Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies

2016

Preparing Faculty to Teach Online: Promoting Success in the Online Classroom

Julia Babcock Hamilton
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, Community College Education Administration Commons, Community College Leadership Commons, Higher Education Administration Commons, and the Higher Education and Teaching Commons

Walden University

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Julia Hamilton

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. Thomas Hadley, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Edward Kim, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Mary Howe, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer

Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2016

Abstract

Preparing Faculty to Teach Online: Promoting Success in the Online Classroom

by

Julia Margaret Babcock Hamilton

MA, East Carolina University, 1997

BS, East Carolina University 1995

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2016

Abstract

Distance learning students at a community college in the southeast United States were not completing their coursework as well as were students enrolled in traditional courses. This disparity was negatively affecting the institution's state performance measures, putting at risk the institution's state-based funding under the state's performance model. The purpose of this qualitative, bounded case study was to explore faculty experiences with online course professional development and faculty's teaching practices related to successful student online course completion. Chickering and Gamson's "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" served as the study's conceptual foundation. Distance learning faculty ($n = 10$), who taught online courses for at least 10 years, and students ($n = 7$) who had completed at least a single online class, volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews. Observations of online courses taught by faculty participants were also conducted. The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis and data were open coded to determine categories and emerging themes. The results of the data analysis identified 4 key themes: preparing faculty to teach online, engaging students in the online classroom, course design and delivery, and supporting and advising students. Based on the findings, a training course was designed to assist faculty in learning to engage, advise, and provide better support services to students in the online classroom. These endeavors may contribute to social change by providing faculty training and support to improve completions rates for community college students in online courses.

Preparing Faculty to Teach Online: Promoting Success in the Online Classroom

by

Julia Margaret Babcock Hamilton

MA, East Carolina University, 1997

BS, East Carolina University, 1995

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

May 2016

Dedication

I dedicate this doctoral study to my grandmother, Shirley Johnson Babcock. As a champion of education for 40 years, my grandmother instilled in me the importance of an education, as well as a love for life-long learning. The number of lives she touched as a teacher and coach is and always will be my inspiration. I hope that I may touch the lives of others with the same grace, love and compassion as she. With equal gratitude I also dedicate this doctoral study to my daughters Sarah Anne and Stephanie. I know there were many times where I had to sacrifice our time together to make this study a reality. My hope is that it serves as an inspiration for you both. I love you both more than words could ever convey. Set your sights on a dream and sail forward and make it happen. Finally, I also dedicate this doctoral study to my husband, Steve. Thank you for your continuous encouragement and support throughout this endeavor. Words cannot fully express my gratefulness and love for you.

Acknowledgments

"The journey of our lives is not just about the destinations we have reached. Our wisdom, education and personal growth come from the people we meet, the paths we choose to follow and the lessons we have learned along the way." ~ Delores Huerta.

First and foremost, I thank God for providing me with the strength needed to grow and learn throughout this journey and for providing me with family, friends, colleagues and mentors to guide and support me along the way. I owe a tremendous amount of gratitude to my husband, Steve. Your unwavering love and support sustained me throughout this process. To my daughters Sarah Anne and Stephanie, thank you for always understanding when I had to sacrifice our time together to work on this project. To Dr. Page Varnell, thank you for giving me the confidence to begin this journey. You are an amazing mentor, colleague and friend. Thanks also go to my dear friends, Mary Walton, Pat Pittman, Jan Carlisto, and Susan Stumbaugh. This study would not be a reality without your prayers, words of encouragement, and support throughout the last five years.

I want to express my sincere gratitude to my doctoral committee: Dr. Thomas Hadley, Chairperson; Dr. Edward Kim, second committee member; and Dr. Mary Howe, University Research Reviewer. Dr. Hadley has been an exemplary Chair and mentor. Dr. Hadley's vast experience in higher education and research has been a tremendous asset to this project. His advice and guidance were paramount to its success.

I would also like to thank Dr. Pennylloyd Baldridge, Dr. Mary Kirk, Dr. Fran Emory and Mrs. Jeanne Huntley for providing guidance and feedback throughout the

process. Finally, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the community college

faculty and students who participated in this study. This study would not be a reality

without your willingness to share your personal experiences with distance learning.

Table of Contents

v

List of Tables

List of Figures

Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Over the last decade, student enrollment in distance learning courses has grown significantly. In 2013, over seven million students took at least one of their classes online (Allen & Seaman, 2014). It is through distance learning that today's universities and colleges can increase higher education access beyond traditional, onsite courses offered at colleges and universities. The increased need for access is especially true in the community college system. As institutions struggle to provide increased access for students, there is also increased scrutiny over course completion rates. While current research on successful course completion finds little difference in the rates of traditional versus distance learning courses, the institution studied has consistently found that distance course completion rates are significantly lower than those of traditional courses (Xu & Jaggars, 2011).

This study focuses on understanding the factors that influence successful course completion in distance learning courses.   A qualitative case study approach was used to provide insight into the student support services that facilitate successful course completion. The goal of this study is to develop a framework of support that adequately prepares students to complete an online course successfully.

Definition of the Problem

Students at a community college in the southeast United States are not successfully completing their coursework as well as students enrolled in traditional courses regardless of their program of study. The institution's distance learning program

is an integral part of the institution and has offered distance learning courses for over 16 years. The institution offered its first online course in the spring of 1998 and had 25 students. By the spring of 2006, the number of online courses had increased to 119. According to Allen and Seaman (2013), the number of students enrolled in distance learning courses worldwide is 32%. Globally, distance learning has experienced tremendous growth. In 2013, over seven million students enrolled in a distance learning course (Allen & Seaman, 2014). The institution studied has followed the same trend with 54.6% of the students taking a course that has a distance learning component. During the 2013-2014 academic year, increased demand at this institution led to 61.7% of faculty teaching at least one online course.

This institution offers distance learning courses in three different formats: web-enhanced (1% to 49% of the instruction online), hybrid courses (50% to 99% of the instruction online), and online courses (100% online). In 2012, the institution offered 13 programs in a distance learning format. Three of the programs were fully online, while an additional 10 programs had more than half of the required courses available online. Distance learning enrollment at the institution has mirrored the national trend with 36.3% of the courses offered in either a hybrid or online format during the 2012 – 2013 year. When the institution includes web-enhanced courses, over 53% of all courses at the institution have at least a portion of the instruction taking place online.

The institution received a grant award of over $1.6 million dollars in 2006 through the Federal Title III Strengthening Institutions grant program. The grant concentrated on improving low retention and graduation rates, streamlining institutional

effectiveness, improving low success and completion rates in online and hybrid courses, improving the effectiveness of advising, and improving data management processes. One component of the Title III grant was increasing successful course completion in courses offered in a distance learning format. As part of the grant, the institution provided distance learning faculty with intensive professional development on a consistent basis. The training encompassed all experience levels and included topics for new and experienced distance learning faculty.

In 2005, only 63% of students enrolled in distance learning courses successfully completed the course with a C or better. When the grant ended, the online course completion rate had increased to 84.1% and hybrid courses increased to 89.5%. While these efforts led to a considerable increase in successful course completion in students enrolled in distance learning courses, it is still lower than the seated course completion rate of 89.9%. The significant increase in success at the course level suggests that a strategic approach for supporting distance learning faculty and students may lead to increasing the number of students completing online courses.

This institution has recognized the importance of distance learning and for professional development focused on distance learning for its faculty and staff through the development the Department of Instructional Support and Distance Learning. The mission of the department is to support the instructional needs of all faculty and serve as the main support structure for distance learning students and faculty. In 2012-2013, the department offered 33 different professional development opportunities with 572 faculty members in attendance. Twenty-seven of the training sessions or 82% of all offerings

were in direct response to a change in versions or features of the learning management system (LMS).

Increased demand for distance learning courses has resulted in the need for additional faculty trained to develop and deliver online courses. The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (2010) requires colleges and universities offering distance learning coursework to certify that faculty are qualified to develop and facilitate distance learning courses. Professional development for distance learning faculty is not only an accreditation requirement, it may impact successful course completion in learners enrolled in distance learning courses. While many faculty members have attended professional development activities related to distance learning and are required to attend training on the LMS, the institution does not have formal procedures to ensure distance learning faculty take part in professional development activities.

Currently, faculty are only required to take a one-time session on the use of the LMS. While these sessions may include basic instructional practices, the focus is clearly on the LMS. They do not cover instructional practices specific to distance learning. There is a wide variability in the contact hours and the topics explored in these training sessions. The institution offers the training sessions on demand and in a shortened format to meet the needs of adjunct faculty hired at the last minute to teach a distance learning course. In addition, the training sessions offered do not include information pertaining to the policies and procedures for distance learning courses. Nor do they include any information related to support services for students and faculty. Another significant issue

is that once faculty attend training on the LMS, there is no annual refresher requirement to keeps their skills current.

Once a faculty member attends the initial training, they are not required to attend any other professional development related to distance learning. Only 66% of distance learning faculty at the institution have attended training pertaining to distance learning within the last two years. In some cases, faculty have not attended professional development specific to distance learning within the last five years. The combination of technology focused training and no requirement for "refresher" training has led to wide variability in the quality in the design and delivery of online courses.

The increased demand for distance learning courses has led the institution to assign faculty online courses without much time to prepare; a serious problem for many adjunct faculty. Of the faculty teaching online at this institution, over 45% are adjunct faculty members. With only 66% of online faculty attending professional development specifically on distance learning in the last two years, there is evidence that faculty may not possess the skills to develop and teach high-quality online courses. While there is a requirement for all online faculty to attend a mandatory distance learning training session, the training is primarily on the use of the LMS. To provide a framework for successful course completion in online courses, it is important that the faculty understand the challenges students face in the online classroom. It is also important that the faculty are aware of the instructional practices that foster course completion. The problem this study addresses is that students are not successfully completing distance learning courses at the same level as students complete traditional courses.

Rationale

To understand why it is imperative to study this topic, it is important to examine how the institution and those within the community college system perceive the problem locally. The current landscape of postsecondary education places extreme importance on completion at both the program and course levels. While increased retention and graduation rates are important, successful course completion is necessary to increase both retention and graduation rates. At the same time, institutions are tasked with providing increased access to higher education. For over a hundred years, community colleges have provided a pathway into higher education for those wanting to enter a vocational or technical trade (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Community colleges have also served as a springboard to four-year institutions for nontraditional students.

Today's community colleges are experiencing tremendous change. Historically, community colleges have provided students a direct path into the employment sector. Today's community college not only provides students a pathway to the workforce through two-year associate degree programs, it also serves as a springboard to the university system. It also provides retraining opportunities for those already in the workforce through industry credentials or certificate programs. As the American Association of Community Colleges (2012) noted, "no matter how significant the contributions of community colleges in the past, the ground beneath their feet has shifted so dramatically in recent years that they need to rethink their role and mission" (p. 1). While community college enrollment continues to grow, current statistics reveal that only three out of 10 full-time community college students will graduate within three years of

beginning their program of study (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011).

According to Achieving the Dream (2012), for the first time in American history,

college-aged citizens are less educated than their parent's generation. At the same time,

the jobs available today require students to possess a higher level of skills and education

than jobs available to them in the past. While those within federal and state government

see community colleges as an integral part of overcoming this gap, less than half of the

students who enter a community college have earned their Associate's degree within six

years. Although this community college has made significant strides in closing the gap

between successful traditional and online course completion rates, there remains a need

to train faculty to be more effective online instructors if this selected community wants to

improve course completion rates in online courses. Successful course completion is

essential if an institution wants retention that ultimately lead to increased graduation

rates.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

The problem in this study is that there is a significant gap between traditional and

distance learning courses in regards to course completion. Like many institutions, this

community college has faced lower completion rates at the course level in its distance

learning offerings when compared with traditional courses. In 2006, the institution

received a federal grant that allowed for intensive professional development for online

faculty. During the grant period, course completion improved significantly in all

modalities of distance learning courses. As noted in Table 1, successful course

completion rates for traditional courses have increased from 89.50% in 2011 to 90.40%

in 2014. During that same period, online courses saw little change with 85.99% of students successful completing an online course. While one could argue that this institution has made improvements in addressing student completion at the course level in distance learning, the disparity between distance learning offerings has increased since the grant period ended. While there are many variables that could potentially impact completion at the course level, the data collected from this institution during the grant period indicates that an intensive professional development for distance learning faculty may lead to improvements in students completing their online courses.

Table 1

Successful Course Completion Rates

	Traditional	Web Enhanced	Hybrid	Online
2011 – 2012	89.50%	86.99%	86.74%	84.32%
2012 – 2013	91.05%	87.82%	86.89%	86.33%
2013 – 2014	90.40%	85.42%	89.26%	85.99%

During the 2013 – 2014 academic year, 90.40% of students enrolled in a traditional course completed it. In contrast, only 85.99% of students enrolled in an online course completed the course. Hybrid courses had 89.26% of the students completing the course. Web-enhanced courses had the largest gap in completion with only 85.42% of students enrolled completing the course. This institution evaluates all online and hybrid through the institution's Quality Assurance Process (QAP). The QAP process rates the overall design and instructional practices used within the course. The difference in web-enhanced courses may be related to the fact that the institution does not require web-enhanced courses to be vetted through the institution's QAP process. Additionally, web-

enhanced faculty are not required to attend professional development specifically related to distance learning. While faculty who teach online and hybrid courses are required to attend professional development specific to teaching in the online classroom before teaching the course, faculty teaching web-enhanced courses are not required to attend training specifically for offering instruction online. In 2013-2014, only 51% of the faculty teaching web-enhanced courses had attended training for distance learning. More alarming, when broken down by employment status, only 23.5% of adjuncts had attended. In some cases, web-enhanced courses may have up to 49% of the instruction taking place in a distance learning format. Web-enhanced courses also make up the second largest percentage of distance learning courses at the institution, with 32.7% of distance learning courses during the 2013-2014 year being offered in a web-enhance format.

Through intense professional development provided through the Title III grant, this institution has made progress in promoting course completion in distance learning courses. Between 2012 and 2014, 100% of distance learning faculty attended professional development sessions designed especially for the distance learning program at this institution. While the grant provided monies especially for professional development, the grant did not yield a strategic plan to sustain professional development for distance learning after the grant. In the years since the grant, attendance at professional development activities specifically for distance learning has declined. In 2011, 100% of distance learning faculty attended professional development related to

distance learning. During the 2013-2014 academic year, only 66% of distance learning faculty attended professional development focused on distance learning.

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Community college enrollment in distance learning courses has seen the strongest growth over the last five years. A recent poll conducted by the Pearson Foundation (2011) found that 57% of students attending two-year institutions had taken at least one online class. While distance learning has provided unprecedented access to higher education, Xu and Jaggars (2011) estimated that students who enrolled in distance learning courses at two-year institutions had withdrawal rates 10% to 15% higher than students enrolled in face-to-face courses. A study of the Virginia Community College system also found that withdrawal rates were lower with a distance learning course completion rate that was 12.7 percentage points lower than traditional courses (Xu & Jaggars, 2010).

Distance learning has become an integral part of the community college system. At one institution, 55% of the faculty taught more than 16 courses online (Eskey & Schulte, 2012). With the shift in content delivery from face-to-face to online, faculty considered training composed of both technology related skills and distance learning pedagogy to be the most essential factors in ensuring student success in distance learning courses (Kang, 2012). Meyer and Murrell (2014) substantiated the need for professional development for distance learning faculty and found that professional development for faculty teaching in the online classroom is a key component of successful course

completion. Kang (2012) also found that a systems approach to professional development was necessary to ensure sustainability.

There is a gap in practice concerning professional development for online faculty. The majority of research focuses on individual programs and does not address what elements should be included. For over 25 years, Chickering and Gamson's (1987) "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" has provided a framework for instructional practices that promote student success in the traditional classroom. Chickering and Gamson (1987) created their framework by examining how students learn and how faculty teach. While research has clearly validated of Chickering and Gamson's framework in the online classroom, there is little research on its use in preparing faculty to teach online (Bangert, 2004, Chizmar & Walbert, 1999, Simsek, 2013, Sowan & Jenkins, 2013; Tirrell & Quick, 2012).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore faculty experiences with online course professional development and faculty's attributes and teaching practices related to successful student course completion in online courses. I hope that this study will promote a discussion about the training needs of distance learning faculty.

<div align="center">

Definitions

</div>

Distance learning (also referred to as distance education): A learning process by which the majority of instruction and interaction takes place with the students and instructor separated by a distance (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 2010).

Hybrid courses: Courses where 50% to 99% of the instruction is conducted online. These courses typically have several face-to-face meetings.

Nontraditional student: Students over the age of 24 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2014).

Online courses: A course where 100% of the instruction is provided online.

Online course record: All distance learning courses at this institution are conducted through the Moodle learning management system (LMS). At the end of each term, the course record is archived and preserved for auditing purposes. The online course record contains all user activity during the course, discussion forums, assignments, lectures, feedback, and assignment submissions. All items have a date and time stamp that indicates when the interaction took place.

Successful course completion: Completing a course with a final grade of C or better

Traditional courses: Courses where 100% of the instruction takes place in a face-to-face format.

Web-enhanced courses: Courses where 1% to 49% of the instruction takes place online. Web-enhanced courses typically have regular class meetings.

<center>**Significance**</center>

In 2009, President Obama announced the American Graduation Initiative. The American Graduation Initiative laid the groundwork for the National Completion Agenda. He emphasized that community colleges should focus on student success and program completion (Obama, 2009). In response to the National Completion Agenda,

the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) released "The completion

agenda: A call to action" in April 2011. Through this report, the AACC set a benchmark

to produce 50% more graduates with in-demand degrees, diplomas and certificates by the

year 2020. The AACC has identified distance learning as one of the major components

in achieving President Obama's goal. The AACC report outlined strategies aimed at

improving teaching pedagogy and enhancing the online skills of both students and faculty

(American Association of Community Colleges, 2011). During this same period, the

state in which this institution operates, moved to a funding by performance model that

accentuates the importance of successful course completion.

This community college has demonstrated that distance learning is an integral

component of the institution. While the institution has made significant strides in

addressing course completion rates in distance learning courses, there is still work to be

done. Enrollment has grown over the last five years, leading to greater demand for

courses and more faculty to teach those courses. This increased demand for more courses

and instructors has highlighted the need to provide support and training for distance

learning faculty. The current climate of higher education places an emphasis on

accountability and in many cases, ties funding to student performance. According to the

President of this institution, the funding model at the state level is shifting to funding by

performance model. Over the course of the next five years, institutions will see an

increase in the percent of funding that is allocated based on performance. Between 2013

and 2014, this institution would have received $53,000 in additional funding had it met

the state performance measures (Schneider, 2014).

In 2013, the community college system of the institution studied implemented

Performance Measures for Student Success (PMSS). One component of PMSS is a

public ranking of all 58 community colleges in the state based on eight performance

assessments. A critical part of PMSS is a performance based funding allocation that is

included in each institution's state budget package. While distance learning does not

directly impact five of the measures, it is a critical component of three of them: the first

year progression, college transfer performance, and curriculum student completion.

First year progression requires institutions to report the percentage of first-time

curriculum students who are enrolled in at least 12 semester hours during the first year

and complete 12 semester hours with a C or better. In 2013, 68.7% of the first year

students successfully met this measure. While this institution was above the system-wide

average of 67.8%, the college did not meet the goal of 74.6%. Institutions are also

required to report the percentage of first-time curriculum students who graduate, transfer

to another institution, or who are still enrolled with 36 hours within a six-year period.

This institution was above the minimum baseline of 28.6% but was below the goal of

45.6%. Finally, institutions must track the number of degree completers and students

who have fulfilled 30 or more credit hours who transfer to a four-year institution. The

measure reported is the percentage of students that earn a GPA of 2.0 or better after two

consecutive semesters at the four-year institution. This institution was above the

minimum baseline of 71.2% but well below the goal of 93.8%.

According to the statewide system office, "if a college exceeds the baseline, but

does not meet the goal, it receives a portion of the performance-based funding for which

it would be eligible" (p. 26). In 2013, the institution received $35,000 in performance

based funding. If the institution's scores had met or exceeded the benchmark on each of

the three performance measures, they would have received $50,000. In 2014, the

statewide allocation per measure doubled. This institution's performance based funding

for 2014 was $38,000. Had the institution met or exceeded the goal for all three

measures, the college would have received an additional $38,000 in additional funding

(Schneider, 2014). With over 52% of all courses having at least a portion of instruction

offered in a distance learning format, the impact of distance learning on PMSS and the

National Completion Agenda is increasingly apparent. As this institution moves forward,

a larger percentage of its state budget will come from performance based funding. As it

stands, this institution only received 70% of the performance based funding allotment. If

the institution is to keep current program offerings, it is imperative that they work

towards achieving 100% of the performance based funding amount.

In addition to funding, this study is also important because many community

colleges are increasing access to higher education through distance learning. At the same

time, many community college students have disproportionate academic challenges that

become more apparent in the online classroom. Faculty must have an understanding of

the support framework for online students and be able to assist students in accessing the

support services offered. Preparing faculty to become more effective online instructors

will help students at this selected community college and will have implications for other

community colleges serving the same population.

Guiding/Research Questions

The local problem is that there is little understanding of the factors that influence successful course completion in distance learning courses. There is also a gap in practice concerning the impact of professional development for faculty on success at the course level and course completion of distance learning students. While recent studies have shown that professional development for distance learning faculty plays a vital role in course completion, there is little research on what components of professional development programs support course completion. The majority of current literatures on distance learning faculty professional development programs only provide an overview of the approach and how it has been delivered. There is little research on how institutionally based faculty development activities directly affect course completion. In order for the Department of Instructional Support and Distance Learning to adequately support both students and faculty, it is essential that the department understand the factors that foster successful course completion in online courses. I believe it is important to identify the factors that directly lead to improving successful course completion in online courses. The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are distance learning faculty experiences with professional development for successful course completion in online courses?

2. What are the attributes and teaching practices of effective online instructors that foster successful course completion in online courses?

3. What are the attributes and instructional strategies of instructors that students perceive to be essential to help them complete online courses?

The findings from these selected guiding research questions were used to develop a framework for distance learning faculty and students that that ultimately leads to successful course completion in online courses.

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

For nearly 27 years, Chickering and Gamson's (1987), "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" has provided a framework for instructional practices that promote student learning and ultimately success and course completion. Chickering and Gamson's (1987) work evolved from a panel of higher education practitioners seeking to improve student learning (Bangert, 2004). Chickering and Gamson's (1987) original framework identified 7 effective principles for teaching. Chickering and Gamson's (1987) "good practice in undergraduate education: (1) encourages contact between students and faculty, (2) develops reciprocity and cooperation among students, (3) encourages active learning, (4) gives prompt feedback, (5) emphasizes time on task, (6) communicates high expectations, and (7) respects diverse talents and ways of learning" (p. 1). Chickering and Gamson (1987) went on to say "while each practice can stand on its own, when all are present their effects multiply. Together they employ six powerful forces in education: (1) activity, (2) expectations, (3) cooperation, (4) interaction, (5) diversity, and (6) responsibility" (p. 2). While Chickering and Gamson's (1987) original research was not intended to be a framework for distance learning courses, Chickering and Ehrmann (1996) expanded the framework to include the impact of new technologies on the 7 practices. Chickering and Ehrmann

(1996) argued that a focus on instructional practices, and not the delivery method of a course, is what prompts success. Chickering and Gamson's (1987) original framework has since been substantiated in online courses by numerous studies (Arbaugh & Hornik, 2006; Bangert, 2004; McCabe & Meuter, 2011; Ritter & Lemke, 2000; Simsek, 2013; Sowan & Jenkins, 2013; Tirrell & Quick, 2012).

Chickering and Gamson's (1987) work sought to improve student success based on research of how faculty teach, and students learn. While the 7 instructional principles are not listed by order of importance, the first one listed, encouraging contact between students and faculty, is considered the most important factor relating to a student's motivation and their integration within the institution. As Cho and Karp (2013) noted, many community college students often arrive with a host of issues unrelated to education. Chickering and Gamson's (1987) first practice encourages interacting between students and faculty. Faculty help students move beyond those issues and persist in their studies by showing concern for a student and their specific issues. According to Chickering and Gamson (1987), "knowing a few faculty members well enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans" (p. 3). By fostering a sense of community, faculty can directly impact a student's success.

The second principle stresses that learning is collaborative and social by nature and should not be competitive and held in isolation. An atmosphere of reciprocity and collaboration amongst students is necessary to promote student success. It is through interactions with both faculty and other students that a student's learning is increased. In

conjunction, the third principle encourages an active approach to learning that uses a diverse means to enforce the topic taught and to relate it to student's personal experiences. Active teaching requires faculty to utilize a multitude of instructional practices that help students process and apply knowledge (Simsek, 2013).

Chickering and Gamson's (1987) fourth principle stresses the importance of feedback. It is through prompt and detailed feedback that students can reflect on what they have learned and what areas they need continue focusing. As Chickering and Gamson (1987) noted, "no feedback can occur without assessment, but assessment without timely feedback contributes little to learning" (p. 4). Faculty must understand that assessment and feedback go hand-in-hand.

The fifth principle emphasizes both a student and faculty's time on task. Many students at the community college level are lacking time-management skills and thus need support in learning how to manage their time effectively. Through instructional practices, faculty can help students learn time management skills and thus increase student and faculty interaction. According to Watwood, Nugent, and Deihl (2009), "deadlines are equally important online, but they also need to be consciously structured around time management issues" (p. 14). Chickering and Gamson (1987) also indicated that time on task was an issue for faculty, not just students. Faculty need to consider their own time management issues when making the transition to the online classroom.

The sixth principle is centered on the concept that when an individual expects more, they will get more. According to Chickering and Gamson's (1987), "expecting students to perform well becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy when teachers and

institutions hold high expectations of themselves and make extra efforts" (p. 5). When expectations are clearly stated and accompanied by instructional activities that directly support those expectations, students will ultimately rise to the occasion.

The final principle is founded upon the concept that each individual student arrives at an institution with a unique set of talents, interests, learning styles and experiences. According to Ritter and Lemke (2000), "effective teaching recognizes and addresses the difference in the abilities and learning styles of students" (p. 105). The online classroom provides students with flexibility in learning, but with that flexibility comes a plethora of materials and options that may be overwhelming for the student.

Studies by Bangert (2004), Chizmar and Walbert (1999), and Simsek (2013) found that Chickering and Gamson's (1987) framework is a vital component in the creation and deliver of an effective online courses. Simsek (2013) also concluded that the seven principles were necessary to ensure quality teaching and learning. Tirrell and Quick (2012) substantiated Chickering and Gamson's (1987) framework and went on to validate the use of the 7 practices when evaluating the quality of an online course. According to Tirrell and Quick (2012), "the seven principles of good practice reflect constructivist learning theory, and so instruments based on the seven principles of good practice have been accepted as effective tools for evaluating online instruction" (p. 589). While the seven principles focus on instructional practices, they also provide a firm foundation for evaluating quality in the online classroom.

A study by Batts, Colaric and McFadden (2006) explored the acceptance of the seven principles by both faculty and students. Their study revealed an acceptance of the

seven principles as a foundation for quality online instruction. Batts, Colaric, and McFadden's (2006) research indicated that training founded upon Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles would lead to an increase in the quality of online instruction.

A study by Sowan and Jenkins (2013) also validated the seven principles and expanded their use in the design, delivery, and evaluation of hybrid courses. It also identified a potential eighth practice that encompasses the instructors' comprehensive management and delivery of the course. Sowan and Jenkins' (2013) study also revealed a higher level of student achievement when compared to previous cohorts. According to Hutchins (2003), "the seven principles may advance the current theoretical framework for enhancing instructional effectiveness as measured by student achievement and satisfaction in web-based classes" (p. 7). While the original seven principles focused on instructional practices, Hutchins (2003) work indicates that a balance must be achieved between instructional practices and course management.

Research conducted by Graham, Cagiltay, Lim, Craner and Duffy (2001) employed the seven principles in the evaluation of distance learning courses. This research substantiated the widely held premise that the seven principles were flexible enough to adapt to all facets of higher education, including online learning. The Ohio Learning Network (2003) also conducted research on the use of the seven principles for course evaluation. The research assessed the state of distance learning in Ohio. The seven principles were used by Ohio to make recommendations for improving the design and delivery of all distance learning courses. In contrast, a study by Arbaugh and Hornik (2006) found that while some of the seven principles did prove to impact the quality of an

online graduate-level course, there was not enough evidence to recommend that institutions use the seven principles as the standard for online course design. While this study was limited to graduate-level MBA courses, it is worthy of noting.

While most of the current research focuses on the implementation of the seven principles in distance learning, research into the determination of whether or not the subject area impacts the implementation of the principles in the traditional and online classroom. A study by Braxton, Olsen, and Simmons (1998) found no significant difference in the effective use of the seven principles between faculty members in low paradigmatic programs versus those in high paradigmatic programs.

Finally, there has been research conducted that focuses on how students perceive the seven principles. Finding by McCabe and Meuter (2011) indicated that students perceive all seven principles as being important for their success in the online classroom. McCabe and Meuter's (2011) research also found that students often felt that the LMS didn't always facilitate effective implementation of the seven principles.

Student Success

Student success is an issue of upmost importance for leaders in higher education. According to Tinto (2012), "despite our nation's success in increasing access to college and reducing the gap in access between high and low-income students, we have not been successful in translating the opportunity access provides into college completion" (p. 4). Tinto (2012) also noted that there are significant variances in course completion rates among institutions. While there has been significant research conducted into the factors

that influence successful course completion, Tinto (2012) noted that the data gained from research is not helpful in implementing programs to support students.

Higher Education. While access to higher education has increased significantly over the last 10 years, retention and graduation rates have steadily declined (Brock, 2010). Tinto's (1975) student integration model continues to be the foundation for understanding why students cease to persist in higher education. Tinto's (1975) theory sought to predict persistence based on a student's experience prior to enrollment and those factors based on a student's individual experiences once enrolled. A key argument in Tinto's (1975) theory focused on a student's sense of community. Students with insufficient interaction or a low sense of community were more likely to withdrawal. Bean (1980) expanded on Tinto's (1975) work and argued that a student's decision to withdrawal can be predicted by a number of background variables including: institutional commitment, prior academic performance, the socio-economic background of the student, and students' interaction with faculty and staff. Later research by Bean and Metzner (1985) built upon Bean's (1980) work and focused on the factors that lead to the withdrawal of non-traditional students.   While much of the earlier research on student attrition focused on the many variables that impact a student's decision to withdrawal, a study by Johnson (1996) focused on faculty differences and program areas on a student's decision to withdrawal. Johnson's (1996) study found that students enrolled in science courses were more likely to withdrawal than students enrolled in other program areas.

The current landscape of higher education has placed increased scrutiny on both retention and graduation rates and most of the current research focuses on a student's first-year (Barefoot, et al., 2005; DeAngelo, 2014). A study conducted by Willcoxson, Cotter, and Joy (2011) sought to identify factors influencing a student's decision to withdrawal for the first year of study and beyond. The study found that the approachability of faculty and the instructional strategies used in the classroom played a large role in a student's decision to withdrawal in their first year and beyond.

Community College.

Student success at the community college level is at an all-time low, with only three out of 10 full-time students graduating within three years of beginning their program of study (American Association of Community Colleges, 2011). Historically, community colleges have provided access to higher education to students who face barriers to higher education. As noted by Liu, Gomez, and Yen (2009), "community colleges serve students with life and time conflicts and students with multiple jobs and responsibilities" (p. 165). Community colleges, by nature, serve students who possess characteristics that inversely impact student success. Research has shown that successful students possess certain characteristics: completion of a college preparatory program of study, immediately enters higher education upon graduation from high school, comes from middle to high income families, have parents who have post-secondary educational experience, attend uninterrupted and enroll in a full-time course load. Community colleges are "open door" institutions and cannot improve student success with selective admissions criteria (Burns, 2010). Burns (2010) noted that colleges must develop a plan

for fostering student success that addresses the challenges facing the non-traditional student. These challenges include: work and family obligations, socio-economic status, developmental education and family support structure.

Community colleges are extremely diverse and influenced by the communities they serve. According to Mertes and Hoover (2014), "given the heterogeneous nature of community colleges, it is incumbent on individual institutions to perform their own analysis on their unique student population" (p. 659). Mertes and Hoover's (2014) research indicates that what works for one institution may not influence successful course completion at another and that individual institutions need to research the unique needs of their students and faculty.

Adult learners that do not have a strong support structure outside of the institution are less likely to complete online courses.   A student's external support system significantly impacts student's success, more so than previous academic performance. While prior academic performance impacts the success in traditional courses, this is not the case in distance learning courses (Park & Choi, 2009). Patterson & McFadden (2009) found that success and course completion rates did not differ statistically based on academic variables. According to Park and Choi (2009), faculty must be aware of a student's need for support so "he/she might help the learners stay in the course by paying extra attention, using appropriate motivational strategies, and providing additional internal support" (p. 215).

The "open-door" nature of community colleges allows students underprepared for college work to enroll in higher education. A study by Barbatis (2010) identified key

factors in promoting success in underprepared students: involvement in campus activities, mentoring, leadership opportunities, use of student support services, and increased faculty-to-student interactions. The study also found that underprepared students typically relied on family members for advice in navigating the college experience. A study on the impact of a student success course also identified similar factors in fostering success and also noted that while programs focused on the individual factors were worthwhile, they may not transform into academic success (Rutschow, Cullinan, & Welbeck, 2012).

Community College Distance Learning

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (2011) defines distance learning as: "a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place" (p. 6). In 2013, over 7 million students took at least one distance learning course (Allen & Seaman, 2014). According to Matthews (1999), there are three clear segments of the historical evolution of distance learning: courses offered via mail correspondence, hybrid approaches, and online courses. While each phase built upon the unique features of its predecessor, the ultimate goal of distance learning has been to make higher education accessible to everyone (Matthews, 1999).

Increased distance learning offerings throughout the community college system has afforded students unprecedented access to higher educational opportunities. According to Cho & Karp (2013), "many students arrive at community colleges with a

host of problems, including inadequate knowledge about how to navigate college as well as poor academic skills" (p. 97). Rovai (2003) built upon the work of Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) and Bean and Metzner (1985) and developed a composite framework for persistence in distance learning. According to Rovai (2003), "there is no simple formula that ensures student persistence. Adult persistence in an online program is a complicated response to multiple issues (p. 12). It incorporates Rowntree (1995) and Cole's (2000) theories concerning the necessary skills for online students. It also combines the work of Workman & Stenard (1996) and Grow (1996) into a single model that is specific to distance learning students. Rovai's (2003) work is divided into student characteristics and skills prior to enrolling and internal and external factors affecting students while enrolled. The following four factors are included: student characteristics prior to admission, student skills before admission, external factors affecting students after admission, and internal factors affecting students after admission (Rovai, 2003).

Tinto (1975) also argued that students come with a variety of unique of characteristics that play an important role in how the student interacts with the institution. As Tinto (1975) noted, "it is the individual's integration into the college environment which most directly relates to continuance in college" (p. 41). Rovai's (2003) built upon Tinto's (1975, 1993) work to develop a framework for distance learning. Rovai's (2003) framework not only addresses factors that impact success and persistence while they are enrolled, it also addresses factors that happen before enrollment. Building upon Bean & Metzner's (1995) theory that age, ethnicity, gender, intellectual development, academic performance prior to attending college, Rovai (2003) found that a low sense of

community and feelings of isolation impacted student persistence in distance learning courses.

A key component of Tinto's (1975) and Rovai's (2003) framework is interaction with all aspects of the institution. As Tinto (1975) noted, inadequate social interaction is directly related to student withdrawals. Rovai's (2003) work focused on the role of faculty in student persistence by exploring five factors: consistency and clarity of policies, promoting self-esteem, developing a sense of community, social integration and pedagogy. Tinto (1975) also "found that social interaction with the college's faculty is related to persistence in that college" (p. 63). Both Tinto's (1975, 1993) and Rovai's (2003) work justifies the exploration of the relationship between distance learning faculty skills and student success and persistence.

Community college faculty face challenges unique to the landscape of the community college. Those challenges include open access, first-generation college students with varying levels of readiness for college coursework, and accountability. Community college students' lives are complex, and most have numerous commitments outside of the institution. This makes distance learning courses appealing and in some cases, the only means by which the student can access higher education (Alexander, Karvonen, Ulrich, Davis, & Wade, 2012). According to Capan and Teclehaimanot (2013), "in a response to busier lives and increased societal expectations, potential students embraced distance education as a means to an end" (p. 1464). The need for increased access have led to significant growth in distance learning courses in the community college system. In 2008, over 97% of all community colleges offered courses

in a distance learning modality. Since 2010, community colleges have seen a 29%

enrollment increase in distance learning courses (Jaggars, Edgecombe, & Stacey, 2013).

Distance learning offerings provide unprecedented access to higher education; however,

success and course completion remains a significant issue in distance education (Capra,

2014; Patterson & McFadden, 2009). While distance learning provides increased access

to community college students, evidence suggests that students enrolled in distance

learning courses are least likely succeed or complete the course (Xu & Jaggars, 2011).

A unique characteristic of many community college distance learning programs is

the fact that many institutions may have significant distance learning offerings, yet do not

offer an entire degree program online (Cejda, 2010). This presents a unique challenge in

supporting distance learning students. If the institution views itself as a traditional brick-

and-mortar institution, they may not fully embrace the unique nature of supporting the

distance learning student.

A study looking at the factors that impact community college course completion

in online courses found that a student's GPA, learning style and basic computer skills can

predict those students who are in danger of not completing a distance learning course

(Harrell & Bower, 2011). Harrell and Bower (2011) also noted that once institutions

identify at-risk students, appropriate support structures and resources can be provided to

those students. A more recent study by Liao, Edlin, and Ferdenzi (2014) found that

"community college students are more extrinsically motivated in their learning and that

students do engage in self-regulated learning in order to get ahead in life, educators could

utilize this trend and transform students into lifetime learners" (p. 13). They also found

that intrinsic motivation is not something that can be used to predict course completion.

Liao, Edlin and Ferdenzi (2014) also indicated that a support structure is a critical

component to ensuring community college student success and course completion in

distance learning course.

Research has shown that an institution's organizational support structure

significantly influences a student's choice to withdrawal from a distance learning course.

Community college students enrolled in online courses are removed physically from the

institution and challenged by competing responsibilities. Institutions must be proactive in

their support of distance learning students. Liu, Gomez and Yen (2009) found that

students who had a positive perception of social presence are more likely have sustained

interaction with the institution, collaborate with their peers and complete an online course

at the community college level with a higher grade.

Distance Learning Faculty

With distance learning enrollments at an all-time high, many institutions are

struggling with how to prepare faculty to teaching online. While the instructional

strategies used to deliver distance learning courses has changed significantly over the last

10 years, the strategies for preparing faculty have not (Lackey, 2011). As Lackey (2011)

noted, while the majority of faculty teaching online have attended formal training, few

feel prepared to teach online.

Faculty Perceptions. While distance learning is experiencing unprecedented

growth, acceptance by faculty has remained low. Since 2004, faculty acceptance has

remained constant, with 30% of faculty believing that distance learning is a viable form

of education (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Mills, Yanes and Casebeer (2009) found that while faculty found distance learning to be necessary to remain competitive, they also felt that there were substantial obstacles in effectively developing and delivering online courses. A study by Fish and Gill (2009) found that only 30% of the faculty interviewed in the study felt that they had received the amount of training necessary to successfully teach online. Without sufficient training, most faculty would not see the value in distance learning. Substantial research has shown that faculty perceive the largest barrier to be the time to attend professional development on the design and delivery of distance learning courses (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Cook, Ley, Crawford, & Warner, 2009; Mills, Yanes, & Casebeer, 2009; Mitchell & Geva-May, 2009; Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008 Windes & Lesht, 2014). Mills, Yanes, and Casebeer's (2009) found that time was the largest concern for faculty. Specifically, the time for course preparation, time to attend professional development and release time to allow for the development of distance learning courses. According to Seaman (2009), the majority of faculty teaching distance learning courses cite student need as the reason they began teaching online.

Research conducted by Windes and Lesht (2014) found that there are differences in how faculty perceive distance learning based on on the classifications of the institution. Community college faculty who have prior experience teaching in the online classroom were found to be less favorable toward distance learning courses than those at other types of institution. Community college faculty often cited competition as the strongest motivator for teaching a distance learning course. The study also found that faculty

members at the community college level are more likely to have concerns pertaining to the quality of online courses.

The instructional practices utilized in a traditional class are not as effective when utilized in an online class. The online classroom fundamentally changes how students and faculty interact. Early adopters of distance learning have often relied on traditional pedagogical practices as they transition to the online classroom (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011). A study by Capra (2014) found that traditional instructional practices may actually impede learning in online courses. Capra (2014) also found that a faculty member's instructional practices is one of the most influential elements in students' success and course completion. Community college faculty must enter the classroom ready to facilitate learning. As Boyer and Usinger (2012) noted, self-directed learning "involves shifting the responsibility for the learning activity from an external source such as a teacher to the individual learner, with the learner assuming some level of control and active engagement with the learning process" (p. 25). Boyer and Usinger's (2012) study found that if distance learning faculty and distance learning support structures were supplemented mechanisms designed to address insufficiencies in interactions and self-efficacy, that those measures would increase student success.

A study by Fish and Gill (2009) found "a program of initial and continuous training is necessary to address both the misconceptions about online learning and to provide the skills necessary for successful online course delivery" (p. 59). The development of an institutional infrastructure to support faculty in creating and delivering online courses is critical in increasing student success (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2009; Powell,

2010). A study by Xu and Jaggars (2013) focused on how an institution can support success and course completion in distance learning courses and identified four methods to improve student success: screening, scaffolding, early warning, and wholesale improvement. Screening sought to prevent students from enrolling in distance learning courses until they could demonstrate they possess the skills to do so successfully. The concept of scaffolding involved incorporating the teaching of online learning skills into courses that traditionally contain a high number of first-time distance learning students. The use of an early-warning system would seek to identify and intervene with struggling distance learning courses. The last component in Xu and Jaggars' (2013) study focused on the quality of distance learning students.

Adjunct Faculty. Adjunct faculty are the fastest growing classification of higher education employees and thus, institutions must address the support afforded to this segment of faculty (McDaniel & Shaw, 2010). Adjunct faculty members play a critical part in distance learning within the community college system. In 2013, over 57% of faculty in North Carolina were employed on a part-time, adjunct basis. The percentage of adjunct faculty that teach online is considerably higher than full-time faculty with 32.4 % of adjuncts teaching online versus 22.2% of full-time faculty (Seaman, 2009). According to Diegel (2013), adjunct faculty perceived professional development to be valuable in enhancing their teaching. They also feel that professional development is important for quality teaching. According to Green, Alejandro, and Brown (2009), adjunct faculty "want to feel that they are a vital part of the university" (p. 9). The increased use of

adjunct faculty has shed light on the issues unique to training adjunct faculty. Special consideration must be given to providing training so that it is accessible to adjuncts.

Distance learning is closely linked with the use of technology and thus is an important component to teaching online. A study by Paver, Walker, and Hung (2014) focused on the integration of technology by adjunct faculty members. The study found a substantial difference between the needs of full-time versus adjunct faculty members in regards to resource availability, time for professional development, reimbursement, and participation in professional development. They also found that peer influence is a vital component in the integration of emerging technologies into an adjunct's course. This highlights the importance of providing time for interaction between full-time and adjunct faculty.

There is some debate as to whether professional development for online faculty should be separated into training specific to full-time versus adjunct. Some institutions offer training specifically for online adjunct faculty, while others provide ongoing training that place full-time and adjuncts in the same training opportunity. A large online university currently offers a mandatory six-week training session for newly hired adjunct faculty members. In contrast, a small southeastern community college provides on-going professional development for any online faculty members (Rogers, McIntyre, & Jazzar, 2010). Shattuck and Anderson (2013) explored the offering of a professional development opportunity tailored to adjunct faculty. When the professional development was offered, over half of the participants were full-time faculty. This unexpected result highlighted the benefits of a single training tailored to faculty and adjuncts. The study

suggested training be designed for both adjunct and full-time faculty and that it utilize design elements for both beginners and experienced faculty.

The rapid increase in the use of distance learning adjuncts has seen a new type of adjunct emerge. The "professional adjunct" is a term given to adjunct faculty who teach solely as a part-time adjunct at numerous institutions. While many view the "professional adjunct" in a negative light, Bedford (2009) noted that "professional adjuncts" present numerous advantages for both the institution and the students they teach. Essentially, the "professional adjunct" is skilled in distance learning pedagogy and in the subject matter in which they teach. They also do not usually demonstrate an academic bias or political views associated with a single organization. Bedford (2009) noted that negative stereotyping often overshadows the benefits of "professional adjunct" faculty.

Preparing Faculty to Teach Online. Professional development for distance learning faculty is a vital to student success and course completion; however, the majority of training sessions are based on research on teaching traditional courses (Meyer & Murrell, 2014). A wide variety of approaches to distance learning professional development can be found in the literature; however, 72% of institutions use in-house programs combined with mentoring. In 2010, 58% of the institutions included a mentoring component. This was nearly a 10% increase over preceding years (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

One of the shortcomings of an on-site professional development program for faculty is a sole focus on the technology or LMS used. The purpose of professional

development for new distance learning faculty should "enable them to survive initially and ultimately thrive in the new teaching and learning space" (Ragan, 2009, p. 3). According to Johnson and Berge (2012), the professional development needs may be different for various experience levels; however, professional development should include technical and pedagogical training, along with ongoing support and collaboration. Johnson and Berge (2012) also noted that peer support is a critical component of any professional development for online faculty. In many programs, faculty receive training solely on how to use the LMS and not on pedagogical strategies for teaching in the online classroom. According to Lackey (2011), many faculty feel that an exposure to more pedagogical strategies for the online classroom would enhance their teaching ability. Ragan (2009) identified six competencies for distance learning professional development: the attitude and philosophy of the faculty member, building community, individual faculty workloads, classroom management techniques, teaching and learning strategies, and technology skills. Ragan's (2009) work suggested that training focused on these six strategies would result in faculty who are effective online teachers and who are confident and comfortable delivering instruction online. As study by Boston, Ice and Gibson (2011) found that new distance learning faculty should be provided a theoretical basis for understanding the online learner and for engaging students in the course.

The majority of faculty teaching distance learning courses has little or no experience as online students. A survey conducted by Betts (2014) found that only 55% of faculty had taken an online course. Roman, Kelsey and Lin (2010) argued that faculty must be immersed in an online course as a student in order to develop positive online

teaching and course management skills. Allowing faculty to experience distance learning

from the student's perspective fosters an enhanced perception of student needs. It also

allows them to experience first-hand the challenges of learning online.

A study by Young and Hoerig (2013) noted that training for online faculty should

also emphasize the need to incorporate lecture materials that allow for a variety of

learning styles. The incorporation of multimodal lecture materials allows for increased

interaction within the course. Young and Hoerig (2013) noted "students do not want

classes where they are left on their own with little interaction with classmates" (p. 451).

Training for online faculty members should include clear guidelines for developing

community in the online classroom for both faculty and students (Boston, Ice, & Gibson,

2011).

Professional development for distance learning should not be a one-time event.

Faculty should receive continual training creating and facilitating of online courses.

According to Vaill and Testori (2012) students are not the only ones in need for ongoing

support. Support services and training for faculty should be ongoing and should include

information on how to access support services. Vaill and Testori (2012) recommend

periodic course checks for new and experienced distance learning faculty. Course checks

are not intended to serve as an official evaluation, but rather to provide support for the

faculty teaching online.

The unique nature of the community college system requires a holistic view on

preparing faculty to teach online. Non-traditional students have unique needs to be

successful in both the traditional and online classroom. Demand for increased distance

learning offerings in the community college system is often driven by a need for increased access for the non-traditional student. As Park and Choi (2009) noted, non-traditional students often do not have a support structure outside the institution and faculty must be prepared to support students beyond instruction. Thus, faculty must have an understanding of the support services available to the online student. As research has noted, preparing faculty to teach online must branch out beyond the initial training. The use of a mentoring program for distance learning faculty has been proven to be an effective means by which to support faculty in their first online course (Green, Alejandro, & Brown, 2009; Hixon, Buckenmeyer, Barczyk, Feldman, & Zamojski, 2011; Meyer, 2014). The use of adjunct faculty is prevalent in the community college system and institutions must understand the unique needs of the adjunct professor. Institutions must also ensure the quality of their distance learning offerings. Each of these factors are important to success and thus considered when researching how to best prepare faculty to teach online.

Mentoring. Literature overwhelmingly supports a mentoring component when preparing faculty to teach online (Green, Alejandro, & Brown, 2009; Hixon, Buckenmeyer, Barczyk, Feldman, & Zamojski, 2011; Huston & Weaver, 2007; Lorenzetti, 2009; Meyer, 2014; Powell, 2010). Mentoring is often seen as a vital component of distance learning faculty development. Research indicates that mentoring programs are closely linked to faculty satisfaction with teaching and are essential to the development of highly skilled distance learning faculty (Dittmar & McCracken, 2012; Green, Alejandro, & Brown, 2009). Vaill and Testori (2012) argue that the inclusion of a

mentoring component in faculty development programs provides faculty with a clear grasp of what instructional practices that work in the distance learning classroom along with those that do not. A mentoring component not only benefits new online faculty, it is also strengthens veteran faculty's skills. As Vaill and Testori (2012) noted, "new instructors learn tips and strategies and learn from the experience of their skilled counterparts, while veteran online faculty are asked to reflect upon their experiences in sharing with new instructors" (p. 116). Roman, Kelsey and Lin (2010) also highlight the importance of mentoring for veteran faculty. Their research found that experienced faculty expanded their repertoire of skill and knowledge of online instruction. A study conducted by Buckenmeyer, Hixon, Barczyk and Feldman (2013) found that the collaborative nature of a mentoring program impacts the extent to which faculty benefit from the training program. The collaborative nature allows them to make changes to their teaching style. Buckenmeyer, Hixon, Barczyk, and Feldman (2013) also noted that faculty who participated in a mentoring program were able to apply the skills learned more broadly.

In their study on professional development, Huston and Weaver's found that eight out of 10 faculty members who participated in professional development activities that utilized a mentoring program were more apt to continue teaching distance learning courses. Huston and Weaver (2007) also found that a mentoring component was an idyllic professional development prospect for existing distance learning faculty. The mentoring program at a Midwest institution defined its outcomes to include ensuring the academic integrity of their online courses by using nationally recognized standard for

assessing the quality of their courses through a peer-review/mentoring process.

Participants of the program were paired with an existing online faculty member outside

of their academic program area to ensure a focus on effective instructional strategies

(Hixon, Buckenmeyer, Barczyk, Feldman, & Zamojski, 2011). The process of utilizing

peer mentoring with faculty from different academic backgrounds ensures the focus on

the pedagogical aspects common to all disciplines (Huston & Weaver, 2007). The

building of community between distance learning faculty is an important aspect of a

mentoring program. It provides a venue in which faculty can share experiences, along

with the ability to discuss and share ideas (Powell, 2010).

There is a significant paradigm shift for faculty who are transitioning from a

traditional classroom to one taught in an online environment. Green, Alejandro, and

Brown's (2009) study focused on the retention of online faculty found that in order to

retain effective online faculty, the institution must strategically plan for the support of its

faculty. A system must be developed to support faculty beyond a single professional

development opportunity. This support system should provide training for first-time

faculty, as well as veteran faculty members. It should provide assistance in instructional

course design and provide mentoring opportunities. Professional development should be

on-going and should expose faculty to the most current trends in distance learning (Fish

& Wickersham, 2009).

Mentoring is an effective means for connection and community building among

faculty. According to Puzziferro and Shelton (2009), "the culture of peer review and peer

mentoring are well aligned with the pedagogical philosophies of online teaching and

learning communities" (p. 6). Research by Meyer (2014) found that distance learning faculty learned best when taught by seasoned faculty members. Through the sharing of experiences, faculty were able to hear and see what other distance learning faculty were doing in their courses. This dialogue provided a level of confidence for new distance learning faculty.

Student Support. Student support is one of the most important component of a distance learning program. Not only do accrediting bodies require a student support structure, research overwhelmingly points to its importance for student success (Park & Choi, 2009; Xu & Jaggars, 2010, 2011, 2013; Young & Hoerig, 2013). A study by Lee, Srinivasan, Trail, Lewis, and Lopez (2011) found that a student's perception of support impacted their satisfaction of the course. If a student perceived that their course was supportive of their individual learning needs, there would be a higher probability that the student would be satisfied with their distance learning experience.

The type of support that is necessary is varied and includes all areas of the institution. Not only is it necessary that a support structure exist, it is extremely important for it to be easy to access. According to Lee, Srinivasan, Trail, Lewis, and Lopez (2011), the problem starts "when students do not know what to do…instructors and instructional designers need to ensure from an early stage of the course that the learner is aware of the type of support available and exactly how to access it and use it" (p. 161). This support is important for both technical support and academic support such as tutoring.

Another important component of distance learning support is the immediacy of the support access. It is vital for a student to believe that a support system is readily available to them (Lee, Srinivasan, Trail, Lewis, & Lopez, 2011). A study by Capra (2014) found that institutions must be conscious of the impact of distance education has on first-time online learners. It is important to understand that first time online students may not fully understand the unique nature of learning online even if they have been advised and oriented to distance learning. The Ohio Learning Network Taskforce (2003) made the following recommendations for student support based on Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles: each online program or course should afford students with clear and concise information on the availability of student support services; students should have distance learning options for advising services, admissions, registration, and financial aid; and that marketing, recruitment and admission materials adequately describe the program and resources available.

Course Development. The current climate of higher education is focused on quality at the course, program, and institutional level. Chancy, et al. (2009) identified key issues that impact the quality of distance learning programs. Institutions must justify their definition of quality and should utilize an inclusive approach to examining their program's needs, along with the needs of their students. Chancy, et al. (2009) also found that guidelines for the structure of online courses impacted student success rates. According to Rovai and Downey (2010), "it is important to design an online course with a clear understanding of how online courses differ from face-to-face courses" (p. 145). Online courses with the lowest success and course completion rates often have been

designed without an understanding of how distance learning courses differ from traditional courses (2010). This highlights the magnitude of continually measuring the effectiveness of online courses. Many institutions have turned to nationally recognized standards for online course evaluations.

Quality Matters (QM) is a nationally accepted standard for the assessment of online courses. Quality Matters utilizes a rubric approach combined with a peer-review process. The QM course rubric includes eight general and 41 specific measures (Quality Matters Program, 2014). Research conducted by Swan, Matthews, Bogle, Boles and Day (2012) found that while there is limited data linking QM to success and course completion that higher grades, increased student interactions are present when the QM rubric is utilized to assess the quality of an online course. Roehrs, Wang and Kendrick (2013) argued that the change necessary for the QM approach to be effective takes time and effort. In contrast, the Community of Inquiry (COI) provides a theoretical framework that allows for synthesis of the transactional issues unique to online courses. The COI expands the QM methodology of course design by including an assessment of the learning process in distance learning courses. The COI uses a survey instrument included elements related to the social presence throughout the course, a faculty member's teaching presence, and the student's cognitive presence (Swan, Matthews, Bogle, Boles, & Day, 2012). Ultimately, success in distance learning is not dependent upon a single assessment tool, but one that is designed through a careful analysis of an institution's distance learning faculty and students.

Institutional Commitment

      In order for distance learning students to be successful, institutions must have the support of their administration. Their support is especially true in the community college system. As Johnson and Berge (2012) noted distance learning provides community college administrators with a new and unique set of challenges. While the challenges are significant, an appropriate support structure will make the transition to the distance learning classroom easier and will help create alternative ways to address the budgeting and space problems that are often found in community colleges. According to Green, Alejandro, and Brown (2009), institution support must include the following: professional development for all experience levels of distance learning faculty, guidance throughout the course development process, and a mentoring component for new distance learning faculty. There is a wide variety of literature on the most effective components of professional development for online faculty. A study by Bailey and Card (2009) identified eight pedagogical practices the foster effective delivery of an online course: the fostering relationships among faculty and other students, engagement in the course material, time management, communication, technology, course organization, flexibility, and high expectations. Bigatel, Ragan, Kennan, May and Redmond (2012) identified similar components: active teaching and learning, administration/leadership, the use of multimedia and other technologies, technological proficiency of the student, and enforcement of course policies. Boling, Hough, Krinsky, Saleem, and Stevens (2012) discovered that courses that designed around text-based content, self-paced learning and that provided limited interactions between students to be inferior to those that formed a

learning community. Still other studies highlight the need for mentoring. According to Barczyk, Buckenmeyer and Feldman (2010), "effective mentoring, as a component of faculty development, enhances teaching and thus the identity of the university" (p. 22). Initiatives such has mentoring components must be support by institutional leadership.

Much of the research indicates that faculty perceives administrative and instructional support to be a critical component in distance learning. A study conducted by Oomen-Early and Murphy (2009) found that faculty perceive there to be no administrative understanding into the time and skills necessary to prepare and manage online courses. Oomen-Early and Murphy (2009) also noted that many faculty feel that there is a lack of pedagogical and instructional support for distance learning faculty. The results of Oomen-Early and Murphy's (2009) study also found that 55% of the faculty involved in the study expressed concern that the current evaluation tool for traditional courses did not relate to the online classroom.

It is important for institutions and its administration to be cognizant of the needs of its distance faculty. According to Maier (2012), it is important for administrators to listen to what distance learning faculty feel they need to be effective and to provide support. Maier's (2012) study identified several strategies for supporting distance learning faculty. Those strategies included: new distance learning faculty orientation, mentoring, the establishment of a distance learning department, promote a campus-wide understanding of distance learning, and sponsor an annual conference for distance learning faculty internally.

Implications

While there is substantial research on how to best prepare students for distance learning courses, there is a gap in research regarding the impact of faculty preparedness on the student success in online courses. Community colleges must ensure that they are supporting its distance learning student and faculty. It is essential that the institution continually assesses the success and retention of its distance learning students and provide a framework for support. While there is a considerable emphasis on support structures for students, support for faculty teaching online courses is often overlooked. Understanding the unique perceptions and experiences of distance learning faculty and students will offer essential evidence for the development of a formal training program for distance learning faculty.

Summary

Distance learning has become a prominent component of community college course offerings; however, the success of students enrolled in distance learning courses is an issue facing community college leaders. The institution in this study has made distance learning critical to the mission of the college. Through its Title III grant, the institution has made important progress in decreasing the gap between the success of distance learning and traditional courses. The institution is now faced with developing a framework of continual support for both its students and faculty.

This section outlined the problem and rationale for exploring how to adequately prepare distance learning faculty at this community college. The conceptual framework outlines sound pedagogical practices for success in the distance learning classroom. The

literature review provided information about the conceptual framework, distance learning at the community college level, success and course completion in distance learning, faculty perceptions, institutional commitment to distance learning, professional development and quality assurance of online courses. I conclude this section with the implications of this study and project.

Section 2 outlines the methodology used for this study. A case study approach was used to provide insight into the instructional strategies used by successful distance learning faculty.   A description of the research site and study participants, along with the types of data collected and the data analysis methods is also provided.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

Between 2006 and 2011, a small community college in the southeast United States participated in a Federal Title III grant that focused on low student completion rates in distance learning courses. During the grant period, faculty were provided extensive professional development related to the design and delivery of online courses. At the end of the grant period, student success rates (grade C or better) increased by 21%. In the years since the grant ended, success rates have steadily declined. The goal of the study is to develop a framework of support that adequately prepares students to complete an online course successfully.

The primary research questions guiding this study were:

1. What are distance learning faculty experiences with professional development for successful course completion in online courses?

2. What are the attributes and teaching practices of effective online instructors that foster successful course completion in online courses?

3. What are the attributes and instructional strategies of instructors that students perceive to be essential to help them complete online courses?

This doctoral project study used a qualitative research design using a case study approach. Two long-standing methods guide the use of a case study approach: those of Stake (1994) and Yin (2009). According to Stake (1994), a "case study is defined by interest in individual cases, not by the methods of inquiry used" (p. 236). Yin (2009) noted that the case study approach is appropriate when research questions require a rich

description of a phenomenon. I chose a case study approach because rich descriptions of

the factors that influence student success are essential to provide a framework for success

in online courses. According to Merriam (2009), if the phenomenon studied is not

intrinsically bound then a case study approach is not appropriate. I confined this study to

one institution between March 2015 through June 2015. Thus, I believe the case study

approach was the best qualitative method for answering the guiding research questions in

this project study.

Qualitative Research Design

According to Creswell (2012), a qualitative design to gather, examine, and

translate data is helpful in providing answers to why and how questions. Participant

interviews can lead to rich data when conducting qualitative research (Yin, 2009).

According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), "interviews can be used in two ways. They may

be the dominant strategy for data collection, or they may be employed in conjunction

with participant observation, document analysis, or other techniques" (p.103). This study

used participant interviews combined with observations of online course records.

Combining interview and observation data allowed for rich descriptions using the

participants' own words.

Interviews are an important component in qualitative research. Interviews with

specific individuals or groups provide the researcher with rich information that is specific

to the location studied (Creswell, 2012). The use of open-ended interview questions

allows the participants to share their experiences in their own words. Open-ended

interview questions provided data based on the participant's perceptions of the

phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2012; Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). The

phenomenon studied was distance learning faculty experiences with professional

development for successful course completion.   I used one-on-one, open-ended

interviews with distance learning faculty and students.

 Observations related to the qualitative study's research questions are a common

method of gathering data in qualitative research. According to Creswell (2012), the use of

observations allows the researcher to take on different roles during the process of data

collection. Creswell (2012) noted that observations allow researchers to "record

information as it occurs in a setting, to study actual behavior" (p. 213). I included the

observation of online course records. Unlike classroom observations, online course

observations require the researcher to observe course behavior by observing past online

course records. Distance learning courses provided information on online course

instruction and also provided insight into the interactions that took place between the

instructor and students.

Research Design Justification

 I considered an exploratory mixed-methods design for this study. According to

Hesse-Biber (2010), an exploratory design allows the testing of the theory generated from

the qualitative phase in a second quantitative phase. Creswell and Clark (2011) noted that

research studies are suited for a mixed-methods design when one of the following is true:

(a) when one data source is not enough, (b) the findings need to be explained, (c) the

results need to be generalized, (d) an additional method is needed to enhance the initial

method, a theoretical stance needs to be used, or (f) the research objective is best

addressed with multiple phases. According to Creswell and Clark's (2011) criteria for a mixed-methods design, this research study did not justify a mixed-methods approach. In this study, there were sufficient data sources to triangulate the results, and the results do not need to be generalized to the population outside of this specific case.

I considered other qualitative approaches, but they were not appropriate for this study. An ethnographic approach requires interaction with the participants studied over an extended period. Merriam (2009) went on to explain that an ethnographic study focuses on the culture of an individual society and explores the beliefs and values of that society. Therefore, I did not consider an ethnographic design (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). As Merriam (2009) noted, the result of a grounded theory approach is the development of a new theory grounded in the data. I did not consider a grounded theory because I did not plan to develop a new theory.

I also considered an intrinsic case study. According to Hancock and Algozzine (2006), researchers use an intrinsic approach when they wish to gain an understanding of a particular individual, group, event, or organization. Merriam (2009) went on to explain that an "intrinsic case study is undertaken when the research is interested in the particular case itself" (p. 48). While this study focuses on a particular institution (the case), the purpose is to use the results to improve course completion rates in online courses. With that in mind, an intrinsic case study was not the most effective approach for this study. Given the purpose and intent of the proposed research, a qualitative method with a case study approach is most appropriate for this study.

Research Setting

The setting for this study was a small community college in the southeast United States, referred to as ABC Community College. During the 2013 – 2014 academic year, this institution had a full-time equivalency (FTE) of 1,524 with 42% of the student population attending on a full-time basis. This community college serves a multigenerational population, with 47% of the students over the age of 24. Student enrollment for the 2013 – 2014 academic year was 81% Caucasian and 10% African American. The institution does not market any of their programs in an online format; however, the institution has provided distance learning offerings with 51% of all students taking at least one online class in 2013.

Participants

Criteria and Number of Participants

For this study, I selected two samples of participants: distance learning faculty and distance learning students. In the first sample, I identified faculty members who had more than 10 years of experience teaching in online classrooms. I selected the second sample from students who had successfully completed at least one online course with a C or better. I took both samples from ABC Community College in the southeast United States.

Faculty Sample. I selected a sample of 10 faculty for this study through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling allows the researcher to gain rich information of the phenomenon studied by selecting participants who can best provide a detailed understanding (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) also noted that by purposefully

selecting participants, a sample will be created that is best suited to help the researcher understand the phenomenon and impart answers to the research questions. To select a faculty sample that reflected the diverse program areas of this institution, I used maximal variation to ensure that participating faculty were representative of each of the institution's program areas. Creswell (2012) further explained that maximum variation sampling is a type of purposeful sampling by which the researcher selects participants with different traits or characteristics. The institution has three divisions: Associate in Applied Science, Health Sciences, and Arts and Sciences. Forty-three percent of the faculty are in the Associate of Applied Science Division. Twenty-eight percent of the faculty are in the Health Sciences Division and 29% in Arts and Sciences. I used these same percentages to purposely select the sample, and discovered that none of the distance learning faculty in the health sciences division had more than seven years teaching experience online. I selected the same sample for faculty using the following criteria: faculty must be currently teaching online, and faculty must have taught online for at least 10 years (seven years for health science faculty). The criteria selected ensured that faculty participants had considerable experience teaching in the online classroom and provided experiences representative of the many programs offered at this institution.

Student Sample. I also selected a sample of seven current distance learning students. I selected the purposeful sample of distance learning students using the following criteria: the student was at least 18 years of age, was currently enrolled in the institution, and had successfully completed at least one online course within the last two years. Purposeful sampling was also appropriate for the student sample because students

who had successfully completed an online course had an understanding of the support

necessary for successful course completion.

Sample Size. The size of a sample can vary and is dictated by the questions

asked, the resources available, and the data needed (Merriam, 2009). According to

Creswell (2012), the purpose of qualitative research is to provide an in-depth

understanding into a specific site through the eyes of individuals within that organization

and researchers should strive for saturation when considering a sample's size. A study

conducted by Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) found that saturation typically occurs

within the first 12 interviews. As the interview process evolved, the participants repeated

the same ideas and experiences. I considered the data collection and analysis saturated

when the participants no longer provided new themes. Saturation was achieved after 10

interviews with faculty participants and after seven interviews with students. A total of

17 participant interviews were conducted.

Participant Access and Protection

ABC Community College does not have a local IRB process and permission to

conduct research at the institution is granted by the institution's administration. The Vice

President of Instruction and Student Support/Chief Academic Officer granted permission

to conduct research at this institution. I met with the Vice President of Instruction and

Student Support/Chief Academic Officer on January 29, 2015. During this meeting, we

discussed in detail the proposed research and the institution's role in the research process.

Also, I provided her with a one-page summary of the proposed study. I obtained a Letter

of Cooperation from the Vice President of Instruction and Student Support/Chief

Academic Officer on January 30, 2015, before actively conducting research (see

Appendix B).

Once I received permission, I sent an email invitation to each of the division

directors at the institution (see Appendix C). I provided detailed information about the

study, criteria for selecting faculty participants and expectations for their participation.

The division directors requested that I forward the invitation to directly to faculty within

their division who met the criteria for the purposeful sample. For distance learning

students, I sent an email (see Appendix D) to the director of the distance learning

department. I provided a detailed overview of this study, criteria for the selection of

student participants and expectations for their participation. The director of the distance

learning department forwarded the invitation to students currently enrolled at the

institution who met the selection criteria outlined in the Participants section. I asked

students who were interested in participating to email me directly.

I held an informational meeting for faculty interested in participating in this study

on March 11, 2015. I held a separate informational meeting for students interested in

participating on April 9, 2015. I provided an informed consent form to both faculty and

student participants during the meetings (see Appendices E & F). I outlined in the letter

the nature of this research study and included the steps taken to ensure the confidentiality

of each participant's contributions. The consent form also included a detailed overview of

the planned use of the data collected in this study.

According to Creswell (2012), research provides us with insight into the lives and

experiences of participants, but it is critical that individuals remain anonymous. I

identified all data sources using an alphanumeric system a letter followed by a number as follows: (a) faculty interview codes began with "F," (b) student interview codes began with "S," and (c) observations began with "O." For example, faculty were coded F1, F2, and so forth; likewise, students and observations followed suit. The electronic audio and transcripts files, as well as printed copies of the transcripts, were identified only by the alphanumeric system outline above. The LMS where the online course records are stored has a feature that displays student names anonymously. This feature was used when access was granted; thus, I identified the faculty member teaching the course, but actual student names were not provided. During the data collection phase, I kept all related materials in a locked cabinet in my campus office. I will shred all written and printed documents and delete all audio recordings after five years.

Researcher-Participant Working Relationship

A good working relationship between the researcher and the participants is critical for a successful study (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010). To gain the trust of the participants, I was transparent about the purpose and intent of my research. I invited potential participants to an informational meeting. I held separate informational meetings for student and faculty participants. During the informational meetings, I provided an overview of the study, along with the estimated time required. I provided participants with an informed consent form that outlined the goals of the research, the time required and participant's rights. I asked participants to email me if they were interested in participating and asked them to bring the signed consent form to the interview. I also provided participants with my contact information and informed them that they could

contact me at any point if they had concerns or issues related to my research. In my role as a researcher, I ensured that participants understood that the purpose of the interviews was to garner an accurate understanding what attributes and teaching practices influence successful course completion in online course and to understand faculty experiences with professional development for successful course completion in online courses.

Data Collection

In this section a detailed view of the data collections for this study is presented. As Stake (1995) noted, data collection requires the researcher to identify quality data sources and to analyze those data with their own eyes and interpretations. Merriam (2009) used a simplified approach for data collection, noting, "data collection is about asking, watching, and reviewing" (p. 85). A study's research questions should guide data collection. The research questions evolved out of the literature reviewed for this study. Also, the participants selected for this study were intentionally selected to provide insight into the factors that influence successful course completion in online courses.

Data Sources

Three sets of data were used for this study. I collected the first set of data through interviews with distance learning faculty. I collected the second set of data through interviews with current distance learning students. I collected the final set of data through the observation of online course records. Below are descriptions of each dataset.

Faculty Interviews. I gathered data from one-on-one, open-ended interviews with faculty who had experience teaching in the online classroom. According to Creswell

and Planko (2011), "a qualitative interview occurs when researchers ask one or more participants general, open-ended questions and record their answers" (p. 217). The purpose of the interviews was to provide insight into instructional strategies necessary to promote successful course completion in the online classroom. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. The interviews were held in one of the private meeting spaces on campus to prevent distraction and to allow the participants to be comfortable in their surroundings. I recorded all interviews using an electronic recording device. An interview protocol (see Appendix G) was be used to record essential data during each interview. I used the protocol to ensure consistency in the questions that I asked. I aligned the questions for the faculty interview protocol with each of Chickering and Gamson's (1987) principles. I transcribed each interview immediately after the interview and provided each participant with a copy of their transcript. I stored the electronic files in a password protected file on my computer.

   Student interviews. I also collected data from current distance learning students. The interviews were open-ended and sought to understand what factors students perceived as promoting successful course completion in online courses. The student interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. I held the interviews in the student meeting room in the student center, which is a private meeting space free of distractions and is familiar to the student participants. I recorded all interviews with an electronic recording device. I transcribed each interview immediately after it had taken place and stored the audio file, along with the transcript, in a password protected file on my computer. An interview protocol (see Appendix H) was used to record essential data during each

interview. I used the protocol to ensure consistency in the questions that I asked. The

questions for the student interview protocol focused on the instructional strategies

perceived to foster successful course completion in the online classroom.

  Observations. Observations of online course records were used to help

understand the instructional strategies used in distance learning courses and to provide

insight into how faculty and students interact with each other in the online classroom.

When a course is offered in a distance learning format, this institution is required to keep

a digital record of the instructional practices used, along with faculty and student

interactions. At the end of each semester, the course is preserved for auditing purposes on

the LMS. In essence, I "observed" the course after it had taken place.

  As Creswell (2012) noted, observations yield information concerning participant

behavior as it occurs in a specific setting. To understand the instructional techniques used

in distance learning courses, I conducted observations of the online course records. I

developed an observational protocol (see Appendix I) that I used to record both

descriptive, and reflective field notes for each course observed. According to Creswell

and Planko (2011), the use of descriptive field notes allows the researcher to record a

description of the activities, events and behaviors observed. I used reflective field notes

to record their thoughts and ideas and themes that developed during the observation.

According to Creswell (2012), a nonparticipant observer role will allow a researcher to

watch and record the phenomenon without actively participating. I assumed a

nonparticipant observer role because the unique nature of online course records will not

allow active participation in the course. To gather rich information, I selected a

purposeful sample of courses using the following criteria: faculty must be currently

teaching online, and faculty must have taught online for at least 10 years (seven years for

health science faculty). I chose a sample size of 15 courses to address the diversity of

courses and course content. The institution stores online course records on its LMS, and I

accessed the courses using a username and password provided by the institution.

Data Recording

It is important for researchers to plan for data collection and recording. According

to Creswell (2012), by planning for data collection, the researcher can anticipate potential

issues and bring sensitivity to potential ethical issues that may impact the quality of the

data itself. In this study, recording methods were planned for the interview phases and

online course observations.

Faculty and Student Interviews. During the interview phase of this study, I

used an interview protocol for the recording of participant responses. I electronically

recorded all interviews using an electronic recording device. The interview protocols

provided structure during the interviews and allowed for careful note taking. As Creswell

(2012) noted, an interview protocol is used to provide consistency and increased validity

throughout the interviews by reminding the researcher of the questions asked. Creswell

(2012) suggested using an interview protocol that includes header information such as

date and time, instructions for the interviewer, the interview questions and room for

responses, and a closing statement. I recorded the interviews using an electronic

recording device, and the electronic files were stored in a password protected file on my

computer. I then generated transcripts for each interview. According to Creswell (2012),

the recording of the interviews will ensure a detailed record of the interview. A research journal was used to collect my reflective thoughts throughout the interview process and during the mining of data from the online course records. This process was useful for my understanding of the emerging themes of this study.

Observations. The online course records are secured on the institution's LMS, and I accessed them using a username and password provided by the institution. Each course was verified through the institution's course information system to ensure that the course identification number on the LMS matched the instructor listed on the schedule. I used an observation protocol to record field notes for each of the observations. Each protocol was kept electronically and stored on a password-protected hard drive.

Role of the Researcher

This study took place at my current place of employment where I am entering my 15th year of employment as the CTE High School Liaison and Instructional Technologist. I am also a faculty member in the Computer Information Technologies Department where I teach one course per semester. I also teach distance learning courses at the institution. Before my employment at this institution, I served as the Director of Distance Education for four years at another community college in the southeast United States. I do not hold a supervisory role over potential participants.

I chose this location because of my connection to this institution and a desire to improve what I perceive as a significant variation in faculty professional development. I am concerned about the research questions because I am involved with training faculty to teach in the online classroom. According to Maxwell (2009), acknowledging the

personal goals of a research study can be a potential bias; however, it can also provide valuable data regarding the phenomenon being studied. Ortlipp (2008) also noted that "keeping self-reflective journals is a strategy that can facilitate reflexivity…to examine personal assumptions and goals" (p. 695). Throughout the data collection and analysis process, I used a reflective journal to record my personal thoughts.

Steps were taken to address any potential bias I may have due to my relationship with this institution through the acknowledgment of potential biases. In my role as an instructional technologist, I help faculty develop online coursework. Because of this fact, I had a working relationship with many of the participants. To address this potential bias, I only discussed the proposed study during the interview process. As an instructional technologist and as an online faculty member, I may have preconceived ideas about success in the online classroom. According to Yin (2009), researchers conducting case study research must have an awareness of personal bias created through personal experiences. During the proposed study, I acknowledged any bias I may have had through my experiences associated with distance learning.

Data Analysis and Validation

I conducted a thematic analysis using distance learning faculty and student interviews, along with observations of online course records. The use of inductive analysis allowed me to code and identify themes derived from the raw data (Creswell, 2012). It also allowed me to condense the vast amount of data collected to a manageable amount. According to Merriam (2009), researchers should simultaneously conduct the process of collecting the data while also performing an analysis. I began analyzing the

data as soon as they were collected and continued to analyze the data throughout the duration of the study.

Coding the data gathered in qualitative research is a critical component in making sense of the data collected. Creswell (2012) suggested that data analysis should be conducted through a six-step process: prepare and organize the data, synthesize the data collected, code the data, identify emerging themes, present the findings, and interpret the meaning the themes. I utilized Creswell's (2012) process to analyze the data collected. Figure 1 illustrates the process I used in the analysis of the data.

Faculty Interviews	Student Interviews	Review Interview Data/Field Notes	Online Course Record Observations	Continue to Code Data	Sorted Data by Codes & Assigned Categories
• Recorded Interview • Transcribed within 48 hours • Recorded Field Notes • Read and identifyied topic codes	• Recorded Interview • Transcribed within 48 hours • Recorded Field Notes • Read and identifyied topic codes	• Entered data into codebook • Searched for repeated patterns	• Entered data into codebook	• Identified patterns and emerging themes	• Reported finding

Figure 1. Data analysis process used in this study

Data Coding

DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, and McCulloch (2011) suggested the use of open, axial, and selective coding in qualitative designs and in this study I followed this approach. In open coding, the researcher explores the emerging concepts and then codes each of the emerging themes (Creswell, 2012). During the open coding phase of this study, I explored the meaning of the data I collected. I began the open coding phase of data collection by recording each faculty interview and personally transcribing each interview within 48 hours. I then read each transcript and the associated field notes multiple times

and identified topic codes. Each transcript was read line by line and topic codes were

handwritten in the margins between each line. I then conducted the student interviews

and continued the open coding phase. I used the same process as I did with the faculty

interview. Each interview was recorded and then transcribed within 48 hours. Each

transcript and the associated field notes were read line by line multiple times, and topic

codes were written in the margin between each line.

Upon completion of the student interviews, I began entering the topic codes into a

codebook. DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, and McCulloch (2011) noted that "codebooks are

essential to analyzing qualitative research because they provide a formalized

operationalization of the codes" (p. 138). I used Microsoft Excel to manage the codes

and associated data. The following columns were used in the codebook: topic code,

research question number, raw text data and participant ID. A separate worksheet was

used for faculty and student interviews. As I entered the data into the codebook, I began

to conduct observations of the online course records. During my observations, I created

descriptive and reflective notes using an observation protocol. I also searched for

evidence of the topic codes identified during the faculty and student interviews. The data

collected from the online course record observations was also entered into the codebook

on its own worksheet.

I then explored the themes in more depth through axial coding and identified

connections. According to Creswell (2012), the axial coding process narrows the broad

codes developed during the open coding phase and determines how those codes relate to

each other. During the axial coding phase, I continued to read and reread the contextual

data collected and searched for connections. For example, I classified the data collected into words and phrases that denoted ideas and associations between concepts. I added a column in my codebook to enter the broader codes. I then used selective coding to identify the core themes. During the selective coding phase, I combined related codes into a single code to identify core categories from the data. The identification of patterns required me to translate the common elements found in each of the data sources into a broad theme.

Validity

The validity of a research study should be of utmost importance to the researcher. According to Merriam (2009), "validity and reliability are concerns that can be approached through careful attention to a study's conceptualization and the way in which the data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted, and the way in which the finding are presented" (p. 210). Merriam (2009) went on to describe strategies that will help ensure validity in qualitative research. Of the strategies outlined by Merriam (2009), I used triangulation, transcript reviews and member checks to provide validity to this study.

Researchers, in identifying their personal biases and identifying potential misunderstandings of what was observed, use member checking. According to Maxwell (2005), member checking "is the single most important way of ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and do and the perspective they have on what is going on" (as cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 217). After all data were collected, I emailed each participant an Excel worksheet that provided their statements, along with the codes that I assigned. I asked each participant to review my interpretation

of the data collected to ensure it provided an accurate reflection of their experiences. This process confines the trustworthiness of the data in this study.

Discrepant Cases

In qualitative research, participants provide data of how they perceive the phenomenon studied. According to Maxwell (2004), "identifying and analyzing discrepant data and negative cases is a key part of the logic of validity testing in qualitative research" (p. 112). The use of open-ended interview questions may allow for information that is not pertinent to the question or data that are not an accurate account. As Maxwell (2004) noted, researchers should analyze both corroborating and discrepant data. The findings are presented as the participants provided them and readers are allowed to come to their own conclusions.

<div align="center">

Findings

</div>

This section contains the findings of this research study. The stated research questions guided the analysis and the interview questions used in this research were derived from the research questions for this study. The results evolved out of interviews with both distance learning faculty and students and were triangulated with the observations of online course records. Four central themes evolved from the data collected: preparing faculty to teach online, engaging students in the online classroom, course design and delivery, and supporting distance learning students. There was considerable overlap of the patterns, codes and themes that evolved out of the data collected for each research question and thus, I will present my findings organized by themes.

Theme 1: Preparing Faculty to Teach Online

New distance learning faculty at ABC Community College are required to attend

training specifically for new online faculty. During the interview process, the faculty

participants discussed the preparation they received before and while teaching online

courses. Four categories evolved from the responses given by the faculty participants:

professional development, design and delivery of professional development, challenges,

and faculty experience (see Table 2).

Table 2

Theme 1 Preparing Faculty to Teach Online

Category	Responses
Professional development	Internal professional development (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F10)
	Distance learning boot camp (F2, F3, F9)
	Sharing online experiences (F1, F5, F7, F8, F10)
	External professional development (F2, F3, F4)
Design and delivery of professional development	LMS (F1, F7, F10)
	Hands-on sessions (F2, F6, F9, F10)
	Faculty credentials (F1, F2, F4, F5, F6, F7, F9, F10)
Challenges	Student interaction (F2, F4, F5, F6, F8, F9, F10)
	Faculty workload (F1, F2, F4, F7, F8, F10)
	LMS updates (F2, F4, F5, F7)
Faculty experience	Experience with distance learning (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F10)

Professional Development. I asked the faculty participants to describe the types

of distance learning professional development that they had attended and to describe the

format of the trainings. All faculty participants indicated that they relied on the

institution's distance learning department for distance learning related professional

development. A wide variety of internal professional development topics were described

by the faculty participants; however, three faculty participants (F2, F3 and F9) provided

in-depth descriptions of their experiences with the Distance Learning Bootcamp. The

Distance Learning Boot Camp was a year-long professional development opportunity that

guided a cohort of faculty through the course design and delivery process. During the

year, faculty completed monthly journals of their experiences and met at least once a

month to share their experiences with other participants. Throughout the boot camp

experience, faculty were exposed to both the technical and pedagogical aspects of

teaching online. During the training, faculty learned how to design and deliver a course

online.

Since the grant ended, distance learning opportunities have shifted away from the

year-long boot camp approach to short one to two hour sessions focusing on a single

topic. Training records from the institution show that the majority of the sessions offered

focus on using the LMS. In 2014, 96.2% of the professional development sessions

offered by ABC Community College related to the LMS. The remainder of the sessions

presented pedagogical topics such as active teaching in the online classroom. The single-

session format currently offered does not offer faculty the opportunity to share their

personal experiences in the online classroom and is typically offered in a lecture format.

While faculty first looked at internal resources for professional development

related to distance learning, they also felt that external professional development was

critical to their success in the online classroom. Participating in statewide professional

development opportunities allowed them to connect with others throughout the state and

within their subject area. This allowed faculty to see how other instructors design and deliver similar courses online. In addition to statewide trainings, faculty also turned to their program-specific professional organizations for professional development. Faculty found that attendance at program-specific conferences or trainings allowed them to share best-practices in their subject area and identify instructional resources that were effective in the online classroom. Faculty also found that sharing challenges unique to their subject area and allowed them to find different approaches to solving the problems presented.

Design and delivery of professional development. The primary focus of training for new distance learning faculty was using the institution's LMS. Faculty were taught how to create content in the LMS and how to structure the design to facilitate ease-of-use. The topics were offered in short, one to two hour sessions and were typically offered in a hands-on, computer lab setting. This allowed faculty to apply what they had learned to their current online courses. Faculty felt this was a critical aspect of the delivery of technology laden sessions. In F10's words, "[I struggled with] just learning Moodle…I learn better by just freaking doing it…Just let me go play with it." Faculty participants stressed the importance of using a hands-on approach to teaching technology laden topics.

Faculty experiences with training topics differed between those participants who held an education degree and those whose degree was in their teaching area. Eight of the 10 faculty participants held a degree in their subject area and had not completed any education courses as part of their undergraduate or graduate coursework. All eight

participants who had not been exposed to education coursework felt overwhelmed by pedagogical-based training topics. F7 shared:

> I've never had an education course in my life. The only courses I have had have been in the subject matter type of thing…we have had some, very little, professional development about learning styles or whatnot. You can't teach me what is taught in an education degree in a two-hour seminar on a Friday afternoon.

Challenges. Faculty participants discussed the unique challenges they face teaching courses in an online format. Faculty cited faculty workload, reaching poor performing students, and changes to the LMS as challenges. The majority of faculty indicated that student interaction was the most difficult part of teaching online. Seven out of 10 faculty participants reported student interaction as the most difficult challenge they faced. In F8's own words, "Teaching online, not having direct student interaction, for me [is a challenge]." While many aspects of interactions were shared, a lack of nonverbal communication appeared to present the most significant challenge for faculty. F9 shared, "I'm really a people person…I like to see [their eyes], that's the personal side of it. The difficult side is…not being able to see the light bulb come on for that student." Faculty also revealed that a lack of non-verbal communication impacted how their text-based communication with students was interpreted. F10 shared:

> It's very difficult to get tone in emails and texts. If you are like me, and you're answering 200 emails a day, you're typically not being short, but you're just being efficient. You answer a question. If it's a yes/no question, you answer

yes/no and you move on. Students, since you don't know them on a personal

level, you never meet them face-to-face, very often the interactions seem, I don't

know…like you're being unfeeling or uncaring.

Faculty workload was also cited as a challenge facing online faculty. Faculty

discussed the different aspects of faculty workload, including class size and additional

duties that posed significant challenges while preparing and teaching online. Four

participants cited class size as a significant challenge. The issue of class size appears to

be a challenge unique to faculty teaching liberal arts courses. Each of the four

participants listed class size as a challenge teach liberal arts courses. F10 shared, "In [our

subject area] our course load will consist of at least five or six courses with 25-30

students in each section. At the institution studied, faculty in health or applied science

programs teach fewer classes due to the number of contact hours." While the number of

seats available in a course is consistent with program areas (25 to 30 students), the

number of contact hours found in liberal arts versus health and applied science course is

less than course in other disciplines. The majority of liberal arts courses have contact

hours ranging from three to five hours. In contrast, health and applied science courses

have anywhere from four to 15 contact hours. ABC Community College requires that all

faculty carry a workload of 18 to 21 contact hours.   On average, liberal arts faculty teach

two to three more courses than faculty in health and applied science programs. The

increased number of courses means that liberal arts faculty serve 50 to 75 more students

in a semester than their health and applied science counterparts.

In addition to class size, faculty also reported that the number of additional duties beyond teaching posed a challenge. Six of the 10 faculty participants indicated that they lead instructors or program chairs and thus were assigned additional duties outside of their teaching load. F4 reported, "When I am not tied to a specific day or time to be in the classroom with the duties that I am actually responsible for, I have the ability to be more flexible [with my other duties]." Faculty also voiced concern that they were assigned online courses as a way to clear time in their schedule to accommodate responsibilities requiring a physical presence.

Updates to the LMS were also named as a challenge facing online faculty. Multiple faculty members indicated that staying abreast of the many changes to the LMS was a challenge. According to information provided at the institution, the LMS used is under contract at the state level. The terms of the contract state that colleges cannot be more than one version away from the most recent LMS version available. As a result, colleges must upgrade their LMS one to two times each year. F7 reported, "The [LMS] that we happen to use seems to have a lot of updates, which in a way that's good. It's always in a continuous state of flux. We don't just like boom, learn it." Faculty also felt that updates to the LMS presented challenges to their students. Faculty reported that changes in the LMS often impacted how students submit coursework and interact within discussion boards.

Faculty experiences. In addition to formal training before teaching online, faculty indicated that personal experience as a student in a distance learning course helped prepare them to successfully teach online. All faculty participants emphasized the

importance of faculty having prior experience with distance learning from the student

perspective. F1's response provides insight into its importance:

> Most of my understanding of the way to teach in an online setting comes from my
>
> experiences as an online student. That is where I benefitted the most. In fact, I
>
> stayed away from teaching online until I personally had taken an online course…I
>
> really think the strongest influence was myself taking graduate level online
>
> courses.

Faculty also indicated that completing the required new online faculty training in a

distance learning format provided them with first-hand experience with the challenges

students may face in an online course.

Theme 2: Engaging Students in the Online Classroom

Faculty were asked how they promoted interaction in the online classes, while

students were asked to describe the types of interactions they experienced when taking

online courses. The focus of theme two is faculty and student interactions and how

interaction influences engagement in an online course. Four categories emerged with this

theme: interactions, asynchronous versus synchronous exchanges, encouraging

interactions, and building community. Table 3 shows the categories and responses given

by the participants.

Table 3

Theme 2 Engaging Students in the Online Classroom

Category	Responses
Interactions	Use of discussion boards (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F10, S1, S2, S4, S5, S6, S7) Instructor presence (S1, S4, S5, S6) Discussion board prompts (F1, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F10, S1, S2, S4, S5, S6, S7)
Asynchronous versus synchronous exchanges	Synchronous tools (F4, F7, F10, S1, S2) Need for interaction (F5, F8, S2) Challenges (F5, F8, S1, S4)
Encouraging interactions	Importance (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7, F8, F9, F10) Group projects (F3, F9) Discussion board grading rubrics (F1, F5, F7, F8, S1, S5, S6
Building community	Difficulty building a sense of community (F2, F4, F8, F9, F10, S3)

Interactions. I asked faculty to describe how they encouraged interaction in their

online classroom. All 10 participants specified that they used discussion boards to

promote interaction in their courses. While 100% of the participants said they used

discussion boards, the observations of the online course records did not substantiate this

claim. Only six of the 15 courses observed contained discussion boards. The lack of

discussion boards observed may be related to the fact that faculty struggle with

developing and facilitating online discussion boards. Seven of the faculty participants

indicated that the use of discussion boards was something with which they struggle.

While the observations found little evidence of discussion boards in the participant's

courses, faculty discussed the variety of ways they use discussion boards in their courses.

Discussion boards were categorized into two types: frequently asked question (FAQ) boards and weekly discussion topics.

Faculty found that the use of FAQ discussion boards not only encouraged faculty-to-student interaction, it also increased student-to-student interaction by allowing students to respond and share their understanding of the topics presented. F2 shared, "[In an FAQ], other students can answer the question or I will go back and answer them…sometimes another student might know the answer and there's no need in waiting for me to get out of [class to] answer [the question]." The observation of online course records provided evidence that substantiated faculty descriptions of FAQ discussion boards. In observations O2, O9, O10, and O12, evidence of FAQ discussion boards was found. In each of the FAQ discussion boards, both the instructor and the students in the course answered questions. Each course used the FAQ discussion board extensively throughout the duration course with each FAQ containing more than 50 posts spread throughout all 16 weeks of the course.

Student participants were also asked to describe the interactions they had with their online faculty and classmates. The students also declared that discussion boards were the primary tool for interactions; however, students revealed that the faculty member's participation in a discussion board was essential to their success. Students felt that instructor participation enhanced the conversation and led to increased discussions. Students also felt that instructor participation in discussion boards increased the quality of student participation and encouraged them to dig deeper into the subject matter.

Students perceive a lack of instructor participation in discussion boards as a lack of

instruction. S5 shared, "[A lack of instructor participation] is frustrating because you feel

as though you're not learning anything." Observations of the online course records

substantiated the students' experiences. As indicated in Table 4, evidence of faculty

participation in course discussion boards was only found in six of 15 courses observed.

Six courses contained discussion boards; however, the faculty member did not participate

in the discussion. Three courses did not contain discussion boards.

Table 4

Discussion Board Interaction and Prompt Type

Observation ID	Participation	Prompt Type
O1	Discussion boards not present in the course	N/A
O2	Faculty participation	Question and answer
O3	Discussion boards not present in the course	N/A
O4	Faculty participation	Peer review
O5	No faculty participation	Case study
O6	No faculty participation	Opinion
O7	No faculty participation	Case study
O8	No faculty participation	Question and answer
O9	Faculty participation	Case study
O10	Faculty participation	Question and answer
O11	Discussion boards not present in the course	N/A
O12	Faculty participation	Case study
O13	No faculty participation	Internet search and report
O14	No faculty participation	Question and answer
O15	Faculty participation	Internet search and report

Discussion board prompts. Faculty participants emphasized the importance of a

strong discussion board prompts. The participants described the types of discussion

prompts used in their online courses, along with the level of interaction that occurred

within each type. The responses were categorized into five types: question and answer,

peer review, opinion, internet search and report, and case studies. The majority of faculty

specified that the type of prompt had a direct impact on the number and quality of posts.

F6 shared:

> I always incorporate case studies into my discussion boards so people have a way
>
> to voice their opinion and a way to…I find that they interact more. Like you can
>
> always see a case study from a different…perspective. So to me it simulates
>
> conversation as opposed to pat answers.

Four of the 10 faculty participants said that they found that prompts involving a case

study provided the most interaction.

Student participants also shared their experiences with discussion boards and how

they were used in their courses. Students need to see the relevance of a discussion board

and how it relates to the topic. When students were unable to ascertain the purpose of a

discussion board, they felt that it was busy work used for attendance purposes. S1

reported, "Some of the discussion boards, I know they use them to keep you in contact,

but I think they are just useless." Three students responded that they did not understand

the purpose or see the relevance of the discussion.

Students also felt that discussions in online courses did not provide the same

experience as discussions in face-to-face courses. S1 reported, "[In a seated class]

somebody would…bring up something about whatever we were discussing and

everybody would give their input and [the instructor] would actually let us sit there and

talk about it but…the discussion boards are not even really the same thing." Students

indicated that these feelings were exasperated by the responses given by faculty. In face-

to-face courses, students felt that faculty interaction and feedback was provided to the class as a whole. In online classes, students felt that faculty feedback was often directed to an individual student and did not help student frame the discussion in the context of the lesson. S2 shared:

> The comments that you do get back on the discussion boards are directed at you instead of the group. They're each one, like focused on that particular person, what they said, not in relationship to the whole class but it's usually just related to your comment. Again, when you have a classroom setting, you'll have interaction and then the teacher can come forth and say how it all melts together or doesn't.

The discussion board prompts observed substantiated faculty participants' descriptions of the types of prompts they used in their courses. Evidence was also found in the observations to substantiate the student perception that faculty responses were directed at specific individuals and not the class as a whole. Five of the six faculty participants who had a presence in their discussion boards directed their comments towards individual students. In O15 the faculty member responded, "[Student's name], I agree with you…" In O12 the instructor posted, "[Student's name], I am delighted to learn …" These types of faculty responses were consistently found in O2, O4, O10, O12 and O15. O9 was the only course that included evidence that the faculty member directed their responses to the class versus individual students. The observation of O9 provided evidence of faculty input that relates the students' response to the topic:

Good example. In your description, if a relational database were being used, these would be two tables within a database and not two separate databases. As we move forward, this illustrates the power of a relational database management system vs. a flat database structure.

While it is difficult to be certain that the instructor's comments were directed to the entire class, the faculty member appeared to make consistently responses that revolved around the lesson versus individual student responses.

Asynchronous versus synchronous interactions. As part of their discussions regarding interactions, both faculty and student participants shared experiences with both asynchronous versus synchronous opportunities.   Three faculty participants revealed that they had used synchronous tools in their online courses in the past, but had not continued to do so. Since online courses at ABC Community College are marketed as asynchronous courses, students are not required to be online at a designed time. F7 shared, "out of all the years I've offered [synchronous sessions], I only had one student take me up on it." The faculty who had attempted to use synchronous tools ceased using synchronous tools because students were unable or unwilling to participate.

Students shared that they had not been offered opportunities for synchronous communication in their online classes; however, three students participants expressed a desire to have synchronous exchanges in their online classes, specifically through chat sessions. The student's desire for synchronous opportunities appears to be a result of the desire for human interaction. S1 shared, "I think they should have it setup to where you come in at least once every two weeks, three weeks and sit down and talk…about your

class even if it's only for 30 minutes." When talking about synchronous opportunities in online courses, students viewed face-to-face interactions as a synchronous exchange.

Encouraging interaction.   Nine of the 10 faculty participants indicated that that it was critical for students to interact with each other, the course content and their instructor; however, all nine declared that they struggled with promoting interaction in their online courses. When asked how they encouraged interaction, faculty shared that they use discussion boards, group projects, or they did not encourage student-to-student interactions. The discussion board was the primary mechanism for promoting student-to-student interaction, with seven faculty participants stating that they used discussion boards to encourage student-to-student interaction. Two faculty members relied on group projects, and one faculty member did not feel student-to-student interaction was necessary.

Discussion boards were the primary mechanism for encouraging student-to-student interaction; however, faculty did not feel that they provided meaningful exchanges. In F5's words, "That's one of the issues with online. It's tough to truly get that same level of interaction." Faculty revealed that student participation in discussion boards was minimal and limited to the minimum requirements to get credit for the assignment. F7 shared, "Students only do the bare minimum to get credit for the discussion board. If you tell them to post and reply to two classmates, then that is all you are going to get." When asked how they graded discussion boards, the majority of faculty indicated that they used a discussion board rubric that requires the student to make an initial post and then reply to a specific number of classmates. Even though the

majority of faculty used discussion boards in their course, they did not feel that discussion boards provided students with the same experience as a face-to-face discussion.

Three faculty members shared that they only use discussion boards because they are easy to implement. Faculty expressed a desire to find other tools that successfully promoted interactions. In F8's words:

> I've tried the glossary but that didn't turn out to be as much of an interaction piece as I expected it would be…I would like to do chatting but we've been kind of discouraged from doing chatting. We've been told that because it's an online class, we can't require students to be at a certain place at a certain time to hold a chat. So I think that's a piece that would be nice to include if we could.

Faculty also revealed that they only use discussion boards because ABC Community College requires their use in online course. While ABC Community College does require activities that promote interaction, the guidelines do not specify the use of discussion boards.

Two faculty members used group projects to facilitate interaction in their course. While only two faculty indicated that they currently use group projects, nine participants shared that they had attempted to use group project in the past. All nine participants shared that they found it difficult to get students to work together. Faculty who had successfully used group projects revealed that the use group projects required a significant time investment on the part of instructors. Faculty also shared that a group size of two to three students was easier to facilitate.

Two faculty indicated that they did not feel that interaction in online courses was necessary. F10 shared, "When people take online courses, a lot of them don't like to do discussions. They want to do the work alone." The faculty not requiring interaction felt that it was more important for students to interact with the content and the instructor than it was with each other.

When asked to describe the interactions students had with their classmates, all but one student participant specified that discussion boards were used for student-to-student interaction. Participants also indicated that interaction within discussion boards was limited and did not provide the same experience as a discussion in a face-to-face course. S1 stated, "[online classes are] more of an independent study. We had to write about [a topic] and just respond, so there is really no interaction." S2 declared that the discussion board was not comparable to face-to-face interactions, "it's not like sitting in a class and having a discussion." Students also expressed frustration with discussion boards and suggested that many students wait until the last minute to participate. Students also indicated that they did not return to the discussion board once they made their post and the required number of replies.

Students expressed frustration with the post and reply format found in most discussion boards. S5 shared, "It's frustrating when you go to complete your discussion assignment and everyone waits until the last minute to do the assignment. I complete my assignments early in the week and I often do not have anyone to reply to." Two students indicated that they had a faculty member that gave two due dates for discussion boards. One for the initial post and a second due date for replies. Students said that this method

worked better; however, the discussions still did not mirror discussions in their face-to-face courses.

The observations of the online course records provided evidence that the majority of faculty require students to post and then reply to a specific number of classmates. Of the 13 courses containing discussion boards, 10 faculty provided instructions requiring students to post and reply. Three of the courses contained a detailed rubric outlining how the discussion board would be graded. I randomly selected one discussion board in each course that used a post and reply format and noted the number of students who participated beyond the required replies. The observations seemed to substantiate the students' perception that discussion boards did not provide the same experience as a face-to-face discussion (see Table 5).

Table 5

Discussion Board Instructions

Observation ID	Discussion Board Instructions	Number of Students Who Posted More than Required
O1	Post and reply	3 of 15
O2	Post and reply	5 of 23
O3	Discussion boards not present in the course	N/A
O4	Rubric	N/A
O5	Post and reply	2 of 21
O6	Post and reply	0 of 10
O7	Post and reply	0 of 13
O8	Post and reply	7 of 12
O9	Rubric	N/A
O10	Post and reply	9 of 11
O11	Discussion boards not present in the course	N/A
O12	Post and reply	5 of 19
O13	Post and reply	3 of 27
O14	Post and reply	8 of 16
O15	Rubric	N/A

Sense of community. I asked each of the faculty participants to explain how they facilitated a sense of community within their online classroom. Faculty expressed that they do not feel a sense of community in their online classes. F8 explained, "I don't feel a sense of community so I doubt that [students] do. I do feel frustrated about that." Five faculty participants indicated that they found it difficult to create a sense of community in their online courses. Faculty felt that the lack of interactive tools within the LMS and the asynchronous nature of online courses were to blame for a lack of community. Two faculty members did not feel that a sense of community was possible or necessary in an online course. In F7's words:

I don't [create a sense of community] and I don't care. If you want that, then come to class. I can't wave a magic wand. In a perfect world, yes that would be wonderful, but then we would need to do the video chat thing and we hold a virtual classroom and everybody [would] have a camera, we could see everybody.

Throughout all responses regarding community, faculty referenced the asynchronous nature of online courses as being the most significant barrier to fostering a sense of community in their online courses. Faculty indicated that online students login to their courses one to two times each week and that this practice is a barrier to building community.

While the majority of faculty discussed the challenge of building community, three faculty participants shared how they try to build a sense of community. Faculty shared that it was important for student to feel like they were in a class and that they could rely on each other in the same manner that they do in face-to-face courses. In F10's words:

I would put on [the discussion board], "Anybody interested in forming a study group?"…you'll see students start to like it then they would talk amongst themselves and start forming study groups and so forth…I maybe initiate that, give them maybe an avenue to form their own little learning community so to speak.

When asked about a sense of community in their online classes, student participants also indicated that they did not feel a sense of community in their online classes. When asked about why they did not have a sense of community, the student

participants mirrored the responses given by faculty. Students felt that the asynchronous nature of online courses prevented the opportunity to build community and that it was important that students feel like they are in an actual course. In S1's words, "there has only been once where I felt like I was in a classroom with an actual teacher." Students also felt that the tools in the LMS did not allow them to get to know their classmates like they would in a face-to-face course.

Theme 3: Course Design and Delivery

Theme three focuses on the design and delivery of online instruction. Five categories evolved out of the data collected: feedback, learning styles, active learning, instructional resources, and reaching poor performing students. Table 6 presents the categories and responses collected.

Table 6

Theme 3 Course Design and Delivery

Category	Responses
Feedback	Types of feedback (F1, F2, F5, F6, F8, F9, F10, S1, S2, S4, S6) Rubrics (S1, S2, S4, S5, S6)
Learning styles	Difficulty in addressing (F6, F7, F8) Via multiple learning resources (F1, F3, F4, F10, S1, S2, S3, S4, S6)
Active learning	Defining active learning (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F8, F9) Promoting active learning (F1, F4, F6, F8, F9)
Instructional resources	Optional resources (S1, S6) Study strategies (S1, S2, S5)
Reaching poor performing students	Techniques used to reach poor performing students (F2, F3, F4, F5, F9, 10) Differences between face-to-face and online (F2, F3, F4, F9,

F10)

Feedback. Faculty were asked to describe the types of feedback that they

provided in their online classes. Seven of faculty provided feedback using the feedback

tool found in the LMS; however, faculty expressed concern that the feedback tool did not

allow for feedback beyond comments. Three faculty members provided feedback using a

word processor. F2 responded, "if they submit in Word and I go in and correct it and

make comments and then send them back the documents with the comments on it so they

can read it." During faculty descriptions regarding feedback, two faculty members

expressed a desire to learn how to provide feedback within a word processor.

Faculty also discussed the impact of class size on the frequency and quality of the

feedback they provided. In F7's words, "I give them a grade. Do I write? Do I comment

on each one? No, the sheer volume of the number of students prohibits that…it's

impossible to provide high quality feedback. It isn't going to happen." In situations

where multiple students experienced the same issue, faculty were more likely to provide

feedback directed to the entire class through a course announcement.

Faculty participants perceived informal feedback as an important component of

assessment. Four faculty participants indicated that they provide informal feedback

throughout the duration of the course. Faculty were asked to describe the types of

informal feedback and the majority of faculty asserted that they allowed students to

submit a draft of assignments in advance of the due date for informal feedback. Faculty

that did not provide informal feedback cited class size as the reason for not providing informal feedback.

Faculty felt that it was important to provide students with positive reinforcement when providing feedback. In F3's words, "I always start by finding something good and then I will tell them where I think they could improve and I maybe give them an example and then finish up with something positive that they did." Faculty felt that students in online classes needed positive reinforcement to stay motivated. Two faculty members suggested that this is especially true of older, non-traditional students.

Students were asked to share their perceptions of instructor feedback. The majority of students revealed that they did not receive adequate feedback in their online courses. S1 shared, "the only time I received feedback for anything was on…in Moodle when they posted your grades and they have comments. That is the only time they would give feedback." Students also linked feedback to instructor presence in the course. S6 shared, "sometimes you didn't even know if the instructor was there or not because you never get feedback." Students also voiced frustration at the timeliness of feedback and indicated that the length of time it took to receive feedback varied significantly from instructor-to-instructor. Students felt that the time it took to receive feedback directly impacted learning. S2 shared, "If you've got to wait two or three days, you've already been working on two or three other courses. It's hard to shuffle your brain back to right where it was." Students also felt that the quality of feedback varied significantly from instructor-to-instructor, with some faculty only issuing numerical grades while other provided lengthy, detailed feedback.

While discussing the types of feedback received, multiple student participants referred to the use of rubrics. Five participants provided detailed descriptions of rubrics when asked to describe the types of feedback they received. Students reported that rubrics helped to clarify assignments and emphasized the concepts that were most important. Students also felt that the use of rubrics improved the score they received on an assignment. In S4's words, "rubrics made it so that I could basically go through [the assignment] systematically and make sure I had everything in place to guarantee a hundred." While five students discussed how rubrics were used, two participants did not understand the purpose behind rubrics.

The observations of online course records provided evidence of three platforms for the delivery of feedback: comments via a word processing package, the LMS feedback tool and via course-wide announcement (see Table 7). Nine courses contained evidence of faculty using the LMS feedback tool. The observations of online course records also provided evidence to substantiate students' claim that some faculty did not provide any feedback in their courses. Of the 15 courses observed, five courses did not contain evidence of faculty-generated feedback.

The use of the LMS feedback tool also appeared to limit the depth of the feedback provided and was limited to comments on the overall assignment. The observations of online course records did not produce evidence of substantial feedback being delivered via the LMS feedback too. In contrast, feedback delivered via a word processing program appeared to contain extensive details for how the student could improve. In addition,

faculty provided multiple comments throughout the entire assignment instead of a single statement regarding the overall assignment.

The LMS feedback tool also appeared to be a primary mechanism to reach out to poor performing students. The observation of online course records provided evidence that faculty use the LMS feedback tool to reach out to poor performing students. Evidence of faculty reaching out to students was found in five of the 15 courses.

Table 7

Feedback in Online courses

Observation ID	Feedback Delivery
O1	LMS feedback tool
O2	LMS feedback tool
O3	No feedback was found
O4	LMS feedback tool
	Announcements
O5	LMS feedback tool
	In-line feedback via word processor
O6	No feedback was found
O7	LMS feedback tool
O8	LMS feedback tool
O9	LMS feedback tool
	Announcements
O10	No feedback was found
O11	No feedback was found
O12	LMS feedback tool
	Announcements
O13	LMS feedback tool
O14	Announcements
	In-line feedback via word processor
O15	No feedback was found

Learning Styles. I asked the faculty participants how they addressed the potential for multiple learning styles when they designed an online course. Four participants indicated that they addressed multiple learning styles by providing students

with the information in a variety of different ways. The most common elements used were PowerPoints, outlines and using videos created other on YouTube. Three faculty expressed a desire to generate their own lecture videos; however, the faculty did not possess the skills necessary to do so.

Students were asked to describe the instructional strategies used in their online class. Four of the seven student participants spoke about strategies that supported multiple learning styles. Students felt that instructor-generated resources were the most beneficial to their learning. S6 shared, "My math teacher prepared videos explaining what we did, like how to solve a problem...those were the most beneficial." Students also spoke extensively about publisher generated content with five of the participants indicating that publisher generated material should be used as a supplement to faculty instruction. S2 reported, "[Publisher content] shouldn't be the focus of the course. They should be an add-ons." Students also discussed the importance of optional resources. Students felt that optional resources allowed them to explore a topic beyond the scope of the assignment and allowed for real-world application.

The observations of online course records provided evidence that that faculty turn to textbook publishers for the instructional content in their online classes (see Table 8). Eight of the 15 courses observed relied solely on publisher-generated content to deliver instruction. In six of the 15 courses, instructors required students to purchase an access code that would allow the student to login to a publisher online system that contained a variety of learning resources such as videos and interactive tutorials. In five of the 15 courses instructors provided video or audio lectures that they had created, along with a

wide variety of other resources such as outlines, websites, images and publisher content. While this substantiates both the faculty and student perceptions that multiple instructional resources were provided, it does not provide evidence that instruction was designed that appealed to multiple learning styles.

I asked faculty participants to define active learning in their own words. The majority of faculty provided definitions that referenced the need for students to take responsibility for their own learning. In F3's words, "I feel like [active learning] is when the student is actually playing a role in their own learning because really they have to be responsible themselves." None of the faculty provided definitions that involved action on the part of the faculty member. Two faculty participants were unable to define active learning and indicated that their lack of educational coursework prevented them from defining active learning. Faculty were also asked how they promoted active learning in their online classroom. While a wide-variety of responses were provided, the responses given all referenced the need to provide students with clear guidelines to navigate the online instruction provided and involved providing students with access to resources that appealed to multiple learning styles.

Table 8

Instructional Resources

Observation ID	Type	Creator
O1	Instructional videos PowerPoints Handouts	Instructor-generated Publisher Instructor-generated
O2	Publisher course website	Publisher
O3	PowerPoints Instructional videos	Publisher YouTube
O4	Publisher course website	Publisher
O5	PowerPoints	Publisher
O6	Instructional videos Handouts Publisher course website	Instructor-generated and YouTube Instructor-generated Publisher
O7	PowerPoints Audio lecture Handouts	Publisher Instructor-generated Instructor-generated
O8	PowerPoints	Publisher
O9	Publisher course website	Publisher
O10	PowerPoints	Instructor-generated
O11	Instructional videos PowerPoints	Instructor-generated Publisher
O12	PowerPoints Handouts	Publisher Instructor-generated
O13	Instructional videos	Instructor-generated
O14	Publisher course website Website links Instructional videos	Publisher Various YouTube
O15	Publisher course website	Publisher

Instructional resources. Student participants were asked to describe the instructional strategies used by their online faculty. While student participants felt that instructors provided a wide variety of instructional resources, students indicated that optional resources and suggestions for how to study were the most beneficial. Two students reported that optional class resources were important to their personal success in online courses. Students felt that the use of optional resources allowed them to explore the topics in more depth. Students also suggested that optional resources helped them make real-world connections. The participants also shared that when no optional resources are provided, students can use the internet to explore the topic on their own. Three student participants revealed that that suggestions for studying provided by faculty helped them to succeed in their online courses. S2 reported, "I found it really useful because [the instructor] asked everybody "What's a trick you used to prepare for these classes?" I had my tricks and they had theirs and we've all done better …we had new ideas." Students shared that in addition to helping them study, the strategies suggested often helped them interact with other students in their class.

Reaching poor performing students. During the discussion on providing feedback to students, six faculty participants described the ways they reached out to poor performing students. Faculty participants utilized email, discussion boards, phone calls and the feedback feature of the LMS to make contact with poor performing students. The most common reason for faculty to reach out to a student was a decrease in activity, with six faculty citing it as a reason to reach out. Faculty also reached out to students whose

grades had dropped or who experienced significant difficulty with an individual assignment.

While faculty felt that it was important to reach out to poor performing students, they also expressed frustration in reaching students who were struggling. Faculty felt that distance learning technologies such as email, discussion boards and the feedback feature of the LMS did not always allow them to contact those students. When asked to describe their experiences with reaching out to poor performing students, faculty indicated that this was an important component in supporting online students. F9 shared:

> Most of the time I do see a turnaround [when I reach out to students] because again, some people who take online classes really don't know what they're getting themselves into.

Faculty also felt that this was an effective way to help students succeed.

Faculty also reported that supporting online students requires faculty to change their mindset regarding student support. The asynchronous nature of distance learning requires faculty to be available at times outside of the normal workday. F4 shared, "You have to put aside that it is a 9 am - 5 pm job perception. You have to be willing to answer those emails that come in at 8:30 – 9:30 pm at night." Faculty also shared that providing support outside of the normal workday can increase the hours required to teach online. Faculty revealed that the structure and design of the course can help reduce the number of hours spent supporting online students.

Faculty also indicated that the level of support necessary for online students is different than the support necessary for face-to-face students. Faculty participants felt

that distance learning faculty should proactively reach out to struggling students. F4

shared:

> One of the things I have [had to adjust is] my view that there is a different level of
>
> support that the instructor must be willing to give an online student…An
>
> instructor has to be willing to go that extra step and reach out to the students
>
> versus waiting for them to come to them.

Faculty experiences revealed the importance of maintaining open lines of

communication in online courses and maintaining a presence in the course. F3 shared, "I

think one of the most important things is just staying in touch with [students]. So that

they know you really are there and you are paying attention to what they are doing."

Faculty felt that it was critical that online students see a faculty member's presence in an

online course.

Theme 4: Supporting and Advising Students

During participant interviews, faculty and students described the support

necessary to be successful in the online classroom. Five categories emerged from the

participants' responses: face-to-face services, student readiness for online learning,

student preparation for distance learning, characteristics of online learners and

technology support (see Table 9).

Table 9

Theme 4 Supporting and Advising Students

Category	Responses
Face-to-face services	Face-to-face expectations (S1, S3, S5) Hybrid offerings (S1, S2, S3, S4)
Student readiness for online learning	Community college students (F1, F2, F6, F7, F8) Hybrid Courses (F2, F3, F4, F5, F10) Distance learning orientation (F1, F4, F7, F8) Technology Skills (F6, F7, F10)
Student preparation for distance learning	Advising (S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S7) Distance learning orientation (S1, S2, S7)
Characteristics of Online Learners	Initiative (S3, S5, S7) Time management (S1, S2, S3, S5, S6, S7) Reading and writing skills (S1, S2, S4)
Technology support	Technical expectations (S1, S3, S4, S6) 24-hour helpdesk (S6, S7)

Face-to-face services. Even though student participants took coursework online, students still view the college as a traditional brick and mortar institution and expect to interact with the institution face-to-face. Two student participants indicated that the ability to meet with their instructor face-to-face is why they were willing to take an online course. S5 shared, "I took [an online class] because I knew where his office was. I knew the man. I knew how he operated. That's why I took it…I like face-to-face classes because I can raise my hand and ask a question." Students also believed that the face-to-face new student orientation was a critical part in helping them succeed. S1

reported, "With the [face-to-face] orientation they physically walk you around campus. They talk to you more. They were able to answer your questions more…getting more information." All of the student participants attended the face-to-face new student orientation.

Student participants also preferred hybrid courses over those offered totally online. Students felt that hybrid courses allowed them more flexibility in their schedule while also providing face-to-face opportunities with their instructor and classmates. S2 reported, "The hybrid courses, I think, are much closer to what they should be because you do get one class a week that you can get direct interaction." All seven participants had taken at least one hybrid course.

Student readiness for online learning. Faculty participants also spoke about how increased access to higher education through distance learning presented a challenge in supporting community college students. Five of the 10 participants felt that community college students taking distanced learning courses required more support because of other responsibilities outside of college. Many of the students enrolled in online courses at the community college level work full-time and have family obligations. Faculty participants felt that students took distance learning courses because it is the only way many non-traditional students can fit higher education into their day-to-day responsibilities. Distance learning has provided access to students who have other obligations that would prevent them from accessing higher education; however, faculty felt that students do not understand the time commitment required to successfully complete an online course.

Faculty participants revealed that many online students are not prepared for the expectations found in online courses or understand the time commitment necessary to successfully complete an online course. Faculty also revealed that while students are required to complete a distance learning orientation before taking an online class, only a small number of students actually complete it prior to the start of their first online course.

In additional to requiring students to complete a distance learning orientation, faculty participants felt that students new to online learning should be slowly introduced to distance learning through hybrid courses. Five faculty participants shared their experiences with hybrid courses and felt that hybrid courses allowed students to acquire the skills necessary to successfully navigate an online course.

When asked what they viewed as the greatest benefit of teaching online., all but one faculty participant spoke about benefits to students. Nine of the 10 participants spoke about student benefits, and a wide variety of benefits were presented. The most common benefit cited was flexibility. While faculty expressed concern that students were not prepared for distance learning, faculty viewed online learning as a benefit to students who could not fit face-to-face courses into their schedule. F7 shared:

> Our student, typical student for a community college, are mobile or they're not resident…They have to take time out of their day to do education and distance learning and online learning allows them to do it either before they go to work, afterwards, during lunch, at whatever time on the weekends or whatever to fit into their busy life schedules.

Faculty also felt that students benefitted from distance learning by becoming for self-confident and self-reliant. Faculty felt that students learn to think for themselves through distance learning and students have stronger critical thinking skills after engaging in online courses. In F2's words:

> I think [online classes] kind of encourages [students] to think for themselves a little more than they used to. You know whenever they had a question [in a face-to-face course] they automatically raised their hand and with an online section…they have to think through things a little bit more in order to go ahead with that assignment.

Faculty felt that students who do not have the confidence to speak up in a face-to-face class will share through asynchronous mediums such as discussion boards and chat rooms. F1 shared, "As an instructor, I love teaching online because I hear my student's voices more in an online class." Faculty also believed that the confidence acquired through online learning transition with them to their face-to-face courses.

Student preparation for distance learning. I asked student participants to discuss how they were prepared for their first online course. Six of the seven students indicated that they did not feel prepared for their first online course. While ABC Community College requires students to take a distance learning orientation before enrolling in an online course, three students did not take the orientation course before their first course started. S2 reported, "I was supposed to take some online orientation but I don't think I did. I just didn't know what that meant." Students felt that the

orientation was an important component in preparing for and online class and that once they did take the orientation, they felt more comfortable with taking a course online. All of the student participants meet with an advisor before registering for an online course; however, three students indicated that their advisor did not discuss online learning with them. S1 reported, "I got my schedule put together but they never really talked to me about online versus in class." Two student participants felt that their advisor should have discussed the time commitment that online courses required and how that may impact the course load.

Students were asked to describe the student support services available for online students. All seven student participants indicated that they were not aware of support services specifically for online students. Students did indicate that there were support services in a face-to-face format and that they were essential to their success. In S3's words, "I would have never made it. I would have never finished if academic support hadn't been over there." Three student participants discussed the need for real-time support services 24 hours a day. Student F shared, "It would be helpful if you had a hotline you could call twenty-four hours if you have problems." While ABC Community College has a distance learning hotline, it is only monitored during normal business hours. Students pointed out that many faculty members have due dates that fall on the weekend or late evenings and support is not provided during those time periods.

Characteristics of online learners. Students were asked to describe the instructional strategies their instructors used that helped them succeed. The student participants' answers did not relate to instruction strategies, but rather focused on

characteristics that students should possess before taking an online class. The

participants revealed that students should possess strong time management and reading

and writing skills. They also felt that students should have the initiative to stay on top of

their learning and proactively reach out to their instructors when they needed help.

The majority of student participants said time management was the single most

essential skill necessary to be successful in an online course. Six of the seven student

participants felt that in order to be successful in an online course, students need to possess

strong time management skills. Students were asked what advice they would give to new

online students and six of the seven participants suggested that students should not be

procrastinators.   S1 indicated that his biggest surprise it was "how easy it was to forget

about [their online class]." Students also discussed the time commitment required to take

an online class. All seven students believed that online courses required significantly

more time than they anticipated. In S2's words, "At first I thought I was going to be free

of a lot of time. I thought it was going to be, oh yeah, easy. Fill in a few assignments and

out the door. It was not all that." The participants recommended that students should set

aside multiple times during the week to work on their course, just as if they were

physically in class.

Student participants S1, S2 and S4 discussed the need for strong reading and

writing skills. The student participants felt that students need strong reading and writing

skills to be successful in an online course. While some faculty used audio and video to

deliver instruction, text based materials was the most common delivery method for

instructional materials. This presents a challenge for students who may not possess

strong reading and writing skills or who may have learning challenges. According to information provided by ABC Community College, students are required to take a placement test to assess their reading and writing ability; however, students are not prevented from taking online courses based on their placement test scores.

Students also voiced their concern regarding other students' reading and writing skills and felt that it negatively impacted online discussions. S2 reported, "I know other people in my classes and the discussion groups, they can't even punctuate. They don't even spell correctly…They shouldn't be enrolled in an online class." Students also felt that their written communication skills improved because of online courses. When asked why they thought their writing skills improved, students cited the need to ask questions via email. In order to avoid the need for multiple follow-up emails, student felt they learned to write more comprehensive questions the first time.

Three student participants felt that students need to possess the initiative to stay on top of their learning and proactively reach out to their instructors when they need help. In S7's words, "It's up to you to engage...get involved, it's your education." Students stressed the need for open communication with their online instructors and encouraged other students to reach out to their online instructors as soon as they have registered for the class. S5 shared, "[Students] should take the initiative to look up the instructor, if it's listed on web advisor, when they register…Send them an email, make an appointment with them, and found out what's the work load." Students also shared that when they took their first online course, they often felt like they were bothering their instructors when they emailed with questions. S3 shared, "It's very important to talk to your

instructors…if you can't communicate with your instructor…if you don't do that, you're going to remain lost." The participants shared that new online students need to understanding that emailing an instructor with a question is no different than raising their hand in a face-to-face class.

   Technical expectations. Distance learning faculty feel that community college students enrolled in online courses require additional computer and technology support. F7 shared:

> They're over their head from the beginning. It's difficult enough to learn [the
> subject matter] but to be learning [the subject matter] while you are trying to learn
> how to use a computer is nearly impossible…Some people end up in online
> courses that are really borderline as far as their technological skills.

Faculty pointed out that community college students enrolled in distance learning are typically older, non-traditional students who may not be comfortable using technology and often do not possess the computer skills to take successfully an online course. Faculty felt that the technology skills necessary for online learning should be assessed before allowing a student to enroll in an online course. F6 reported, "it is too overwhelming and we ask too much computer skill when we teach online for them not…for us not to be extremely aware of what their capabilities are before we let them sign up for a class." While ABC Community College requires all students to take a computer literacy exam prior to admission, the institution does not prevent students who do not pass the exam from taking distance learning courses. Faculty also indicated that distance learning students often look to the faculty for technology related support.

In contrast, student participants felt that faculty should make technical expectations clear before the start of the class and provide students with clear information for obtaining technical support. Three participants shared their personal experience with the technical requirements for an online course. All three participants indicated that their instructors did not provide support for the technology used in the course and the faculty did not provide information regarding where they could obtain technical assistance. S1 shared, "We were expected to know how to use [Lockdown Browser] and didn't have much help with it. Student suggested that student taking online courses should understand that they also need to have strong computer skills and be able to troubleshoot their own computer problems.

Even though ABC Community College has a distance learning help line, students looked to academic support services for technical assistance. Two students indicated that without the technical assistance provided by the academic support services staff, they would have dropped their first online course. Students also expressed frustration at the lack of 24-hour support for technical issues.

Outcomes

The problem this study addressed was that students at a community college in the southeast United States are not successfully completing their coursework as well as students enrolled in traditional courses regardless of their program of study. The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that influence successful course completion in distance learning courses. A three-week professional development course was developed for new and existing online faculty. The data analysis of this case study identified three

outcomes: engaging students in the online classroom, advising students for online learning and distance learning support services. The course will be conducted in an online format and will provide faculty with opportunities to share with other online faculty.

Conclusions

Distance learning is an important aspect of the community college system. Through this qualitative case study I sought to understand faculty and student experiences with distance learning to expand the knowledge of the role of professional development in successful course completion, interviews were conducted with distance learning faculty and students, in addition, observations of online courses records were conducted. According to the findings, four themes emerged from the data analysis: preparing faculty to teach online, engaging students in the online classroom, course design and delivery, and supporting students.

Research Question 1: What are distance learning faculty experiences with professional development for successful course completion in online courses?

The findings of this study answered research question one. The faculty at ABC Community College look internally to their distance learning department to provide the training necessary to teach in the online classroom. Faculty also expected the institution to keep them abreast of the latest trends in distance learning. Before faculty teach online, they should have experience as an online student and be provided with opportunities to share their personal experiences with other online faculty.

Research question 2: What are the attributes and teaching practices of effective online instructors that foster successful course completion in online courses?

The findings of this study answered research question two. While distance learning has increased access to higher education, it has brought with it new challenges for faculty. Faculty believe that many students are unprepared for online coursework and that many students had little understanding of how online courses are conducted. Student participants also voiced feeling unprepared for online coursework. Many of the student participants either had not completed the distance learning orientation or were unaware that they had registered for an online course. Faculty and student participants felt that hybrid course offerings helped students ease into totally online coursework and helped students become successful.

Faculty and student participants seemed to struggle with engagement in their online courses. All of the faculty participants used discussion boards to facilitate interaction in their online courses, but only six participated in their discussion boards. Student participants seemed to interpret the lack of instructor presence as a lack of caring on the instructor's part. Students also perceived the lack of instructor presence as impacting their success in the course, and they did not feel they received the same experience in an online discussion as they would have in a face-to-face course.

Faculty discussed the multiple ways that they provided feedback in their online courses. The majority of the faculty participants indicated that they relied on the feedback tool within the LMS while others used in-line comments within a word processor. It appears that there is a difference in the quality of feedback provided with

the LMS tool and in-line comments in a word processor. Faculty who use the LMS feedback tool tend to leave short comments relating to the entire assignment, whereas inline comments in a word processing document are very detailed and specific to different portions of the assignments. Students did not feel that they received enough feedback in their online courses and indicated in some cases that the only feedback they received was the grade earned.

Students perceived student support services to be critical to their success in online courses. Students discussed the preparation they received before taking their first online course. All but one of the students felt that they were not prepared to take a course in an online format. A specific area of concern centered on the advising process and understanding what an online class was. Six student participants asserted that they did not understand how faculty conducted an online class and in some cases, did not know they had enrolled in an online class. Students enrolling in an online class at ABC Community College are required to take a distance learning orientation before the start of class; however, several of the student participants indicated that they did not know about the orientation or did not take it before taking their first online course.

While ABC Community College has significant distance learning offerings, both faculty and students do not appear to view the institution as an online institution. This theme emerged throughout all aspects of this study. Students seem to expect to be able to do business with the institution face-to-face. Faculty also expect to interact with their online students face-to-face. This unique culture presents a unique set of challenges when students are geographically distant to ABC Community College. While the

institution has support services for distance learning students, they do not appear to know how to access those services.

Research question 3: What are the attributes and instructional strategies of instructors that students perceive to be essential to help them complete online courses?

While the findings did not fully answer research question three, the findings did yield important data for preparing for supporting and advising students in distance learning courses. Student participants identified three characteristics that they felt helped online students be successful: initiative, time management and reading and writing skills. Student participants felt that online students need to be able to take the initiative to reach out to their online faculty members when they needed help. They also felt that successful online students take the initiative to get involved in their education. Overwhelmingly, students believed that strong time management skills were essential to succeeding in the online classroom. Students also did not fully understand the extent that time management skills that were necessary to take an online course. They also indicated that they were not prepared for the time commitment that online classes require. Finally, student participants believed that students taking online courses should possess strong reading and writing skills.

Student participants identified strategies that they perceived to help them succeed in the online classroom. The strategies identified were classified into two categories: instructional resources and technology. The instructional resources that students felt facilitated success were: optional resources, study strategies and pacing guides. Students perceived optional resources as an important component in their understanding of the

course materials. Student participants also found that suggestions from faculty on how to study also helped them fully comprehend the material. Students provided multiple examples of how faculty taught them how to study the course materials effectively using strategies such as flash cards or games. Students also felt that pacing guides for each unit helped them plan and work through the course material effectively and helped them improve their time management skills. Students also shared the challenges that technology brought to the online classroom. Students spoke about the challenges that came with the use of new technologies in their online classes. Students felt that the institution needed to provide technical support available 24/7 to assist with those challenges.

The outcomes that evolved out of this study were used to develop a three-week professional development opportunity for faculty at ABC Community College. In section three, I will present the project that was developed based on the findings of this study, along with current literature related to the topic. I will also discuss local and far-reaching implications and the potential for social change

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to deliver a three-week online professional development opportunity for new and experienced distance learning faculty. The outcomes of this project study: engaging students in the online classroom, advising students for online learning, and distance learning support services, were the basis for this project. As the results of this qualitative case study show, faculty and student experiences with distance learning are important to consider when designing professional development for distance learning faculty. This professional development should provide distance learning faculty with an understanding of the instructional strategies that promote successful course completion in online courses. The objectives of the proposed professional development opportunity are to prepare faculty to promote success in the online classroom.

In this section, I will describe a professional development plan for preparing faculty to teach in the online classroom. I will present a literature review that explores each of Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles and how they relate to distance learning. I will describe the project and associated goals and provide the rationale for conducting the professional development described. Also, an implementation plan containing an outline of the professional development and the resources necessary to implement the project are presented. The plan discusses the potential barriers to the project. This section will conclude by outlining the implications for ABC Community College and opportunities for far reaching social change.

Description and Goals

The data analysis of this case study identified four emerging themes critical to successful student online course completion: preparing faculty to teach online, engaging students in the online classroom, course design and delivery, and support for students. Preparing faculty to teach online is a critical component in helping faculty transition to the online classroom. Faculty not only need an understanding of how to design and deliver online instruction, but they must also understand how to promote engagement in their online classes. Also, faculty teaching in an online classroom must have an understanding of the support services available for distance learning students and serve as a student advisor for program and course selection. Faculty should have an understanding of the characteristics found in successful online students to best advise students in their course selection. While the task of providing student support services for online students may not fall to faculty, faculty should have an understanding of these services and be able to help students gain access to them.

To address the unique skills faculty need to teach successfully online within a community college system, I have developed a 3-week online professional development program to meet the needs of online faculty at ABC Community College. Participants will spend between six and eight hours each week working through a weekly unit of material within the institution's LMS. The training will provide an understanding of how to engage students in an online class and properly advise students for online learning. Faculty will also receive a comprehensive overview of the support services available to online students, and strategies for advising online students.

The basis of this professional development training opportunity is Chickering and Gamson's (1987) "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" and best practices in the field of distance learning. The professional development opportunity outlined in this project will allow distance learning faculty to gain insight into the best practices that promote successful course completion. The training is designed for new and experienced distance learning faculty members and will focus on the design and delivery of online instruction in a community college setting. Training activities will include: (a) a scholarly discussion of each of the topics presented, (b) the development of an online unit of instruction that promotes engagement, (c) assignment of a faculty mentor, and (d) opportunities to share best practices.

The professional development is designed for both new and current distance learning faculty. Week one features an overview of distance learning at the community college level, information on the importance of engagement in distance learning, best practices for promoting engagement in distance learning, and factors that may impede engagement. Faculty will read scholarly works, watch videos, participate in scholarly discussions, develop discussion board prompts that facilitate interaction, and critique each other's prompts. Week two will focus on advising distance learning students. Faculty participants will learn about the characteristics of successful online students, as well as, student requirements for enrolling in an online course. Faculty will be provided access to the required distance learning student orientation and will be provided with specific information on how students may gain access to the orientation. Week three will focus on student support services. Faculty participants will learn what student support

services are available to online students and will be providing specific information on how students can access those services.

The goals of the professional development opportunity are designed to provide distance learning faculty with (a) the tools necessary to promote engagement in online courses, (b) knowledge of student support services for distance learning students, and (c) the skills necessary to help prepare students online students. The intent of the first goal is to help distance learning faculty promote student-to-student and faculty-to-student interactions in their online courses. The purpose of goal two is to provide faculty with the skills necessary to properly advise students wishing to enroll in distance learning coursework. Finally, goal three is to make faculty aware of the student support services available and how students can access those services. As a whole, these three goals should prepare distance learning faculty to promote success in their online courses.

Rationale

I based the design of this project on the fact that distance learning faculty at ABC Community College look internally for professional development related to teaching online. The decision to offer this professional development opportunity in an online format rose out of the data analysis of this study. Faculty overwhelmingly indicated that professional development for online faculty should be offered in an online format so that faculty could experience online learning from the student perspective.

Faculty teaching in online classrooms face challenges unique to that modality of instruction. An understanding of how to design and deliver online instruction is not a topic that can delivered in a one-time training. It is an on-going process of learning to

adapt to the online classroom. The development of training that includes new online faculty paired with existing faculty will promote the sharing of best practices in the design and delivery of online instruction (Maier, 2012; Mastel-Smith, Post, & Lake, 2015; Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011).

Understanding the specific needs of an organization is essential to providing high-quality professional development opportunities. The research outlined in this project study identified critical gaps in practice within online courses. The themes that evolved from the study clearly align with Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles. The seven principles will serve as the foundation for the content of the professional development described. At the end of the professional development opportunity, faculty will leave with an online unit of instruction that fosters student success, knowledge of support services available to online students, and advising strategies for students wishing to take online courses.

Review of the Literature

The landscape of higher education has undergone tremendous change over the last 10 years and the impact on faculty teaching within the community college system is tremendous. Institutions are faced with the challenge of providing faculty with the training necessary to adapt their skillset to current practices in higher education. The purpose of this literature review was to investigate each of the seven principles identified by Chickering and Gamson (1987). Specifically, the focus was on how faculty can utilize and implement the principles to foster successful course completion in their online courses. I conducted the literature review by searching various educational databases

such as ERIC, SAGE Premier and Education Research Complete and were accessed

through the Walden library. Additional research was conducted through the use of

Google Scholar. Keywords utilized during my search included: *professional*

development, faculty training, student engagement, online coursework, mentoring, time

management, online course design, learning styles, and *active teaching and learning*.

Professional Development for Distance Learning Faculty

Preparing faculty to teach in the online classroom is a challenge facing all higher

education institutions that offer online coursework. According to McQuiggan (2012),

"faculty preparation for online teaching must be conceptualized as a process of

transformation rather than simply translation" (p. 11). Research as shown that

professional development for distance learning faculty has a positive impact on a

student's academic achievement (Elliott & Oliver, 2015). However, professional

development opportunities must be well planned and relevant to the faculty attending.

A study conducted by Hardre (2012) found that professional development must have

relevance and value in order for community college faculty to engage in the professional

development opportunity. Terosky and Heasley's (2014) work also found that

professional development for distance learning faculty should be based on their needs.

As Terosky and Heasley (2014) noted, "if the goal is faculty buy-in and engagement with

the improvement and future of online education, it remains essential that all faculty

development programs assess faculty needs and align their resources accordingly" (p.

10). As Rutz, Condon, Iverson, Manduca and Willett (2012) noted, "the development of

a culture that values ongoing learning about teaching, coupled with the development of

skills that support reflective teaching based on observations of student learning, is as important as the individual lessons learned in a particular workshop" (p. 47). In order to effectively prepare faculty to teach in the online classroom, institutions should carefully consider the components of in-house professional development offerings.

An essential element of professional development programs for distance learning faculty is the inclusion of a mentoring component. Numerous studies have found that faculty mentoring programs are essential for new distance learning faculty (Maier, 2012; Mastel-Smith, Post, & Lake, 2015; Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011). As Mastel-Smith, Post and Lake (2012) noted, "faculty new to online education should have guest access to established courses for the purpose of observing experienced online educators" (p. 151). A study conducted by Maier (2012) found that faculty not only need to be trained on instructional technologies and pedagogies, but it is essential that they are provided support through a mentor or learning community. As Baran, Correia and Thompson (2011) noted, "it is critical to prepare and support teachers for online learning so they know what to expect and how to establish their online teacher persona through online pedagogies, and also develop positive attitudes towards online teaching" (p. 436). The use of faculty mentors allows new online faculty to observe the instructional strategies used by veteran online faculty members. According to Betts and Heaston (2014), "faculty need to be able to showcase their work, illustrating the high quality of instruction and learning to their colleagues" (p. 11). Research conducted by Betts and Heaston (2014) found that faculty learn best by working with other faculty members.

Professional development for online faculty should not be limited to a single professional development opportunity. It should be an on-going process. According to Baran, Correia and Thompson (2011), "programs preparing faculty to teach online need to encourage them to critically reflect upon their past experiences, assumptions, and beliefs towards learning and teaching, question them, and transform their perspectives by engaging in critical reflection, pedagogical inquiry and problem-solving" (p. 435). Reilly, Vandenhouten, Gallagher-Lepak and Ralston-Berg (2012) argued that, "faculty need ongoing professional development in e-learning, especially as technology changes rapidly and students are increasingly more tech savvy" (p. 107). A process of continual learning in best-practices is crucial for distance learning faculty.

Interaction and Collaboration

Interaction in distance learning courses is a significant challenge facing faculty teaching in the online classroom. A study conducted by Bailie (2014) found that active interaction facilitated by faculty was an important component of an online course. In addition, research has shown that online course interactions impacts student success. A study conducted by Mahle (2011) found that high levels of interaction in online courses significantly increased student success rates. The study also found that high levels of interaction had a positive impact on knowledge retention. A study by Lillis (2012) found a direct correlation between the number of faculty-to-student interactions and student attrition rates. Jaggars, Edgecombe and Stacey's (2013) research also found that instructor-to-student interaction is a key component to student success.

The skills necessary to facilitate interaction in the face-to-face classroom often do not work in the online classroom. Lillis (2012) suggested that rather than focus on student characteristics, institutions should train faculty on increasing interaction in their online courses. Research conducted by Bailie (2014) found that students felt that faculty should be active participants in online discussions. In addition, they found that students felt this type of interaction to be more important that online office hours.

A study conducted by Holzweiss, Joyner, Fuller, Henderson and Young (2014) found that students feel that deep learning occurs through faculty-to-student interaction within the course. In order to facilitate these types of learning interactions, faculty must learn to design and select learning activities. According to Lee and Kovach (2011), "understanding what resources are available and how they might be used to foster instructor-student interactions as well as peer interaction will contribute to appropriate technology integration and the fulfillment of students' need to active course content and engaged learning" (p. 123). According to Gillingham and Molinari (2012), the number of faculty-to-student interactions and the quality of those interactions depends on the instructional design of the course.

Professional development for online faculty should also include information regarding the resources and technology that is available. According to Lee and Kovach (2011), "understanding what resources are available and how they might be used to foster instructor-student interactions as well as peer interaction will contribute to appropriate technology integration and the fulfillment of students' need to active course content and engaged learning" (p. 123). According to Bailie (2015), faculty member's interactions

within a discussion board should occur on a regular basis; however, the interactions should be for the purpose of moving the discussion forward and not to fulfill a predefined schedule. As Baker (2011) noted, a fundamental component of successful discussion boards is that they are instructor facilitated. Faculty should use discussion boards that have a specific purpose and are aligned with the learning outcomes of the course (Baker, 2011). Faculty should also be taught how to design discussion board prompts that help facilitate discussion and interaction. A study by Ioannou, Demetriou and Mama (2014) found that poor discussion board responses were often imitated by students throughout the course resulting in weak engagement. With this in mind, faculty should learn how to design structured guidelines for their discussions, model quality postings and participate in the discussions.

While the majority of online classes at the community college level utilize an asynchronous approach, a study by Jowallah (2014) found that the use of both synchronous and asynchronous instructional strategies increase interaction in the course and the learning experiences of the students. Research conducted by Yamagata-Lynch (2014) found that the use of both asynchronous and synchronous interactions helped students gain a sense of stability. It also helped the student stay on task and build community with their classmates.

Active Teaching and Learning

Technologies in distance learning have provided unprecedented access to higher education; however, with those technologies faculty face the challenge of using them effectively in their classrooms. As Lee and Kovach noted, (2011), "the rapid rise of

online learning and related technologies presents a tremendous opportunity for educators to design courses that engage students through the use of technology" (p. 123). Professional development for online faculty should focus on preparing instructional material that actively engages students.

Research has shown that the use of instructor generated instructional materials facilitates active teaching and learning. According to Draus, Curran and Trempus (2014), the use of instructor-generated instructional videos increases student interaction in distance learning courses. As Gaytan (2015) noted, "faculty must understand that teaching online courses does not mean that students learn as much as they can on their own with very little instruction and supervision" (p. 63). Jaggars, Edgecombe and Stacey's (2013) argue that the effective use of interactive technologies in online courses is difficult to implement. Regardless, student interaction with the online course content is important. As noted by Kuo (2014), student satisfaction with online course content plays an important role in student success.

Providing Feedback to Students

Literature overwhelmingly indicates that feedback in online courses is essential to student learning (Lundberg & Sheridan, 2015; Gaytan, 2015; Mahle, 2011) According to Mastel-Smith, Post and Lake (2015), "balanced feedback, including positive comments and areas for improvement and student affirmations will help faculty and students connect and promote positive student outcomes" (p. 151). Feedback should also be unique to the individual student. As Portugal (2015) noted, faculty should provide feedback that is individualized to the specific learner's needs. The use of individualized

feedback can help foster a sense of community. A study conducted by Fernandez-Toro and Hurd (2014) found that feedback tailored to the individual student helped students to understand the steps necessary to improve their work and encouraged them to persist in the course.

Lundberg and Sheridan (2015) argued that faculty members play an important role in student learning by providing feedback that pushes the student to work hard and achieve high expectations. As Gayton (2015) noted, "online faculty must understand that quality of faculty and student interactions does not mean responding to a study rather quickly, but it includes ways in which online students can improve their performance and, therefore, increase their knowledge" (p. 63). Research conducted by Hollenbeck, Mason, and Song (2011) found that student-to-faculty interaction helped students form a sense of community. A study conducted by Jaggars, Edgecombe and Stacey (2013) found that students feel "a sense of teacher caring when the instructors posted frequently in chat rooms, invited student questions and responded quickly to those questions, provided detailed feedback on student assignments, and asked for and responded to student feedback about the course" (p. 2). According to Holzweiss, Joyner, Fuller, Henderson and Young (2014) students felt that positive feedback provided motivation to the student and that the faculty member cared about their individual learning.

High Expectations

Lundberg and Sheridan (2015) found that an important component of student success in the online classroom is high expectations by faculty. According to Lundberg and Sheridan (2015), "more important than frequent interactions with students was the

response of students to work harder than they thought they could in response to faculty

expectations" (p. 13). A study conducted by Nawroot and Doucet (2014) found that

when institutions communicate high expectations to students, they are motivated to work

harder in the course.   While most course syllabi contain the instructor's expectations in

the course, the use of email is another method of communicating an instructor's

expectations. A study by Robb and Sutton (2014) found that students who received

personal emails from their instructor had higher levels of motivation. The emails also

gave students the perceptions that their instructor was willing to communicate and cared

about them and their work.

Time Management

According to Todd, Ravi, Akoh and Gray (2015) time management is a critical

skill for all students in an online classroom and faculty need to provide students with

clear expectations on what should be completed when. As Todd, Ravi, Akoh and Gray

(2015) noted, "when students understand that their instructor is always present, has

clearly set expectations and provides effective feedback, they work to meet these

expectations and do not want to disappoint their instructor." (p. 2). A study by Karim

and Kandy (2011) found that students who have been exposed to instruction in time

management skills are more successful in their course work. Helping students acquire

time management skills is another challenge facing community college faculty in the

online classroom.

While many institutions provide training in time management as part of a student

orientation or college success course, some institutions look to hybrid course offerings to

help students acquire time management skills. According to Barker (2015), hybrid course offerings help students develop time management skills. This puts faculty in the position to model strong time management skills. As Nawroot and Doucet (2014) noted, time management should be facilitated by faculty through the release of course materials on a predictable schedule and by not allowing periods of inactivity within the course. Reaching out to students during periods of inactivity is an effective way to help students with time management issues (Jo, Kim, & Yoon, 2015). A study by Nadinloyi, Hajloo, Garamaleki, and Sadeghi (2013) found that faculty can help students acquire time management skills through the use of calendars or planners combined with reminders of how and when to use the materials.

Diverse Learning Styles

The diverse nature of the community college classroom requires that faculty adapt their teaching and learning to appeal to the varied learning styles of their students. A study by Mastel-Smith, Post and Lake (2015) argued that faculty not only need to organize their course differently, they must also present the course content in such a way that it appeals to the myriad of diverse learning styles. According to Çakıroğlu (2014), a student is more successful when their learning style matches the instructional material provided. The administering of a learning styles inventory at the beginning of a course allows an instructor to match a student's learning style with their course materials. It also allows the student to understand how they learn best. According to Gogus and Gunes (2011), "knowledge of learning styles affects students' awareness of how they learn best and contribute to their taking responsibility of their own learning" (p. 599). Portugal

(2015) cautioned that a one-size-fits all approach to teaching in an online class does not promote success. Faculty must utilize individualized instructional strategies to address the various learning styles of the students currently enrolled in their classes.

Summary

The results of this study suggested that professional development for distance learning faculty does impact successful course completion. It also found that promoting community and engagement in the online classroom was a struggle that both faculty and students faced. Literature supported the premise that faculty need specialized training in promoting interaction in their courses (McQuiggan, 2012; Elliott & Oliver, 2015; Bailie, 2015; Mahle, 2011; Lillis, 2012; Jaggars, Edgecombe, & Stacey, 2013; Holzweiss, Joyner, Fuller, Henderson, & Young, 2014). Providing distance learning faculty with a deeper understanding of Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles and how they relate to teaching in the online classroom, as well as how to facilitate the support of online students may help faculty foster successful course completion. The content of the professional development described in this study was guided by Chickering and Gamson's (1987) seven principles, the results of this study and the evidence presented in the literature review.

Implementation

The professional development developed as part of this project study will be implemented at ABC Community College where this study was conducted. In order to successfully implement the professional development, I have coordinated the implementation with the Director for Instructional Support and Distance Learning. I

have also procured the necessary resources for this project and developed a timeline for implementation. In addition, I have identified potential barriers to the project and have taken steps to address them.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

ABC Community College recognizes the importance of distance learning support through the organization of the Department of Instructional Support and Distance Learning. The department is responsible for the delivery of professional development for faculty teaching online and makes it the logical choice for coordinating the training outlined in this study. While new distance learning faculty are required to complete professional development prior to teaching online for the first time, faculty are not required to participate in professional development beyond the initial training.

The professional development outlined in this study will include a mentoring component that pairs new distance learning faculty with those already teaching in the online classroom. The mentoring component will allow for the sharing of best practices in the design and delivery of online instruction. It will also afford existing distance learning faculty the opportunity to stay abreast of current practices in distance learning.

Potential Barriers

The project outlined in this study was designed to meet the unique needs of ABC Community College. ABC Community College is a small institution and faculty teaching at the institution have many responsibilities beyond teaching. Time is a potential barrier to this project. Time barriers are not a challenge unique to this institution. Research overwhelmingly points to time issues as one of the significant

challenges facing distance learning faculty (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Cook, Ley, Crawford, & Warner, 2009; Mills, Yanes, & Casebeer, 2009; Mitchell & Geva-May, 2009; Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008 Windes & Lesht, 2014). A reduction in the course load of faculty completing the training is recommended to provide the time necessary to actively engage in the professional development and to design and develop their online course.

Proposal for Implementation and Time Table

The scheduling of courses for the fall semester is completed in January of each year. At that time the Department of Instructional Support and Distance Learning schedules training for faculty new to the online classroom. I will present the professional development outlined in this study at a meeting with the academic deans. At this meeting I will explain the professional development and the need for existing online faculty to participate. The purpose of the meeting is to share the results of this study and the inclusion of the mentoring component.

The professional development opportunity will be conducted online over a three-week time period. The proposed professional development opportunity is scheduled for the first three weeks of April 2016. Participants will be expected to spend between six and eight hours each week working through the content of the training. While the participants will have flexibility in when they work through the material, each module will have a specified due date. An informational meeting for participants will be conducted prior to the start of the training. The purpose of this meeting will be to

introduce new online faculty members to their mentors and to provide an overview of the professional development.

Roles and Responsibilities

Initially my role in this project was to develop the content for this professional development. While I will offer to facilitate this training, the Director of Instructional Support and Distance Learning will chose the facilitator. The participation of the Director of Instructional Support and Distance Learning and the instructional technologist in that department is critical to the success of the project. The Director of Instructional Support and Distance Learning will provide support for the project by scheduling the training and identifying existing distance learning faculty to serve as mentors. They will also provide access to the institution's LMS for the development of the training and will enroll the faculty participants into the training course. The instructional technologist's role is to provide technology support to faculty throughout the training, the design of the course, and when faculty begin teaching in the online classroom.

<div align="center">

Project Evaluation

</div>

According to Reilly, Vandenhouten, Gallagher-Lepak and Ralston-Berg (2012), an evaluation of faculty professional development is a critical to the success of professional development offerings and that a continuous improvement model is the most effective way to evaluate professional development. Participants will be invited to complete an evaluation survey upon completion of the training. The survey contains Likert scale questions regarding the effectiveness of the delivery of the professional development (Appendix A). A second survey for new online faculty will be used once

the faculty member successfully completes their first semester teaching online (Appendix

A). The second survey will also utilize Likert scale questions relating to the design and

delivery of their first online course and ABC Community College. In addition, the

second survey will also use open-ended questions that will allow faculty to express their

experiences in their own words. Upon completion of all online courses, students are

asked to complete a course satisfaction survey. Satisfaction surveys for new online

faculty will include additional questions relating to the design and delivery of the course.

The results of each of these surveys will be used to gage the effectiveness of the training

and to lay the foundation for continuous improvement.

<div align="center">**Implications Including Social Change**</div>

Local Implications

This project is important to ABC Community College because of the large

number of students who enroll in distance learning courses. With over 54% of all

students taking at least one online course and over 61% of all faculty teaching online, this

institution is continually faced with preparing faculty to teaching in the online classroom

and helping students successfully complete online coursework. This project was

designed for the unique needs of the faculty and students at ABC Community College.

The data collected in this study identified several areas of concern in the design and

delivery of online courses. The data also identified issues pertaining to advisement of

students and in promoting support services offered to online students. The results

indicated that many students new to online learning did not fully understand what an

online course was and how it was delivered. They also did not know of support services

specifically for online students. In addition to helping faculty design and deliver online instruction, professional development will help faculty understand what student characteristics are needed to successfully take an online course and help students gain access to the support services available for online students.

Far-Reaching Implications

This project has the ability to positively impact social change within other community colleges and higher education institutions world-wide. According to Allen & Seaman (2014), in 2013 over seven million students were enrolled in online course work. Distance learning has provided access to higher education without traditional geographic boundaries and with this expansion, institutions are struggling with how to prepare both faculty and students for the unique experience the online classroom provides. Research shows that preparing faculty to design and deliver online instruction is critical to student success (McQuiggan, 2012; Elliott & Oliver, 2015; Hardre, 2012; Terosky & Heasley, 2014; Rutz, Condon, Iverson, Manduca, & Willett, 2012). The ubiquity of distance learning course offerings indicates that this project is pertinent world-wide. Online faculty at any higher education institution will need training in the design and delivery of online instruction.

<div align="center">

Conclusion

</div>

While this project study was developed in response to the needs of ABC Community College, the project's global usefulness is apparent. Institutions across the globe are continuing to increase the number of courses and programs offered online. Professional development for faculty who teach online is critical to successful course

completion. This professional development will provide new and existing online faculty

with the skills necessary to design and deliver online instruction, advise students in the

selection of online courses and help students gain access to support structures specifically

for online students. In this section, a three-week professional development opportunity

was presented based on the findings outlined in Section 2, along with a literature review

presenting current research on professional development for distance learning faculty.

Section 4 will provide a comprehensive review of the project, as well as my personal

reflections.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths

This project study reaffirmed the importance of professional development for faculty teaching in the online classroom. I proposed a professional development program based on the research conducted in this project study. I believe a thoughtful, research grounded training and development for online faculty will significantly improve successful course completion rates for students. Faculty indicated that promoting engagement in the online classroom was a significant challenge. In contrast, students perceived a lack of instructor presence as having a negative impact on learning and successful course completion.

The professional development outlined in Appendix A addresses the need for faculty to develop the skills necessary to design and deliver online instruction that promotes an increase in course completion rates for students.   Embedded into each week of the online professional development session is an opportunity for faculty to acquire and demonstrate the necessary skills required to design and deliver online instruction.

 One of this project's strengths is its design. By developing a single training opportunity for both new and existing online faculty, the training encourages faculty to share best practices while laying the framework for faculty mentors for new online faculty. Another strength of the project is that it identified a disconnect between student and faculty perceptions regarding engagement in online courses. By identifying the disconnect between students and faculty, faculty can receive professional development

that helps them understand the unique needs of online students and provides them with the tools necessary to intentionally promote interaction and engagement in their courses.

The approach used for data analysis is another of this project's strengths. Interviews of both faculty and students provided rich descriptions of their own perceptions of what it takes for students to be successful in the online classroom. By incorporating observations of online course records with faculty and student interviews, the triangulation revealed the real-life experiences of both faculty and students. My research design allowed for the creation of professional development tailored to faculty and students in the online classroom.

Project Limitations

A limitation of this project is that the range of topics covered in the professional development are complex, and a single three-week professional development opportunity may not provide faculty with an in-depth understanding of the material presented. While participants receive a significant amount of information in the training, reinforcement of the topics will take place through additional professional development sessions offered throughout the academic year.

An additional limitation of this project is that the formulation of the professional development presented was based on research conducted at ABC Community College. If other institutions provide this professional development to their faculty, the content of the training would need customization to meet their unique needs. Finally, a limitation of this study is that the hiring of adjunct faculty often doesn't take place until close to the

start date of the course. The limited time between hiring and the beginning of the course would not allow ample time for adjunct faculty to complete the training.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

The research collected in this study revealed that there are several gaps in practice relating to the advising of distance learning students and the design and delivery of online courses. Another approach to addressing these gaps is to develop a distance learning faculty handbook. The development of a distance learning faculty handbook would provide faculty with a comprehensive guide relating to all aspects of teaching in the online classroom. It would also be a valuable resource for new distance learning faculty, especially for new adjunct faculty members who may not be familiar with the array of support services available for distance learning faculty and staff. Another approach would be to setup a self-paced online training that allowed faculty to work through the material in this project. This approach would make it easier to accommodate varying faculty schedules. It would also allow faculty to return to the material and work through it multiple times. While this is a viable alternative approach, it also has a substantial issue. Participants would not have the opportunity to see modeling of best practices in fostering engagement in the course.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Throughout the course of this project study, I have gained a significant amount of knowledge concerning scholarship. I have learned that educators must remain current and up-to-date with both knowledge and best practices in their field. The importance of up-to-date practices is especially true in the field of distance learning.   Those involved in

the delivery of distance education are faced with the task of not only staying up-to-date with best practice, but will also assuming other roles such as advising of the distance learning students and helping students obtain support services for distance learning. I have learned that in order to help faculty with this challenge, research into the specific needs of faculty and students at our institution.

Over the last 20 years, I have developed the skills necessary to be an effective practitioner. I believe that this project study has significantly strengthened my practitioner skills. Through this project, I have become more conscious of the importance of developing professional development developed through research-based practices. I have also learned that the unique nature of higher education makes it imperative that institutions provide professional development related to pedagogical practices on a continual basis and should not assume that faculty possess a basic understanding of educational principles. Faculty often do not come from an educational background and professional development on pedagogical practices should be provided at a basic level and should be slowly introduced over time.

As an instructional technologist, I frequently develop professional development opportunities for distance learning faculty; however, I have never used a research-based approach when developing the content of the training. In the past, I would review best-practices related to the professional development topic and use that as the foundation of the training. This experience has taught me that effective professional development should start with research into related theoretical frameworks and a review of current literature on the topic. It should also include research into the current practices of both

faculty and the students they serve. While I have often polled faculty for input into their

training needs, I have never included student opinions in that process. I have learned

through this process that it is especially important to collect data from all stakeholders, as

the discovery of potential gaps can significantly impact student and faculty success. The

gap between the perceptions of faculty and students highlighted a significant challenge

facing distance learning students and faculty. By gathering input from all stakeholders, I

will have a stronger basis for the development of training content.

Throughout this process, I have learned a great deal regarding leadership. In the

past, I have said leadership is an attitude, not an action. Helmrick (2016) asked 33 CEOs

and industry leaders to define what leadership meant to them. Of the definitions included

in Helmrick's (2016) article, two had a profound impact on me personally. Katie Easley,

the founder of Kate Ryan Design, defined leadership as follows: "Leadership is stepping

out of your comfort zone and taking a risk to create reward" (as cited in Helmrick, 2016,

p. 1). Josh Kuehler, president of Internal Consistency, stated, "Leadership is the ability

to inspire motivation in others to move toward a desirable vision. While management

focuses on tasks, leadership is focused on the person. All in all, the best leadership drives

change and long-lasting motivation." (as cited in Helmrick, 2016, p. 1).Throughout the

course of this project study, I have come to realize that leadership is an attitude displayed

by actions. The landscape of higher education is constantly changing, and many within

higher education find change uncomfortable. According to Murray (2009), "the

enterprise of the future will approach change in three ways: it will accept change as a

state of being and integrate it into its culture; it will encourage employees to be

comfortable with unpredictability and to recognize that business models may be in flux, and it will ensure that its values and goals provide alignment and cohesion during times of rapid change" (p. 30). I have learned through this process that having a goal and clearly communicating that goal to those around you is critical to the success of any project. As a result of this study, I am now more aware of how I react to change and that I provide clear goals when facing challenges that fundamentally change our organization.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

Distance learning has provided adults with unprecedented access to higher education. Increased access is especially true within the community college system. Students whose life experiences prevent access to higher education now are afforded the opportunity of an education through distance learning courses and programs. Increase access to higher education does not automatically equal success. Many of the students who enroll in online coursework do so because it is the only way they can fit education into their life. I believe that the work I have accomplished through this project study will help faculty better support students in their online courses. It will allow them to increase their engagement with their students and allow them to help guide distance learning student to the support services necessary to help them succeed. I have learned through this process that faculty in the community college system often have many roles within their institution and thus require professional development on a wide variety of topics.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

I developed this project to meet the needs of faculty teaching in the online classroom. By providing administrators with a sound research-based project plan,

professional development created specifically for this institution will provide customized training to faculty at ABC Community College. The implications of this study could lead to further research in student support services for distance learning students in community college coursework. It could also lead to additional research into how to better prepare community college students for online coursework. Also, a quantitative study could be conducted to research the success of distance learning students in courses taught by faculty who have completed the professional development outlined in this study, and ABC Community College could track the successful course completion of students enrolled in courses taught by faculty who completed the professional development.

Conclusion

The aim of this project study was to explore the impact of professional development for distance learning faculty on successful course completion. An in-depth review of the current literature provided the framework for distance learning student and faculty interviews, as well as observations of online course records. The data collected provided rich descriptions of the experiences of both faculty and students and laid the foundation for the professional development outlined in Appendix A. While I customized this professional development opportunity for the unique needs of ABC Community College, other institutions can easily modify the content and approach. Preparing new and existing faculty to teach in the online classroom is essential to successful course completion. It is also critical that both faculty and students understand the support structures in place for distance learning students. By providing faculty with

an understanding of the unique needs of distance learning students, faculty can pave the

way towards student success in the online classroom.

References

Achieving the Dream. (2012). *The Challenge*. Retrieved from

http://www.achievingthedream.org/goal/challenge

Alexander, A., Karvonen, M., Ulrich, J., Davis, T., & Wade, A. (2012). Community

college faculty competencies. *Community College Journal of Research and

Practice*, 849-862.

Allen, E., & Seaman, J. (2013). *Changing Course: Ten Years of Tracking Online

Education in the United States.* Sloan Consortium. PO Box 1238, Newburyport,

MA 01950. Retrieved from

http://sloanconsortium.org/publications/survey/changing_course_2012

Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2010). *Class differences: online education in the United

States.* The Sloan Consortium. Retrieved from

http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED529952.pdf

Allen, I., & Seaman, J. (2014). *Grade change: tracking online education in the United

States.* Babson Survey Research Group. *Higher Education Reports. ISBN,*

1343495857. Retrieved from

http://www.onlinelearningsurvey.com/reports/gradechange.pdf

American Association of Community Colleges. (2011). *The completion agenda: A call to

action.* Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.

American Association of Community Colleges. (2012). *Reclaiming the American dream:

A report from the 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community

Colleges.* Washington, DC: American Association of Community Colleges.

Arbaugh, J. B., & Hornik, S. (2006). Do Chickering and Gamson's seven principles also apply to online MBAs. *The Journal of Educators Online*, 1-14.

Bailey, C., & Card, K. (2009). Effective pedagogical practices for online teaching: Perception of experienced instructors. *Internet and Higher Education*, (3), 152-155.

Bailie, J. (2015). Online graduate instruction: what faculty consider reasonable in relation to what students expect. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 11*(1), 42-54.

Bailie, J. L. (2014). What online students what compared to what institutions expect. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 17*(2). Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/summer172/bailie172.html

Baker, D. (2011). Improving pedagogy for online discussions. *Business Education Innovation Journal, 3*(2), 26-29.

Bangert, A. (2004). The seven principles of good practice: A framework for evaluating online teaching. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 217-232.

Baran, E., Correia, A.-P., & Thompson, A. (2011). Transforming online teaching practice: critical analysis of the literature on the roles and competencies of online teachers. *Distance Education, 32*(3), 421-439.

Barbatis, P. (2010). Underprepared, ethnically diverse community college students: factors contributing to persistence. *Journal of Developmental Education*, *33*(3) 14.

Barczyk, C., Buckenmeyer, J., & Feldman, L. (2010). Mentoring professors: a model for developing quality online instructors and courses in higher education. *International Journal on E-Learning*, *9*(1), 7-26.

Barefoot, B., Gardner, J., Cutright, M., Morris, L., Schroeder, C., Schwartz, S., . . . Swing, R. (2010). *Achieving and sustaining institution excellence for the first year of college.* John Wiley & Sons.

Barker, J. (2015). Benefits of hybrid classes in community colleges. *Contemporary Issues in Education Research*, 1-4.

Batts, D., Colaric, S., & McFadden, C. (2006). Online courses demonstrate use of seven principles. *International Journal of Instructional Technology and Distance Learning*, 15-25.

Bean, J. (1980). Dropouts and turnover: the synthesis and test of a casual model of student attrition. *Research in Higher Education*, 155-187.

Bean, J., & Metzner, B. (1985). A conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. *Review of Educational Research*, 485-540.

Bedford, L. (2009). The professional adjunct: an emerging trend in online instruction. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, *12*(3). Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/fall123/bedford123.html

Betts, K. (2014). Factors influencing faculty participation & retention in online & blended education. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, 17(1). Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/spring171/betts171.html

Betts, K., & Heaston, A. (2014). Build it but will they teach?: strategies for increasing faculty participation and retention in online and blended education. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 17*(2). Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/summer172/betts_heaston172.html

Bigatel, P., Ragan, L., Kennan, S., May, J., & Redmond, B. (2012). The identification of competencies for online teaching success. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 59-77.

Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: an introduction to theories and methods.* Boston, MA: Pearson Learning Solutions.

Boling, E., Hough, M., Krinsky, H., Saleem, H., & Stevens, M. (2012). Cutting the distance in distance education: perspectives on what promotes positive online experiences. *Internet and Higher Education*, 118-126.

Bolliger, D., & Wasilik, O. (2009). Factors influecing faculty satisfaction with online teaching and learning in higher education. *Distance Education*, 103-116.

Boston, W., Ice, P., & Gibson, A. (2011). Comprehensive assessment of student retention in online learning environments. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*, *14*(1). Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/spring141/boston_ice_gibson141.html

Boyer, N., & Usinger, P. (2012). Tracking pathways to success: identifying learning success factors across course delivery formats. *International Journal of Self-Directed Learning*, 24-37.

Braxton, J., Olsen, D., & Simmons, A. (1998). Affinity disciplines and the use of principles of good practice for undergraduate education. *Research in Higher Education*, 299-318.

Brock, T. (2010). Young adults and higher education: barriers and breakthroughs to success. *The Future of Children*, 109-132.

Buckenmeyer, J., Hixon, E., Barczyk, C., & Feldman, L. (2013). Does participation in a faculty distance education mentoring program comprehensively improve teaching methods? *International Journal on E-Learning*, 139-152.

Burns, K. (2010). Community college student success variables: a review of the literature. *Community College Enterprise*, 33-61.

Çakıroğlu, Ü. (2014). Analyzing the effect of learning styles and study habits of distance learners on learning performances: a case of an introductory programming course. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*. Retrieved from http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/1840/3004

Capan, L., & Teclehaimanot, B. (2013). Online success rates and completion rates amoung community college students: a demographic study. *World Conference on E-Learning in Corporate, Government, Healthcare, and Higher Education*, 1464-1473.

Capra, T. (2014). Online education from the perspective of community college student within the community of inquiry paradigm. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 108-121.

Cejda, B. (2010). Online education in community colleges. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 7-16.

Chaney, B., Eddy, J., Dorman, S., Glessner, L., Green, L., & Lara-Alecio, R. (2009). A primer on quality indicators of distance education. *Health Promotion Practice* , 222-231.

Chickering, A., & Ehrmann, S. (1996). Implementing the seven principles: Technology as a lever. *AAHE Bulletin*, 3-6.

Chickering, A., & Gamson, Z. (1987). Seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education. *AAHE Bulletin*, 3-7.

Chizmar, J., & Walbert, M. (1999). Web-based learning environments guided by the principles of good teaching practice. *Journal of Economic Education*, 248-259.

Cho, S.-W., & Karp, M. (2013). Student success courses in the community college: early enrollment and educational outcomes. *Community College Review*, 86-103.

Cohen, A., Brawer, F., & Kisker, C. (2014). *The American community college.* San Fransisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Cole, R. (2000). *Issue in web-based pedagogy: a critical primer.* Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group.

Cook, R., Ley, K., Crawford, C., & Warner, A. (2009). Motivators and inhibitors for university faculty in distance and e-learning. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 149-163.

Cresswell, J. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* Boston, MA: Pearson Learning Solutions.

Creswell, J., & Plano Clark, V. (2011). *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

DeCuir-Gunby, J., Marshall, P., & McCulloch, A. (2011). Developing and using a codebook for the analysis of interview data: an example from a professional development research project. *Field Methods*, 136-155.

Diegel, B. (2013). Perceptions of community college adjunct faculty and division chairpersons: support, mentoring, and professional development to sustain academic quality. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 596-607.

Dittmar, E., & McCracken, H. (2012). Promoting continuous quality improvement in online teaching: the meta model. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 163-175.

Draus, P., Curran, M., & Trempus, M. (2014). The influence of instructor-generated video content on student satisfaction with and engagement in asynchronous online classes. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching, 10*(2), 240-254.

Elliott, R., & Oliver, D. (2015). Linking faculty development to community college student achievement: a mixed methods approach. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, *40*(2), 85-99.

Eskey, M. T., & Schulte, M. (2012). Comparing Attitudes of Online Instructors and Online College Students: Quantitative Results for Training, Evaluation and Administration about Administrative Student Support Services. *Online Journal of*

Distance Learning Administration, 15(4). Retrieved from

https://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/winter154/eskey_schulte154.html

Fernandez-Toro, M., & Hurd, S. (2014). A model of factors affecting independent

learners' engagement with feedback on language learning tasks. *Distance*

Education, 35(1), 106-125.

Fish, W., & Gill, P. (2009). Perceptions of online instruction. *The Turkish Online Journal*

of Educational Technology, 53-64.

Fish, W., & Wickersham, L. (2009). Best practices of online instructors: Reminders. *The*

Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 279-284.

Gaytan, J. (2015). Comparing faculty and student perceptions regarding factors that affect

student retention in online education. *American Journal of Distance Education*,

29(1), 56-66.

Gillingham, M., & Molinari, C. (2012). Online courses: student preferences survey.

Internet Learning, 1(1), 36-44.

Gogus, A., & Gunes, H. (2011). Learning styles and effective learning habits of

university students: a case from Turkey. *College Student Journal*, 45(3), 586-600.

Graham, C., Cagiltay, K., Lim, B.-R., Craner, J., & Duffy, T. (2001). Seven principles of

effective teaching: A practical lens for evaluating online. *The Technology Source*.

Retrieved from

http://technologysource.org/article/seven_principles_of_effective_teaching/

Green, T., Alejandro, J., & Brown, A. (2009). The retention of experienced faculty in

online distance education programs: understanding factors that impact their

involvment. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning.* Retrieved from http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/683/1279

Grow, G. O. (1996). Teaching learners to be self-directed. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 125-149.

Guest, G., Bunce, A., & Johnson, L. (1006). How many interviews are enough? An experiment with data saturation and variability. *Field Methods*, 59-82.

Hachey, A., Conway, K., & Wladis, C. (2013). Community colleges and underappreciated assets: using institutional data to promote success in online learning. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*. Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/spring161/hachey_wladis.html

Hancock, D., & Algozzine, B. (2006). *Doing case study research: a practical guide for beginning researchers.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Hardre, P. (2012). Community college faculty motivation for basic research, teaching research and professional development. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 36(8), 539-561.

Harrell, I., & Bower, B. (2011). Student characteristics that predict persistence in community college online courses. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 178-191.

Helmrick, B. (2016). 33 Ways to define leadership. *Business News Daily.* Retrieved from http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/3647-leadership-definition.html

Hesse-Biber, S. (2010). *Mixed methods research: Merging theory with practice.* New York, NY: Guilford Press.

Hixon, E., Buckenmeyer, J., Barczyk, C., Feldman, L., & Zamojski, H. (2011). Beyond
early adopters of online instructions: Motivating the reluctant majority. *Internet
and Higher Education*. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.iheduc.2011.11.005

Hollenbeck, C., Mason, C., & Song, J. (2011). Enhancing student learning in marketing
courses: an exploration of fundamental principles for website platforms. *Journal
of Marketing Education*, 33(2), 171-182.

Holzweiss, P., Joyner, S., Fuller, M., Henderson, S., & Young, R. (2014). Online
graduate students' perceptions of best learning experiences. *Distance Education,
35*(3), 311-323.

Huston, T., & Weaver, C. (2007). Peer coaching: Professional development for
experienced faculty. *Innovation in Higher Education*, 5-20. doi:10.1007/s10755-
007-9061-9

Hutchins, H. (2003). Instructional immediacy and the seven principles: strategies for
facilitating online courses. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*,
6(3). Retrieved from
http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/fall63/hutchins63.html

Ioannou, A., Demetriou, S., & Mama, M. (2014). Exploring factors influencing
collaborative knowledge construction in online discussions: student facilitation
and quality of initial postings. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 28(3),
183-195.

Jaggars, S., Edgecombe, N., & Stacey, G. (2013). *Creating an effective online instructor
presence.* New York, NY: Community College Research Center .

Jaggars, S., Edgecombe, N., & Stacey, G. (2013). *What we know about online course outcomes. Research overview.* New York, NY: Community College Research Center, Columbia University.

Jo, I.-H., Kim, D., & Yoon, M. (2015). Constructing proxy variable to measure adult learners' time management strategies in LMS. *Educational Technology & Society*, 18(3), 214-225.

Johnson, G. (1996). Faculty differences in university attrition: a comparison of the characteristics of arts, education and science student who withdrew from undergraduate programs. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 75-91.

Johnson, S., & Berge, Z. (2012). Online education in the community college. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 897-902.

Jowallah, R. (2014). An investigation into the management of online teaching and learning spaces: a case study involving graduate research students. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning, 15*(4). Retrieved from http://www.irrodl.org/index.php/irrodl/article/view/255/477

Kang, H. (2012). Training online faculty: A phenomenology study. *International Journal on E-Learning*, 391-406.

Karim, S., & Kandy, M. (2011). Time management skills impact on self-efficacy and academic performance. *Journal of American Science*, 720-726.

Kuo, Y.-C. (2014). Accelerated online learning: perceptions of interaction and learning outcomes among african american students. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 241-252.

Lackey, K. (2011). Faculty development: an analysis of current and effective training strategies for preparing faculty to teach online. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*. Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/winter144/lackey144.html

Lee, R., & Kovach, J. (2011). Online technologies for engaged learning: a meaninful synthesis for educators. *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 12*(2), 113-123.

Lee, S., Srinivasan, S., Trail, T., Lewis, D., & Lopez, S. (2011). Examining the relationship among student perception of support, course satisfaction, and learning outcomes in online learning. *Internet and Higher Education*, 158-163.

Liao, H.-A., Edlin, M., & Ferdenzi, A. C. (2014). Persistence at an urban community college: the implications of self-efficacy and motivation. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 1-17.

Lillis, M. (2012). Faculty emotional intelligence and student-faculty interactions: implications for student retention. *Journal of College Student Retention, 13*(2), 155-178.

Liu, S., Gomez, J., & Yen, C.-J. (2009). Community college online course retention and final grade: Predictability of social presence. *Journal of Interactive Online Learning*, 165-182.

Lodico, M., Spaulding, D., & Voegtle, K. (2010). *Methods in educational research: from theory to practice.* San Francisco, CA: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Lorenzetti, J. (2009). Developing Faculty Competency in Online Pedagogy. *Distance Education Report*, 5-8.

Lundberg, C., & Sheridan, D. (2015). Benefits of engagement with peers, faculty, and diversity for online learners. *College Teaching*, 8-15.

Mahle, M. (2011). Effects of interactivity on student achievement and motivation in distance education. *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, 207-215.

Maier, L. (2012). What are online teaching faculty telling us about building community. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 884-896.

Mastel-Smith, B., Post, J., & Lake, P. (2015). Online teaching: "are you there, and do you care?". *Journal of Nursing Education, 54*(3), 145-151.

Matthews, D. (1999). The origins of distance education and its use in the United States. *T. H. E. Journal (Technological Horizons in Education)*, 54-67. Retrieved from http://thejournal.com/articles/1999/09/01/the-origins-of-distance-education-and-its-use-in-the-united-states.aspx

Maxwell, J. A. (2004). *Qualitative Research Design: An Interactive Approach.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.

McCabe, D. B., & Meuter, M. (2011). A student view of technolgy in the classroom: does it enhance the seven principles of good practice in undergraduate education. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 149-159.

McDaniel, H., & Shaw, M. (2010). Online adjunct faculty professional development and training in higher education. *Journal of eLearning and Online Teaching*, *1*(5), 1-8.

McQuiggan, C. (2012). Faculty development for online teaching as a catalyst for change. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 16*(2), 27-61.

Merriam, S. (2009). *Qualitative research: a guide to design and implementation.* San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons.

Mertes, S., & Hoover, R. (2014). Predictors of first-year retention in a community college. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 651-660.

Meyer, K. (2014). How community college faculty members may improve student learning productivity in their online courses. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 575-587.

Meyer, K., & Murrell, V. (2014). A national study of training content and activities for faculty development for online teaching. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 18*(1). Retrieved from http://olj.onlinelearningconsortium.org/index.php/olj/article/view/355/97

Mills, S., Yanes, M., & Casebeer, C. (2009). Perceptions of distance learning among faculty of a college of education. *Journal of Online Learning and Teaching*, 19-28.

Mitchell, B., & Geva-May, I. (2009). Attitudes affecting online learing implementation in higher education institutions. *Journal of Distance Education*, 71-88.

Nadinloyi, K. B., Hajloo, N., Garamaleki, N. S., & Sadeghi, H. (2013). The study efficacy of time management training on increase academic time managment of student. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 134-138.

Nakajima, M., Dembo, M., & Mossler, R. (2012). Student persistence in community college. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 591-613.

National Center for Educational Statistics. (2014). *Who is nontraditional?* Retrieved from Institution of Education Sciences: http://nces.ed.gov/

Obama, B. (2009, July 14). *Statements and releases*. Retrieved from The White House: http://www.whitehouse.gov/the_press_office/Excerpts-of-the-Presidents-remarks-in-Warren-Michigan-and-fact-sheet-on-the-American-Graduation-Initiative

Oomen-Early, J., & Murphy, L. (2009). Self-actualization and e-learning: A qualitative investigation of university faculty's perceived needs for effective online instruction. *International Journal on E-Learning*, 223-240.

Ortlipp, M. (2008). Keeping and using reflective journals in the qualitative research process. *The Qualitative Report*, 695-705.

Park, J.-H., & Choi, H. (2009). Factors influencing adult learners' decision to drop out or persist in online learning. *Educational Technology & Society*, 207-217.

Patterson, B., & McFadden, C. (2009). Attrition in online and campus degree programs. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*. Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/summer122/patterson112.html

Paver, J., Walker, D., & Hung, W.-C. (2014). Factors that predect the integration of technology for instruction by community college adjunct faculty. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 68-85.

Pearson Foundation. (2011). *Second annual Pearson Foundation community college student survey.* Washington, DC: Pearson Foundation.

Portugal, L. (2015). Work ethetic, characteristics, attributes, and traits of successful online faculty. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 18*(1), 1-18.

Powell, T. (2010). What motivates faculty to adopt distance learning. *International Journal of Advances in Life Sciences*, 173-187.

Puzziferro, M., & Shelton, K. (2009). Supporting online faculty - revisiting the seven principles (a few years later). *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*. Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/fall123/puzziferro123.html

Quality Matters Program. (2014). *Quality Matters: About Us*. Retrieved February 26, 2012, from Quality Matters Program Website: http://www.qmprogram.org/about

Ragan, L. (2009). Defining competencies for online teaching success. *Distance Education Report*, 3-6.

Reilly, J., Vandenhouten, C., Gallagher-Lepak, S., & Ralston-Berg, P. (2012). Faculty development for e-learning: a multi-campus community of practice (COP) approach. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 16*(2), 99-110.

Ritter, M., & Lemke, K. (2000). Addressing the 'seven principles for good practice in undergraduate education' with internet-enhance education. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education*, 100-108.

Robb, C., & Sutton, J. (2014). The importance of social presence and motivation in distance learning. *The Journal of Technology, Management, and Applied Engineering*, 1-10.

Roehrs, C., Wang, L., & Kendrick, D. (2013). Preparing faculty to use the quality matters model for course improvement. *Journal of Online Teaching and Learning*. Retrieved from http://jolt.merlot.org/vol9no1/roehrs_0313.htm

Rogers, C., McIntyre, M., & Jazzar, M. (2010). Mentoring adjunct faculty using the cornerstones of effective communication and practice. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 53-59.

Roman, T., Kelsey, K., & Lin, H. (2010). Enhancing online education through instructor skill development in higher education. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*. Retreived from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/winter134/roman_kelsey134.html

Rovai, A. (2003). In search of higher persistence rates in distance education online programs. *The Internet and Higher Education*, 1-16.

Rovai, A., & Downey, J. (2010). Why some distance education programs fail while others succeed in a global environment. *Internet and Higher Education*, 141-147.

Rowntree, D. (1995). Teaching and learning online: a correspondence education for the 21st century? *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 205-215.

Rutschow, E., Cullinan, D., & Welbeck, R. (2012). *Keeping students on course: an impact study of a student success course at Guilford Community College.* MDRC.

Rutz, C., Condon, W., Iverson, E., Manduca, C., & Willett, G. (2012). Faculty professional development and student learning: what is the relationship? *Change*, 40-47.

Schneider, B. (2014, June 18). Associated Vice President Research and Performance Management. (J. Hamilt, Interviewer)

Seaman, J. (2009). *Online learning as a strategic asset.* New York, NY: Association of Public and Land-grant Institutions.

Seybert, J., & Rossol, P. (2010). What drives instructional costs in two-year colleges: data from the Kansas study of community college instructional costs and productivity. *Society for College Instructional Costs and Productivity*, 38-44.

Shattuck, J., & Anderson, T. (2013). Making a match: aligning audience, goals, and content in online adjunct training. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*. Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/winter164/shattuck_anderson164.html

Simsek, U. (2013). Views of prospective teachers about the seven principles of effective teaching and learning, using social studies as a case. *Educational Research and Review*, 1337-1347.

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. (2010, June). *Distance and correspondence education policy statement.* Retrieved September 22, 2013, from The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges:

http://www.sacscoc.org/pdf/Distance%20and%20correspondence%20policy%20fi

nal.pdf

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. (2011). *The*

principles of accrediation: Foundations for quality enhancement. Decatur, GA:

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges.

Sowan, A., & Jenkins, L. (2013). Use of the seven principles of effective teaching to

design and deliver an interactive hybrid nursing research course. *Nursing*

Education Perspectives, 315-322.

Stake, R. (1994). Case studies. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln, *Handbook of*

qualitative research (pp. 236-247). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing .

Stake, R. (1998). Case studies. In N. Denzin, & Y. Lincoln, *Strategies of qualitative*

inquiry (pp. 86-109). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing.

Swan, K., Matthews, D., Bogle, L., Boles, E., & Day, S. (2012). Linking online course

design and implementation to learning outcomes: A design experiment. *Internet*

and Higher Education, 81-88.

Taylor, A., & McQuiggan, C. (2008). Faculty development programming: If we build it,

will they come? *Educause Quarterly*, 29-37.

Terosky, A. L., & Heasley, C. (2014). Supporting online faculty through a sense of

community and collegiality. *Online Learning Journal, 19*(3), 147-161.

The Ohio Learning Network Task Force. (2003). *Quality learning in Ohio and at a distance, a report of the Ohio Learning Network Task Force on quality in distance learning.* Ohio Learning Network.

Tinto, V. (1975). Dropout from higher education: a theoretical synthesis of recent research. *Review of Educational Research*, 89-125.

Tinto, V. (1987). *Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Tinto, V. (1993). Building community. *Liberal Education*, 16-21.

Tinto, V. (2012). *Completing college: rethinking institutional action.* Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

Tirrell, T., & Quick, D. (2012). Chickering's seven principles of good practice: student attrition in community college online courses. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 580-590.

Todd, C. L., Ravi, K., Akoh, H., & Gray, V. (2015). An online adult-learner focused program: an assessment of effectiveness. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 18*(3). Retrieved from https://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/fall183/todd_ravi_akoh_gray183.html

Vaill, A., & Testori, P. (2012). Onientation, mentoring and ongoing support: A three-tiered approach to online faculty development. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 111-119.

Walsham, G. (1995). Interpretive case studies in IS research: nature and method. *European Journal of Information Systems*, 74-81.

Watwood, B., Nugent, J., & Deihl, W. (2009). *Building from content to community: [Re] thinking the transition to online teaching and learning.* Viriginia Commonwealth University, Center for Teaching Excellence, Richmond, VA.

Willcoxson, L., Cotter, J., & Joy, S. (2011). Beyond the first-year experience: the impact on attrition of student experiences throughout undergraduate degree studies in six diverse universities. *Studies in Higher Education*, 331-352.

Windes, D., & Lesht, F. (2014). The effects of online teaching experience and institution type on faculty perceptions of teaching online. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration*. Retrieved from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/spring171/windes_lesht171.html

Windham, M., Rehfuss, M., & Williams, C. (2014). Retention of first-year community college students. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*, 466-477.

Workman, J., & Stenard, R. (1997). Student support services for distance learners. *Education at a Distance*, 18-22.

Xu, D., & Jaggars, S. (2010). *Online learning in the Virginia Community College System.* New York, NY: Community College Research Center.

Xu, D., & Jaggars, S. (2011). *Online and hybrid course enrollment and performance in Washington State Community and Technical Colleges.* New York, NY: Community College Research Center.

Xu, D., & Jaggars, S. (2013). *Adaptability to online learning: Differences across types of students and academic subject areas.* New York, NY: Community College Research Center.

Yamagata-Lynch, L. (2014). Blending online asynchronous and synchronous learning. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 15(2).

Yin, R. (2009). *Case study research: design and methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Young, A., & Hoerig, B. (2013). Utilizing student feedback to inform faculty development activities for online course development and delivery. *Internation Journal on E-Learning*, 439-453.

Appendix A: The Project

Introduction

This project study addresses the need for preparing distance learning faculty to facilitate successful course completion in online course. The purpose was to address the gaps in practice described by distance learning faculty and staff. The project site is a small community college is the southeastern United States. The institution regularly provides professional development for online faculty; however, there are no clear guidelines governing the professional development. It is often given on-demand and in small groups. Once distance learning faculty attend a session for new online faculty, there are no additional professional development requirements. Through interviews with distance learning faculty and students, it was revealed that both students and faculty struggle with engagement in their online course. The results also indicated that students and faculty did not have a clear understanding of the student support services for online students. Finally, many faculty at this institution also serve as student advisors. The results of this project study showed that faculty need to have an understanding of the requirements of taking an online course and how they can help prepare students for online learning. This project was developed to provide faculty with best-practices for engaging students in the online class and to provide faculty with the knowledge of support structures for online students, as well as information on how to best advise students wishing to take online courses. The professional development outline in this project study was customized for the faculty at this institution, but it could be easily modified so that it would be beneficial to other community colleges.

Project Goals, Outcomes, and Objectives

Title: Preparing Faculty to Teach Online: Promoting Success in the Online

Classroom

Goals: The goals of this professional development opportunity are to provide

distance learning faculty with:

- The tools necessary to promote engagement in online courses.
- Knowledge of student support services for distance learning students
- The skills necessary to help prepare students for online learning.

Learning Outcomes:

Week 1 Outcomes
Upon completion of week one, participants should be able to:

- Identify Chickering and Gamson's Seven Principles
- Identify best practices for promoting faculty-to-student interactions
- Identify best practices for promoting student-to-student interactions
- Create a discussion board prompt that promotes both faculty-to-student and student-to-student interaction
- Create a discussion board rubric to evaluated a discussion board assignment

Week 2 Outcomes
Upon completion of week two, participants should be able to

- Discuss the challenges facing first-time distance learning students
- Identify best practices in preparing students for distance learning
- Explain to students the skills necessary for taking an online course
- Explain to student the requirements for taking an online course

Week 3 Outcomes
Upon completion of week three, participants should be able to

- Identify the student support services available to distance learning students
- Help students access student support services
- Identify the technology resources available to students

- Discuss the challenges facing faculty in helping students access student support services

Target Audience: New and existing distance learning faculty at ABC Community College

Location/Format: This professional development will be offered in an asynchronous online format. The information is broken down into the three weekly modules as follows:

- Week 1 – Engaging in the Online Classroom (6 – 8 hours, due on day 7)
- Week 2 – Advising Students for the Online Classroom (6 – 8 hours, due on day 14)
- Week 3 – Distance Learning Student Support Services (6 – 8 hours, due on day 21)

Timeline: The training is scheduled for three consecutive weeks. Faculty will work through the course materials at a time of their own choosing; however, due dates for each weekly module will be assigned. Faculty should expect to spend between 6-8 hrs per week with the course material.

Week 1 Lesson Plan – Engaging in the Online Classroom

Activity 1 – Introductions

Visit the Introductions Discussion Forum and post an introduction. Use the following questions to help guide your response:

1. What subject area do you teach?
2. Have you ever taught online? If so, describe your experiences.
3. Have you ever taken a class online? If so, what was the most challenging part of taking a class online? What was the greatest benefit?

After you have posted your introduction, return to the Introductions Discussion Forum throughout the week and respond to other participants. Use the following to guide your responses:

- Did you face the same challenges?
- How might you have overcome those challenges?
- Was your experience different? In what ways?
- Do you teach in the same subject area? If so, what classes do you think might be challenging to teach online? Which classes could easily be taught online?

Learning Resource 1 –Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education

Chickering and Gamson's "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education was published in 1987 and gave faculty seven principles that increased student success in higher education. Their article was based upon research on undergraduate education. While the principles identified by Chickering and Gamson were not developed for distance learning courses, research later proved that the principles were also effective in the online classroom. Begin this week by reading Chickering and Gamson's "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education".

Activity 2 – Discussion of the Seven Principles

Visit the Seven Principles Discussion Forum and respond to the following prompt:

Chickering and Gamson provide seven principles that help students succeed. Think about each of the seven principles and identify one idea for how you can address each of the seven principles in your online classroom. Return to the

discussion board throughout the week and respond to other participants. Use the following to help guide your responses:

- Share your own similar experience
- Post your own opinion backed by research
- Respond with a thought-provoking question related to a classmates response
- Provide the pros and cons in using the suggested approach

Learning Resource 2 – Promoting Interactions in Your Discussion Boards Video

Watch the "Promoting Interactions in Your Discussion Boards" video. This video contains interviews with four experienced distance learning faculty. Faculty discuss the challenges they faced in fostering interactions in their online classroom and how they overcame those challenges. Faculty also discuss how faculty should interact in their discussion boards.

Learning Resource 3 – Crafting a Strong Discussion Board Prompt

CRAFTING A STRONG DISCUSSION BOARD PROMPT
ENGAGING YOUR STUDENTS IN AN ONLINE DISCUSSION

LEARNING OUTCOMES

At the conclusion of this section, you should be able to:
- Identify the types of discussion board prompts
- Write a discussion board prompt that facilitates engagement
- Develop a discussion rubric that promotes engagement

WHAT IS A DISCUSSION?

Think about the following questions:
- What does a discussion look like in your face-to-face courses?
- What role do you play in your face-to-face discussions?
- What do you think an online discussion should look like?

TYPES OF DISCUSSION BOARDS

- Peer review
- Collaborative writing
- Case study
- Internet field trip
- Group debate
- Brainstorming

WRITING EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION BOARD PROMPTS

- Before you write a discussion board prompt, you need to decide what it is that you would like the students to know.
- Write your prompt with that goal in mind.
- Avoid prompts that have yes/no answers
- Use prompts that utilize convergent, divergent or evaluative thinking

Convergent	Divergent	Evaluative
Prompts start with: • How does… • Why does…	Prompts start with: • Predict… • What are the possible effects of… • Imagine you are…	Prompts start with: • Defend the use of… • What do you think… • Justify

SAMPLE PROMPTS

Convergent	Divergent	Evaluative
In what ways does a CT scan differ from a MRI? How does a antivirus software package differ from malware prevention software?	How might life today differ without antibiotics? How might the performance of the operating system be impacted by the simultaneous use of two antivirus programs?	Justify France's decision to close their borders for three months following the recent terrorist attacks.

Ciardiello, Angelo. (1998). "Did you ask a good question today? Alternative cognitive and metacognitive strategies." Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy. 42, 210-219.

FACULTY ROLES IN ONLINE DISCUSSIONS

- You are a PARTICIPANT in your discussion boards – students should know that you are "in" the discussion
- Ask open-ended questions instead of providing answers
  - For example: You provide an promising solution to repairing the structure; however, what do you think the impact will be on the strength of the structure?
- Make sure your students understand that you expect them to respond to your additional questions.

SUGGESTIONS FOR EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION BOARDS

- Communicate your expectations starting with the introductory assignment
- Provide examples of a strong discussion board post
- Guide the student through your expectations
  - Provide a desired length
  - Criteria for their response
  - Learning resources that should be consulted in the post
- Encourage socialization during the first few days of the course – it establishes community
- Model your expectations in your own discussion board posts
- Tie the purpose of the discussion board to your course learning outcomes

STUDENT CHALLENGES

- Students often struggle with creating a post that can be discussed
- Student typically respond with pat answers
- Students often do not know how to respond to a classmate – this frequently leads to answers like "I agree with Joe…"

CREATING DIALOG

- Start by explaining the purpose of the discussion board in your class and what they can expect to learn from your discussion boards
- Teach your students how to respond. Instructions for responding should not be limited to "respond to 2 classmates"
- Provide students with ideas that can help guide their responses
  - For example:
    - If you have experienced something similar share how you responded to the situation.
    - What are the pros and cons of preparing beef in this manner? Provide citations from our Beef Preparation Guide to support your answers.
- Make sure your participation expectations are clear – you cannot require your students to respond the way you expect if you do not tell them how to do that

EVALUATING DISCUSSION BOARDS

- Develop a rubric that allows students to earn points for different types of contributions
  - Challenge an idea
  - Provide alternative solutions
  - Help clarify an idea
- Have students submit a self-reflection of their contributions to the discussion – require that they also include their own posts
- Have students submit a summary of all topics discussed during the week

SUMMARY

In this lesson we have explored how to:

- Write an effective discussion board prompt
- Facilitate your online discussions
- Evaluate your discussion boards

Learning Resource 4 – Sample Discussion Board Rubrics

Evaluating a Discussion Board

GRADING THAT ENCOURAGES DISCUSSION

Developing a Discussion Board Rubric

☐ Use of a rubric that encourages discussion is critical to increasing engagement

☐ Students need to understand the purpose of the discussion and how their comments will be assessed

☐ Provide guidance on what the post should contain

☐ Discussion rubrics are not one-size-fits-all – choose a rubric that works well for your discussion topic and teaching style

Discussion Board Evaluation Example 3

Discussion Board Evaluation – Discussions for this class will be evaluated on the quality and timeliness of the post. Participation in the course discussion board is determined by the number of days you actively engage in the board. The following scale will be used to determine your grade for the discussion board:

90 – 100 Grade = A	80 – 89 Grade = B	70 – 79 Grade = C	0 – 69 Grade = D/F
Discussion responses earning an A must include: • >= 3 participation days • Makes strong connections to learning resources • Stimulate additional discussion • Makes connections to real-life circumstances	Discussion responses earning a B must include: • >= 2 participation days • Makes some connections to learning resources • Makes some connections to real-life circumstances	Discussion responses earning a C must include: • Do not allow time for classmates to read and respond • Makes minimal connections to learning resources • Makes minimal connections to real-life circumstances	Discussion responses earning a C must include: • Do not allow time for classmates to read and respond • Does not make connections to learning resources • Does not make connections to real-life circumstances

Discussion Board Evaluation Example 2

Each week, your discussion board contributions will be evaluated using the following rubric:

Original Response to the Prompt (14 Points)
✓ Cites a minimum of 2 points from your weekly learning resources (3 Points)
✓ Provides a critical analysis of the topic and is not a regurgitation of learning resources (9 Points)
✓ Provides a example of how the learning resources relate to your personal experiences (2 Points)

Responses to Classmates (16 Points)
✓ Share your own similar experience (4 Points)
✓ Post your own opinion backed by citations from our learning resources (4 Points)
✓ Respond with a thought-provoking question related to a classmate's response (4 Points)
✓ Provide the pros and cons in using the suggested approach (4 Points)

Discussion Board Evaluation Example 1

Class Discussions - Class discussions are an essential component of our course. My expectation is that you will regularly contribute your questions, comments and ideas to the prompt posted each week. My role in our discussion board is to facilitate and help move the discussion forward. I will read all posts and contribute to the discussion as needed. As part of my contributions, I may pose a question. While the question may be in reply to a specific student, my expectation is that all students will read and contribute.

Evaluating Class Discussions - Class discussions are evaluated based upon the quality of the postings, NOT the quantity. There are a total of 15 discussion boards in this course and the grading scale found below will be used to assign points. One bonus point can be earned each week for actively engaging others in the discussion. Class discussions will be worth a total of 45 points.

1 Point	2 Points	3 Points
Minimal response to the prompt	Response address the prompt, but does not encourage additional discussion	Response addresses the prompt and encourages additional discussion and follow-up

Discussion Board Evaluation Example 4

Category	4 Points	3 Points	2 Points	1 Point
Timeliness	Responds within 24 hours of the discussion begin date	Responds within 48 hours of the discussion begin date	Responds within 72 hours of the discussion begin date	Responds later than 72 hours of the discussion begin date
Grammar/Spelling	Posts are free of grammatical and spelling errors	Posts have no more than 3 grammatical or spelling errors	Posts have no more than 5 grammatical or spelling errors	Posts have more than 5 grammatical errors
Relevance	Posts are related to the topic and includes citations from the learning resources	Posts are related to the topic, but may not cite learning resources	Posts are somewhat related to the topic	Posts are not related to the topic and do not include citations from the learning resources
Contribution to Learning	Promotes additional discussion on a regular basis by asking and/or responding to additional questions	Frequently promotes additional discussion by asking and/or responding to additional questions	Occasionally promotes additional discussion by asking or responding to additional questions	Does not promote additional discussion.

Activity 3 – Developing a Discussion Prompt that Promotes Interaction

Choose a unit of study from a course that you currently teach. Write a discussion board prompt for the unit. The prompt should incorporate each of the components discussed in Learning Resources 2 and 3. When you have completed your prompt, share it with the other participants in the Writing a Discussion Prompt forum. Then provide a peer-review of each of your classmate's prompts. You might consider:

- o Providing suggestions for improving the prompt
- o Identifying potential challenges of the prompt

Activity 4 – Developing a Rubric for Your Discussion Board

Using Learning Resource 4 as a guide, develop a rubric for the discussion you developed in Activity 3. Share your rubric in Rubric Peer Review Discussion Forum. After you have posted your rubric, review and provide feedback to each of your fellow faculty members.

Week 2 Lesson Plan – Advising Students for the Online Classroom

Activity 1 – Your Experience with Advising Students for the Online Classroom
Visit the Advising Experience Discussion Board and share your personal experiences with advising students. If you have advised students regarding online learning, share your experiences. If you are new to advising online students, describe how you advise students for traditional courses. How do you think those processes will have to change for the online learner?

After you have posted your personal experiences, return to the discussion forum throughout the week and respond to other participants. Use the following to guide your responses:

- Did you face the same challenges?
- How might you have overcome those challenges?
- Was your experience different? In what ways?

Learning Resource 1 – In the Student's Own Words Video

Watch the video titled, "*In the Student's Own Word*". This video contains interviews with current online students discussing their experiences in taking their first online course. Students discuss the challenges they faced and what they wish they had known before taking an online course.

Learning Resource 2 – Distance Learning Student Orientation

Go to the Distance Learning Student Orientation link. Work through the orientation as though you are a first time online student. As you work through the orientation, think about the skills students need to have to take an online course. Once you have completed the orientation, upload your certificate of completion in Moodle using the Orientation link.

Learning Resource 3 – Distance Learning Student Readiness Inventory

Go to the Distance Learning Student Readiness Inventory and take the assessment. Students should take this inventory prior to registering for an online course. As you take the inventory, be thinking about how you can use this in the advising process.

Activity 2 – Challenges Facing Distance Learning Students

Visit the Challenges Discussion Board and discuss the challenges facing first-time distance learning students. Use the following questions to guide your post:

> What challenge did you find the most surprising? As an advisor what could you do to help prevent those challenges? As a faculty member, what can you do to help support first-time distance learning students? How might you use the distance learning student orientation and readiness inventory to help advise first-time distance learning students?

After you have posted your initial response, return to the discussion forum throughout the week and respond to other participants. Use the following to guide your responses:
- o What are the pros and cons of that approach?
- o What are some examples you have used in similar situations?
- o Expand on your classmate's response.

Activity 3 - Advising Checklist

Visit the Advising Checklist discussion board and brainstorm on a checklist for advising first-time online students. For example: What questions might you want to ask? What information should you make sure they have? What assessments will they need to complete?

As a group, narrow the checklist down to the top ten items needed on an advising checklist.

Week 3 Lesson Plan – Distance Learning Student Support Services

Learning Resource 1 – Overview of Distance Learning Student Support Services

ONLINE STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES
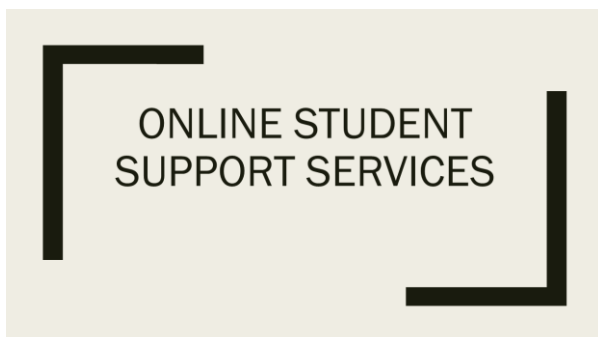
Library Services

- Students can access most library resources online from the Library Services Moodle page.
- All research databases can be access online
- Students who may need library services beyond those listed on the Library Services Moodle page can contact the library at [email] or [phone number]

Online Tutoring

- All students have access to ThinkingStorm
- ThinkingStorm provides students with on-demand online tutoring in math, science, writing, business and nursing courses
- ThinkingStorm is free for all students and can be accessed from the drop-down menu in Moodle

Registrar's Office

- All business conducted with the Office of the Registrar can be conducted either in person or online
- Students should visit the Office of the Registrar's webpage for specific instructions for online students
- Students can contact the Office of the Registrar at [email] or [phone]

IT Help Desk

- The IT Help Desk is the first point of contact for any technical question
- Students can contact the IT Help Desk at [phone number]
- Important Links
  – Password Reset Server
  – Student Email Access
  – Internet Access
  – Help Desk Request Portal
  – Moodle

Technology Support

- Students have access to important technology tutorials via Moodle
- Technology tutorials include:
  – Technology requirements
  – Accessing wireless on campus
  – Moodle homepage tour
  – Logging into Moodle for the first time
  – Moodle survival skills for students
  – Using WebAdvisor for the first time
  – How to register for classes
  – Getting started with Office 365
  – Outlook email tutorial

Learning Resource 2 – Support Services Overview Video

Watch the video titled, "*Support Services Overview*". This video provides an overview of each of the support services available to students and how distance learning students can access the services.

Activity 1 – Technology Tutorials WebQuest

Visit the Technology Tutorials webpage and work through the tutorials. As your work your way through the tutorials, answer the following questions in a word processing document:

1. What are the minimum computer requirements for taking an online course?
2. Name each of the components found on the Moodle homepage.
3. What is the password to access the campus wireless network?
4. Name each of the four steps in registering for classes.
5. Explain the process for downloading the free student version of Microsoft Office.
6. What mobile devices are supported by technology services?
7. Name 4 Moodle survival skills.

Once you have completed the Technology Tutorials WebQuest, upload your file to our Moodle course page.

Learning Resource 3 – ThinkingStorm Online Tutoring Video

Watch the video titled, "*ThinkingStorm Online Tutoring*". This video provides an overview of the ThinkingStorm Online Tutoring platform. This video will provide an overview of the service, subject area providing, usage reports and information for accessing the service.

Activity 2 – Support Services Quiz

Visit our Moodle course page and complete the Support Services quiz. This interactive quiz will test your knowledge of the support services and allow you to visit each of the support services webpages. You may take the quiz as many times as necessary.

Activity 3 – Supporting the Distance Learning Students Discussion

Visit the Supporting Distance Learning Students discussion board and discuss the how faculty can help students access the necessary support services. Use the following questions to guide your post:

- How can faculty reinforce the services available to distance learning students?

- How can faculty increase awareness of the services available?
- What are the challenges in helping distance learning student gain access to services?

After you have posted your initial response, return to the discussion forum throughout the week and respond to other participants. Use the following to guide your responses:

- What are the pros and cons of that approach?
- What are some examples you have used in similar situations?
- Expand on your classmate's response.

Professional Development Formative Feedback

Thank you for completing this training opportunity. This evaluation will provide important feedback on the effectiveness of this session. Please circle your response to each of the following questions.

1. The content presented in this training was easy to navigate.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

2. The content of this training prepared you for teaching in the online classroom.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

3. The multimedia elements of this training were easy to use.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

4. The discussions in this training helped my understanding of the concepts presented.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

5. The activities in this training reinforced my understanding of the concepts presented.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

6. How will you incorporate the information presented in this training in your online courses?

7. Please share any additional comments or suggestions regarding this training session.

Professional Development Summative Feedback

This evaluation will provide important feedback on the effectiveness of this session. Please circle your response to each of the following questions.

1. The content presented in this training helped prepare me for my first online course

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

2. The content of this training was presented in an appropriate depth.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

3. As a result of this training, I have the skills necessary to facilitate engagement in my online courses.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

4. As a result of this training, I have the knowledge necessary to inform students of the support services available to distance learning students.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

5. As a result of this training, I have the knowledge necessary to advice and prepare students for their first online course.

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

6. What concepts from the training did you use in your online courses?

7. What concepts do you feel were needed but were not covered in the training?

8. Please share any additional comments or suggestions regarding this training session.

Appendix B: Faculty Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:	
Date:	
Location:	
Interviewer:	
Interviewee:	
Subject Area:	

[Describe the project to the interviewee.]
The purpose of this study is to explore the framework necessary for successful course completion in distance learning courses. The study will analyze data collected from faculty and student interviews, along with observations of online course records. This interview will be recorded and a transcript will be created. You will have an opportunity to review the transcript to ensure accuracy. You will also have an opportunity to make adjustments to the transcripts. This interview will take approximately an hour to complete.
[Have the interviewee read and sign the consent form.]
[Turn on the tape recorder and test it]

Questions
1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. What subjects do you teach? How long have you been teaching online?
2. How do you encourage faculty-to-student interaction in your online classroom? How do you encourage student-to-student interaction?
3. Describe you provide feedback on student assignments. How often do you provide feedback?
4. How do you facilitate a sense of community between students within your online classroom?
5. How do you address the potential for multiple learning styles in your online courses?
6. How do you define active learning? How do you promote active learning in your online courses?
7. Tell me about the types of professional development related to distance learning have you attended. Describe the format of the trainings.
8. How do you keep up-to-date with distance learning technologies and best practices for online learning?

9. What is the most difficult part of teaching online? What is the greatest benefit of teaching online?

Appendix C: Student Interview Protocol

Time of Interview:	
Date:	
Location:	
Interviewer:	
Interviewee:	
Subject Area:	

[Describe the project to the interviewee.]
The purpose of this study is to explore the framework necessary for successful course completion in distance learning courses. The study will analyze data collected from faculty and student interviews, along with observations of online course records. This interview will be recorded and a transcript will be created. You will have an opportunity to review the transcript to ensure accuracy. You will also have an opportunity to make adjustments to the transcripts. This interview will take approximately an hour to complete.
[Have the interviewee read and sign the consent form.]
[Turn on the tape recorder and test it]

Questions
1. Tell me a little bit about yourself. What are you majoring in? How long have you been a student at this institution?
2. Describe your experience with online courses.
3. What information did your advisor provide you with prior to taking your first online course?
4. Describe the interactions you have had with your online instructors and classmates.
5. Describe the instructional methods (such as videos, PowerPoints, case studies, discussions, etc) your online instructors have used. Which ones do you feel helped you succeed academically?
6. Describe the type of assignment feedback you have received in your online courses.
7. Describe the student support services available for online students. Describe their impact on your success. Are there support services you feel should be added for online services?
8. How would you describe the difference between online and traditional courses?

Appendix D: Observational Protocol

Course:
Semester:
Faculty Full-time or Adjunct:

Description Notes	Reflective Notes