact that over 62% of the participants confirmed that the interaction student-student, has helped in their learning process and in making friends.

The participants mentioned other issues related to serving their needs, such as course content, study workload and technical matters. On these issues, the data revealed that 37.5% of the participants had a negative experience with the course content. The most common concerns were linked to outdated material, grammatical errors and content alignment. For some, the quality of the content is very important, this information was coming from “college professors”. As Serena expressed it, “Mucha de la información utilizada es de hace dos o tres años. Módulos recibidos datan de 2006, 2007, 2009 y estamos en 2014. Módulos y presentaciones en power point con increíbles errores ortográficos por profesores universitarios, acentos, comas, etc.”. (Much information used is two or three years old. Modules, which one receives are dated 2006, 2007, 2009 and we are in 2014. Modules and power point presentations, which have incredible spelling horrors by university professors, accents, commas, etc.” Some had issues with the way some courses are organized, Michael had the worst experience of all,

Para un estudiante a distancia es importante tener módulos, El módulo le enseña al estudiante una línea a seguir y conoce la perspectiva que tiene el profesor y hacía donde el profesor lo desea dirigir. Si el profesor solo te va dando materiales, materiales, pero no tiene un modelo a seguir, lo que puede hacer es que el estudiante pierda el interés en la clase como tal. Inclusive se le hace mucho más difícil ese tipo de educación.

(For an online student it is important to have modules. The module shows the student a line to follow and to learn the professor’s perspective and where the teacher wants you to go. If the professor is only giving you material, but does not

have a model to follow, what could happen is that the student will lose interest in the class as such. It can make this type of education much more difficult).

Among the other issues mentioned, the data showed no significant concerns or complaints.

Theme 5: Improvements and Overall Student's perception of the Campus OLEP

This final theme stems from the issues presented in RQ five and serves as a follow-up on theme four where the participants share some areas of concern. This theme is grounded on these two questions:

From your experience, which areas of the Campus' OLEP need to be improved?

Over all, do you have a positive perception of the Campus' OLEP?

The data gathered from these questions presented both participants suggestions on what improvements would facilitate their learning experience and, taking into account their concerns, how did they perceived the Campus' OLEP.

On the issues the participants though needed to be improved, they indicated a need for an increase faculty-student communication/interaction, uniformity of content design (modules) and increased communication of technical changes. Out of these three concerns, the majority agreed that improving faculty-student communication was the most important. Sofia explained the importance of having regular communications between herself and the faculty,

Si el profesor es uno que está en constante contacto con los estudiantes por medio de la plataforma es bastante llevadero. Pero si el profesor no mantiene contacto cercano o contesta los mensajes con prontitud, pues entonces se crean muchas

dudas, lagunas y en mi caso personal, por ser una persona estructurada, si me sacan de esa estructura, “me mueve el piso”.

(If the professor is one who is in constant contact with students through the platform, the process is quite bearable. But if the Professor does not maintain close contact or answers the messages promptly, then it can create many doubts, gaps and in my case, being a very structured person, if I am taken out of my structure, “it moves my floor”).

Some participants explained that the lack of communication, or the delay of some in answering, made them feel at a loss. This is how Serena described it,

Nunca hablé con algunos profesores, rara vez el profesor pone una nota individual o mensajes. Hay algunos que lo hacen, no voy a generalizar, pero la mayoría no lo hace. Y yo creo que deberían implementar una mejor forma de comunicación donde el estudiante no se sienta aislado.

(I never spoke with some professors, some rarely put individual notes or messages. There are some who do it, I'm not going to generalize, but some do not. And I think that they should implement a better procedure of communication where the student does not feel isolated).

The matter of course content uniformity, the participants explained that it had to do with some courses they had taken that either did not have learning modules or had modules that looked incomplete. From Michael's experience, modules give him direction and purpose. “Es necesario tener módulos, el módulo le enseña al estudiante una línea a seguir y conoce la perspectiva que tiene el profesor y hacía donde el profesor

lo desea dirigir... Sin los módulos, no tienes un modelo a seguir...” (It is necessary to have modules. With modules the student has a line to follow, knows the professor’s perspective and where they want to take us... Without modules, you don’t have a model to follow...) Overwhelmingly, the majority of the participants agreed on the effectiveness of the platform (Bb) used to deliver the OL courses, only Raphael complained and he accepted that besides he lacked computer skills and no desire to improve them. He stated he preferred F2F courses to OL, and had only taken online courses because the classes he needed were not scheduled F2F, “I prefer the classroom, I like to be talked to directly because I retain it better than reading from a computer. I would only take classes online, if he could not attend F2F...”

Some complained that sometimes, when the platform was being updated or maintained, they were not informed on time about it or not at all. Sofia’s experience brings together those feelings, “Cuando la plataforma cambia o hacen actualizaciones o lo que sea, lo que se presenta a través se ve afectado. O bien sea, que de momento está y después no está. Y eso, lógicamente nos retrasa”. (When the platform changes or updates are made or whatever, what is shown through it is altered. Or sometimes something is there and then it is not. And that, logically delays us).

Although a high percentage of the participants manifested some concerns about the Campus’ OLEP, they agreed on its usefulness and help in being able to complete a degree or enhance their education. All of them conveyed a very good opinion and perception about the Campus’ OLEP. Some went so far as to say that they would recommend it to other adults their age. To sum-up the participant’s feelings, I would

use the statements of two of the most critical participants, first Walter and then Sofia, to conclude. When asked how he perceived the OLEP, Walter stated, “Mi percepción del programa es excelente. Le da la oportunidad a los estudiantes de mejor manejo del tiempo, podemos hacer más, las horas son flexibles y podemos trabajar a nuestro paso”. (My perception of the program itself is excellent. It gives the students the opportunity for better time management, we can do more, the hours are flexible, and we can work at our own pace). He added, “Lo recomendaría, pero les diría, de acuerdo a mi experiencia, sobre los pro y los contra. Lo recomendaría ya que tiene sus ventajas y unas pocas desventajas...”. (I would recommend it, but I would tell them about the pros and cons from my experience. I would recommend it as it has its advantages and few disadvantages ...). About her perception of the Campus’ OLEP, Sofia affirmed,

Realmente buena. Porque la mitad de mi Bachillerato fue “online”, de no haber sido por eso no lo hubiese podido completar, hubiese que tenido que traer a mis tres pequeños para acá. Independientemente que haya algunos detalles o inconvenientes o percances que hayan ocurrido en el camino...

(Really good. Half of my Bachelor’s degree was completed "online". Had it not been for online education I could not have finished it. I would have had to bring my three children here. Regardless there are some details, problems or mishaps that have occurred along the way).

Observation Analysis

The study’s participants were observed as part of the data collection process. The observations were done to evaluate the participants’ behavior and reactions while being

interviewed. The techniques utilized were, structured observations, “a discrete activity whose purpose is to record physical and verbal behavior” (Mulhall, 2003), and direct, non-intrusive observation, which “provides an opportunity for researchers to observe directly what is happening in the social setting, interact with participants” (Pauly, 2010). I observed the participants, took notes, and interacted without disturbing them.

Using a Likert Scale table, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, I watched the participant’s while conducting the interviews to determine the following: if they exhibited interest in the issues discussed, knowledge about the issues discussed, the level of comfort with the interview and the issues debated, and if their gestures displayed interest or not in the matters considered. The data yielded that over 87% strongly agreed or agreed with a positive reaction to the behaviors and reactions considered. Only Serena, the participant with the least experience in the OLEP with only nine OL credits taken, seemed not to have complete command of the issues. During the interview and observation process, Raphael, was the only participant who openly stated that he did not like OLE. I wondered why he decided to be part of the study, because he was the only one that, at times, looked as if was not sufficiently interested, in the process (see figure 1 1).

Figure 1

Interview Observations

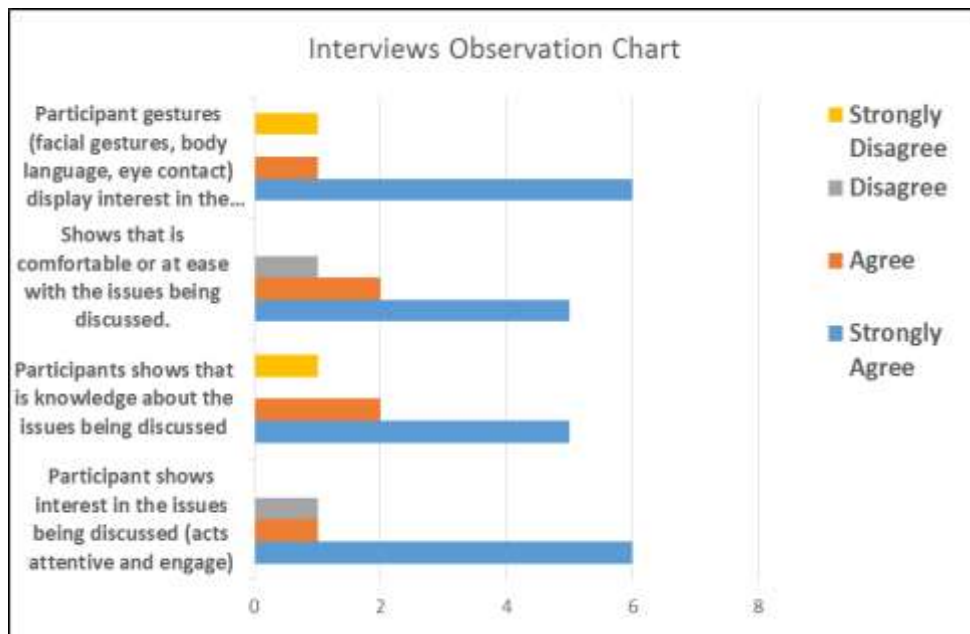


Chart showing the distribution of the interview observations.

Conclusion

I chose a qualitative research design for this study considering that this study sought to be the vehicle that will give voice to the viewpoint, experiences, and needs of the population chosen to participate in it (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). It is paramount that the phenomenon under study, how this campus' adults, 35 years and older, perceive the OLEP, is clearly explained. This requires obtaining data that will provide what is described by various experts as a "thick rich description", of the phenomenon under investigation (Lodico, 2010, et. al.; Merriam, 2009; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006). This is essential because in "thick description, the voices, feelings, actions, and meanings of interacting individuals are heard" (Denzin, 1989, as cited in

Ponterroto, 2006, p.540). In view of that fact, I had to find a research approach that would allow me to meet the features described above. After a careful review of the numerous qualitative research approaches, I selected to perform a case study and the literature reviewed supports this decision (Glesne, et al., 2011; Merriam, 2009; Cresswell, 2008; Hancock & Algozzine, 2006).

The study's findings might not be generalizable. In contrast, exploring, explaining, and understanding the experience related by the participants is what is sought. The population selected for this study was very small, which is consonant with case study research and it was chosen among this university's 2014 full and part-time enrollment cohort. The participants were enrolled for at least two consecutive semesters and had to meet the criteria set for the study. They were selected using purposeful random sampling. Oral data was collected from experiences narrated by the study's participants. To meet all ethical requirements and protect participants from harm, an ethical protocol that pledged to insure the following aspects, participants' informed consent, anonymity, and desire to participate.

Before the data analysis started, the information gathered was coded and topics of interest identified. It was then organized by themes of interest related to the study's RQs. Next, the data was coded manually, using pencil and paper, and stored in a computer. Microsoft Word and Excel were used to be illustrated some of the findings. Finally, to assure the study's credibility, validity and data accurateness, its findings were be triangulated to find determine if there are were any discrepancies in the participants' statements. Member checks were conducted, asking the participants to review their

statements to ensure their accuracy (Creswell, et al., 2008). The process was peer reviewed, except for the confidential information, by a volunteer campus faculty member. The final product is the precise depiction of the study's purpose, which was to present how the 35 years and older student population perceived this Campus' OLEP.

Upon conclusion of the project study, I plan to present a findings' report to the campus' administrative staff and to OLEP faculty members. This report will be made available online for the remaining faculty. To verify the study's reliability, the findings will be further reviewed by two OLEP members (Merriam, 2009). The findings will be used to develop a best practice manual to help the OLEP faculty provide a better education experience to the population studied. Finally, this manual also formulates teaching strategies to assist the OLEP faculty in helping how the adult student.

In section three of the project's study, findings will be explained. Also, a description of the project and its goals, and an explanation of the reasons for choosing the study area will be submitted. This section will also include a review of the literature that supports this type of study and a complete description of the project. In addition, an explanation of how the project will be evaluated and implemented will be included with a segment presenting a summary of the study's final reflections and conclusions.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

In 1995, this Puerto Rican university's Campus began offering its first OL courses; this action expanded and strengthened its academic offerings, introducing OLE as an alternative vehicle for its adult students to obtain access to higher education. Since then, this Campus' OLEP has grown steadily with respect to the number of OL faculty, students, courses, and programs, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels. A significant part of the university's growth has been driven by an increase in the population of adult students 35 years and older. Although this university, as an institution and at this campus, previously conducted several quantitative studies to assess OL students' satisfaction with the campus' OLEP; these provided incomplete data in regarding the OLEP performance. These studies incompletely captured the level of the students' satisfaction with regards their university's OLEP because many variables were not being taken into account. These early studies, for example, did not collect data on variables such as age, gender, and social background. The student population aged 35 years and older has also not been studied separately.

This research gap was addressed by conducting a qualitative student satisfaction study. The study was specifically designed to obtain the dependable data necessary to understand the demands of this campus' student population and make the improvements and changes suggested by the findings. This investigation specifically collected data related to several previously ignored variables including age, gender, and social background. This type of study has become more necessary as this campus OLEP

expanded its offerings and its appeal to a wide variety of students. A qualitative satisfaction study that assessed how satisfied the Campus's 35 years and older student population are with its OLEP was strongly needed due to the growth of this segment of the student population.

The resulting doctoral study project was crafted to explore how the student population, 35 years and older, perceived the OLEP at the university's campus. The qualitative data collected from these interviews yielded the information necessary to assess which areas of the OLEP are satisfying these student's needs and which need to be improved or changed- something that could not be determined with the quantitative data that was available. I also developed a best-practices manual for the OL faculty; this manual was specifically aimed at addressing the needs and concerns of students 35 years and older. This section describes the project's goals, rationale, and implementation process, as well as notable issues related to the project.

Description and Goals

The main objectives of this qualitative case study was to assess the level of satisfaction with the OLEP at this campus, of the student population 35 years and older and to develop a faculty best practices' manual that would help OL faculty best serve the study's population. In order to conduct this assessment, I selected eight OL students meeting these criteria:

- a. Students had to be 35 years or older.
- b. Students who may have taken a course given by me.

c. Student who are not currently taking of my courses or are not required to take one in the future.

d. Students with 30 or more credit hours approved. Student that have taken 3 or more online courses.

I conducted in-depth interviews with the participants using open-ended questions. The nature of this type of question allowed the participants to express their complete views and feelings, thus allowing me to gather the necessary data to achieve the study's objectives. Data analysis indicated which areas of the Campus' OLEP were benefiting the 35 years and older students as well as areas that needed to be modified in order to better serve this population. The collected data showed important information that will help, not only in the improvement of existing courses, and inform the creation of future ones. Taking into account the concerns conveyed by the participants help me to develop a final product (best-practices manual) that took in to account these population expectations.

The results of the data analysis showed that the participants interviewed had a high level of satisfaction with the Campus' OLEP. The data also showed that there were areas of concern that needed to be improved, such as faculty-students interaction, timely feedback, among others. The study's findings supported the development of a faculty best practice manual. This manual was created with one goal in mind: helping the OLEP faculty understand and best serve the academic needs voiced by the population investigated. It was also designed to also help the OLEP faculty develop skills to improve teacher-students relationship and provide new teaching strategies that take into consideration the needs of these particular students and more broadly, all OL students at

the institution studied. It will also help in the development of programs and/or strategies that will help upgrade and adjust the campus' OLEP (Sahin and Shelley, et al, 2008). Finally, the study's findings and the faculty manual will be presented to the campus' Chancellor for consideration and potential implementation. After the project study is completed its findings and manual will be present to the campus' OL faculty through training and workshops.

Rationale

The reason for choosing to create an OLE faculty manual emerged from the consideration that OL faculty members need to understand the specific needs of the adult student population 35 years and older, since no previous studies had been conducted at the university or campus. The data analyzed confirmed that consideration and it was also aligned with the tendency exhibited by many higher education institutions, in regards to the institutionalization of OLE as a new medium to help students achieve their academic goals (Roach and Lemasters, et al 2006, Sahin and Shelley, 2008). In support of this assertion, LaPrade, Marks, Gilpatrick, Smith, and Beazley (2008), declared that "Over 4.6 million students were taking at least one online course in the fall of 2008.... a 17 % increase over the number reported the previous year" (p.24). The Campus' OLEP has followed this trend, showing an uninterrupted growth since its launch back in 1995 (Torres-Nazario, et al, 2011). The data reviewed also confirmed that the research investigating students' perceptions in OLE is very important because the information gathered should be taking into account at the moment of creating, improving, or changing any aspects of OLE (Sahin and Shelley, et al, 2008).

In order to develop an OLEP that takes into account the students' needs, investigating and learning about student's perceptions and necessities is paramount. This need was described by Sahim and Shelley, et al (2008), who noted, "Without investigating what satisfy students in distance education.... it is difficult to meet their needs and improve their learning (p. 217). The student's perceptions learned from the data become more important when adding the statement made by Sahim and Shelly (2008). Also, Jeffries and Hyde (2009) added that some of the data showed that not enough students' observations and their learning experiences in the OL environment has been taking into account; "in spite of a major increase in funding" (p. 119). These remarks align with my fifteen years' experience as an OLE faculty member that it is very important to heed the students' opinions and experiences before making changes to any OLEP. Harnessing Technology pointed out that before making any change to existing courses or creating new ones, "we need to listen to people's views, and ensure that technology meets their requirements" (In Harnessing Technology (2005), as cited in Jeffries and Hyde, et al, 2009).

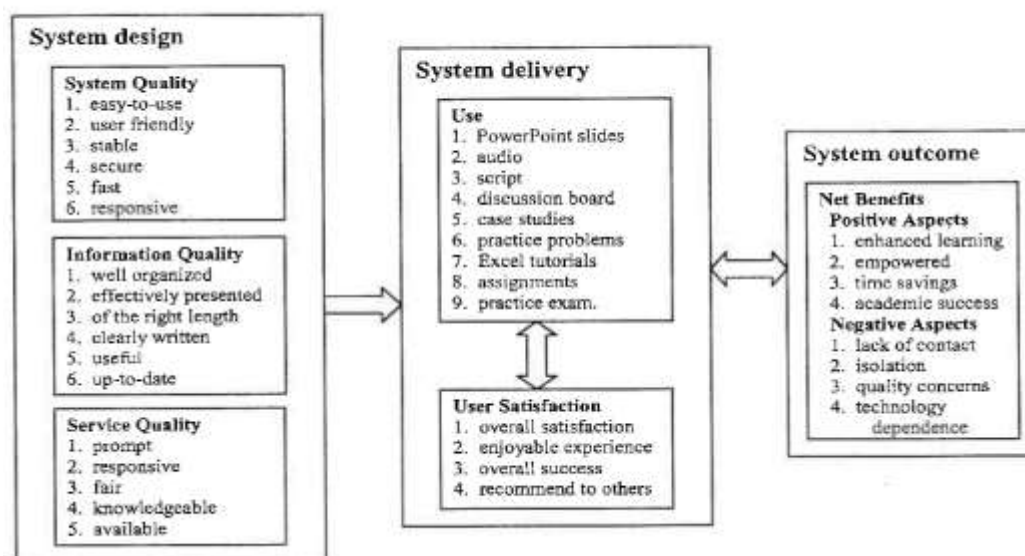
The data postulated the participant's experiences and feelings with respect to the campus OLEP, in regards to their perceptions and needs. The collected data also supported by a study conducted by Holsapple and Lee-Post (2006) that avows OLE as the one most innovating, widespread changes to traditional education. It also affirmed its importance in providing students with a more dynamic and flexible way of learning. This project study adheres to the findings and recommendations found in the data collected and the literature evaluated concerning OL students and their aspirations. This doctoral

project study listened to the learners in order to evaluate their satisfaction with this campus' OLEP and taking them into consideration before advising on what needs to be changed or improved. The data also revealed that the most significant element in the OL teaching-learning transaction is the relationship between instructor and learner. Better understanding of the learners' needs and expectations by the OL faculty will result in a more satisfied student. That is why, among other issues, that a best practices manual is one of the outcomes of the study. This manual will suggest which practices need to develop, improve or change. Also, new teaching techniques and approaches will be introduced to help improve student satisfaction. This manual will be useful also for future OL faculty recruits.

Review of the Literature

The literature review identified ample literature describing the prevalence and wide spread use of OLE as a necessary element in higher education (La Prade, Marks, Gilpatrick, Smith, and Beazley, 2011; Sahim and Shelly, et al, 2008). Much of the literature examined focused on student satisfaction with OLE. None of the studies examined used the same age range as this doctoral study as the primary subjects however. As a result, one of this project study's objectives was to address this research gap by assessing the satisfaction level of students 35 years and older. This study follows many characteristic of the Holsapple and Lee-Post (2006) e-learning success model which will be discussed at length later. Comparing the data obtained from the guiding question, addressed many of the issues encompassed by the Holsapple and Lee-Post, (2006) model, as seen in figure 2.

Figure 2



Holsapple and Lee-Post e-learning success model

There is a considerable amount of literature examining and supporting student satisfaction with OLE studies, (Casey, 2008; Fortune, Spielman, & Pangelinan, et al (2011); Getzlaf, Perry, Toffer, Lamarche, & Edwards, et al (2009); Larreamendys-Joens & Lienhardt, et al, 2006; Olszewski-Kubilus & Corwith, et al (2010); Pearlman, et al (2011); Soukup, 2011; Whisher, Sabol & Moses, et al (2005), among others). Since the information at hand is quite vast, there is a coherent need to keep updating it. This will help support the validity of this study. Next, I will be examining additional research that supports the original premise of this investigation. Wagner, Werner, and Schramm (2005), conducted a yearlong comparative study aimed to assess the level of satisfaction between graduate students enrolled in OL and F2F MBA master program. This study

examined the satisfaction perception of 246 students and, based on the student response to the following areas:

1. Instructor interaction
2. Course structure and effectiveness
3. Course content
4. Interaction with fellow students
5. Overall satisfaction with the course

While recognizing that the study was not fully completed at the time of publication, Wagner, Werner, and Schramm, et al (2005) presented some interesting findings in support of the advantageousness of OLE. They asserted that OL students had a higher satisfaction rate in all five factors evaluated. Also of interest, was the fact that responses by employed students reaffirmed that OLE provides them with the necessary flexibility to attend school and obtain an education; an issue raised in this project study. The success of any OLEP is based on students' satisfaction perceptions of the viability of the learning process (Lemaster, et al (2006); Smart and Cappel, et al (2006). In an effort to develop an effective model to assess learning in the OL environment, Holsopple and Lee-Post, et al, (2006), conducted an action research study to prove the effectiveness of the model they developed: E-Learning Success Model so it could be used in the future to conduct similar studies. After collecting students' feedback, the course used for the study was overhauled and offered again. After evaluating the data, the usefulness of the E-Learning Success Model and its applicability for evaluating OL learning effectiveness was validated. Students' perceived satisfaction was also addressed in a descriptive study of a

master education and leadership program of OL and F2F students, conducted by Roach and Lemasters, et al (2006). The study points out that while OLE has been growing, assessing how the level of students' satisfaction with this learning tool had not being equally assessed. They also noted "while there are differences among students' academic level, some of the.... satisfaction studies do not differentiate between.... Students" (p. 318). The data was attained through an end-of-course Likert Scale survey of 267 OL and F2F students. The two most significant aspects were:

1. Degree of satisfaction with delivery and content
2. What factors are related to satisfaction? (p. 322)

In their overall findings, Roach and Lemasters reported et al (2006) that OLE was highly rated; a finding that agrees with most of the studies presented. They also pointed out several aspects that students found to be of outmost importance such as on time feedback and effective communication with the facilitator, clear instructions, and tech support. The first of the three got poor evaluations. In contrast, what is most interesting is that in the findings they mentioned that there are "valuable concerns to be addressed" (p. 317).

Technology and having the skills to work with it is an important aspect of the OLE system (Sahim and Shelly, et al (2008). Looking at the role played by technology in students' satisfaction, as it relates in their success in DE, Sahim and Shelly, et al (2008) conducted a statistical study that would help predict students' satisfaction. Looking at the importance of technology literacy, they concluded that most students do not have the necessary technological skills to working with the OLE technology, "Many.... Students

entering the university have no experience with the Internet and very little with information technology” (p. 216). Their study took into consideration students technological skills in the OL educational setting. Specifically, using the tools offered by an OL course such as “e-mail.... discussion boards.... exams....” (p.217). The study was conducted at an undergraduate four year college and involved 195 students. The findings seemed to support Sahim and Shelly’s, et al (2008) premise, in concluding that those students having technological capabilities were more satisfied than those that did not. They concluded that to avoid students’ disenchantment, institutions and facilitators should make sure that the student taking the course had the necessary skills to navigate within the course. It also supported findings suggesting that course interaction among students and the instructor is also a predictor for students’ satisfaction. One of the study’s assertions also supports the need for this project study “In designing, developing and delivering distance education courses students’ needs and perceptions should be central.... Indeed without investigating what satisfies students in distance education courses it is difficult to meet their needs and improve their learning” (p.217).

The literature reviewed overwhelmingly indicates that OL students show a higher degree of satisfaction with OLE than their F2F counterparts. In 2009, figures released by the US Department of Education were cited in a study conducted by Anderson, Indike, and Standerford, (2011), supporting the effectiveness of OLE and the level of students’ satisfaction with OL learning, “The U.S. Department of Education.... conducted an extensive meta-analysis of over 1,000 studies on online learning. After screening the studies.... that met their criteria, they concluded that students in online courses

outperformed students in traditional face-to-face formats” (p.3). On the other hand, as we have seen, students’ satisfaction has been linked to a variety of issues, among them: flexibility (Wagner, Werner, and Schramm, et al, 2005); feedback, tech support (Roach and Lemasters reported et al, 2006), and technological abilities (Sahim and Shelly, et al, 2008).

Another issue added to the importance of having satisfied students was introduced in a first of its kind empirical study conducted by Schreiner, (2009), which linked student satisfaction to student retention. Schreiner argued that, from a practical point of view, higher learning institutions fear student drop out because of its economic impact although it is not their sole concern, “Higher education colleges and universities.... perceived satisfaction as a means to an end.... because of its.... impact on student motivation retention recruitment and fundraising” (p. 1). The study was conducted over a three year period (2005-2008) and a total of 65 higher education institutions participated in it. It is important to mention that all of the institutions participating were four year colleges and universities. The significance of this study is unprecedented, not only for the issue studied or the amount of institutions participating, but for its scope. More than 27,000 students, from freshman to seniors, participated in a satisfaction survey made of 79 questions. Schreiner, et al (2009) findings confirm that satisfaction and retention “persistence” are linked. They also concluded that satisfied students were likely to recommend their school to others and return to the same institution to complete their studies. The study also found that level of satisfaction and its features changed depending

on the student level. It also concluded that satisfaction was taken into account at the time to decide whether to continue studying or not.

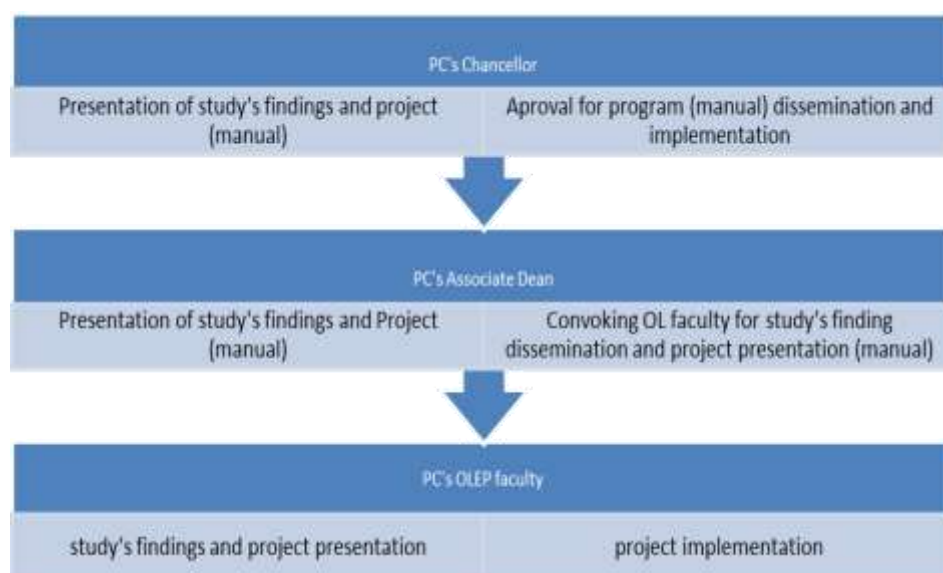
Implementation

Researchers at Angleros States University (nd), explained that project implementation is one of most important phase of the project; it is one that involves putting the designed plan to work. The implementation process (IP) will start once the doctoral program has been completed. To guarantee a successful IP of the program the participation of all stakeholders is paramount, because their understanding, trust, acceptance, and cooperation in the process will guarantee its success (Olander and Landin, 2005). The importance of gaining stakeholders trust, acceptance and cooperation lies on the fact, as explained by Olander and Landin (2005) that "... a stakeholder is any.... Individual with.... the power to a threat or a benefit to the project.... A negative perception by any stakeholder can severely obstruct a.... project" (p321). To implement this project there are three stakeholders that needed to be taken into consideration: the Campus' Chancellor, the OLEP associate Dean and the OLEP faculty members. As I explained, the project (manual) will be presented to the OLEP faculty through a workshop; for this to happen, the Chancellor's and the OLEP Associate Dean's approval is essential.

The IP has been organized as follows: First, the study's findings and the proposed project will be presented to the Campus' Chancellor, the project's IP success hinges on her approval. After gaining the Chancellor approval, the same will be done to the OLEP Associate Dean. The Associate Dean, will help to organize and convoke the OLEP

faculty for the presentation of the study's findings, the program (manual) and programing the workshops needed to coach the faculty. Lastly, after obtaining the OLEP's Associate Dean approval, the study findings will be share with the Campus' OLEP faculty. The workshop will be presented at a future date (see chart 3). Once the workshop, explaining the manual's practices and recommendations, has been imparted to the campus OLEP faculty, the implementation processes will be ready to begin.

Figure 3



Flowchart showing the study's implementation process

As part of the IP, the study's findings could be used to assess the Campus' OLEP effectiveness. The data could help the OLE Department decide if any changes need to be made either to courses or services. The result of this assessment could also help in dealing with any changes related to administrative issues such as course design, course content, and technology, among others. To know if the program's (manual)

recommendations accomplished its goals, a follow-up satisfaction study needs to be conducted to analyze the findings.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

The success of the project's IP will depend upon all stakeholders' willingness to accept the study's findings and the project's recommendations. As Cafarella (2010) explained, you need the support of the people in charge of the administrative duties and final decision making authority, at this Campus' those being the Chancellor and the OLEP Associate Dean. The IP's success will depend on two factors. First, the Campus' administration (Chancellor and the OLEP Associate Dean) will need to commit to implement the recommendations derived from the study. Second, the willingness of the OLEP faculty to make use of the project's findings.

Other resources that could be available for the project's IP are this Campus physical facilities and the technological resources (computers, Smart Boards, among others), in the Campus Instructional Development Center (CIDC). Those resources could be used to present the workshop to the OLEP faculty.

Potential Barriers

A potential barrier might present itself in finding the appropriate time to offer the workshop. It is important to consult with the OL faculty to identify a suitable date and time to meet. The workshop or workshops will have to be organized by the OLEP and included in the Faculty's Development Calendar. In order for the IP to be effective and for the project to work, the attendance and cooperation of a great percentage of the OLEP

faculty is needed. I also need to gain their trust to ensure their commitment, motivation and compromise to accept and use the manual guidelines.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

The project IP will begin once the doctoral program has been completed. The process of presenting and obtaining the Campus Chancellor's approval for the program implementation could take a week or two and attaining the OLEP Associate Dean's support and cooperation an additional month. The workshop or workshops will be accomplished during a day-long conference. A Friday session may be most appropriate, since there is limited academic activities (classes) on that day. But the ultimate decision will be made by the OLEP Associate Dean.

Roles and Responsibilities of Student and Others

The Chancellor's and the OLEP's Associates Dean approval is paramount to the dissemination of the study's findings and the project's IP. With their approval and involvement, the OLEP faculty's' acceptance and help with project's IP has a greater prospect for success. They will be responsible to persuade and encourage the OLEP faculty to trust and implement the program's proposals.

Roles and Responsibilities of Administrators

The Chancellor's and the OLEP's Associates Dean approval is paramount to the dissemination of the study's findings and the project's IP. With their approval and involvement, the OLEP faculty's' acceptance and help with project's IP has a greater prospect for success. They will be responsible to persuade and encourage the OLEP faculty to trust and implement the program's proposals.

Roles and Responsibilities of Faculty

Ultimately, the program was designed to be used and executed by the OLEP faculty. From that standpoint, the success of the program's IP will solely depend on the OLEP faculty's commitment to the project IP. In addition to participation in the workshop(s), the OLEP faculty will have to be convinced that implementing and using the project will improve the teaching-learning transaction and that it will help improve faculty-student communication.

Roles and Responsibilities of Project Developer

The project developer will be in charge of developing the workshop or workshops necessary to present the manual to the OLEP faculty members. The project developer needs to make the Campus' OLEP authorities believe in the project and bring the faculty on board in the process. The project developer's role is to facilitate the understanding and acceptance of the project, acting as "...a guide or 'discussion leader' for the group. A facilitator's job is to get others to assume responsibility and take the lead" (<http://www.virginia.edu/processsimplification/resources/Facilitator.pdf>).

Therefore, the role played by the project developer during the workshop(s) presentation needs to be one of joining together with the rest of the Campus' OLEP faculty during the project's IP. Consequently, the project developer will act as a facilitator, sharing and explaining that the manual's proposals stem from information provided by the study's participants, students 35 years and older, and supported by other studies.

Project Evaluation

After a one semester implementation, the effectiveness of the project will be evaluated by asking the Campus' OLEP faculty and students to complete a satisfaction survey that will provide information on the project's performance from their respective perspectives. Nevertheless, in order to have a real assessment of the project's accomplishment or lack thereof, a follow-up qualitative satisfaction study will be necessary. Another possibility would be re-interviewing the study's participants that remain enrolled in the OLEP to ascertain if their perceptions have changed. The information gathered will reflect these students' perception of the changes proposed by the project were applied and if their satisfaction level has improved. Conducting follow-up interviews is necessary in order to make a balanced pre and post comparison of students' satisfaction. The data gathered will provide information that will allow measurement of the success of the project and if its objectives were or were not accomplished. This process will have to be repeated in the future in order to maintain the project's goals and update the manual.

Implications Including Social Change

Local Community

Social change is defined by Greenwood and Guner (2008) as "shifts in the attitudes and behavior that characterize a society" (p. 1). This project study sought to generate transformations at adjustments in this Campus' OLEP that will improve how students 35 years and older perceive its OLEP and our academic community's environment as a whole. Our project study was designed to learn if the adult student

population, 35 years and older, sees this Campus' OLEP as a program that works for them and that takes their needs into account. The data collected offered the necessary information to evaluate the satisfaction level of the Campus' OLEP of the population studied. The data also provided evidence that allowed for the development of a best practices manual for the OLEP faculty. This manual will provide a variety of ways to help the faculty understand how to address the needs of these adult students, improve how they relate to each other and improve how to service to this population.

Far-Reaching

A review of the literature for this section suggested the scarcity of qualitative student satisfaction studies. A fact worth noting is that specific studies about students 35 years and older were not founded. Although this study's findings might not be generalized due to the small sample used, its findings are aligned with most of the studies reviewed during the research. Nevertheless, I believe that more detailed qualitative students' satisfaction studies are needed. In the future, similar studies might focus on a different population, gender or ethnicity. Information concerning student satisfaction will not only help institutions to make better administrative decisions, but will also help their faculty understand the population it serves and provide students with better academic options. This study could be considered a beginning towards that end.

Conclusion

The aims of this project study were: 1.To assess the level of satisfaction of the adult student population, 35 years and older, with this Campus' OLEP. 2. To develop a best practice manual to help the Campus' OLEP faculty learn how to develop a better

relationship with their students and provide better academic service to this segment of the campus' student population. As demonstrated in the literature review, the study was designed to record to the .participants' voices, feelings, experiences, and expectations to gain data to that could be used to improve their educational experience. The project study gathered the necessary feedback to recognize which components associated with the Campus' OLEP meet the expectations and were satisfactory to the population at issue and which need to be improved or change to promote a satisfactory learning experience. It also helped to develop a project manual which will help the Campus' OLEP faculty better understand, communicate with and serve students 35 years and older. This manual will help the faculty members to understand these adult population, their peculiarities, what they look for in an OL course and improve faculty-student communication. This hopefully will produce more satisfied and better academically prepared students. It will also improve faculty satisfaction. In the next section, I will explain other relevant aspects related to this project study, issues such as, strengths, limitations and a more detail analysis of the project study.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The project study was conducted to assess how satisfied the adult student population, composed of individuals 35 years of age and older, was with this Puerto Rican University's campus' OLEP and to determine if a faculty manual for this area was necessary. The literature reviewed indicated out that OLE has become a very important element in the academic offering at many colleges and universities (Allen & Seaman, 2011), and that this segment of the adult population has become the fastest growing of the student population (The NCES, 2011, et al.; Mansour & Mupinga, 2007; Palmer & Holt, 2009; Getzlaf, Perry, Toffner, Lamarche, & Edwards, 2009). This Puerto Rican university has followed suit and its OLEP is now the fastest growing program at the institutional level, and the Campus where the study was conducted, is leading that charge (Torres-Nazario, et al., 2011). The significant size and growth of the adult student population, especially those over 35 years of age, make it important to determine their satisfaction level with the campus OLEP. It is also important to take into account their views and perceptions to prevent their leaving the OLEP and to guarantee that the services (academic and administrative) being offered to them are satisfying their needs. Assuring that their students are satisfied with the services provided by the campus OLEP, and are academically successful, will help the university and this campus continuing progress.

Before deciding on the topic of this investigation, I reviewed past satisfaction studies conducted by the university, across the larger institution and by this campus,

(IAUPR, PC, Distance Education Department, 2011, et al.; IAUPR, VAAEPS, 2010; RLC, et al., 2010). My examination noted that most of these were quantitative studies and that the information collected from the satisfaction surveys was limited because it did not include experiential data, and did not allow the participants to offer any information beyond the surveys' limited questions. Those studied also did not concentrate on the adult population 35 years and older. An ethnographic study conducted on the campus' OLEP, also concluded that the program needed, "...to complete 'needs assessment procedures' for informed decision making. The OLEP staff points out that this is a limitation that this program has" (Torres Nazario, 2011, p. 36).

Project Strengths

One of the study's strengths is that it provided the university and this campus with a qualitative satisfaction study on how adult students, 35 years and older, perceived the campus' OLEP. The study data collected offers the campus, a first-hand look at the experiences related by adult students 35 years and older, addressing a gap in previous research. Another strength of the study was the production of a best practices manual to aid the campus' faculty OLEP faculty that applied the results of the data analysis. This manual, when implemented, will help the OL faculty to understand the studied population, improve faculty-student communications, and aid the OL faculty to provide in better satisfying their students' needs. This project will help improve the campus OLEP faculty teaching techniques and building rapport with both the target population and OL students in general. At the same time, it will be a great help to the faculty because

it will increase their knowledge of OLE, adult learning, and additional OL teaching techniques for adult students.

I developed this manual using data from my study and a review of literature on the following topics: online education, adult education, adult online education, and online teaching techniques, among others. These studies, manuals, and recommendations used to support the manual document recognized and valid teaching techniques that can be used by the target audience of this manual. I also drew on my experience of nearly seventeen years as an OL instructor, informing the work with the knowledge and understanding that I have developed about the campus' OL students throughout those years.

This project study has several additional strengths. One of these strengths is the study's inclusive character, which is the result of taking the needs and benefits of all stakeholders (students, faculty and administration) into consideration. The greatest strength of this study, however, is important data gathered from the adult students. Their experiences and suggestions are central to both, the project study, and manual. The success of the program depends upon all interested parties working together.

Recommendations for Remediation of Limitations

One of the limitations of the case study is that it was conducted with only eight participants, representing a very small percentage of the total student population. This makes generalizations of the study results unlikely, although the study's findings are in line with most of the studies examined in the literature review. The project's success revolves around two words: implementation and compliance. A significant potential limitation is the implementation and compliance not being properly put into practice. If

the project is not implemented properly and supported by all stakeholders, neither the gathered data, the findings, nor the manual will assure the proposed benefits. The support of the administrators in charge (the campus' Chancellor and OLEP Assistant Dean) and the OLEP faculty members is essential to the project's success. A successful outcome requires that the Chancellor and OLEP Assistant Dean agree with the study's findings and the manual contents, and that they also require that the OLEP faculty adopt and put the manual into practice. Participation by the campus' OLEP faculty members is also very important; an important event in promoting a successful adoption of the study manual would be the OL administrators summoning the faculty to attend a presentation of the project (manual), followed by the faculty members' acceptance of the project. Faculty commitment is an important factor in the project's success or failure.

Implementing this project successfully would be more difficult without the full participation and cooperation of all stakeholders and especially the administrators and OLEP faculty. If the implementation process does not proceed as expected, an alternative solution would be to find other ways to disseminate the study's findings and the project (manual) amongst the OLEP faculty; I would also have to let them know that I could become a peer mentor to those that desire to implement the project. Peer mentoring is an effective and proven technique when carried out properly. On the effectiveness of peer mentoring, Colvin and Ashman (2010) advised that "... peers have such an impact on one another, over the years there have been many attempts to harness and utilize this influence more formally" (p. 121). I will offer lectures and workshops about the study and the manual implementation to those members interested in learning about the project.

This could be done via email, my professional online page and, since I am part of the OLEP faculty, through person-to-person communications.

Scholarship

I have been teaching OL for the nearly seventeen years. I have a Bachelor's degree in education and additional graduate and doctoral studies in history, plus professional certifications and training in OL education. During my years as a college professor and specifically with OL, I have taken and received many workshops, trainings, and certifications offered by the university and the Campus, among others, etc., on OL education. Those opportunities have helped me to become knowledgeable and proficient with this environment's technology, teaching techniques, and OL teaching methods. In my field of expertise, history, I have also made sure to keep up with the latest trends and information, and to promote my scholarly growth through graduate and doctoral studies. This helps to guarantee that I offer my students an up-to-date and excellent education. I have also keep-up with the scholarly responsibilities that come with being a college professor through writings, investigations, and publications on topics related to my discipline, since scholarship evidence is required to be respected as a professional in this field.

My efforts at academic enhancement were previously directed primarily to the field of history, not my pedagogical responsibilities. After I enrolled at the Walden University and decided to obtain a doctoral degree in adult education, however, my perspective in academic growth and scholarship vastly changed. I have been teaching adults for many years, but I developed a very different view of who adult students are and

their needs, expectations, potential, and hopes. This change in perspective is the result in part because I have become an adult student myself. This has caused me to grow significantly as a scholar.

My growth as a scholar began with my first course at Walden University. To fulfill Walden's University academic requisites, I was required to complete the requisite courses, and to accomplish that I had to read many works by the leading experts on the adult education field. I was also required to demonstrate, through extensive writings an understanding of what I had read many works and the subjects studied so as to prove my competence and scholarship. But my real challenge was proving proficiency and growth as scholar; this came when I started writing my project study, the final requisite to obtain my doctoral degree.

For this endeavor, I completed a vast amount of reading on the subject of my study and surrounding areas. I researched, read, reviewed and analyzed hundreds of peer reviewed articles, professional journals, books, and online articles, among other sources. Through the review of this extensive literature, I became more knowledgeable in the adult education field and the issues surrounding it.

The process of creating my project study cemented my growth as scholar. For the project study, I had to detect a situation I considered a problem, in my field, that needed to be confronted and researched, but I had to explain why based on an extensive research of professional literature; I also had to create a possible solution that would help improve the situation: my project. Through my literary research, I became more interested in adult online education and student satisfaction. The review of literature allowed me to

realize that there was a void among the studies about students' perceptions with online learning and online adult education, on those dealing with adult students, 35 years and older. This I found worrisome, because the literature overwhelmingly demonstrated that adult students are the fastest growing segment of the college student population in the US; when I looked at my institution's own satisfaction studies, what I found was eerily similar. My growth as a scholar allowed me to choose the situation I wanted to study, improve, and contribute new knowledge.

The process of writing my project study has been one of constant scholarly growth, because as you continue to write, you have to continue reading and adding new knowledge; through the study's revision and correction process, the same. I understand that a scholar is a transitive verb, and that it is a never-ending process that will continue throughout the years you spend teaching and learning. Through this journey, I became more than a scholar; I became a lifelong learner.

Project Development and Evaluation

Developing my project was the most challenging part of this whole journey, but also enlightening and fun at the same time. The process of developing my manual for teaching adults OL, required that I understood the literature studied, interpret the information collected from the participants, and present the study's findings in a manner that benefited the stakeholders that might be affected by them. This was a knowledge builder, scholar developing and pedagogical challenging procedure, that pushed me to go beyond my expectations.

This challenge was threefold. It began when I started to look for an issue that I could define as a problem. To achieve this, I had to do extensive research and reading on adult OL education and look for what I believe was missing. I found both in the literature and at my place of work what in my opinion was the problem: the lack of perception studies on OL adults students, 35 years and older. But identifying the problem was just the beginning, the more I learned about adult student perception on OL education, the more information I needed to find support for my proposed project study; this was a process of non-stop academic learning and growth. The second fold was obtaining all the necessary authorizations from the Walden and the Puerto Rican university IRBs; this was a lengthy and tedious process, which I successfully achieved. I proposed to conduct my project study at the institution I teach; this decision was the challenge's third fold. I asked and gained consent from the institution's authorities to conduct the study and access to the OL student population needed to accomplish it. After accomplishing this last phase, I identified those students that later decided to be part of the project study.

Since the research design chosen was a qualitative case study, I had to conduct one on one interviews with the eight participants selected for the study. The interview process gave me access to a wealth of information and allowed me to see the project's problem from a human perspective and their experiences. I started learning while enjoying this new academic stage. The data amassed almost completely confirmed that the problem I stated existed, and that it was in line with the literature reviewed. From the interview process, the participants' experiences and the data analysis, I learned about the students' perceptions about the Campus' OLEP. I discovered their positive views about

the OLEP and which things they perceived needed to improve. After concluding the data analysis, I began to develop what later became my project, a Manual for Teaching Adults Online, a manual that could help the Campus' OL faculty understand and provide a more sensible approach to those students' expectations and fulfill their academic demands.

Once I concluded the interview and data analysis process, I had the necessary information to understand the participants' perceptions and concerns of the campus' OLEP; and with that information, I set out to develop the best practices manual.

The process of creating the teachers manual demanded that I carry out extensive research and studies on online teaching best practices and techniques; this investigation yielded a considerable amount of studies and research on the subject. I discovered that some of them are the basis for other best practices teaching manuals, for online and traditional education developed by other institutions. I used some of those studies as the basis for my manual, another valuable element was the addition of my experiences as an OL educator for many years; I knew the project's setting and the participant's characteristics. The final product was a manual that will help the OL faculty and students develop a better teaching-learning transaction, and the OLEP focus on faculty development and paying attention to its students' positive assessment, perceptions, and concerns.

I believe this manual will have a very positive impact in improving the campus' OLEP, its faculty and students; at this time it too early to evaluate its effectiveness. For that the project needs to be implemented for a prudent amount of time that would allow to assess if it succeeded in its purpose, and even if it needs to be re-tooled. In section 3,

Project Evaluation, I detailed specific strategies that need to be followed to evaluate the project's achievements.

Leadership and Change

The Merriam & Webster dictionary (2014) defined a leader as a “person who has commanding authority or influence” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/leader>). Since I became an educator more than two decades ago, I unknowingly assumed that role, and began trying to become a positive influence and an example to my students. This role allowed me to assert, in a successful manner, the necessary changes needed to be a more effective in the instructor. Through this academic journey, and especially because of the people that played a defining role in my academic success, I understood the importance of leadership. I also realized the need for leaders in the education arena, because leaders, besides guiding others, can act as agent of change. Leadership, in higher education, has become a very important and necessary commodity, as Hill (2005) articulated, “Given the complexity and dynamism of life in American colleges and universities, the development of leadership talent... is fast becoming a strategic imperative”. The author explained that even though this institutions does not hire faculty members because of leadership experience, but rather by academic expertise, they are asking, more and more, from their faculty members to assume the role of leaders (Hill, 2005).

After completing the study and creating the project, I saw the need for me to take a leadership role in the implementation of the manual's recommendations, and prompting the necessary changes for the program to be implemented. At that point, the statement

about leadership expressed by Hill (2005) took a new meaning: through my actions I would show my colleagues what we needed to do to improve the OLEP and how it was perceived by the adult students' population, 35 years and older. This realization also made me recognize that this was an important task and that I had to serve as an example, not only to my colleagues but to my students. Since I had never taken any course or training in leadership, this prompted me to ask myself the following question: how I could I become a leader? I found a solution to my uncertainty by doing what had work for my throughout this experience: I researched and read about leadership and how to become a leader. Through this investigation, I found the basic answer, "Leadership is a self-development process.... You have to teach yourself" (The Vine: Harvard's Linda Hill Shatters Myths About Leadership, 2011). I acknowledged that it was my responsibility to assume a leadership role in front of my peers and students, and that by doing so, I would learn how to become a better leader and affect the changes needed to help improve the campus' OLEP and help to develop students' satisfaction with the faculty performance. I understood that to become a leader, "Individuals, must teach themselves by doing, observing it, and interacting with others. Leadership development is a long-term and challenging process for which there are few shortcuts" (Hill, 2005, p. 28).

Analysis of Self as Scholar

Evaluating yourself as a scholar is not an easy proposition, because it might be considered as a self-serving process. Nevertheless, as an educator, I can attest to my intellectual evolution during this academic journey. This doctoral process has allowed me

to become a well-educated person; it helped me to grow not only as an educator, researcher, and practitioner, but also as a scholar. It also helped become a better human being and a learner for life. I have been an educator for many years, but as I fulfilled each of the requisites to obtain my doctoral degree at Walden University; I began to add knowledge, developed new learning; which I later put into practice. The amount of research done, studies analyzed, and the project developed, are a testimony of my scholarly evolution and proficiency. The project design process gave the opportunity to create a scholar artifact that could help improve a difficult situation that is affecting the institution I work for.

Through the past years, I have noticed that my colleagues recognized my academic progress. I have seen a change in the way they relate to me and how my academic arguments are viewed and accepted and sought by some of them. During my doctoral study process, some of my colleagues volunteered to help review my work; furthermore, during the data gathering and analysis process, one of them worked very closely with me and served as a peer reviewer and advisor. This interaction allowed my colleagues to learn about what I was doing and it provided me with their input. Thanks to the growth of scholar capabilities, I am asked with more frequency to be part of my institution's academic activities. Also, my arguments, proposals, and suggestions are viewed in a more positive light, due to the fact that people have confidence in what I have learned and my academic progress in recent years.

A final point is that my academic maturity reached a new level during my contact with the study's participants; this was a whole new learning experience. The literature

review, the constant writing and revisions, did provide me with ample academic and professional knowledge, but the direct contact with the participants, listening to their testimony and experiences, gave the opportunity to acquire, not only knowledge, but wisdom from a new and different perspective.

Analysis of Self as Practitioner

I became an educator over two decades ago, which means that I have been a practitioner in my field of studies that long. The experience I acquired while completing my doctoral study expanded the meaning of the term practitioner. I am a full time history professor, and during these years, I have applied what I learned in “real time”, which meant putting into practice new techniques and teaching methods. In my case, the pinnacle of becoming a real life practitioner came when it was a time to create my project. This meant more than learning and applying what was learned; it meant creating something new to improve a specific situation. I believe that this doctoral journey helped me learn, develop, and apply new pedagogical, technical skills and teaching strategies that have allowed me to become a better educator. What I have accomplished during this time, more important than the degree I will earn, will help improve my teaching abilities, academic status, and professional reputation.

Analysis of Self as Project Developer

Developing my project was this journey’s most intense, interesting, enlightening, and satisfying phase. I have, in many occasions, worked in program development. I was part of the university’s Institutional Committee and the Campus as well, that revised all the history courses syllabi. I also designed and developed three OL history courses for the

undergraduate program and two OL history courses at the graduate level. Nevertheless, none of those experiences came close to what I experienced and learnt creating the OL best practices manual for OL faculty. The wealth of knowledge that I developed through the extensive review of literature, the process of getting the necessary authorizations (IRB permits) to conduct my study, and most of all, the knowledge acquired during my contact with the study's participants made the learning experience as a project developer a unique one.

During the process of developing my project, I learned more about my creative capabilities. Before developing this project, unlike what I had done before, I went from being part of proposals for changes to designing a program that could directly initiate and accomplish change. To achieve this, I had to do a lengthy and probing analysis of the Campus' OLEP, to expose a situation that could be adverse to the institution, faculty, and students. This activity allowed me to learn and understand about my institutions' stakeholders in a more comprehensive way. It also afforded me the necessary grasp of the conditions I wanted to address and the possible ways it could be managed.

Finally, the project I designed, while I looked at other recognized and established studies on the subject of best teaching practices (both OL and traditional), is based substantially on my extensive experience as an OL instructor and the fact that I have a comprehensive understanding of the study's participants and institution's stakeholders. I developed this project, figuratively speaking, as a glove, with proposed solutions and techniques tailored to remedy the situation revealed. I have learnt that I can determine

what needs to be changed, support my findings, but most important, create the potential solution for that change, and this will be instrumental in promoting change.

The Project's Potential Impact on Social Change

I have been an OL faculty member at this campus since the late 1990s. I have the seen the OLEP grow, improve, change, and adjust to the fluctuations and transformations in the population it serves. After excising my personal bias, I still have a remarkable perspective of the campus OLEP. Developing my project study, I understood that the OLEP was not created to serve the campus but the academic needs of its students, which for whatever reason were not able or willing to physically travel to the campus. Therefore, knowing, learning, and understanding the students' perception and recognizing which issues they acknowledge served their needs and which needed to improve is essential. The literature reviewed confirmed that students' satisfaction studies are being recognize as an intrinsically part of many higher education institutions developmental plans. My concerns shifted when I realized, as an adult OL student, that the studies I had research and examined, including those from my own institution, did not dealt directly with the adult student population 35 years and older. Therefore, I decided that a perception study on adults students, 35 years and older, was necessary. The need for qualitative studies on how these adult perceived OL education might not be the only issue that this Campus' OLEP needs to revised, but this particular issue besides being close to me, as I explained, was supported by the literature researched.

This study, due to its nature and small sample, might not be generalizable to the general population. However, after concluding the study, its findings and the manual

resulting from it could help improve, not only this Campus' OLEP, but it could be applied and used by other institutions with a similar programs. The OL faculty manual presents an opportunity to provoke change, well beyond the campus', to all Puerto Rican colleges and universities. OL education, as the studies revealed, continue to grow and it is an important part of the academic offering at many colleges and universities. On the other hand, the adult population, 35 years and older, has also been proven to be the fastest growing segment of the students enrolling at this type of institutions. Therefore, learning about how those students perceived OL education is essential for higher learning institutions to make sure they are providing the necessary attention to this population academic needs. This study provides higher education institutions with information that could be used to recruit new students and train their faculty. This could be considered an important contribution that could have an impact that could provoke social changes at the local level and beyond.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

One of the project study's contributions is the vast bibliographical references collected during this process. Although the study concentrated on how older students perceived this Puerto Rican University Campus' OLEP, the research conducted extended much further. The literature reviewed went well beyond the selected topic to include others that were supplementary, such as adult education, OL education, students' perception on OLE, and OL education practices, amongst others. This study will help other scholars, interested in learning or researching on these topics, conduct further investigations.

I am confident the manual I developed will help improve this Campus' OLEP areas identified by the study's participants. This study and manual could also be used by other institutions to provide their OL faculty with an additional teaching educational manual. Also, it is important to recognize that the project adds new knowledge to the OLE field, when, besides the literature researched, the wealth of information gathered from the experiences shared by the study's participants is taken into account.

Nevertheless, as the literature confirmed, this study and project are not sufficient; more qualitative students' satisfaction studies like this one need to be conducted. One of the study's shortfalls is the small sample used. Consequently, similar studies with a larger sample need to be performed in the near future, to confirm this study's findings, to dispute or to expose new issues that need to be studied. New and broader research studies that take into consideration different ethnicities, ages, and gender are needed. Those studies will yield a more complete picture on how students' perceived OLE. In this case, the study and project made me aware of the need to oversee the project's implementation and outcomes. Also, since I teach students of different ages, conducting a new study that takes into consideration online student's perceptions, from a younger population point of view, is recommendable.

Conclusion

Completing my doctoral study was a long and challenging process. Accomplishing the final part, the project, was very enlightening. At the conclusion of my project study, I can substantiate my growth as an educator and scholar. The question presented as my project study's title, How Adults 35 and Older, Perceive Online

Education, defined a problem associated with this Campus' OLEP. The problem presented, and the lack of qualitative studies on how adult students, 35 years and older, perceived the Campus' OLEP, was substantiated by the comprehensive literature research conducted. The data collected from the interviews with the study's participants yielded the needed information to comprehend the problem, and to develop a helpful tool to address the problem, my project, a best-practice manual for the Campus' OLEP faculty. This manual will give the OLEP faculty members some guidelines on how to improve the faculty-student interaction and the better use of the OL platform's communication tools. This manual contemplates the concerns the participants manifested during the one-on-one interview process. Although similar studies, with a sizeable sample and a more diverse population, might be needed to support these findings, its strengths, and weaknesses.

Another important aspect of this journey is the growth and reinforcement of my scholarly baggage. To complete my doctoral degree, I had to study and report on dozens of books on adult education, OL education, and other related topics. I also completed a substantial and methodical literature research of articles on topics related to the study and later wrote a review explaining how they related to my study. At the conclusion of my project research, I do not regard myself as an expert on this subject, but a scholar and lifelong learner. Following that line, another important aspect granted by this experience, was the opportunity to proof and demonstrate my creative potential. One of the project study requirements was the development of a "project" that suggested possible solutions to the problem statement. In my case, this condition gave the opportunity to create an OL best practice manual for the Campus' OLEP faculty that will aid them in teaching adults,

35 years and older, and how to use the courses' delivery platform communications tools, in more effective ways. If implemented, this manual has the potential, not only to improve faculty-students interaction, academic and otherwise, but help OL faculty members to become more knowledgeable of the course delivering platform and its uses.

Although this study might not be generalizable, for the reasons I explained, it could be a positive influence on social change at the local and institutional levels, and beyond. The study's participants explained that one of aspects, within the Campus' OLEP, was to see improvement in the faculty-student communication and interaction, in the form of a more timely and effective feedback. This manual offers the OLEP faculty a variety of practices that address these issues and that can be easily implemented. The findings, obtained from the data and the information related by the participants, were in line with the studies reviewed for the study. This means that other institutions could ask their OL faculty to implement the manual. Furthermore, the practices proposed in this manual could be applied to students of all ages.

This study will add new knowledge to the adult education field, online and traditional. The manual, developed as result, has the potential to help OL faculty members, and students of all ages, at this campus and elsewhere, developed a better relationship and communication with their students while improving the learning experience. But this study is not a "magic bullet", which will cure all of the campus' OLEP limitations, because besides what I investigated, there might be other issues that need to be examined. Therefore, similar studies with a more sizable sample and more ethnically and gender diversified need to be conducted. Finally, I feel that at this juncture,

I have positively contributed to improve what I set out to do, the Campus' OLEP. During this journey, I improved my scholarly credentials, solidified my academic and creative skills, and became a better practitioner and educator.

References

- Abu Hasan, H. F., Azleen Ilias, A., Abd Rahman, R., & Abd Razak, M. Z. (2008). Service Quality and Student Satisfaction: A case study at private higher education institutions. *International Business Research*, 3, 163-175. Retrieved from cse.net.org/journal/index.php/ibr/article/.../952
- Aging by baby boomers (2007). *CQ Research*, 7(37), 865-888. Retrieved from http://www.agingsociety.org/agingsociety/publications/public_policy/cqboomers.pdf
- Allen, I. E. & Seaman, J. (2011). *Going the distance: Online education in the United States, 2011*. Retrieved from <http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/goingthedistance.pdf>
- Allen, E.I. and Seaman, J. (2010). *Class differences: Online education in the United States, 2010*. Retrieved from http://sloanconsortium.org/sites/default/files/class_differences.pdf
- Allen, E.I. and Seaman, J. (2009). *Learning on demand: Online education in the United States, 2009*. Retrieved from sloanconsortium.org/sites/default/files/class_differences.pdf
- Allen, E.I. and Seaman, J. (2008). *Staying the course: Online education in the United States, 2008*. Retrieved from http://www.sloanconsortium.org/sites/default/files/staying_the_course-2.pdf

Anderson, D., Imdieke, S., & Standerford, N.S. (2011). Feedback please: Studying self in the online classroom. *International Journal for Instruction*, 4(1). Retrieved from http://www.e-iji.net/dosyalar/iji_2011_1_1.pdf

Anglero State University, IT Project Office. (n. d.). *Project implementation*. Retrieved from http://www.angelo.edu/services/project_management/Project_Implementation.php

Ahmad, F & Aziz, J. (2009). Student's perception of teachers teaching literature communicating and understanding through the eyes of the audience. *European Journal of Social Science*, 7(3), 17-26. Retrieved from http://www.eurojournals.com/ejss_7_3_02.pdf

Arbaugh, J. L. & Hornik, S. (2006). Do Chickering and Gamson's seven principles also apply to online MBA's? *The Journal of Educators Online*, 3(2), 1-18. Retrieved from <http://www.thejeo.com/Volume3Number2/ArbaughFinal.pdf>

Bambara, C. S., Harbour, C. P., Gray Davies, T., & Athey, S. (2009). Delicate engagement: The lived experience of community college students enrolled in high-risk online course. *Community College Review*, 36, 219-238. doi: 10.1177/0091552108327187

Braun, V & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2), 77-101. Retrieved from http://eprints.uwe.ac.uk/11735/2/thematic_analysis_revised_-_final.pdf

- Baillie, L. (2013). Enhancing observational data in qualitative research. *Nurse Researcher*, 20(5), 4-5. Retrieved from <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=597315d2-45e2-4462-8005-7a2e897f7b02%40sessionmgr113&vid=9&hid=116>
- Brookfield, S. (1984). The contribution of Edward Lindeman to the develop of theory and philosophy in adult education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 34, 185-196. Retrieved from Sage Journals Database.
- Buzzetto-More, N. A. (2008). Student's perceptions of various e-learning components. *Interdisciplinary Journal of E-Learning Objects*. 4, 113-134. Retrieved from <http://jite.org/documents/Vol5/v5p201-219Smart54.pdf>
- Casey, D. M. (2008). A journey of legitimacy: The historical development of distance education through technology. *TechTrends*, 52(2), 45-51. doi: 10.1007/s11528-008-0135-z
- Chan, C.W., Pearman, C.J., & Farha, NW. (2011). *P2P: Assessing a peer evaluation strategy*. Retrieved from <http://www.sicet.org/journals/jetde/jetde10/6-chang.pdf>
- Chifwepa, V. (2008). Providing information communication technology-based Support to distance education students: A case study of the University of Zambia. *African Journal of Library, Archives & Information Science*, 18(1), 43-54.
- Clardy, A. (2005). *Andragogy: Adult learning and education at its best?* (ERIC Document No. ED465047). Retrieved from ERIC Data Base.
- Closson, R. B. (2010). Critical race theory and adult education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 60(3), 261-283. doi: 10.1177/0741713609358445

- Colorado State University. Writing @CSU. Writing guides: Case study. Retrieved from <http://writing.colostate.edu/guides/research/casestudy/index.cfm>
- Colvin, J.W. & Ashman, M. (2010). Roles, risks, and benefits of peer mentoring relationships in higher education. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 18(2), 121–134. doi 10.1080/13611261003678879
- Comings, J. P. (2007). *Persistence: Helping adult education students reach their goals*. Retrieved from http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/ann_rev/comings-2.pdf
- Conole, G. (2008). Listening to the learner voice: The ever changing landscape of technology use for language students. *ReCALL*, 20(2), 124-140. doi: 10.1017/S0958344008000220
- Conceição, S. C. O. (2006). Faculty lived experiences in the online environment. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 57(1), 26-45. doi: 10.1177/1059601106292247
- Corbin, J. (n. d.). *In Vivo coding*. *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*. Retrieved from <http://srmo.sagepub.com/view/the-sage-encyclopedia-f-social-science-research-methods/n459.xml>
- Corden, A. and Sainsbury, R. (2006). Using verbatim quotations in reporting qualitative social research: The views of research users. *Social Policy Research Unit, University of York*. Retrieved from <http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/pdf/verbusers.pdf>
- Craig, A., Goold, A., Coldwell, & Mustard, J. (2008). Perceptions of roles and responsibilities in online learning: A case study. *Interdisciplinary Journal of E-*

learning and Objects, 4, 205-223. Retrieved from

<http://www.ijello.org/Volume4/IJELLOv4p205-23Craig510.pdf>

Creswell, J. W. (2008) *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. (3rd ed.) Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson Education Inc.

Cull, A., Sprangers, M., Bjordal, Aarason, N., West, K and Bottomly, A. (2002). *Eort quality of life group translation procedures*. Retrieved from, http://ipenproject-org.heracenter.org/documents/methods_docs/Surveys/EORTC_translation.pdf

DiMaria-Ghalili, R., Ann, R., & Ostrow, L. (2005). Distance education for graduate nursing: One state school's experience. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 44(1), 5-10.

Dixon, R., Dixon, K & Siraguza, L. (2007). Individual's perceptions of online environments: What adult learners are telling us in ICT: Providing choices for learners and learning. *Proceedings Ascilite Singapore 2007*. Retrieved from <http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/singapore07/procs/dixon.pdf>

Edelson, P. & Pittman, V.V. (2001). *E-learning in the United States: New directions and opportunities for university continuing education*. Retrieved from http://www.stonybrook.edu/spd/dean_papers/newdelhi.pdf

Fenwick, T. (2008). Workplace learning: Emerging trends and new perspectives. *New Direction for Adult and Continuing Education*, 119, 17-26. doi:10.1002/ace.302

- Filep, B. (2009). Interviewing and translation strategies: Coping with multilingual settings and data. *Social Geography*, 4, 59-70. Retrieved from <http://www.soc-geogr.net/4/59/2009/sg-4-59-2009.pdf>
- Fortune, M.F., Spielman, M., Pangelinan, D. (2011). Student's perceptions of online or face-to-face learning and social media in hospitality, recreation and tourism. *Merlot Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 7(1), 1-16. Retrieved from http://jolt.merlot.org/vol7no1/fortune_0311.pdf
- Freeman, M., deMarrais, K., Preissle, J., Roulston, K., and St. Pierre, E. A. (2007). Standards of evidence in qualitative research: An incitement to discourse. *Educational Research*, 36(25), p. 25-32. doi: 10.3102/0013189X06298009
- Getzlaf, B., Perry, B., Toffner, G., Lamarche, K., & Edwards, M. (2009). Effective Instructor feedback: Perceptions of online graduate students. *The Journal of Educators Online*, 6(2), 1-22. Retrieved from <http://www.thejeo.com/Archives/Volume6Number2/GetzlafetalPaper.pdf>
- Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (4 ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson Education.
- Goldsmith, L., Snider, D., & Hamm, S. (2010). Student perception of their online learning experience. *International Journal of Education Leadership Preparation*, 5(4), 1-2. Retrieved from <http://cnx.org/content/m35740/latest/>
- Greenblatt, A. (2007). Aging by baby boomers (2007). *CQ Research*, 7(37), 865-888. Retrieved From http://www.agingsociety.org/agingsociety/publications/public_policy/cqboomers.pdf

- Greenwood, L & Guner, N. (2008). *Social change. The Institute for the Study of Labor*. Retrieved from http://e-archivo.uc3m.es/bitstream/10016/5123/1/Social_WPIZA_2008_3485_preprint.pdf
- Gudewich, C. (2012). *Mentoring for retention, morale, and succession planning in a small federal agency*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/pqdtlocal1005747/docview/102563948/fulltextPDF/13CD685733414C85PQ/1?accountid=1487>
- Hayes, D. (2006). *Case study*. University of Plymouth. Retrieved from http://www.edu.plymouth.ac.uk/resined/Case_study/casest.htm#Part%20II:%20BBSER%20VIN%20PEOPLE%20AT%20WORK
- Hancock, D. R., & Algozzine, B. (2006). *Doing case study research: A practical guide for beginning researchers*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hill, L. (2005). *Leadership development: A strategic imperative for higher education*. Retrieved from <http://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/ffp0506s.pdf>
- Holsapple, C.W. & Lee-Post, A. (2006). Defining, assessing and promoting e-learning success: An information system perspective. *Decision Sciences Journal of Innovating Education*, 4(1), 67-85. doi:10.1111/j.1540-4609.2006.00102.x
- Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus. (2011). *Datos estadísticos, modalidad distancia 2011-30*. Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus, Departamento de Educación a Distancia.
- Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus. (2010). *Informe de satisfacción con los servicios e instalaciones del Recinto de Ponce de la Universidad*

Interamericana de Puerto Rico para los años 1999 al 2010. Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus, Centro de Recursos para el Aprendizaje.

Interamerican University of Puerto Rico (2009b). *Misión del Recinto de Ponce*.

Retrieved from <http://ponce.inter.edu/html/mision.html>

Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, VAAEPS. (2010). *Recinto de Ponce: Estudio de satisfacción –estudiantes que tomaron únicamente cursos a distancia durante los términos 201030 y 201033. Resultados 2009-10*. Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, Vice-presidencia de Asuntos Académicos y Planificación Sistémica.

Jackson, L. D. (2009). Revisiting adult learning theory through the lens of an adult learner. *Adult Learning*, 20(3/4), 20-22.

Jeffries, A. & Hyde, R. (2010). Building the student's blended learning experiences from current research findings. *Electronic Journal of E-learning*, 8(2), 133-140.

Jeffries, A. & Hide, R. (2009). Listening to the learners' voice in H E: How do students reflect on their use of technology for learning. *Electronic Journal of E-Learning*, 7(2), 119-126. Retrieved from <http://www.ejel.org/volume7/issue2>

Jump, L. & Jump, R. (2006). Learning academic skills online: Student perceptions of the learningpProcess. *Proceedings of the First International LAMS Conference: Designing the Future of Learning*, 45-54. Retrieved from http://lamsfoundation.org/lams2006/pdfs/Jump_Jump_LAMS06.pdf

- Johnston, J. Killion, J., & Oomen, J. (2005). Student satisfaction in the virtual classroom. *The Internet Journal of Allied Health Science and Practice*, 3(2). Retrieved from <http://ijahsp.nova.edu/articles/vol3num2/johnston.pdf>
- Kara, A. & DeShields, O. W. (2004). *Business student satisfaction and retention in higher education: An empirical investigation*. Retrieved from http://www.realmarcom.com/uop/documents/research/student_satisfaction.pdf
- Khandkar, S. H. (n.d.). *Open coding*. Retrieved from <http://pages.cpsc.ucalgary.ca/~saul/wiki/uploads/CPSC681/open-coding.pdf>
- King, K. (2008). Television in the schools: Instructional television and educational media resources at the national public broadcasting archives. *Techtrends: Linking Research & Practice to Improve Learning*, 52(4), 59-65. doi: 10.1007/s11528-008-0178-1
- Knowles, M. S. (1978). Andragogy: Adult learning theory in perspective. *Community College Review*. Retrieved from Sage Journals Online Data Base.
- Knowles, M. S., Holton III, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2005). *The adult learner*. San Francisco: Elsevier Butterworth Heinemann.
- Krenner, C. & Weinerman, J. (2011). Adult learning theory: Applications to non-traditional students. *Journal of College Reading and Learning*, 41(2), 87-96. Retrieved from <http://ehis.ebscohost.com>
- Kuh, G. D., Kinzie, J., & Hayek, J. C. (2006). What matters to student success: A review of literature commissioned report for the National Symposium on Post-Secondary

- Student Success: Spearheading a dialog on student success. *National Postsecondary Education Cooperative*, 1-149.
- Lee, K. S. (2009). Listening to students: Investigating effectiveness of an online graduate teaching strategies course. *MERLOT. Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 5(1), 72-87. Retrieved from http://jolt.merlot.org/vol5no1/lee_0309.pdf
- La Prade, M., Marks, A., Gilpatrick, M., Smith, D., & Beazley, J. (2011). Walking through online classrooms: A study in best practices. *Review of Higher Education and Self-Learning (RHESL)*, 4(9), 24-30. Retrieved from EBSCO Data Base.
- Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, G. (2008). Going the distance with online education. *Review of Education Research*, 76 (4), 567-605. doi: 10.3102/0034654307004567
- Lodico, M., Spaulding, D., & Voegtler, K. (2006). *Methods in educational research: From theory to practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Malik, M. E., Danish, R. K. & Uman, A. (2010). The impact of service quality on students' satisfaction in higher education institution in Punjab. *Journal of Management Research*, 2(2), 1-11. Retrieved from <http://macrothink.org/journal/index.php/jmr/article/download/418/322>
- Markham, S. & Hagan, D. (n. d.). *Student satisfaction*. Retrieved from http://cerg.csse.monash.edu.au/reports/sat_1202.htm
- Massachusetts Department of Education. (2003). *Massachusetts recommended criteria for distance learning course*. Retrieved from http://www.doe.mass.edu/edtech/news03/distance_learning.pdf

- MediaCollege.Com. *Open-ended question*. Retrieved from
<http://www.mediacollege.com/journalism/interviews/open-ended-questions.html>
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2008) Adult learning theory for twenty-first century. *New Directions on Adult Education, 119*, 93-98. Retrieved from HW Wilson Data Base.
- Merriam, S. B. (2003). *Review of adult learning and literacy, 4*, 199-220. Retrieved from
http://ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/ann_rev/rall_vol4_ch6.pdf
- Merriam, S. B. (2001). Andragogy and self-directed learning: Pillars of adult education. *New Directions and Continuing Education, 89*, 3-13. Retrieved from EBSCO Data Base.
- Merriam, S. B. Caffarella, R., & Baumgartner, L. (2007). *Learning in adulthood: A comprehensive guide* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. & Brockett, R. (1997). *The profession and practice of adult education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Morrison, K. (2012). *Parent perceptions of their participation in teaching children letter-sound association*. (Doctoral Dissertation). Retrieved from
<http://search.proquest.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/pqdtlocal1005747/docview/92947653/83E0F54A6F464121PQ/1?accountid=14872>
- Mortagy, Y. & Boghikian-Whitby, S. (2010). A Longitudinal comparative study of student perception in online education. *Interdisciplinary Journal of E-Learning Objects, 5*, 24-43. Retrieved from <http://www.ijello.org/>

Volume6/IJELLOv6p023-044Mortagy684.pdf

- Morten, M. F (2003). Online education terms. *Online Education and Learning Management Systems*, 25-38. Retrieved from <http://www.studymmentor.com/Terms.pdf>
- Mullhal, A. (2003). In the Field: Notes on observation on qualitative research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 41(3), 306–313. Retrieved from <http://eds.b.ebscohost.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=4&sid=597315d2-45e2-4462-8005-7a2e897f7b02%40sessionmgr113&hid=116>
- Mulenga, D and Liang, J-S. (2008). Motivations for older adult’s participation in distance Education: A study at the National Open University of Taiwan. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 27(3), 289–314. Retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/02601370802047791#.U7BrMpRd8E>
- Mupinga, D. M. (2007). Student’s positive and negative experiences in hybrid and online classes. *College Student Journal*, 41(1), 242-248. Retrieved from EBSCO Data Base.
- Merriweather, L. (2004). Afrocentric philosophy: A remedy for Eurocentric dominance. *New Directions and Continuing Education*, 102, 65-74. Retrieved from EBSCO Data Base.
- Nasseh, B. (1997). *A Brief history of distance education*. Retrieved from <http://www.seniornet.org/edu/art/history.html>

Noel-Levitz & CAEL. (2011). *The national adult learners satisfaction-priorities report*.

Retrieved from http://www.cael.org/pdfs/ALI_report_2011

North Carolina State University. (2011). *Historically stated, radio college 101*. Retrieved

from <http://news.lib.ncsu.edu/scrc/tag/distance-education/>

Olander, S. & Landin, A. (2005). *Evaluation of stakeholder influence in the*

implementation of construction projects. Retrieved from <http://www.iei.liu.se/>

[fek/svp/723g18/articles_and_papers/1.107451/OlanderLandin2005IJPM.pdf](http://www.iei.liu.se/fek/svp/723g18/articles_and_papers/1.107451/OlanderLandin2005IJPM.pdf)

Olszewski_Kubilus, P. & Corwith, S. (2010). Distance education: Where it started and

where it stands for gifted children and their educators. *Gifted Children Today*, 34

(3), 16-75.

Ozilins, U. (2009). *Back translation as a means of giving translators a voice*. The

International Journal of Translation & Interpreting Research. Retrieved from,

<http://trans-nt.org/index.php/transint/article/viewFile/38/55>

Palmer, S. & Holt, D. (2009). Staff and student perceptions of an online learning

environment: Difference and development. *Australasian Journal of Educational*

Technology, 25(3), 366-381. Retrieved from <http://www.ascilite.org.au/>

[ajet/ajet25/palmer.pdf](http://www.ascilite.org.au/ajet/ajet25/palmer.pdf)

Parker, M. A. & Martin, F. (2010). Using virtual classrooms: Student perceptions of

features and characteristic in an online and a blended course. *MERLOT Journal of*

online Learning and Teaching, 6(1). Retrieved from <http://jolt.merlot.org/>

[vol6no1/parker_0310.htm](http://jolt.merlot.org/vol6no1/parker_0310.htm)

- Pauly, B. M. (2010). *Direct observation as evidence*. *Sage Research Methods*. Retrieved from <http://srmo.sagepub.com/view/encyc-of-case-study-research/n114.xml>
- Pearlman, A. (2010). Television up in the air: The Midwest program on airborne television instruction, 1959-1971. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 27(5), 477-497. doi: 10.1080/15295030903583655
- Pew Research Center. (2014). *The rising cost of not going to college*. Retrieved from <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2014/02/11/the-rising-cost-of-not-going-to-college/>
- Ponterotto, J.G. (2006). Brief note on the origins, evolution, and meaning of the qualitative research concept “Thick Description”. *The Qualitative Report* 11(3), 538-549. Retrieved from <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR11-3/ponterotto.pdf>
- Portland Community College. (2007). *Boomers go to college*. Portland Community College taskforce on aging. Retrieved from <http://www.encore.org/files/PCCBoomerReport033007.pdf>
- Pusser, B., Breneman, D. W., Gansneder, B. M., Kohl, K. J., Levin, J. S., Milam, J. H., and Sarah E. Turner, A. E. (2007). Returning to learning: Adults’ success in college is key to America’s future. *Lumina Foundation for Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.luminafoundation.org/publications/ReturntolearningApril2007.pdf>
- Rachal, J. R. (2002). Andragogy’s detectives: A critique of the present and a proposal for The future. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 52(3), 210-227. Retrieved from Sage data base.

- Reischmann, J. (2004). *Andragogy. History, meaning, context, function*. Retrieved from <http://www.uni-bamberg.de/fileadmin/andragogik/08/andragogik/andragogy/Andragogy-Internet.pdf>
- Roach, V. & Lemasters, L. (2006). Satisfaction with online learning: A comparative descriptive study. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 5(3), 318-332. Retrieved from <http://www.ncolr.org/jiol/issues/pdf/5.3.7.pdf>
- Rodriguez, M. C., Ooms, A., & Montañez, M. (2008). Students' perception of online-learning quality given comfort, motivation, satisfaction, and experience. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 7(2), 105-125. Retrieved from <http://www.ncolr.org/jiol/issues/pdf/7.2.2.pdf>
- Russo, T. & Benson, S. (2005). Learning with the invisible others: Perceptions of online presence and their relationship to cognitive and affective learning. *Educational Technology & Society*, 8(1), 54-62. Retrieved from http://www.ifets.info/journals/8_1/8.pdf
- Sagepub.com A (very) brief refresher on the case study method. Retrieved from http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/41407_1.pdf
- Saldaña, J. (2013). *Applications of case study research* (2nd. edition). London, UK: Sage publications.
- Samans, J. (n.d). *The Impact of web-based technology on distance education in the United States* [HTML document}. Retrieved from <http://www.nyu.edu/classes/keefe/waoe/samans.html>

- Sahin, I. & Shelly, M. (2008). Considering students' perceptions: The distance education student satisfaction model. *Educational Technology & Society, 11*(3), 216-223. Retrieved from http://ifets.info/journals/11_3/15.pdf
- Schreiner, L. A. (2009). *Linking satisfaction and retention*. Noel-Levitz Inc. Retrieved from <http://www.nwmoc.uwstout.edu/admin/provost/upload/LinkingStudentSatis0809.pdf>
- Schwartz, M. (n.d). Satisfaction of students with online learning. *The Learning & Teaching Office*. Retrieved from http://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/lt/resources/handouts/Online_Learning.pdf
- Summer, J. (2000). Serving the system: A critical history of distance education. *Open Learning, 15*(3), 267-285. Retrieved from <http://pages.towson.edu/bsadara/istc717/modules05/module8/3888263.pdf>
- Smart, K. L. & Capel, J. J. (2006). Student perception of online learning: A comparative study. *Journal of Information Technology Education, 5*, 202-219. Retrieved from <http://jite.org/documents/Vol5/v5p201-219Smart54.pdf>
- Somenarain, L., Akkaraju, S., & Gharbaran, R. (2010). Student perception and learning outcomes in asynchronous and synchronous online learning environment in a biology course. Merlot, *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 6*(2), 353-356. Retrieved from http://jolt.merlot.org/vol6no2/somenarain_0610.pdf
- St. Clair, R. (2002). Andragogy revisited: Theory for the 21st century? *Clearing House on Adult Career and Vocational Education*. (ERIC Document No. ED468612). Retrieve from ERIC data base.

- Sacramento State College of Continuing Education. (2012). *Online education at the college of continuing education*. Retrieved from <http://www.cce.csus.edu/programs/online/>
- Scott, J. C. (2005). The Chautauqua vision of liberal education. *History of Education*, 34(1), 41-49. Retrieved from <http://ehis.ebscohost.com>
- Song, L. Singleton, E. S., Hill, J. R. *Improving online learning: Student perception of useful and challenging characteristics*, 7, 59-70. Retrieved from ftp://140.127.40.36/jeromeftp/students%20collection%20and%20work/93CAI/M9253320/Improving_online_learning.pdf
- Stanford-Bowers, D. E. (2008). *Persistence in online classes: A study among community college stakeholders*. Retrieved from <http://jolt.merlot.org/vol4no1/stanford-bowers0308.pdf>
- Soukup, P. A. (2011). Communication technology and education. *Communication Research Trends*, 30(3), 3-36. Retrieved from EBSCO Data Base.
- Southern Association of Colleges and Schools: The Commission on Colleges. (2010). *Distance and Correspondence Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/Distance%20and%20correspondence%20policy%20final.pdf>
- Tallent-Runnels, M. K., Thomas J. A., Lan, W.Y., Cooper, S., Ahern, T. C., Shaw, S. M., and Liu, X. (2006). Teaching online courses: A review of research. *Review of Educational Research*, 76, 93-135. doi: 10.3102/00346543076001093

The Museum of Broadcast Communications. *Educational television*. Retrieved from

<http://www.museum.tv/eotvsection.php?entrycode=educationalt>

The University of Scranton. (2012). *International Correspondence Scholl of Scranton,*

Pennsylvania 1897-1996. Retrieved from <http://matrix.scranton.edu/>

[academics/wml/bk-Manuscripts/ics-aid.shtml](http://matrix.scranton.edu/academics/wml/bk-Manuscripts/ics-aid.shtml)

The Vine: Harvard's Linda Hill shatters myths about leadership. (2013). Retrieved from

[http://www.theroot.com/video/2011/03/harvard_business_schools_linda_hill_shat](http://www.theroot.com/video/2011/03/harvard_business_schools_linda_hill_shatters_myths_about_leadership.html)

[ters_myths_about_leadership.html](http://www.theroot.com/video/2011/03/harvard_business_schools_linda_hill_shatters_myths_about_leadership.html)

Torres, M. (2011). *El programa de estudios a distancia: Breve estudio etnográfico*.

Unpublished manuscript.

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology. (2012). *Understanding*

the implications of online learning for educational productivity. Retrieved from

<http://ctl.sri.com/news/ImplicationsOnlineLearning2.pdf>

United States Distance Learning Association. (n.d). *Time & evolution of distance*

learning in the US. Retrieved from <http://www.usdla.org/>

[mini_websites/timeline/start.html#://](http://www.usdla.org/mini_websites/timeline/start.html#://)

University of Virginia. (n.d.). *The role of the facilitator*. Retrieved from

<http://www.virginia.edu/processsimplification/resources/Facilitator.pdf>

Wagner, R., Werner, J., & Schramm, R. (2005). An evaluation of student satisfaction

with distance learning courses. *Presented at the 18th Annual Conference on*

Distance Teaching and Learning. Retrieved from <http://www.pgsimoes.net/>

Biblioteca/An%20evaluation%20os%20student%20satisfaction%20with%20distance%20learning%20courses.pdf

What is Qualitative interviewing? Retrieved from

<http://www.public.asu.edu/~ifmls/artinculturalcontextsfolder/qualintermeth.html>

Williamson, J. *The history of distance education*. DistanceEducation.org. Retrieved from

<http://www.distance-education.org/Articles/The-History-of-Distance-Education-113.html>

Wisher, R. A., Sabo, M. A. & Moses, F. L. (2004). Distance learning: The soldier

perspective. *US Army Research Institute Special Report 49*, 1-22. Retrieved from

<http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army/s49.pdf>

World Health Organization. (n.d.). *Process of translation and adaptation of instruments*.

Retrieved from http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/research_tools/translation/en/

Yang, Y. & Durrington, V.A. (2010) Investigation of student's perceptions of online

course quality. *International JL on E-Learning*, 9(3), p. 341-361. Retrieved from

file:///C:/Users/halvarez/Downloads/09durrington_2010Jul31.pdf

Yin, Robert. (2012). *Applications of case study research* (3rd. edition). London, UK:

Sage publications.

Yehia M. & Boghikian-Whitby, S. (2010). A longitudinal comparative study of

student perceptions in online education. *Interdisciplinary Journal of E-Learning and Learning Objects*, 6, 23-43. Retrieved from <http://ijello.org/>

Volume6/IJELLOv6p023-44Mortagy684.pdf.

Appendix A: The Project

Three Practices for Teaching Adults

Online

and the Effective Use of Online

Communication Tools

Created for work with adults 35 years

and older

(and all students)

By: Hector Alvarez Trujillo

Summer 2014

Background on Distance and Adult Education

Merriam-Webster defined a manual as “A small book that gives useful information about something” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/manual>).

The Teaching Adults Online: Best Practices Manual was designed following that proposition. The manual was created with the purpose of sharing with online faculty members some important information about teaching adults students, 35 years and older. But first, let’s review some information about adult teaching traditions and theories.

Teaching adults is not a new technique, as a designed practice it has been around for over 80 years. But efforts to provide adults with the means and facilities to learn has an historic tradition that can be trace to the 18th and 19th centuries. It was at that time, when the first form of distance education appeared, authors pointed out that this type of distance education was used solely to benefit adults (Casey, 2008; Olszewski-Kubilus & Corwith, 2010; Whisher, Sabol & Moses, 2005; Edelson & Pittman, 2001; Scott, 2005). The same authors alluded to the use of correspondence (mail) to deliver educational material, such as religious education for priest, and miners, among others.

However, a term to define a specific education approach aimed to teach adults began in the 1920s and was coined by Edward Lindeman. Lindeman’s book, *The Meaning of Adult Education*, written in 1926, changed the way most people viewed education for adults (Nixon-Ponder, 2014, Merriam, 2008, 2004; Reischmann, 2004; Brookfield, 1987). Together with Lindeman’s work , the publications by Thorndike’s, *Adult Learning*, 1928 and *Adult Interest*, 1935 and Bryson’s *Adult Education* in 1936,

solidified the notion that adults, in the right environment, could learn just like younger people (Brookfield, 1987; Merriam, et al, 2004; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Krenner & Weinerman, 2011). As Lorge described, “When time pressure was removed, adults up to age 70 did as well as younger adults” (Lorge, as cited by Merriam, et al., 2004). Adult education evolved through the years, and took a new construct when Malcolm Knowles introduced the term andragogy, as a new theory of adult teaching, (Clardy, 2005; Merriam, 2004).

The term andragogy dates back to the 19th century. As Knowles, Holton, & Swanson (1998), explained, that term andragogy was introduced to refer to a new way to teach adult and differentiate it from the term pedagogy or the way younger people was taught. Knowles’ andragogy was for many years the theory through which most educator visualized adult education. Although andragogy, as an adult learning theory, faded with the years, it is still used and an important tool for adult education (Merriam, et al., 2004). Together with andragogy, other educational approaches, such as, Togh and Knowles’s method of self-directed learning, Freire’s and Mezirow’s transformational learning, context based learning, critical perspective and the emotions, body, and spirit in learning or the “third period of adult learning theory”, are used in adult learning.

Defining terminologies: adult education, young adults and old adults.

To properly present this manual content, three terms need to be outlined: adult education, young adults and old adults. This terms have been defined by different authors, but for this manual purposes specific definitions will be applied. Adult education, as a generalization, has to do with the development of activities that promote

and help an specific population further its schooling or training, to improve their lives (Criu and Ceobanu, 2013; Chen, Kim, Moon & Meriam, 2008; Edelson, 2000). But it is UNESCO's definition that in a holistic way, best expressed what adult education should bring about,

The term "adult education" denotes the entire body of organized educational processes, whatever the content, level and method, whether formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities a... whereby persons regarded as adult by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications ... bring about changes in their attitudes or behavior in the twofold perspective of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development (Martínez de Morentin de Goñi, 2006).

Adulthood could be define by chronological age or psychological development (Jensen Arnet, 2000). One of the most accepted classification of human development is Erickson's Model of 8 stages of psychosocial development, deemed to be, "the most influential view of adult development..." (Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007). Erickson defined young adults or young adulthood as people from 19 to 40 years old, while old adults or mature adults, from 65 years and older. There is a category in between, that Erickson called middle adulthood, which are people from 40 to 65 years old (<http://web.cortland.edu/andersmd/erik/sum.html>).

Benefits of Adult online education

Undeniably there is a need for online educators to be mindful and attentive of adults, 35 years and older, in their virtual classrooms. The literature supporting the benefits of adult and adult on line education is prolific. In the case of adults choosing online education as a vehicle for obtaining a quality higher education degree, researchers point out to demographic, social and economic changes, as important factors to promote the use of this education method. Among the reasons detailed in different studies are, the growth of unemployment, one parent households, both parents working, and even gasoline's price increase, which makes transportation more expensive (Chifwepa, 2008; DiMaria-Ghalili, Ann & Ostrow, 2005; Donovan, 2009; Fenwick, 2008; St. Amant, 2007; Tallent-Runnels, Thomas, Lan, Cooper, Ahern, Shaw, and Liu, 2006). In fact, the literature pointed out, that the adult 35 years and older, is one of the fastest growing population going back to college, (Allen & Seaman, et al., 2008; Chifwepa, 2008; DiMaria-Ghalili, 2005, et al.; Donovan, 2009; Fenwick, 2008). The Ponce Campus has followed the trend mention above, its adult population, 35 years and older, has grown as has its Online Education Program (IAUPR, Distance Education Department, 2011; Torres, 2011). In short, the growth of the 35 years and adult student population and the importance of its Online Education Program at the Ponce Campus, requires and demands that its online faculty is prepare to serve and understand the academic needs of these students.

This Manual was created with adult students, 35 years and older, in mind because there is sufficient data supporting providing more attention to this population. The techniques developed resulted from a qualitative research case study conducted with the participation of a segment of the campus 35 years and older adult student population. Therefore, this techniques were developed after listening to the student's experiences, requests and in an effort to provide the online faculty with some strategies that would help them provide a better educational experience to these adult population.

Introduction and Instructions

The purposes of this manual is to offer online faculty members information and new approaches that will help them understand, work, and help their older students, 35 years and older, in their academic endeavor. The practices presented in this manual derived considerably, from a qualitative satisfaction study conducted among students from that age group. In this investigation interviews and observations were conducted among the students, fitting the age group above mentioned. During this interviews they expressed their perceptions and experiences with the online education program at the Ponce Campus and also their thoughts in how the teaching-learning transaction could be improved. Satisfaction studies, among higher learning institutions, have become an essential tool in their quest to better the offering, academic and otherwise, to their students.

This type of studies have become more important since online education became an important part of higher education institutions, and adults students an important element of their student population (Noel-Levitz, 2011). The manual practices are based on proven teaching strategies such as, Chickering and Gamson's (2007), Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate, one of the classic study's on teaching practices, Pelz (2004), (My) Three Principles of Effective Online Pedagogy, Ragan (2009), 10 Principles of Effective Online Teaching: Best Practices in Distance Education, Poe & Stanssen, (n.d.), Handbook for the Online Faculty for the University of Massachusetts, among others. To that I added my online teaching experience of over fifteen years. Finally the

procedures discussed in this manual, are also supported by an abundant review of studies on the subject.

The manual focusses in four aspects that study's participants considered needed to be improve: 1- Feelings of isolation. 2- Slow of deficiency feedback. 3-Uneven course design. 4- Incautious technical issues. The last issue refers to technical difficulties or abrupt platform changes, that students could experience during the progression of the class which the professor perhaps does not possess the expertise to assist them. There are other ways to support your students, it is important for the online faculty member to "Become familiar with the technology used in your online course" (Poe & Stanssen, n.d.). The issues mentioned in this study are not new, unique or limited to the population studied, they could be applied to students of all ages. The concerns expressed by the participants were shared by participants in a study of online graduate students. The study was conducted by Song, Singleton, Hill, and Koh (2004), and founded that "lack of community, difficulty understanding instructional goals, and technical problems were challenges to.... online learning experiences" (As cited in Yang & Durrington, 2007 p. 345). The fundamental element in dealing with the above aspects, is developing an excellent communication exchange and interaction between faculty and students (Long, Marchetti & Fasse, 2011). Be mindful that "Communicating effectively is an important aspect of any college experience...." (Linfield College, 2010). It is also important to remember, that communications, in online course occurs in two ways: asynchronously, this "communication and activities take place outside of real time" (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2014). The use of this type of communications does not requires an

immediate response. And synchronously “or real-time communication that takes place like a conversation” (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2014). The good news is that the platform (Blackboard) used by this university in Puerto Rico for instruction delivery, offers tools to allow both types of communication. This offers the opportunity to create an outstanding interconnected environment. Blackboard offers the following asynchronous communication tools: announcements, forum (discussion board) and messages (email). It also offers the following synchronous tool: instant message (IM) or “chat board”. Use these tools to create an environment of open and constant communication, between you and your students.

But to use the tools effectively, first you need to become proficient in its uses, I recommend you start by becoming familiar with the Blackboard’s User Manual (http://ponce.inter.edu/ed/ManualBlackboard/manualBlackboard9_est.pdf), only your proficiency using these tools will guarantee your success. Become familiar with the technology used in your online course long before your course starts, including hardware and software, and spend time exploring their options (Poe & Stanssen, (n.d.)).

The principles presented in this manual illustrate how communication could help to improve the perceptions students might have about the issues presented. It also illustrates how it could be accomplished, this will help the online faculty improve the teaching-learning transaction and create a more active online classroom. The principles are presented in a straightforward manner, no scientific or overreaching language was used. Since establishing an effective communication between you and your students and among the students themselves, will be at the heart of every principle, be conscious that

all of the principles are interconnected and closely related. Although this manual was designed to deal with adult students, 35 years and older, it can be used to work with students of all ages. After describing the best practices principles, the manual also has a section describing each communication tool, how to use them effectively and examples of some of its recommended usages.

The Principles

Principle 1: The significance of good first impressions, first.

Be there since day one, start by letting them know who you are and start to know who they are; remember what Will Rogers said, “You never get a second chance to make a good first impression”. The importance of beginning your class with good communication can be seen in a traditional classroom the first day of class. An old-fashioned ritual the first day of classes in a traditional classroom, is the class introductions where the instructor introduces him or herself and ask the students to do the same. That first act is key to the rest of the semester and the relationship or lack thereof, between the instructor and the students because “Opening communications.... between yourself and students will pay dividends throughout the semester” (Wright, 2012).

For the online scenario should not be different, make that “first impression” everlasting; make the first move, your students might not do it. An effective way of “breaking the ice” is introducing yourself to you students’, let them know about yourself, but go beyond the academics issues. It is very important to start a productive relationship, “Sometimes students never have the sense that the professor is a "real person," Sharing something about yourself can begin a constructive relationship” (Write, 2012). Use the communication tools you have at hand, and begin a conversation with your students the first day of class, this conversation will probably last the whole semester.

Principle 2: Age matters, adults, 35 years and older, are important to you and to your institution

As instructors, we need to keep in mind that online education is here to stay and that it is an important component of the Ponce Campus, academic offering. It is also important to remember that online is one of the most important vehicles through which adults get their education today; in addition, today “Asynchronous course delivery is the most widely used teaching modality” (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, and Jones, as cited in Mortagy et al., 2010, p. 23). Now, take into consideration, as many studies have confirmed, the constant rise in the adult population in higher learning institutions (Allen and Seaman, 2008; Chifwepa, 2008; DiMaria-Ghalili, Guittens, Rose & Ostrow, 2005; Donovan, 2009; Fenwick, 2008; Mortagy, et al., 2010). Today, “Adult learners continue to be the largest and fastest growing segment of the web-based distance education market” (Calvin & Winfrey Freeburg, 2010). The alliance of this two factors, gave birth to what we today call, distance online adult education. Therefore we can safely conclude that age does matters.

In learning age is important, because you have to adapt your teaching methods to your students’ ages and this is nothing new. Knowing your student’s age is critical to understand their lives, and understanding your students’ lives will give you an insight into how they might act on an educational setting. Some authors, like Yankelovich (2005) suggested that “virtually every aspect of higher education that is now geared to young people at the start of their work lives rather than those nearing the end...” He emphasized that higher institutions should “... strengthen existing programs for the growing numbers

of adults.... matching the needs of adults students, 35 years and older, with more-suitable materials and more-convenient timetables” (as cited in Portland Community College Taskforce on Aging, 2007) and there is where the role of the faculty comes in. Since we are the ones that have the closest contact with the students, we are the ones better suited to understand their needs and to take care of their academic necessities. The first principle showed you the importance getting to know your students and establishing a good relationship with them from day one. Doing that will allow you to uncover if you have adult students, 35 years and older, in your class, and this in my experience, can be done using the appropriate communications tool (see discussion boards).

Principle 3: Make your presence known, be present, and be aware

The asynchronousness of online learning could make an online course a very lonesome place. Because of this fact, most students will access their class only when is convenient to them. That could provoke in some students feelings of isolation, as some of the study’s participants expressed. This possibility could be minimize if you, as the instructor and facilitator, let your students know that you are going to be present. This could be an “icky” proposition for some faculty or prospective online members, because it might be assumed as becoming a slave on your students and computer. Ragan (n.d.) recently related an experienced he had on this issue, one I share, and that makes this point very clear,

During a recent online faculty development program.... One individual expressed their understanding that the online instructor should be available to the students 24/7. I raised a concern.... because I feared this belief would inhibit good

instructors from getting involved in teaching online.... Although well intended, asking the online instructor to be available.... was setting them up for failure and frustration. We do not expect that dedication from the face- to-face instructor, and nor should we expect that of our online instructors (Ragan. n.d., p. 5-6).

As an instructor/facilitator you have to be available to your students, but, as Ragan expressed, I do not agree with the notion of being “available 24/7”. In my experience it does not work, it is a waste of time and effort. Nevertheless, your students need to know when are you going to available and that you will respond to them in a timely manner, otherwise they will feel abandon, and most likely lose interest in the class.

Your students need to know that you are there and that they count on you, I agree with Ragan statement explaining that “Students in an online course rely on the instructor to follow the established course schedule and to deliver the course within the scheduled time frame” (p.6). But besides following course’s schedules and rules, the instructor/facilitator has to let the student know that she/he, besides their academic success, also cares about their wellbeing. No instructor/facilitator should ever believe, as Ragan stated (n.d) stated that “since most of the course is already authored and designed for online delivery.... they simply need to serve as the proverbial ‘guide on the side’ (p. 5).

The literature analyzed recommends that you should access you course twice a day, and in my experience that works. Let them know how communication will flow on weekends and/or holidays, this will prevent you students from forming misleading

expectations. Let them know that you might not be able to access the course during these dates because like them, you will need time to attend your other personal obligations. Most of what I presented here is what Garrison & Archer (2000) described as “teaching presence” which he described as, “the facilitation and direction of cognitive and social process for the realization of personally meaningful and educationally worthwhile learning outcomes” (As cited in Pelz, 2004, p. 44). If you follow what I have outlined in this principle, I believe that you and your students will create an exceptional and lasting relationship that would guarantee their academic success. Therefore, from day one let them know that you will be “present and aware”.

Communication tools: a brief description

In online learning, the faculty member has to be more than a subject matter expert and a pedagogue; she or he has to be also a facilitator of learning, “A facilitator is an individual whose job is to help to manage a process of information exchange” (<http://www.wghill.com/facilitate.htm>, n.d). Facilitation is provided by channeling communications between two or more people and providing the necessary assistance to enable them to work together (elearnspace.org, 2002). In order to achieve this goal, the instructor/facilitator has to become knowledgeable of the communication tools available to her or him. That said, every instructor has to remember that the mere existence of this tools does not guarantee an effective communication, because not all students will use them uniformly. Before we take quick look at the communication tools display by the Blackboard platform and its uses, always keep these two advices in mind at all time: 1- “... students have different perspectives on what makes their communication and

interaction work best because of their different personalities and learning styles (Wang, 2011, p. 81). 2- At the beginning of each semester, to connect with each student and establish “teacher presence in the course. Connect with students right away – and throughout the course” (Brown University, School of Professional Studies, n.d.).

Asynchronous tools

Asynchronous communication does not require each participant to present at the same time (University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2014; Hrastinsky, 2008; Wang, 2011). Blackboard offers the most employed asynchronous communication tools used in online learning: announcements, discussion board/forum and message/email. Hrastinsky (2008) explained that most students chose online education because of its asynchronous features, because of the need of “combining education with work, family, and other commitments” (p. 52). But keep in mind that not being at the same place, at the same time, makes developing an effective communication even more important.

Announcements:

As it is categorized, use this tool to advertise something that needs your students’ immediate attention, but be as brief and direct as you can. Use simple language and instructions and provide directions where to follow-up what you announced. This space could be used very effectively to break the ice the first day of class. Because you can make your presence felt and indicate your students what you expect them to do from the start (see example below).

I recommend you use the announcement tool to post/advertise information such as: First day of class welcome, greetings, reminders of future activities or events,

deadlines (assignments, tests, quizzes, etc.), and or expectations. Make your presence known and felt because, as Pimpa (2010) pointed out, “Most students also prefer to have a non-formal communication before the class start” (Communication, para. 8).

Welcome to Class

The screenshot shows a Blackboard LMS interface. At the top, there is a green header bar with a search box and a user profile icon. Below the header, there are navigation tabs for 'Institution', 'Courses', and 'Content Collection'. The main content area is titled 'Announcements' and contains a 'Create Announcement' button. A sidebar on the left lists various course navigation options such as 'Inicio', 'Clasificación', 'Ayudas', 'Mensajes', 'Calendario', 'Contenido del Curso', 'Módulo Introducción', 'Contenido de Curso', 'Asignaciones', 'Ejercicios', 'Foros de Discusión', 'Ejercicios', 'Mis Notas', 'Apoyo Académico', 'Profesor (a)', 'Preguntas Frecuentes', 'Tablas en Línea', 'Caj', 'Materia Educativa', 'Libros', 'Apoyo Estudiantil', 'Apoyos Técnicos', and 'Evaluación del Profesor'.

The main announcement is titled 'Quiz 1' and includes the following text:

Item is not available

Posted on Monday, July 7, 2014 11:58:00 PM EDT

Humanistic and Pedagogical Department

Prof. Álvaro Trujillo

Series: 7291

Course: GEHS 2010

Term: 2014...

Quiz 1

I would remind you that the quiz 1 will be available on the 12 and 13 of June, from 08:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. The quiz could be access it twice, but you should remember, that after taking it the first time, you must wait 24 hours to be able to retake it. In addition to the study subjects, you should read the PPT presentations 1 and 2, which are supportive material, as well as chapters 1 and 2 of your text book. Remember, do not leave it to the last moment. Any questions let me know.

Prof. Álvaro Trujillo

Posted by Victor Alvarez
Title:
Post:
ID: 201407070001
PROCESO DE PR (20140720)

Reminder



Announcements

Quiz 1

Posted on: Monday, July 7, 2014 11:29:00 PM AST



Humanistic and Pedagogical Department

Prof. Alvarez-Trujillo

Course: GEHS 2010

Section: 7291

Term: 2014...

Quiz 1

I would remind you that the quiz 1 will be available on the 11 and 13 of June, from 08:00 a.m. to 11:59 p.m. The quiz could be access it twice, but you should remember, that after taking it the first time, you must wait 24 hours to be able to retake it. In addition to the study subjects, you should read the PPT presentations 1 and 2, which are supportive material, as well as chapters 1 and 2 of your text book. Remember, do not leave it to the last moment. Any questions let me know.

Prof. Alvarez-Trujillo

Test Posted

Posted on: Thursday, June 12, 2014 8:00:00 AM AST

The following Test has been made available in Exámenes: Pruebas Costa_1.

Forums or discussion boards:

Teachersstream (2010), considers this tool to be, “one of the most commonly used tools in online teaching” (p. 2). The reason being is that discussion boards offer both faculty and students a space where a lengthy and productive discussion and/or conversation can be develop and continue over an extended period of time. It also allows you and your students to exchange ideas, debate knowledge enrichment issues and inquired development. It is important that all the discussions/conversation that take place in this space are connected with the course syllabus.

I recommend you use the discussion board for: introductions (beginning of class personal introductions), greetings, personal matters (selling or buying books), course feedback o concerns, supplement a class topic; cover class issues limited by time, provide bonus work, and most important to offer your students with additional sources of information about the course’s topics, among others. You can also create a forum, which you can learn if you have adult students, 35 and older, in your class. In my experience a forum that ask your students to share their age group has been helpful (see examples below).

Finally, be sure to name/label each forum appropriately with simply and clear instructions, and provide enough time to promote participation on the discussions posted. Following these steps will help avoid students’ mix-ups, delays or non-participation, proper labeling will allow you to create the forums your course might need. Although there is no defined numbers of forums per course, do not over reach because this, in my experience, could be tiresome and discourage some students from participating.

Personal introductions

1  [Let each know each other](#) 

3  0

Humanistic and Pedagogical Department

Prof. Alvarez-Trujillo

Course: GEHS 2010

Section: 7291

Term: 2014

Greetings:


I will appreciate presentation, greetings, messages are sent through the forms titled "Personal Messages". Mail only used to communicate on matters pertinent to the course. I would appreciate your attention to this matter. To start, I believe that we must begin to get to know one another, I ask you to participate in this forum by completing the following information:

- Full name
- Place of birth and place of residence (city only)
- You Major
- Years of enrollment (freshman, sophomore, etc.)
- Something that you would like us know about yourself.


Look forward to greeting meeting every one of you

Prof. Alvarez-Trujillo

Class focus

 **Discussion Board**

Forums are made up of individual discussion threads that can be organized around a particular subject. Create Forums to organize discussions. [More Help](#)

[Create Forum](#) Search Discover Content 

[Create](#)

Title	Description	Total Posts	Unread Posts	Total Participants
Discussion	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 200px; height: 50px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	0	0	0

Prof. Alvarez-Trujillo **Course: GEBS 100**
Section: 7291 **Term: 2024...**

Forum 1: Plagiarism

BACKGROUND:

While plagiarism is not only illegal but also immoral, each day this becomes more common within the institutions of high education (universities). Despite the insistence by teachers, managers (as), advisors (as), counselors (as), etc., many students continue trying to evade the existing rules that alert them to possible setbacks and penalties that would pass through to be surprised in such violation. The demands of compliance, the canons of honesty, and propriety, are even more stringent for students enrolled in graduate studies and post-graduates (masters and doctorates). The debated aspects, made available in the presentation that you should read for this forum, must be able to, in order to continue to perform your assignments and research. After watching the presentation on plagiarism (link from the title) explain the following guiding questions, in your own words:

- 1- What is plagiarism?
- 2- Do you think you should punish or ignore?
- 3- Why do you think that happens so often?
- 4- What responsibility, in your opinion, have educational institutions on this issue?
- 5- According to the presentation, explain how you could avoid plagiarizing and what your personal recommendation for not doing so.

CRITERIA:

- 1- Read the instructions document, about the rules of participating in the Discussion board/Forum before participating.
- 2- Copy the guiding questions in your discussion board and write your responses below.

INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1- You must post your opinion and reply to the opinions made in your post.
- 2- You should also answer two of the opinions posted by your peers.
- 3- Your opinion and discussion of your peers opinions must be based on the subject and be consistent, and be coherent. Comments such as, "to I think, I agree with you, I share your opinion, etc.," will not be considered as opinions. To reply to a message, please do it by naming the person you are addressing your opinion to.
- 4- Both their participation and their answers must abide by the rules and follow the proposed topic.
- 5- Participation in this forum has a value of 8 points value of.
- 6- Incomplete entries that, or that do not follow the instructions, will receive a fraction of the value of the Forum.
- 7- Initial opinion and replies to replies to it = 4 points
- 8- Replies to opinions = 4 points

If you have any questions or doubts, please contact me.

Prof. Alvarez-Trujillo

Messages or email

Messages or emails might be the most used communication tool of all (CITES, 2012; Wang, 2011). Users understand that writing or reading a message does not imply an immediate answer or acknowledgement of receipt. The reason being is that this type of communication is not restricted by time. In other words, students can use when it suits them, day or night or any day of the week (Wang, 2011). But be careful, this does not mean that the student is not in need of an answer or a reaction, it means that the student feel more comfortable with a private one-on-one communication. This is one of the reasons why, as explained by Wang (2011) that "... some students prefer to email instructor with personal and course related questions" (p. 85).

Sometimes students looking for information or with questions, might sent an email to the course instructor and copy the entire class, this usually happens when the instructor does not answer that student question in a timely manner. It is important to remember that email messages are personal, respond to them in that manner. When responding to a message of this kind, do not replay to the entire class, but remind the student to do the same. There are going to be times when one of your students will send you a message, present a question or doubt, whose answer might benefit the whole class. Again, do not answer sending a message to entire class. Answer the person who send you the message, and if you think the information might of value to the class, post in the announcement section and make reference to the individual who brought it to your attention.

There are two ways to work effectively with this tool: describe, to your students, the institutional guidelines on sending and answering emails, and make sure you follow it; and the most effective way is trying to answer any communication daily. Brown's University School of Professional Studies recommends that "you check in twice a day, perhaps for just 30 minutes at a time" (Brown University, School of Professional Studies, n.d.); in my experience accessing your courses and connecting with your students daily has proven to be very productive. Again, explain to your students your policy about weekends and holidays (since most communication is private, there are not examples).

Synchronous tool

As I explained before, synchronous communication takes place in "real time", it is a procedure that to a great extent resembles to a person-to-person conversation. In contrast to asynchronous communication, synchronous brings the instructor and the students' closer, because being present at the same time is required. "Asynchronous sessions help e-learners feel like participants rather than isolates.... communication plays a very important role in making students feel less isolates" (Hrastinsky, 2008, p. 52), thus creating a sense of a learning community that brings people together. But not everything is as good as it sounds with asynchronous communication since this type of communication demands participants to be present at the same time. Remember that most students choose online learning because of their daily life's commitments, which sometimes makes it impossible to coordinate for a "real time" meetings,

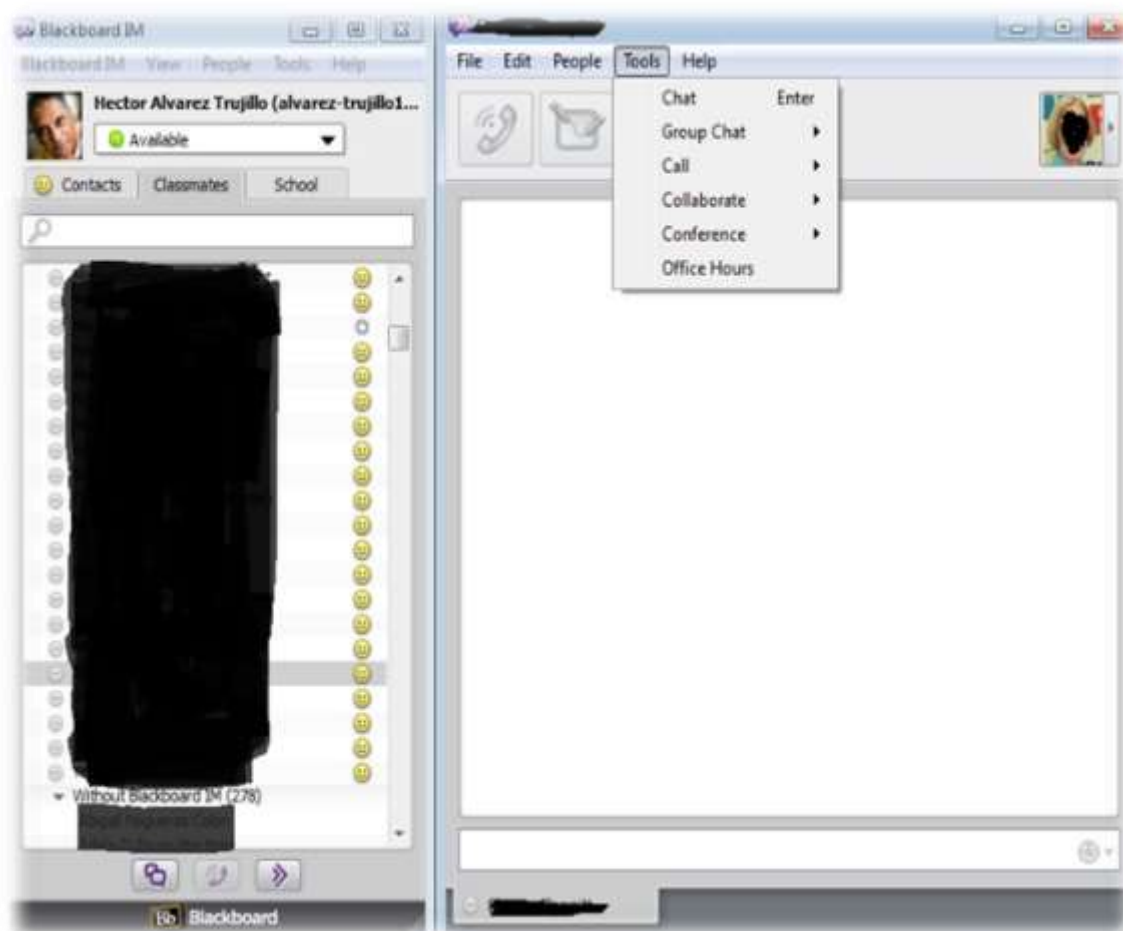
... most students did not like to.... because group members could not find a suitable time to meet online. Most students had a full-time job during the day time

and took care of their children during evenings and weekends. They enjoyed the flexibility of studying on their own time and could not stand any set class meetings, even once a week. (Wang, 2011, p. 87).

However, keep in mind that there will be some students that will be able to attend synchronous meetings, therefore you should schedule this sessions for their benefit. For this purpose Blackboard offers you the Instant Message tool which is great for instantaneous communication.

In my experience, those that like and/or are able to attend the “real time” meetings display a great level of satisfaction with the learning that transpires during this gatherings. And it is a helpful vehicle to communicate, answer questions or simply to let your students know that you are always present. When well coordinate, it could also be used for group discussion, meetings, among others (see example below). One of the difficulties presented by this toll is that to operate it, both faculty and students need to register, probably the reason why, in my experience, a considerable number of students never used it.

Individual conversation/chat



Final thoughts

Remember, having a better relationship with your students is not only possible, it is crucial for the success of teaching and learning transaction, and that it is why I stress how important it is to do this from the first day of class. All of the issues presented, are based on experts proven theories, abundant studies on the subjects and my personal experience as an online faculty member for over 15 years. Although what I captured here was prepared with adult students, 35 years and older, in mind, you can also apply with your younger students.

The reason I developed this brief manual is because if put into practice, what you will find here that worked for me and others, will work for you too. I shared three practices that will help you improve and conduct your online class, but there are many more. This manual offers you plenty of studies that will help you further your knowledge on online best teaching practices, but you have to access them. I would also recommend that you subscribe to these two online education journals: Faculty Focus, (<http://www.facultyfocus.com>) and Magna Publications, (<http://www.magnapubs.com>). They are free and a reliable source of knowledge in this daily changing world of online education. I would like to live with one my favorite of Ragan's words, "As you plan your online course, it is helpful to remember that in any environment "good teaching is good teaching" (Ragan 1998, as cited in Poe & Stanssen, p. 12).

Prof. Hector Alvarez Trujillo

References

- Akdemir, O. (2008). Teaching online courses: Experiences of Instructional Technology Faculty Members. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE*, 9 (2), 97-108. Retrieved from <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED501108.pdf>
- Anderson, J. & McCormick, R. (2005). Ten Pedagogic Principles for E-learning. *OINSIGHT Observatory for New Technologies and Education*. Retrieved from http://www.itslearning.us/Websites/itstest/Images/Documents/Ten_Pedagogic_Principles_for_E-learning.pdf
- Arnet, J. J. (2000). A theory of development for the late teens through the twenties. *American Psychologist*, 55(5), 469-480. Retrieved from http://www.jeffreyarnett.com/articles/ARNETT_Emerging_Adulthood_theory.pdf
- Brookfield, S. (1984). The contribution of Edward Lindeman to the development of theory and philosophy in adult education. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 34, 185-196. Retrieved from Sage Journals database.
- Calvin, J. & Winfrey Freeburg, B. (2010). Exploring adult learners' perceptions of Technology competence and retention in a web-based courses. *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 11(2), 2010, pp. 63-72
- Casey, D. M. (2008). A journey of legitimacy: the historical development of distance education through technology. *TechTrends*, 52(2), 45-51. doi: 10.1007/s11528-008-0135-z
- Chen, L-K, Young Sek Kim, Y.S., Moon, P., and Merriam, S. B. (2008). A Review and Critique of the Portrayal of Older Adult Learners in Adult Education Journals,

1980-2006. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 59(3), p. 3-21. doi,

10.1177/0741713608325169

Chickering, A. W. & Gamsom, F. (1987). *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.lonestar.edu/multimedia/SevenPrinciples.pdf>

Chifwepa, V. (2008). Providing information communication technology-based support to distance education Students: A case study of the University of Zambia. *African Journal of Library, Archives & Information Science*, 18(1), 43-54.

CITES. (2012). *Explore teaching strategies*. University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Retrieved from <http://www.cites.illinois.edu/reference/pedagogy/communication/communication3.html>

Criu, R. & Ceobanu, C. (2013). E-learning implications for adults learning. *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education-TOJDE*, 14(2), p. 56-65. ISSN 1302-6488

DiMaria-Ghalili, R., Ann, R., & Ostrow, L. (2005). Distance education for graduate nursing: One state school's experience. *Journal of Nursing Education*, 44(1), 5-0.

Edelson, P. & Pittman, V.V. (2001). *E-learning in the United State: new directions and opportunities for university continuing education*. Retrieved from http://www.stonybrook.edu/spd/dean_papers/newdelhi.pdf

Facilitation. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.wghill.com/facilitate.htm>

Fenwick, T. (2008). Workplace learning: Emerging trends and new perspectives. *New*

Direction for Adult and Continuing Education, 119, 17-26. doi:10.1002/ace.302

Gary, L., Marchetti, C., & Fasse, R. (2011). The Importance of Interaction for Academic Success in Online Courses with Hearing, Deaf, and Hard-of-Hearing Students.

The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning. Retrieved from <http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/1015/1952>

Hrastinsky, S. (2008). Asynchronous & synchronous e-learning. *Educase Quarterly*, 4, 51-55. Retrieved from <https://net.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/eqm0848.pdf>

Knowles, M. S., Holton III, E. F., & Swanson, R. A. (2005). *The Adult Learner*. San Francisco:Elsevier Butterworth Heinemann.

Larreamendy-Joerns & Leinhardt, G. (2008). Going the distance with online education.

Review of Education Research, 76 (4), 567-605. doi:10.3102/0034654307004567

Lawrence C. Ragan, PhD. 10 Principles of Effective Online Teaching: Best Practices in *Distance Education. Faculty Focus*. Retrieved from

<http://www.facultyfocus.com/free-eeports/principles-of-effective-online-teaching-best-practices-in-distance-education/>

Linfield College. (2010, March 9). *How to communicate in an Online College*

Environment [Blog post]. Retrieved from <http://www.linfield.edu/dce/blog/online-college-communication/>

Martínez de Morentin de Goñi, J. I. (2006). *What is adult education?* UNESCO answers.

Editorial San Sebastian. Retrieved from <http://uil.unesco.org/fileadmin/keydocuments/AdultEducation/Confintea/en/WhatIsAdultEducationUNESCOAnswers.pdf>

- Merriam, S. B. (2008) Adult learning theory for twenty-first century. *New Directions on Adult Education, 119*, 93-98. Retrieved from HW Wilson data base.
- Nixon-Ponder, S. (2014). *Leaders in the field of adult education: Eduard C. Lindeman*. Ohio Literacy Resource Center. Retrieved from <http://archon.educ.kent.edu/Oasis/Pubs/0800-1.htm>
- Merriam, S. B. (2007). *Learning in Adulthood*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Son.
- Merriam-Webster. On Line Dictionay. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/manual>
- Olszewski_Kubilus, P. & Corwith, S. (2010), Distance education: where it started and where it stands for gifted children and their educators. *Gifted Children Today, 34* (3), 16-75.
- Pelz, B. (2004). (My) Three principles of effective online pedagogy. *JALN, 8*(3), p. 33.43. Retrieved from <https://www.ccri.edu/distancefaculty/pdfs/Online-Pedagogy-Pelz.pdf>
- Pimpa, N. (2010). Rethinking Business Education. Techniques in increasing students engagement in online international business and finance courses. *2nd International Conference on Business & Management Education*. Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/3579242/Techniques_in_Increasing_Students_Engagement_in_Online_International_Business_and_Finance_Courses
- Poe & Stanssen (Eds). (n.d.) *Teaching and learning online*. University of Massachusetts Amherst. Retrieved from http://www.umass.edu/oapa/oapa/publications/online_handbooks/Teaching_andLearning_Online_Handbook.pdf

- Reischmann, J. (2004). *Andragogy. History, meaning, context, function*. Retrieved from <http://www.uni-amberg.de/fileadmin/andragogik/08/andragogik/andragogy/Andragogy-Internet.pdf>
- Ragan, L. C. (n.d.). Establishing Online Instructor Performance Best Practices and Expectations. Magna Publications, *Faculty Focus Special Report*, 2-24. Retrieved from https://www.facultyfocus.com/account/downloads/?grant_token=78
- Right, D. (2012). *The most important day: Starting well*. Teaching and Learning Center, University of Nebraska. Retrieved from <http://www2.honolulu.hawaii.edu/facdev/guidebk/teachtip/dayone.htm>
- Tallent-Runnels, M. K., Thomas J. A., Lan, W.Y., Cooper, S., Ahern, T. C., Shaw, S.M., and Liu, X. (2006). Teaching online courses: A review of research. *Review of Educational Research*, 76, 93-135. doi: 10.3102/00346543076001093
- TeacherStream, LLC. (2009). *Mastering online discussion board facilitation*. Retrieved from <https://www.edutopia.org/pdfs/stw/edutopia-onlinelearning-mastering-online-discussion-board-facilitation.pdf>
- University of Wisconsin-Madison. (2014). *Teaching and learning excellence: Asynchronous vs. synchronous*. Retrieved From <https://tle.wisc.edu/blend/facilitate/communicate?q=blend/facilitate/communicate>
- Wang, S. (2011). Promoting student's online engagement with communication tools. *Journal of Educational Technology Development and Exchange*, 4(1), 81-90. Retrieved from jetde.theti.org/evaluate/downloadArticle.do?articleId=2120

Wisher, R. A., Sabo, M. A. & Moses, F. L. (2004). Distance Learning: the soldier perspective. *USArmy Research Institute Special Report 49*, p. 1-22.

Retrieved from <http://www.au.af.mil/au/awc/awcgate/army/s49.pdf>

Appendix B: University in Puerto Rico Enrollment statistics 2008-2010

Concepto	200810	200910	201010	201110	201130	Pantalla
Matricula total	5,476	5,963	6,048	6,094	5,610	SWDRMAT
Estudiantes con algún curso a distancia en el Recinto	1,674	1,935	2,478	3,096	2,539	SWDISTP
Estudiantes totalmente a distancia	933	1,022	1,132	1,352	1,403	SWDISTP
Secciones presenciales	623	625	631	512	780	SWDCRFA
Secciones en línea	161	229	189	189	206	SWDCRFA
Estudiantes del Recinto de Ponce en otros Recintos	200810	200910	201010	201110	201130	PANTALLA
Aguadilla	6	16	26	32	28	SWDISTB
Arecibo	6	13	19	39	27	
Barranquitas	3	3	4	4	4	
Bayamón	1	4	1	10	15	
Fajardo	14	11	14	23	30	
Guayama	5	8	13	15	25	
Metro	4	4	3	4	4	
San Germán	6	2	3	1	10	
Total	45	61	83	128	143	
Estudiantes de otros Recintos en el Recinto de Ponce	200810	200910	201010	201110	201130	PANTALLA
Aguadilla	17	16	18	16	24	SWDISTB
Arecibo	21	43	60	91	94	
Barranquitas	29	32	31	48	68	
Bayamón	40	31	52	57	64	
Fajardo	34	29	35	45	43	
Guayama	41	64	68	72	79	
Metro	64	84	83	23	19	
San Germán	100	121	147	175	193	
Total	346	420	494	527	584	

Appendix C: University in Puerto Rico Student satisfaction Study-2009-2010

Estudio de Satisfacción - Estudiantes que tomaron únicamente cursos a distancia durante los términos 201030 y 201033
Resultados 2009-10

Propósito

Conocer el nivel de satisfacción de los estudiantes a distancia con los servicios que brinda la Institución.

Muestra

La encuesta fue dirigida a todos los estudiantes de la Institución de nivel sub-graduado que estaban tomando únicamente cursos a distancia en los términos 201030 (semestre de enero a mayo de 2010) y 201033 (trimestre de marzo a mayo de 2010).

De un total de 1,176 estudiantes sub-graduados del Recinto de Ponce matriculados completamente a distancia para esos términos, 182 estudiantes contestaron el cuestionario, para una tasa de participación de 15%.

Método

El cuestionario fue enviado por correo electrónico durante el mes de abril a los estudiantes que estaban tomando únicamente cursos a distancia en los términos 201030 (semestre de enero a mayo de 2010) y 201033 (trimestre de marzo a mayo de 2010).

La escala de satisfacción utilizada, es la siguiente:

	Nada Satisfecho	Algo Satisfecho	Satisfecho	Muy Satisfecho	No uso el servicio
Servicio					

Para obtener una medición más precisa del nivel de satisfacción de los estudiantes se excluyó la alternativa de “No uso el servicio” en el cálculo del porcentaje de satisfacción.

Además, se auscultó la importancia otorgada por los estudiantes a los servicios evaluados utilizando la siguiente escala:

	Nada Importante	Algo Importante	Importante	Muy Importante	No Tengo Opinión
Servicio					

Para obtener una medición más precisa del nivel de importancia de los estudiantes se excluyó la alternativa de “No tengo opinión” en el cálculo del porcentaje de importancia.

Perfil de la muestra

Variables	Categorías	f	%
Sexo	Femenino	132	73%
	Masculino	50	27%
	Total	182	100%
Edad	18 años o menos	3	2%
	19 a 24 años	68	37%
	25 a 34 años	71	39%
	35 a 44 años	25	14%
	45 años o más	15	8%
	Total	182	100%
Trabajo	0 horas	48	26%
	1 a 10 horas	18	10%
	11 a 20 horas	19	10%
	21 a 40 horas	48	26%
	más de 40 horas	49	27%
	Total	182	100%
Meta Académica	Cursos no conducentes a grado	6	3%
	Asociado	13	7%
	Bachillerato	163	90%
	Total	182	100%
Programa	Regular	121	67%
	AVANCE	61	34%
	Total	182	100%
Programa de Clase	11 créditos o menos	35	19%
	12 créditos o más	147	81%
	Total	182	100%
Términos Académicos	Semestre	159	87%
	Trimestre	16	9%
	Bimestre	0	0%
	Combinación	1	1%
	Otro	6	3%
	Total	182	100%
Créditos aprobados	0 créditos	19	10%
	1 a 29 créditos	50	27%
	30 a 59 créditos	38	21%
	60 a 89 créditos	31	17%
	90 a 119 créditos	25	14%

Variables	Categorías	f	%
	más de 120 créditos	19	10%
	Total	182	100%
Créditos a distancia	0 créditos	28	15%
	1 a 29 créditos	107	59%
	30 a 59 créditos	28	15%
	60 a 89 créditos	12	7%
	90 a 119 créditos	6	3%
	más de 120 créditos	1	1%
	Total	182	100%
Graduación	No	150	82%
	Sí	32	18%
	Total	182	100%

Resultados

Preguntas generales	Alternativas	f	%
Indique la importancia que tiene para usted recomendar estudiar a distancia en la Universidad Interamericana.	Muy Importante	93	65%
	Importante	33	23%
	Algo Importante	12	8%
	Nada Importante	4	3%
	Total	142	100%
Indique su satisfacción general con la educación a distancia de la Universidad Interamericana.	Muy Satisfecho	65	44%
	Satisfecho	54	36%
	Algo Satisfecho	23	15%
	Nada Satisfecho	7	5%
	Total	149	100%

Preguntas	Importancia	f	%	Satisfacción	f	%
1. La prontitud con la que se publica el prontuario de la clase en la página web del curso.	Muy Importante	122	75%	Muy Satisfecho	78	46%
	Importante	35	22%	Satisfecho	63	37%
	Algo Importante	4	2%	Algo Satisfecho	20	12%
	Nada Importante	1	1%	Nada Satisfecho	9	5%
	Total	162	100%	Total	170	100%
2. La organización de los módulos de	Muy Importante	121	75%	Muy Satisfecho	69	41%
	Importante	34	21%	Satisfecho	66	39%

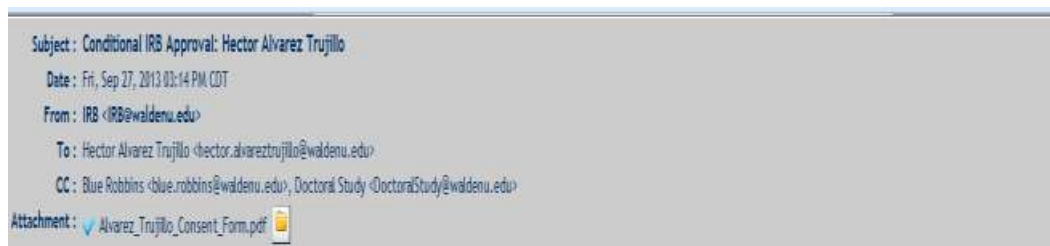
Preguntas	Importancia	f	%	Satisfacción	f	%
aprendizaje.	Algo Importante	6	4%	Algo Satisfecho	29	17%
	Nada Importante	1	1%	Nada Satisfecho	6	4%
	Total	162	100%	Total	170	100%
3. La claridad de las instrucciones de los trabajos asignados.	Muy Importante	128	79%	Muy Satisfecho	60	36%
	Importante	25	15%	Satisfecho	46	27%
	Algo Importante	8	5%	Algo Satisfecho	49	29%
	Nada Importante	1	1%	Nada Satisfecho	14	8%
	Total	162	100%	Total	169	100%
4. La cantidad de los foros virtuales para compartir su opinión con otros compañeros en el curso.	Muy Importante	83	52%	Muy Satisfecho	72	43%
	Importante	46	29%	Satisfecho	56	34%
	Algo Importante	24	15%	Algo Satisfecho	30	18%
	Nada Importante	6	4%	Nada Satisfecho	9	5%
	Total	159	100%	Total	167	100%
5. La funcionalidad de los enlaces de la página del curso.	Muy Importante	107	66%	Muy Satisfecho	59	35%
	Importante	42	26%	Satisfecho	60	36%
	Algo Importante	9	6%	Algo Satisfecho	42	25%
	Nada Importante	3	2%	Nada Satisfecho	7	4%
	Total	161	100%	Total	168	100%
6. El dominio que demuestran los profesores del contenido de los cursos.	Muy Importante	130	81%	Muy Satisfecho	70	44%
	Importante	27	17%	Satisfecho	61	38%
	Algo Importante	3	2%	Algo Satisfecho	24	15%
	Nada Importante	1	1%	Nada Satisfecho	5	3%
	Total	161	100%	Total	160	100%
7. El nivel de participación que fomentan los profesores.	Muy Importante	115	72%	Muy Satisfecho	50	31%
	Importante	32	20%	Satisfecho	55	34%
	Algo Importante	10	6%	Algo Satisfecho	40	25%
	Nada Importante	2	1%	Nada Satisfecho	15	9%
	Total	159	100%	Total	160	100%
8. La rapidez con que los profesores informan los resultados de la evaluación de su trabajo académico.	Muy Importante	115	71%	Muy Satisfecho	41	26%
	Importante	33	20%	Satisfecho	52	33%
	Algo Importante	9	6%	Algo Satisfecho	44	28%
	Nada Importante	4	2%	Nada Satisfecho	22	14%
	Total	161	100%	Total	159	100%
9. Las estrategias de enseñanza que utilizan los profesores.	Muy Importante	117	73%	Muy Satisfecho	44	28%
	Importante	36	22%	Satisfecho	58	36%
	Algo Importante	6	4%	Algo Satisfecho	44	28%
	Nada Importante	1	1%	Nada Satisfecho	13	8%
	Total	160	100%	Total	159	100%

Preguntas	Importancia	f	%	Satisfacción	f	%
10. La orientación que ofrecen los profesores sobre su programa académico.	Muy Importante	112	70%	Muy Satisfecho	42	26%
	Importante	40	25%	Satisfecho	58	36%
	Algo Importante	7	4%	Algo Satisfecho	40	25%
	Nada Importante	1	1%	Nada Satisfecho	19	12%
	Total	160	100%	Total	159	100%
11. El estímulo que dan los profesores para la búsqueda de información y la investigación.	Muy Importante	100	64%	Muy Satisfecho	48	31%
	Importante	49	31%	Satisfecho	64	41%
	Algo Importante	5	3%	Algo Satisfecho	32	20%
	Nada Importante	3	2%	Nada Satisfecho	13	8%
	Total	157	100%	Total	157	100%
12. El trato que le dan sus profesores.	Muy Importante	121	77%	Muy Satisfecho	58	37%
	Importante	27	17%	Satisfecho	53	34%
	Algo Importante	8	5%	Algo Satisfecho	34	22%
	Nada Importante	1	1%	Nada Satisfecho	13	8%
	Total	157	100%	Total	158	100%
13. La rapidez con que los profesores atienden sus dudas y preguntas.	Muy Importante	125	80%	Muy Satisfecho	35	22%
	Importante	26	17%	Satisfecho	49	31%
	Algo Importante	4	3%	Algo Satisfecho	54	34%
	Nada Importante	2	1%	Nada Satisfecho	20	13%
	Total	157	100%	Total	158	100%
14. Las oportunidades para evaluar el desempeño de los profesores.	Muy Importante	112	71%	Muy Satisfecho	38	24%
	Importante	36	23%	Satisfecho	60	38%
	Algo Importante	7	4%	Algo Satisfecho	36	23%
	Nada Importante	2	1%	Nada Satisfecho	24	15%
	Total	157	100%	Total	158	100%
15. La disponibilidad de cursos de su concentración.	Muy Importante	115	75%	Muy Satisfecho	70	46%
	Importante	32	21%	Satisfecho	47	31%
	Algo Importante	5	3%	Algo Satisfecho	25	17%
	Nada Importante	1	1%	Nada Satisfecho	9	6%
	Total	153	100%	Total	151	100%
16. Las oportunidades para llevar a cabo experiencias prácticas relacionadas a los cursos.	Muy Importante	91	61%	Muy Satisfecho	43	30%
	Importante	46	31%	Satisfecho	59	42%
	Algo Importante	12	8%	Algo Satisfecho	30	21%
	Nada Importante	1	1%	Nada Satisfecho	10	7%
	Total	150	100%	Total	142	100%
17. El acceso a los recursos bibliográficos y a otras fuentes de	Muy Importante	102	68%	Muy Satisfecho	60	42%
	Importante	41	27%	Satisfecho	52	36%
	Algo Importante	7	5%	Algo Satisfecho	27	19%

Preguntas	Importancia	f	%	Satisfacción	f	%
información que ofrece el Centro de Acceso a la Información (CAI).	Nada Importante	1	1%	Nada Satisfecho	4	3%
	Total	151	100%	Total	143	100%
18. La disponibilidad de tutorías a distancia.	Muy Importante	86	61%	Muy Satisfecho	26	23%
	Importante	43	30%	Satisfecho	25	22%
	Algo Importante	10	7%	Algo Satisfecho	28	25%
	Nada Importante	2	1%	Nada Satisfecho	34	30%
	Total	141	100%	Total	113	100%
19. La calidad de su programa de estudios (concentración).	Muy Importante	112	73%	Muy Satisfecho	70	46%
	Importante	37	24%	Satisfecho	55	36%
	Algo Importante	3	2%	Algo Satisfecho	22	15%
	Nada Importante	1	1%	Nada Satisfecho	4	3%
	Total	153	100%	Total	151	100%
20. El proceso de admisión a la Universidad a distancia.	Muy Importante	112	76%	Muy Satisfecho	88	61%
	Importante	27	18%	Satisfecho	34	24%
	Algo Importante	7	5%	Algo Satisfecho	15	10%
	Nada Importante	2	1%	Nada Satisfecho	7	5%
	Total	148	100%	Total	144	100%
21. El proceso de selección de cursos a distancia.	Muy Importante	110	74%	Muy Satisfecho	77	52%
	Importante	31	21%	Satisfecho	39	27%
	Algo Importante	5	3%	Algo Satisfecho	24	16%
	Nada Importante	2	1%	Nada Satisfecho	7	5%
	Total	148	100%	Total	147	100%
22. Las opciones de pago de la matrícula a distancia.	Muy Importante	107	75%	Muy Satisfecho	80	58%
	Importante	26	18%	Satisfecho	37	27%
	Algo Importante	8	6%	Algo Satisfecho	17	12%
	Nada Importante	2	1%	Nada Satisfecho	5	4%
	Total	143	100%	Total	139	100%
23. Los servicios de registraduría a distancia.	Muy Importante	112	76%	Muy Satisfecho	73	52%
	Importante	28	19%	Satisfecho	38	27%
	Algo Importante	6	4%	Algo Satisfecho	22	16%
	Nada Importante	2	1%	Nada Satisfecho	8	6%
	Total	148	100%	Total	141	100%
24. Los servicios de asistencia económica a distancia.	Muy Importante	111	76%	Muy Satisfecho	75	54%
	Importante	25	17%	Satisfecho	38	27%
	Algo Importante	9	6%	Algo Satisfecho	17	12%
	Nada Importante	2	1%	Nada Satisfecho	9	6%
	Total	147	100%	Total	139	100%

Preguntas	Importancia	f	%	Satisfacción	f	%
25. Los servicios de recaudaciones a distancia.	Muy Importante	106	74%	Muy Satisfecho	68	51%
	Importante	27	19%	Satisfecho	40	30%
	Algo Importante	9	6%	Algo Satisfecho	16	12%
	Nada Importante	2	1%	Nada Satisfecho	10	7%
	Total	144	100%	Total	134	100%
26. La orientación disponible para estudiar a distancia.	Muy Importante	109	75%	Muy Satisfecho	52	36%
	Importante	31	21%	Satisfecho	46	32%
	Algo Importante	3	2%	Algo Satisfecho	30	21%
	Nada Importante	3	2%	Nada Satisfecho	15	10%
	Total	146	100%	Total	143	100%
27. La ayuda provista por el personal de apoyo técnico cuando tiene problemas con los cursos a distancia.	Muy Importante	119	81%	Muy Satisfecho	56	39%
	Importante	22	15%	Satisfecho	43	30%
	Algo Importante	3	2%	Algo Satisfecho	26	18%
	Nada Importante	3	2%	Nada Satisfecho	17	12%
	Total	147	100%	Total	142	100%
28. El acceso a información sobre las normas y reglamentos de la Universidad.	Muy Importante	102	70%	Muy Satisfecho	74	52%
	Importante	36	25%	Satisfecho	49	35%
	Algo Importante	5	3%	Algo Satisfecho	15	11%
	Nada Importante	2	1%	Nada Satisfecho	3	2%
	Total	145	100%	Total	141	100%
29. El acceso a inf. sobre la prevención de enfermedades de transmisión sexual, uso de drogas, alcohol y tabaco.	Muy Importante	92	65%	Muy Satisfecho	56	45%
	Importante	34	24%	Satisfecho	40	32%
	Algo Importante	12	9%	Algo Satisfecho	18	14%
	Nada Importante	3	2%	Nada Satisfecho	11	9%
	Total	141	100%	Total	125	100%
30. La ayuda brindada por los consejeros profesionales para trazar sus metas.	Muy Importante	103	75%	Muy Satisfecho	40	32%
	Importante	26	19%	Satisfecho	35	28%
	Algo Importante	6	4%	Algo Satisfecho	25	20%
	Nada Importante	3	2%	Nada Satisfecho	24	19%
	Total	138	100%	Total	124	100%
31. El acceso a distancia a los servicios de Capellanía.	Muy Importante	72	59%	Muy Satisfecho	31	34%
	Importante	30	24%	Satisfecho	28	31%
	Algo Importante	13	11%	Algo Satisfecho	16	18%
	Nada Importante	8	7%	Nada Satisfecho	15	17%
	Total	123	100%	Total	90	100%

Appendix D: Walden's conditional IRB approval



Dear Mr. Alvarez Trujillo,

This email is to notify you that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved your application for the study entitled, "How Adults 35 and Older, Perceive Online Education" conditional upon the approval of the community research partner, as documented in a signed letter of cooperation. Walden's IRB approval only goes into effect once the Walden IRB confirms receipt of that letter of cooperation.

Your approval # is 09-27-13-0132519. You will need to reference this number in your doctoral study and in any future funding or publication submissions. Also attached to this e-mail is the IRB approved consent form. Please note, if this is already in an on-line format, you will need to update that consent document to include the IRB approval number and expiration date.

Your IRB approval expires on September 26, 2014. One month before this expiration date, you will be sent a Continuing Review Form, which must be submitted if you wish to collect data beyond the approval expiration date.

Please note that this letter indicates that the IRB has approved your research. You may **NOT** begin the research phase of your doctoral study, however, until you have received the **Notification of Approval to Conduct Research** e-mail. Once you have received this notification by email, you may begin your data collection. Your IRB approval is contingent upon your adherence to the exact procedures described in the final version of the IRB application materials that have been submitted as of this date. This includes maintaining your current status with the university. Your IRB approval is only valid while you are an actively enrolled student at Walden University. If you need to take a leave of absence or are otherwise unable to remain actively enrolled, your IRB approval is suspended. Absolutely NO participant recruitment or data collection may occur while a student is not actively enrolled.

Your IRB approval is contingent upon your adherence to the exact procedures described in the final version of the IRB application materials that have been submitted as of this date. If you need to make any changes to your research staff or procedures, you must obtain IRB approval by submitting the IRB Request for Change in Procedures Form. You will receive confirmation with a status update of the request within 1 week of submitting the change request form and are not permitted to implement changes prior to receiving approval. Please note that Walden University does not accept responsibility or liability for research activities conducted without the IRB's approval, and the University will not accept or grant credit for student work that fails to comply with the policies and procedures related to ethical standards in research.

When you submitted your IRB application, you made a commitment to communicate both discrete adverse events and general problems to the IRB within 1 week of their occurrence/realization. Failure to do so may result in invalidation of data, loss of academic credit, and/or loss of legal protections otherwise available to the researcher.

Both the Adverse Event Reporting form and Request for Change in Procedures form can be obtained at the IRB section of the Walden web site or by emailing irb@waldenu.edu http://inside.waldenu.edu/c/Student_Faculty/StudentFaculty_4274.htm

Researchers are expected to keep detailed records of their research activities (i.e., participant log sheets, completed consent forms, etc.) for the same period of time they retain the original data. If, in the future, you require copies of the originally submitted IRB materials, you may request them from Institutional Review Board.

Both students and faculty are invited to provide feedback on this IRB experience at the link below:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=qHBjzkJMux43pZegKlmdIQ_3d_3d

Sincerely,
 Jenny Sherer, M.Ed., CIP
 Associate Director
 Office of Research Ethics and Compliance
irb@waldenu.edu
 Phone: 812-312-1341
 Fax: 626-605-0472
 Office address for Walden University:
 100 Washington Avenue South
 Suite 900

Appendix E: Chancellor's cooperation letter



10 de octubre de 2013

Prof. Héctor Alvarez Trujillo
Programa Doctoral
Walden University

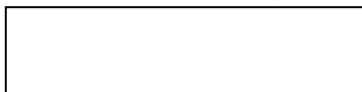
Estimado profesor Alvarez Trujillo:

Deseamos informarle que el Recinto de Ponce de la Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico está en la mejor disposición de ofrecer nuestras facilidades para que realice su investigación doctoral "**How Adults 35 and older Perceive Distance Education**".

Debe comunicarse con la Dra. Omayra Caraballo, Decana Asociada de Educación a Distancia, teléfono 284-1912, extensión 2126 o al correo electrónico ocarabal@ponce.inter.edu para ultimar detalles de su investigación.

Esperamos poder ayudarle en sus propósitos.

Atentamente,



Rectora

Appendix F: Walden IRB final approval

Support Help Walden University Hello, Hector Alvarez-Trujillo Log Out

myWALDEN
UNIVERSITY PORTAL

Dashboard Personal Tools My Communities My CrislerAlert

10/15/2013 10:21 AM (7/1) My Dashboard Personal Tools E-mail

Tools Folders
Check Email
Compose Email
Folders
Filters
External Accounts
Archive
Email Tracking
Settings

Quick Search
From Search

10 / 756

Reply Reply All Forward Delete Move to Folder Add to

Subject: Notification of Approval to Conduct Research-Hector Alvarez-Trujillo

Date: Tue, Oct 15, 2013 10:21 PM CDT

From: IRB <IRB@waldenu.edu>

To: Hector Alvarez Trujillo <hector.alvareztrujillo@waldenu.edu>

CC: Blue Robbins <blue.robbins@waldenu.edu>, Doctoral Study <DoctoralStudy@waldenu.edu>

Dear Mr. Alvarez-Trujillo:

This email confirms receipt of the letter of cooperation for the community research partner and also serves as your notification that Walden University has approved BOTH your doctoral study proposal and your application to the Institutional Review Board. As such, you are approved by Walden University to conduct research.

Please contact the Office of Student Research Administration at doctoralstudy@waldenu.edu if you have any questions.

Congratulations!

Jenny Sheer
Associate Director, Office of Research Ethics and Compliance

Leleini Endicott
IRB Chair, Walden University

Appendix G: University in Puerto Rico IRB approval



November 20, 2013

Héctor Álvarez Trujillo
P.O. Box 589
Mercedita P.R. 00715-0589

APPLICATION REGARDING STUDY # 13-14-038: "HOW ADULTS 35 AND OLDER, PERCEIVE ONLINE EDUCATION"

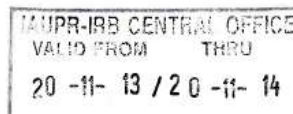
The document the researcher sends for IRB review and approval is included with this letter. The document was approved with the following condition:

Regulations require that:

- all documents (surveys, informed consent/assent documents, letters of collaboration/authorization, etc.) presented to research subjects have the IRB seal of approval
- a summary report of findings be sent to the IRB Administrator after the research has been completed for record purposes.
- the IRB has the authority to review/observe ongoing research and documentation to verify compliance with regulations by the researcher.
- changes made to the research protocol after this approval must be reviewed by Board members prior to application to research subjects. Some of these changes may be approved by expedited review while others may require full Board review.

If the research has not been completed and report of findings has not been submitted by November, 2014 the protocol is subject to continuing review by the Board.


Gladys Rivera Ocasio
Institutional Director for Sponsored Programs /
IRB Administrator



Appendix H: Invitation letter-English



Study's title: How Adults 35 and Older, Perceive Online Education
Principal investigator: Hector Alvarez Trujillo

Dear online student

I, Hector Alvarez Trujillo, Doctorate Education student at Walden University, invite you to participate in a research project entitled How Adults 35 and Older, Perceive Online Education.

The purpose of this research project is to gather enough information from online students', to help understand how satisfied is the adult population, 35 and older is with the Ponce Campus Online Education Program. The study will help understand what is working, what needs to be modified or change. Should you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview and will be ask to answer some questions related to your participation in online education and your perception of the Program. The interviews will be conducted by me.

The interviews will last at least one hour, if more time is needed, you will need to agree to it.

This research should benefit online students by providing the necessary information that the Online Education Program might need to align online courses to better serve the 35 and older student population. It will also benefit online faculty, by providing important information on how to connect, relate, and communicate with online students.

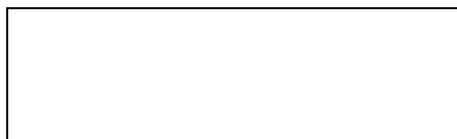
If you have any pertinent questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Hector Alvarez Trujillo (787-367-4325), hector.alvareztrujillo@waldenu.edu or Dr. Blue Robbins, Doctoral Study's Chair Person (blue.robbsins@waldenu.edu)

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me (see below for contact information).

Thank you,
Hector Alvarez Trujillo

787-367-4325
hector.alvareztrujillo@waldenu.edu

Appendix H1: Invitation letter-Spanish

**Carta de Invitación**

Título del estudio: Cómo Estudiantes de 35 años o más Perciben la Educación a Distancia

Investigador Principal: Héctor Alvarez Trujillo

Estimado estudiante a distancia:

Yo, Héctor Alvarez Trujillo, estudiante del Programa Doctoral de Educación, de Walden University, le invito a participar en un proyecto de investigación titulado ¿Cómo los estudiantes de 35 años o más perciben la Educación a Distancia?

El propósito de este proyecto de investigación es reunir la suficiente información, para entender qué tan satisfecha se encuentra la población estudiantil adulta, de 35 años y más, con el Programa de Educación a Distancia del Recinto de Ponce. El estudio permitirá entender lo que está funcionando y lo que hay que modificar o cambiar. Si decide participar, se le pedirá participar en una entrevista y se le pedirá responder algunas preguntas relacionadas con su participación en la educación en línea y su percepción del Programa de Educación a Distancia. Las entrevistas serán realizadas por mí. Las entrevistas durarán por lo menos una hora, si se necesitara más tiempo, usted tendría que estar de acuerdo.

Esta investigación debe beneficiar a los estudiantes en línea, al proveer la información necesaria que pueda facultar al Programa de Educación a Distancia, a sistematizar o reorganizar los cursos en línea, para servir mejor a la población estudiantil de 35 años o más. La información obtenida también beneficiará a facultad en línea, proporcionando importante información sobre cómo enlazar, relacionar y comunicarse mejor con esta población estudiantil.

Si usted tiene cualquier pregunta acerca de sus derechos como participante de la investigación, póngase en contacto con Hector Alvarez Trujillo (787-367-4325, hector.alvareztrujillo@waldenu.edu o el Dr. Blue Robbins, Director del Proyecto de Estudio (blue.robbins@waldenu.edu).

Si usted tiene alguna pregunta, no dude en contactarme (véase abajo para información de contacto).

Gracias

Hector Alvarez Trujillo

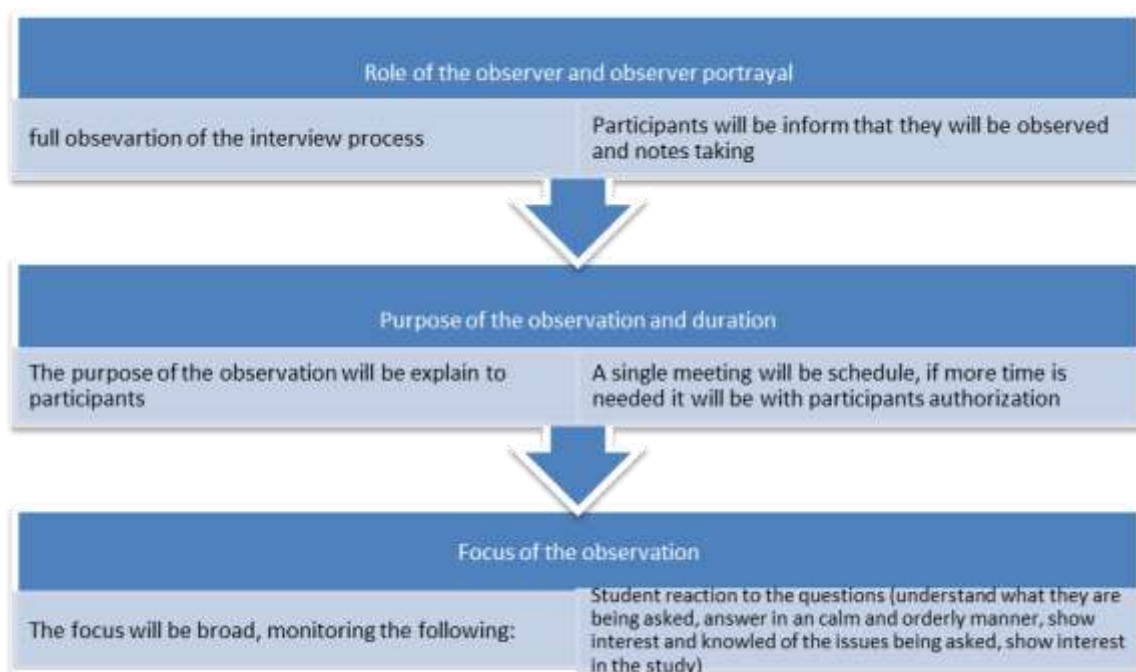
787-367-4325 hector.alvareztrujillo@waldenu.edu

Appendix I: Interview Guide

Guiding questions	
The purpose of this study is to gather enough data in order to fully understand the how the adult population, 35 and older, satisfaction level with a Puerto Rican university Campus. In order to elicit the necessary information, I developed four questions, each accompanied by two shadow questions to allow the informants to elaborate on their answers:	
1.	Why did you enroll in college?
a.	What are your short and long term educational goals?
b.	What attracted to you to this Puerto Rican university Campus?
2.	Why did you choose OLE to obtain your degree?
a.	How does the OELP fulfill that decision? Explain.
b.	Are you likely to continue in the OLEP? Explain.
3.	Does the OELP take into account your needs as an older adult?
a.	From your experience, which are the most helpful areas of the OLEP? Explain.
b.	From your experience, which are the least helpful areas of the OLEP? Explain.
4.	From your experience, how could this university Campus improve its OLEP?
a.	From your experience, which areas need to be improved? Explain.
b.	Over all, do you have a positive perception of the OLEP? Explain.

Appendix J: Observation table

Behaviors to be observed	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Comments
Participant shows interest in the issues being discussed (acts attentive and engaged)					
Participant shows knowledge about the issues being discussed					
Participant shows that she/he is comfortable or at ease with the issues being discussed (acts calm and collected during the interview, voice manner)					
Participant gestures (facial gestures, body language, eye contact) display interest in the issues being discussed					

Appendix K: Interview protocol¹

¹Adapted from,
http://www.slidefinder.net/q/qualitative_research_trustworthiness_observation_interviewing/day11/29382224

Appendix L: Informed Consent-English

INFORM CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of How Adults 35 and Older, Perceive Online Education. The study being proposed seeks to examine the level of satisfaction of the adult population 35 years and older with the Interamerican University of Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus (PC) Online Education Program (OLEP). The researcher is inviting students 35 and older, currently enrolled in OLEP. The participants will be selected from the OLEP full and part time registration list. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Hector Alvarez Trujillo who is an education doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as a professor of history in this Campus, but this study will be conducted separate from that role.

Background Information:

The purpose of this project study is to gather the necessary information to understand how the PC's 35 and older adult students perceive the OLEP and how satisfied they are with it, and to find out what, if anything, are the areas that might need to be improved or changed.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Provide documents that certify your age
- Consent to be interview, at least one time for a period of 60 minutes
- Consent to a follow up interview, if necessary
- Consent that your interview be recorded and archive
- Consent to be observed and notes of said observation be taken

Here are some sample questions:

- Why did you enroll in college?
- What are your short and long term educational goals?
- What attracted to you to LAUPR, PC Campus?
- Why did you choose OLE to obtain your degree?
- How does the OLEP fulfill that decision? Explain.
- Are you likely to continue in the OLEP? Explain.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Inter American University, Ponce Campus will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as, annoyance with the questions or follow up questions, fatigue with the interview process, or becoming anxious with the process.

The findings of this study will have an effect at the Inter American University of Puerto Rico, Ponce Campus, Online Education Department. It will further understanding how its 35 years and older population perceives the Online Education Department. It will also have an impact in all matters

related to the performance of the population 35 and older; issues such as course design, content, educator-student relations, and technical support, among others.

Payment:

No form of payment or grant will provide you if you decide to participate in the study. The published materials will be available in the University Library and its website. You will not be paid or royalty will be received by your participation. The final work will not be for sale, since it will be available for free access of people who wish to see it or read it.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. The data collected will be placed in a secure locked box and for confidentiality purposes, will be stored at the researcher's residence. Only the researcher will have access to the box's contents. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via telephone at, 787-367-4325 or via electronic mail at, hector.alvarezrujillo@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is IRB will enter approval number here and it expires on IRB will enter expiration date. The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Appendix M: Informed Consent-Spanish

Formulario de información y consentimiento

Usted ha sido invitado a participar en una investigación de cómo adultos 35 años y más, perciben la educación en línea. El estudio propuesto pretende examinar el nivel de satisfacción de la población adulta de 35 años o más con el Programa de Educación en Línea de la Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Ponce. El investigador está invitando a los estudiantes de 35 años de edad o más, actualmente inscritos en Programa de Educación a Distancia. Los participantes serán seleccionados de la lista de registro del Programa de Educación a Distancia que estén matriculados a tiempo completo o parcial. Este formulario es parte de un proceso llamado "consentimiento informado" para que pueda entender este estudio antes de decidir si tomar parte del mismo.

Este estudio será realizado por el investigador Prof. Héctor Álvarez Trujillo, quien es un estudiante de doctorado en educación de Walden University. Usted puede conocer al investigador como un profesor de historia de este Recinto, pero este estudio se conducirá separado de esta función.

Antecedentes:

El propósito de este estudio es reunir la información necesaria para entender cómo los estudiantes adultos 35 y mayores de Recinto de Ponce, perciben el Programa de Educación a Distancia y qué tan satisfechos están con éste, y para averiguar lo que, si acaso, son las áreas que necesiten ser mejoradas o cambiadas/

Procedimientos: Si acepta participar en este estudio, se le pedirá a:

- Proveer documentación que certifique su edad
- Consentir que entrevista, en que una vez por un periodo de 60 minutos
- Consentir a un seguimiento de la entrevista, si es necesario
- Consentimiento de que su entrevista sea grabada y archivada,
- Consentimiento para observarse y notas de dicha observación durante la entrevista

Estos son algunos ejemplos de las preguntas:

- ¿Por qué se matriculó en la Universidad?
- ¿Cuáles son sus objetivos educativos a corto y largo plazo?
- ¿Lo que le atrajo al Recinto de Ponce, de la Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico?
- ¿Por qué eligió la educación en línea para obtener su título?
- ¿Cómo cumple la educación a distancia con esa decisión? Explique.
- ¿Es probable que continúe en el Programa de Educación a Distancia? Explique

El carácter voluntario del estudio:

Este estudio es voluntario. Si usted decide participar o no en el estudio, su decisión será respetada. Nadie en la Universidad Interamericana, Recinto de Ponce le tratará diferentemente si usted decide no participar en el estudio. Si decide unirse al estudio ahora, puede todavía cambiar su decisión más tarde. Usted puede dejar de participar en el estudio en cualquier momento.

Riesgos y beneficios de estar en el estudio:

Este tipo de estudio implica cierto riesgo de malestares menores que se encuentran en la vida diaria, por ejemplo, molestia con las preguntas o preguntas de seguimiento, fatiga con el proceso de entrevista, o volverse ansioso durante el proceso.

Los resultados de este estudio tendrán un efecto en el Departamento de educación a Distancia de la Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, Recinto de Ponce. Nos ayudará más a entender cómo la población de 35 años y más percibe el Departamento de Educación a Distancia. También tendrá un impacto en todos los asuntos relacionados con el desempeño de la población de 35 y más; temas como el diseño contenido y de los cursos, relaciones entre educador-alumno y soporte técnico, entre otros.

Pago:

Ninguna forma de pago o donación se le dará si usted decide participar en el estudio. Los materiales publicados, estarán disponibles en la biblioteca de la Universidad y su sitio Web. No se pagarán o recibirán regalías por su participación. El trabajo final no será para la venta, ya que estará disponible para el libre acceso de las personas que desean verlo o leerlo.

Privacidad:

Cualquier información que usted proporcione se mantendrá de forma confidencial. El investigador no utilizará su información personal para ningún propósito fuera de este proyecto de investigación. Además, el investigador no incluirá su nombre o cualquier otra cosa que podría identificar en los informes de estudio. Los datos recogidos durante el proceso de entrevista se archivarán en una caja cerrada y por propósitos de seguridad, se mantendrán en la residencia del investigador y sólo éste tendrá acceso a ellos. Datos serán conservados durante un periodo de al menos 5 años, según lo requerido por la Universidad.

Contactos y preguntas:

Usted puede aclarar cualquier duda que tenga ahora. Si tiene preguntas más adelante, puede comunicarse con el investigador vía telefónica al 787-367-4325 o mediante correo electrónico a hector.alvareztrujillo@waldenu.edu si quieres hablar en privado sobre sus derechos como participante, puede llamar a Dr. Leilani Endicott. Ella es la representante de Walden University que puede discutir esto con usted. Su número de teléfono es 612-312-1210. Número de

Appendix N: List of Acronyms

Agl&st- Academic goals, long and short term

BC-Blended courses

CAEL- Council for Adult and Experiential Learning

CALC- The Computer Assisted Learning Center

CIDC- Campus Instructional Development Center

Cole- Choosing online education

DE-Distance education

F2F-Face to face

IAUPR-Interamerican University of Puerto Rico

IP-Implementation process

IRB- Institutional Review Board

Mtes&g- Motives to enroll and goals

OL&rsn- Online learning and regards to student's needs

OL-Online

OLC-Online courses

OLE-Online education

OLEP-Online Education Program

Osp- Overall student's perception of the PC's OLEP

PC-Ponce Campus

Planning

RCL- The Resource Centre for Learning

RQ-Research Questions

VAAPS- Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Systemic