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Female Persistence in Fully Online Allied Health Programs at a Career College

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
2019

Abstract

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MS, Robert Morris University, 2002

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Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Persistence to program completion is critical for online students. Retaining online students is a struggle in higher education with online persistence rates being significantly lower than nononline students. In this qualitative case study the perceptions of female graduates who persisted in a fully online allied health program at a career college were investigated. Using Tinto's theory of student departure and self-determination theory, the characteristics, attitudes, and motivations of female online learners explored to discern their perceived success in the online classroom. The research questions focused on participants' perceptions, skills, and attitudes that contribute to their success, experiences with support services, and a review of archival documents to examine existing systems to support this population to gain insight into possible methods to support persistence challenges by designing meaningful learning experiences, to strengthen student persistence and develop faculty for online teaching. Notes from document reviews and semistructured interviews with 12 participants were analyzed and coded using an inductive approach to identify themes in the data. Results of the research indicated that participants used a variety of strategies for success, connected to the campus community, were prepared for online learning, and engaged with learning materials to support persisting to graduation. The findings of this study will influence social change by providing administrators and faculty a 3-day professional development program to strengthen faculties' understanding of online students' needs thereby improving online student support, persistence to degree completion, and graduation. Degree completion will improve career opportunities resulting in a higher quality of life.

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Dedication

This study is dedicated to my partner, Wendy, who stood by me during this journey with unwavering support and motivation. Through the continuous support of my family and friends I have been able to accomplish this milestone in my life. Although my Dad is not here to see me reach this milestone, thank you to him for always encouraging me to pursue education and never to stop learning new things. The constant support, encouragement, and understanding about absences from life over the past years have been instrumental in completing this doctoral journey.

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Introduction

It is not uncommon for online institutions to struggle with retaining online students at the beginning of their college career (Shaw, Burrus, & Ferguson, 2016). Different factors such as class rank, grade point average, online experience, and technology competence can contribute to online students persisting and moving towards degree completion (Glazier, 2016). Self-efficacy, self-determination, autonomy, and time management are also factors that affect an online student's choice to withdraw or persist (Street, 2010). An investigation of female student perceptions of what is required to be successful and persevere will help in developing methods to address persistence challenges and create more meaningful learning experiences that increase student persistence.

The Local Problem

There is a problem in a local technical college, specifically, an issue with the yearly persistence of online female students enrolled in allied health programs at the college. The online allied health programs offered include a medical coding certificate (MCC) program and a medical office administration associate of science degree program. The problem at the college is the persistence of female students enrolled in allied health programs. The college enrollment was 609 students in online allied health programs from 2010 to 2015 with 94.5 % of the students being female and attending on a full-time basis (Vice President of Education, personal communication, October 15, 2016).

Since the inception of fully online allied health programs at the college in 2010, 341 female students withdrew from the college (Vice President of Education, personal communication, October 15, 2016). Despite a student-focused college environment that offers various support systems such as synchronous tutoring, full time faculty, weekly synchronous sessions that are recorded, access to an academic advisor and a program coordinator, 42% of female online students withdrew from the college since 2010 (Vice President of Education, personal communication, October 15, 2016). The college enrolled a total of 866 fully online students in the allied health programs from 2010 to 2015 (Registrar, personal communication, October 17, 2016). The majority of students enrolled in fully online allied health programs have been female with only 60 male students enrolled in the programs. Forty-three percent of students enrolled in fully online allied health programs have withdrawn from the college over a 5-year span. Fifty-six percent of the 60 male students enrolled in the fully online allied health programs at the college have withdrawn from 2010 to 2015 (Vice President of Education, personal communication, October 15, 2016). The percent of male students who have left the fully online programs is staggering because of the small number of males who chose either a medical coding certificate program or a medical office administration associate of science degree program. The number of female students who have withdrawn from their fully online allied health programs from 2010 to 2015 was 42 % (341 students) of the 806 female students enrolled. The persistence rate of female students in online allied health programs at the college between 2010 to 2015 has been inconsistent as the online student population increased as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

2010–2015 Persistence Rates for Fully Online Allied Health Students

Year	Gender	Population	Withdrawn	Withdraw %	Combined withdraw %
2010	Female	49	17	35%	37%
	Male	2	2	100%	
2011	Female	108	30	28%	29%
	Male	7	3	43%	
2012	Female	146	70	48%	49%
	Male	11	7	64%	
2013	Female	146	72	49%	50%
	Male	11	7	64%	
2014	Female	165	76	46%	47%
	Male	13	7	54%	
2015	Female	192	76	40%	40%
	Male	16	8	50%	

Note. Adapted from *Online Retention Report*

Female students enrolled in online allied health programs are leaving the college with debt and no certificate or degree. Several possible factors are contributing to this problem, among which are feelings of isolation, the inability to engage with student resources, and the understanding of what skills are needed to succeed as an online student (Hart, 2012; Hartnett, 2015; Street, 2010; Thomas, Herbert, & Teras, 2014).

The proliferation of students participating in online education programs across the United States continues as higher education enrollments decline (Allen & Seaman, 2015). Online learning course enrollments have increased over the years with more and more institutions offering courses at a distance (Allen & Seaman, 2013, 2015). The complexity of retaining students in a postsecondary setting has been a topic of interest for academics for many years (Boston, Ice, & Gibson, 2011; Hart, 2012; Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges,

& Hayek, 2006; Tinto, 2006). When comparing the attrition rate of online students and traditional students who attend on campus, online attrition rates are 3% to 5% higher (Haynie, 2015). As online coursework becomes more of a mainstay in schools, the concern regarding the persistence of students has become an increased focus for administrators (Boston, & Ice, 2011; Poll, Widen, & Weller, 2014; Thistoll, & Yates, 2016). Postsecondary schools must be cognizant of student persistence to assist in preserving the longevity of the college or university.

Increased federal attention on the completion of college from the Department of Education has prompted postsecondary school staff to examine the overall persistence of students (Miller & Bell, 2016). Academic leaders have a growing concern about student retention in distance education courses, and 44.6% of leaders agree that online student retention presents more challenges than face-to-face courses (Allen & Seaman, 2015). *The Condition of Education* report from the National Center for Educational Statistics indicated that the retention of first-time degree-seeking students who return in the fall for 2-year private for-profit postsecondary schools is 66% (Kena et al., 2016; McFarland et al., 2017). An investigation of the perceptions of female students and what assists them in being successful online will help academic leaders address issues of retention in distance education courses.

Rationale

The retention of students is a vital aspect of a college and an understanding of why students persist, what skills are needed to persist, and what services assist students in persisting is critical to the sustainability of a college (Tinto, 2017; Yang, Baldwin, &

Snelson, 2017). According to Gullixson (2015), the withdrawal of students at a college can affect the reputation of an institution, lower revenues, and increase the cost of recruiting new students.

The consequence of losing students extends beyond the college walls (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2013; Boston, Ice, & Burgess, 2012; Chiyaka, Sithole, Manyanga, McCarthy, & Bucklein, 2016). Individuals who have achieved a college degree are more apt to be employed, live a healthier lifestyle, and move up the socioeconomic ladder (Ma, Pender, & Welch, 2016). Leaving college can have a significant impact on the earning potential and the overall health of an individual. According to Ma et al. (2016), 68% of females with an associate degree were earning more than the median earnings for females with a high school diploma. Exploring how to have a positive effect on student persistence in fully online programs will assist individuals in realizing their dreams and reaching their full earning potential to have a positive impact on society (Allen, & Seaman, 2015, 2017; Cochran, Campbell, Baker, & Leeds, 2014).

In this study, I explored the insights of female students enrolled in fully online allied health programs at a career college. My intent was to determine what contributed to a female student's persistence to graduation and explore their experiences to understand the skills, abilities, and attitudes that influenced persistence. In the study, I examined the student experience with fully online courses and explored strategies that influence staying on track to graduation from both the perspective of the student and the college.

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of online female students to determine the skills and attitudes required to complete an allied health online program and persist to graduation. In addition, I explored documents such as the mission statement, college catalog, and student handbook to identify the support services that contributed to student persistence at the college. This study contributes to the body of knowledge needed to address the problem of student persistence by providing strategies that assist students in completing an online program in allied health and persisting to graduation.

Definition of Terms

In this study I use several terms associated with online learning. The following terms are used throughout: asynchronous learning, attrition, distance education, learning management system, online learning, persistence, retention, synchronous learning, and virtual classroom software.

Allied health: Health professionals outside of doctors and nurses who provide services that support the healthcare of individuals at various levels (Demo, Fry, Devine, & Butler, 2015).

Asynchronous learning: Online courses that are designed to allow students the ability to complete coursework at their own pace and on their own time without concurrent one-on-one interaction with the faculty member. Incorporates the use of discussions and online assignments in a flexible learning environment (Hrastinski, 2008; Yamagata-Lynch, 2014).

Attrition: The reduction of student population at the college over time (Street, 2010).

Career college: A postsecondary institution that offers certificate, associate, and bachelor level programs of study that target specific careers (Miller, Topper, & Richardson, 2017).

Distance education (also referred to as online learning): The use of the Internet and software with a physical separation between the learner and faculty member that may include both asynchronous and synchronous learning components to deliver learning to students who are remote to campus (Allen, & Seaman, 2015, 2017; Miller et al., 2017).

Learning management system: Software systems that are designed to allow schools the ability to deliver course curricula via technology that allows faculty and students to share materials, provide assignments, and communicate (Lonn & Teasley, 2009). For this study students use the Blackboard Learning Management System.

Nontraditional student: A student who meets one or more the following characteristics: attending school part-time, independent financially, single caregiver, working full time, delayed enrollment in higher education (Radford, Cominole, & Skomsvold, 2015).

Persistence: The ability of students to maintain enrollment in their online courses on a consistent basis from term to term and year to year until graduation (Hart, 2012; Rovai, 2003).

Retention: The measure that the college uses to show the percent of students who maintain enrollment in their courses on a consistent basis from term to term and year to year until graduation (Boston et al., 2011; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 2006, 2012).

Synchronous learning: Online courses that are designed to allow students the ability to interact with their faculty members in real time through the use of virtual classroom software (Miller et al., 2017). Students in this study use Blackboard Collaborate Ultra for synchronous learning.

Virtual classroom software: Computer software that provides a synchronous learning solution for faculty and students that enables collaboration and the sharing of information in real time (Bower, Dalgarno, Kennedy, Lee, & Kenney, 2015). Sessions can also be recorded for students to review on their own as part of the learning (Vu & Fadde, 2013).

Significance of the Study

Although retention efforts can be specific to individual students, exploring this topic further will assist in improving retention efforts within fully online programs and courses. The examination of why learners leave, when they leave, and how to mitigate these causes indicates numerous reasons for poor retention and shows the need for a deeper understanding of methods to solve the issue of online student retention (Bawa, 2016). A thorough qualitative inquiry of what can improve the persistence rates of online allied health female students at a career college will benefit the student, the institution, and society. Increasing persistence in online programs has the potential to impact many individuals positively.

The failure of students to persist at an institution can have negative consequences for the institution, the student, and society. Loss of students can result in a damaged reputation, revenue loss, and increased recruitment cost for a higher education institution (Aljohani, 2016; Braxton et al., 2013). The proliferation of online learners presents retention challenges for higher education institutions. Furthermore, as more students opt for online courses, a higher rate of withdrawal extends the time needed to complete a degree, which can result in higher costs for students (Shea & Bidjerano, 2016). Students who persist in college and reach graduation have a higher earning potential than those who only have a high school diploma (Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2013). Students, who do not complete their college education end up strapped with loan debt, experience psychological and emotional ramifications, and still have no degree (Tinto, 2012). Increasing persistence will impact society by lowering loan default rates and by producing educated and skilled workers who can give back to the community and produce for their companies (Baum et al., 2013). The institution, the student, and society all benefit from learning more about why students stay or depart from a higher education institution.

Improving the retention of students in a fully online program will provide students with the opportunity to graduate and realize their career goals. An improvement in retention and the identification of perceived barriers and strategies for success would be beneficial for students and the college (Baum et al., 2013; Eitzen, Kinney, & Grillo, 2016). Discovering the factors that influence the success of students in online learning

will assist other postsecondary schools with executing, refining, or expanding persistence
initiatives to achieve higher retention rates.

When students withdraw and do not graduate from a postsecondary school, they
are more apt to default on their loans and not be able to find substantial employment
(Raviv & Bar-Am, 2014; Tinto, 2012). The identification of effective strategies and
methods that improve the persistence of students in distance education will assist in
preparing both students and faculty for online learning experiences (Tinto, 2012). This
study will help in identifying ways to be more proficient in assisting students in reaching
their goals and graduating. The results of the study provide higher education
administrators, faculty, and support staff involved with delivering online programs with
strategies to help students persist to graduation and find career success.

Research Questions

The following research questions provided the direction for the research. The
questions address the perceptions of female graduates of fully online allied health
programs at a college. The questions provided a framework when conducting in-depth
participant interviews to identify the insights, skills, abilities, and attitudes of female
graduates of fully online allied health programs. Participant interviews and document
review assisted with identifying the support services available to fully online allied health
students. The research questions were focused on the perceptions of female graduates
who have completed a fully online allied health program:

RQ1: What are the perceptions of female graduates who successfully complete a

fully online allied health program?

RQ2: What perspectives do fully online allied health program female graduates

share regarding their skills and attitudes that contributed to their success in

completing the fully online program?

RQ3: What is recorded in archival documents that supports the persistence of

female students enrolled in fully online allied health program?

RQ4: What experiences do the allied health program female graduates share

regarding the allied health program services that contributed to successfully

completing the online program?

Review of the Literature

As online learning continues to grow in higher education institutions as a viable

opportunity for individuals to pursue a degree or a certificate without traveling to a

campus location, persistence to graduation becomes a critical factor (Hart, 2012; Lee &

Choi, 2011). Persistence in an online program can present challenges for some learners

and may result in withdrawal from a course or an entire program. The persistence of

online students is an important topic for education leaders (Allen & Seaman, 2013, 2015,

2017; Baum et al., 2013). Determining what will impact a student's decision to stay or

withdraw will assist college administrators with maintaining enrollments and the viability

of a higher education institution (Gaytan, 2013).

The purpose of this literature review was to provide information about online

learner persistence and what influences students' persistence to graduation. The review

will provide the reader with an overview of the different factors and perceptions that

impact retention and an examination of theories related to persistence. I conducted the

review of the literature to review the factors, perceptions, and characteristics associated

with online persistence to graduation. An examination of the tenants of Tinto's theory of

student departure and self determination theory (SDT) provided the conceptual

framework for the study.

Conceptual Framework

Retaining students in higher education institutions has been a topic of research for

many years. A common thread of much of the retention research is the need for

engagement in the first year at college (Tinto, 2006). Using a qualitative case study

approach allowed for an empirical in-depth inquiry into the phenomenon of online

persistence within the context of the student's experience (Yin, 2014). The combination

of the tenets of Tinto's theory of student departure and the tenets of SDT provided the

focus of the research and the research questions. Tinto (2012) states that "college

graduates fare far better than non-graduates" (p. 12). Tinto's theory of student departure

includes individual characteristics, previous experiences, and prior commitments coupled

with interactions within the college environment with peers, faculty, and administration

as influences on student persistence (Tinto, 1975). While Tinto's research primarily dealt

with campus retention, the areas of social and academic integration can translate to the

online environment to assist with improving retention efforts (Burkholder et al., 2013).

Human motivation and personality are fundamental to SDT and provide the framework to

explore the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence an individual's behavior (Deci &

Ryan, 1985, 2008). Autonomy support and interpersonal involvement are key elements

to promoting self-determined motivation in students (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci,

Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). SDT provided an analytic framework for exploring online student motivation, autonomy, competence, and relatedness in regard to online learning experiences (Chen & Jang, 2010; Hartnett, 2015). A combination of Tinto's theory of student departure and SDT assisted in understanding the motivations of online students better while learning about what the college can do to support and retain online students to graduation.

Student isolation, student engagement, and student skill sets are factors that can interfere with the ability of a student to persist in an online course or program (Hartnett, 2015; Thomas et al., 2014). Tinto's theory of student departure and SDT contributed to explaining the perceptions and characteristics of the students who persist at the college. Understanding what engages and motivates students to learn and persist in the online learning environment can assist the college with addressing retention issues in alignment with the college mission and vision. A combination of the two theories provided a useful lens through which to examine student perceptions, skills, abilities, attitudes, and college experiences while providing insight into the motivational aspects of reaching a specific goal (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Tinto, 1975, 2012).

Tinto's Theory of Self-Departure

The work of Tinto is synonymous with research studies specific to student retention in higher education and consistently provides the building blocks for much of the research. The earliest retention studies focused on students attending campus-based programs, and it is clear that the existence of campus relationships was a fundamental element of student persistence (Davidson & Wilson, 2013). Student attrition is most high

during the first year of college at most institutions of higher education (Shea &

Bidjerano, 2014; Tinto, 1987). A solid commitment from a higher education institution

in providing quality education with the integration of inclusive classroom environments

and the campus community is key to effective retention practices (Tinto, 1987, 2012).

The model of student departure presented by Tinto evolved from Durkheim's

(1951) theory of suicide that touts suicide as a phenomenon that results from societal

influences. Tinto's theory of student departure has been a basis of many studies on

retention and a model theory for student retention research since the 1970s (Braxton,

2000; Davidson, & Wilson, 2017). As shown in figure 1, Tinto's model of student

departure is a combination of many different student attributes and experiences that shape

a student's decision to stay or drop out of a higher educational institution (Tinto, 1975,
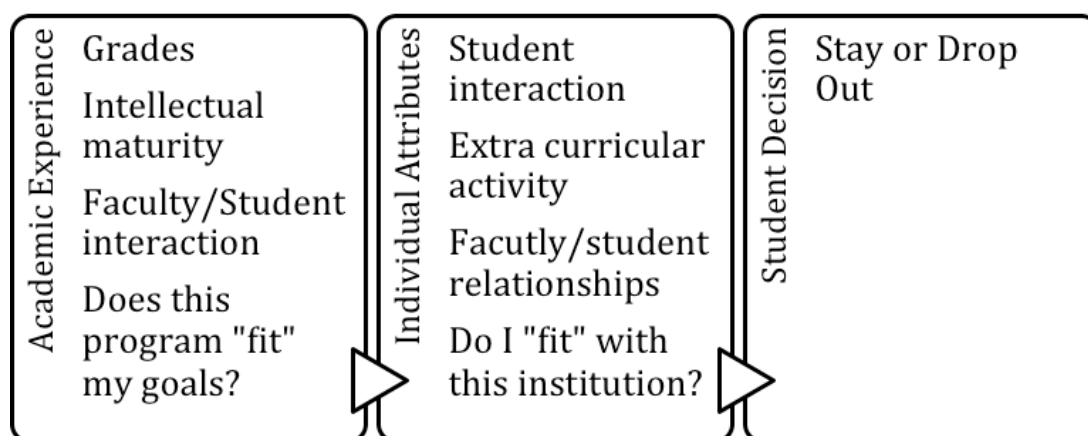
1987).

Figure 1. Simplified version of Tinto's model of student departure: academic experience
+ individual attributes = student decision (Tinto, 1975, 1987).

Figure 1 illustrates that Tinto's student departure model is a combination of many

different aspects of a college education. The student's experience with the academic

aspects of college from achievement to particular personal goals combined with the

student's individuality and interactions with peers influence a student's decision to stay

or withdraw. Tinto's work suggests that the departure of students from higher education

hinges on a student's ability to integrate into the campus community both socially and

academically (Tinto, 1987, 2012).

Social learning, interaction, and collaboration are key elements to supporting

higher retention rates and contribute to increasing student retention in online learning

environments (Brownson, 2014; Geri, Gafni, & Winer, 2014). Kember (1989) and Rovai

(2003) both developed theories of student retention that used Tinto's model of student

departure as a building block for their theories of why students leave online higher

education. Online persistence is a combination of factors, in addition to the interaction of

factors that occur prior to college admission and after college admission, and no simple

formula exists to explain a student's ability to persist in college (Rovai, 2003). Online

students who have the capacity to adapt to a new college environment and integrate both

socially and academically are more likely to persist, and those who do not become

involved will tend to drop out (Brownson, 2014; Geri et al., 2014; Rovai, 2003). With a

focus on academic and social integration, Tinto's model of student departure provides a

context that supports the strategies and methods for retaining students in an online

environment.

Self-Determination Theory

SDT centers on motivation and how people interact with their social environment

(Deci & Ryan, 2000; Legault, 2017). Deci and Ryan's (1985, 2000) theory consists of

several theories that together provide an understanding of the motivation and functioning

of individuals in a variety of situations from work, relationships, education, religion, and

sports (Fernet, 2013; Legault, 2017; Reeve & Lee, 2014). SDT focuses on the intrinsic

motivation of an individual and the environmental circumstances that influence intrinsic

motivation (Deci, Ryan, & Williams, 1996; Van Loon, Ros, & Martens, 2012). The

theory touts that individuals have an intrinsic need to feel competent, connected to others,

and possess autonomy within their environment (Chen & Jang, 2010; Hartnett, 2015).

The six mini theories of SDT presented by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) focus on

motivation and personality and include (a) cognitive evaluation theory, (b) organismic

integration theory, (c) causality orientation theory, (d) basic psychological needs theory,

(e) goal contents theory, and (f) relationships motivation theory (Legault, 2017).

An intrinsic need to experience efficacy after completing a task, connectedness,

and the freedom to reach personal goals free of outside pressures are the building blocks

to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000; Deci et al., 1991; Hartnett, 2015). Researchers

indicated that intrinsically motivated students approach learning with interest, understand

the connection between learning and future endeavors, and tend to persist to graduation in

school (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Garaus, Furtmüller, & Güttel, 2016; Hartnett, St. George, &

Dron, 2014; Rienties, et al., 2012). Chen and Jang's (2010) research indicates that SDT

provides a basis for determining appropriate support strategies for online students and

help to increase their success rate in online higher education.

Motivation is a process of meeting a specified result that makes it a critical aspect

of online learning (Hartnett, 2012; Hartnett, St. George, & Dron, 2011, 2014; Rienties et

al., 2012). Studies using SDT as a framework show that feedback, instructor presence, capability, curiosity, significance, cooperation, and choice influence a student's intrinsic motivation to learn in the online environment (Hartnett et al., 2011, 2014; Hartnett, 2015; Rienties et al., 2012). A combination of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors has been shown to influence an online student's ability to persist and depend on a learner's specific situations (Hartnett, 2015; Johnson, Stewart, & Bachman, 2015; Lee, Pate, & Cozart, 2015). SDT provided a foundation for exploring what makes online learners persist to graduation.

Higher Education Persistence and Retention

The persistence of learners at all types of institutions whether private or public, profit or nonprofit, or 2 or 4 year is a strategic focus to maintain the viability of an organization. Retention is a critical issue that affects the ability of a student to reach their educational goals and the financial stability of a higher education institution (Boston et al., 2011; Lint, 2013). Kena et al. (2016) and McFarland et al. (2017) reported that student retention is a vital aspect related to the success of both students and higher education institutions. Academic leaders in higher education use persistence and retention as a measure of student success and satisfaction and see the retention of learners as a critical goal.

The retention of learners in higher education has been a topic of research since the 1930s where researchers referred to retention as student mortality: the failure to graduate (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Tinto's student integration model of retention originally published in 1975 provides the foundation for the national dialog still occurring

today about undergraduate retention. Tinto's model is one of the most well-known

theories on student retention and has influenced the view of modern-day practitioners and

researchers (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Troxel, 2010). The Tinto student

departure model focuses on student academic and social integration factors that influence

a student's decision to stay or withdraw from an institution (Tinto, 1975, 1987, 2006).

The model presented by Tinto (2006, 2012) has provided the basis for the many

undergraduate retention studies over the years making retention one of the most widely

studied in higher education (Berger & Lyon, 2005).

Just as retention of undergraduate students is a critical aspect for on campus

programs and universities, the retention of online students is also a critical aspect that

must be monitored and explored by higher education administrators. As the enrollment

of online learners increases, the need to reduce the attrition of learners is a serious

challenge (Allen & Seaman, 2013, 2015, 2017; Bawa, 2016). Researchers indicated that

online students are apt to withdraw at any point of their programs with no consistent

patterns of departure and no relation to the level of the program (Bawa, 2016; Jaggars,

2011; Willging & Johnson, 2009). Many factors seem to influence a student's decision to

stay or withdraw from an institution, and all stakeholders need to be cognizant of what

influences a student's propensity to stay or withdraw.

Online Enrollments and the Persistence of Online Learners

Postsecondary online enrollments have grown rapidly over the past decade, and

the number of students taking at least one online class has increased (Christensen, Horn,

Caldera, & Soares, 2011; Allen & Seaman, 2015). Higher education enrollments in 2-

year institutions are projected to increase to 8.2 million students by 2025, with female

enrollments across higher education expected to increase 17 % from 2014 to 2025 (Kena

et al., 2016). In 2014, 12% of all undergraduate enrollments (4.8 million) participated in

at least one online course or an online program with 1.2 million students enrolled in a

fully online program (Kena et al., 2016). From 2012 to 2015, a total of 6 million

undergraduate and graduate students participated in distance education that is a growth of

11.0 % since 2012 (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Figure 2 shows the overall growth of

students in the United States taking online courses from 2012 to 2015 according to the

National Center for Educational Statistics Integrated Postsecondary Education Data. The

figure shows an increase of 596,699 total online students from 2012 to 2105.

Student Count in Online Courses

Year	Student Count
2012	5,425,406
2013	5,611,551
2014	5,795,730
2015	6,022,105
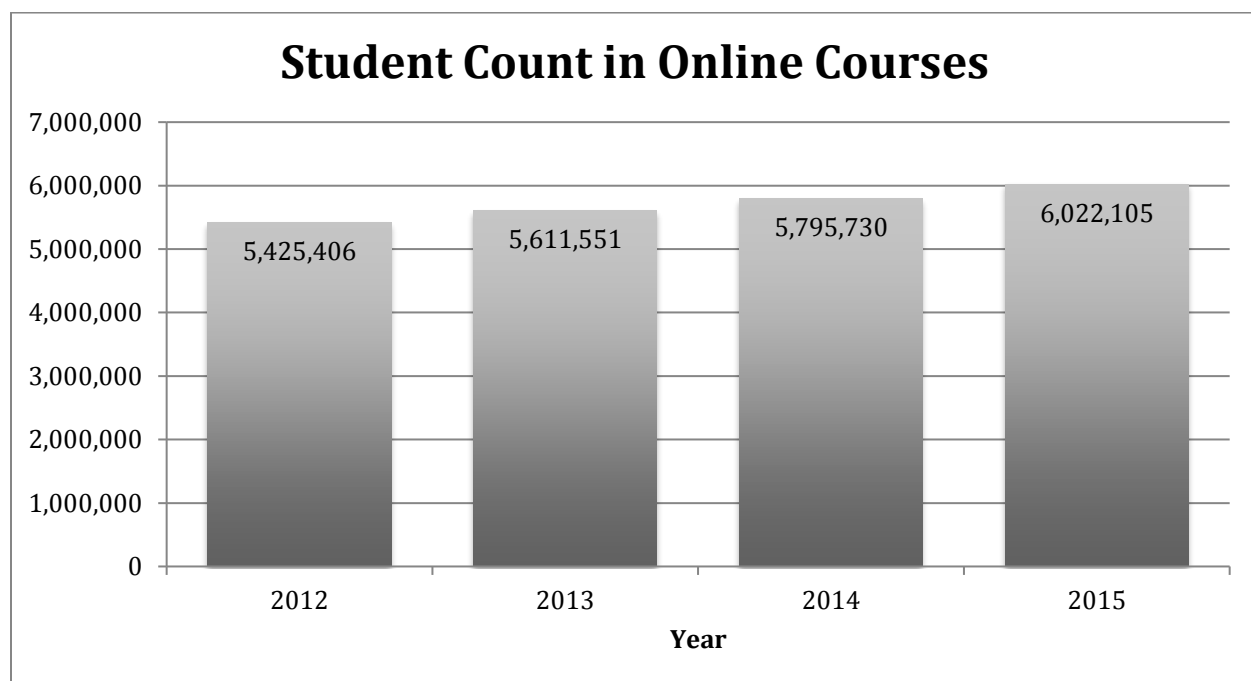
Figure 2. Students taking online courses 2012 to 2015 (Allen & Seaman, 2017).

Online learning has become a critical component for strategic growth and the

retention of online students presents challenges for administrators (Allen & Seaman,

2015; Mannay & Wilcock, 2015; Sebastianelli, Swift, & Tamimi, 2015). An increased number of individuals are choosing to enroll in online courses and online programs to take advantage of the flexible nature of distance education (Gazza & Hunker, 2014; Kruger-Ross & Waters, 2013; Lee & Choi, 2011). The growth in online programs has increased the need to address the persistence of online learners in higher education.

With colleges and universities continuing to implement online course offerings as a strategic method to extend their reach and increase overall enrollment, administrators and faculty need to collaborate to implement strategies to address the challenges of online persistence (Allen & Seaman, 2015, 2017). Online programs have been shown to experience lower persistence rates than campus-based programs (Bolliger & Wasilik, 2012; Chiyaka et al., 2016; Croxton, 2014). As more students leave and never finish an online degree, student debt increases and the student default rate is likely to increase (Bawa, 2016; Gazza & Hunker, 2014; Raviv & Bar-Am, 2014; Tinto, 2012). Retaining online students is challenging and students are apt to drop out of an online course or program at any time during their studies because of personal problems, job-related issues, or program-related challenges (Bawa, 2016; Chiyaka et al., 2016). The challenges of retaining online learners needs to be a focus as more and more online courses offerings become a mainstay in higher education.

Factors that Impact Retention

Many factors can contribute to retaining online students that range from students' personal attributes, the learning environment, and external circumstances. Literature indicates that online student factors associated with self-discipline, time management,

interaction with students and faculty, and institutional support can assist with persisting in an online course (Boston et al., 2012; Chiyaka et al., 2016; Gaytan, 2013; Mayes, Luebeck, Ku, Akarasriworn, & Korkmaz, 2011; Sebastianelli et al., 2015). Individuals who are more self-disciplined and are able to self-regulate themselves are more apt to be successful in online courses (Ainsa & Olivarez, 2017). When examining issues associated with the different factors and perceptions that impact retention, Yang, et al., (2017) concur that it is important to realize that there will be variability for each student.

Experts indicated online students must be prepared to study online, be the right fit for an online course, experience dynamic interaction with faculty and classmates, and have access to support services to persist in an online course or program (Gaytan, 2013, 2015; Shaw et al., 2016). Discovering the critical influencers on student retention in online courses can potentially assist students with successfully completing an online program of study. Online educators and administrator practices need continuous refinement to provide the necessary support services to assist with engaging online learners to help them persist to graduation. Shaw et al. (2016) noted that additional support systems are paramount to influencing the retention of online students and provides multiple strategies for application. A student's decision to withdraw or continue is affected by the decisions and actions of the school and understanding the influential factors can help make a difference in what way the decision will go for the learner (Rovai, 2003; Tinto, 2012).

Higher education institutions need to make the retention of online students a priority and work to overcome the challenges of students persisting in online courses and

programs. Student retention is a combination of theoretical, policy, institutional, and individual tenants that provide a framework for exploring challenges with technology as an integral part of supporting students (Burkholder et al., 2013; Salter, 2012). Academic administrators are challenged to do what works to retain online students and continue to find newer solutions in an ever-changing society.

Characteristics of Online Learners

Researchers have been examining the differences between learners through different lenses over the years (Ackerman, Beier, & Kanfer, 2013). Researchers have shown that there are variations of the main characteristics of online learners compared to their campus counterparts as indicated in the figure 3 (Colorado & Eberle, 2012; Johnson, 2015; Kummerow, Miller, & Reed, 2012; Quinn & Stein, 2013; Radford, 2011; Xu & Jaggars, 2013). The demographic for online learners is multifaceted and consists of more females, older students with additional responsibilities, military personnel, and students labeled as non-traditional because they are not directly entering college within the same year of high school graduation (Radford et al., 2015; Shea & Bidjerano, 2014; Soares, 2013; Wladis, Conway, & Hachey, 2013, 2016; Wladis, Wladis, & Hachey, 2014). A typical online leaner can be characterized by their age, marital status, college enrollment status, employment status, socioeconomic status, geographic location, and familial responsibilities (Colorado & Eberle, 2012; Johnson, 2015; Radford, 2011; Xu & Jaggars, 2013). Figure 3 presents a multifaceted depiction of an online learner who comes to a college with a variety of characteristics that influence their experiences and ability to persist to graduation.
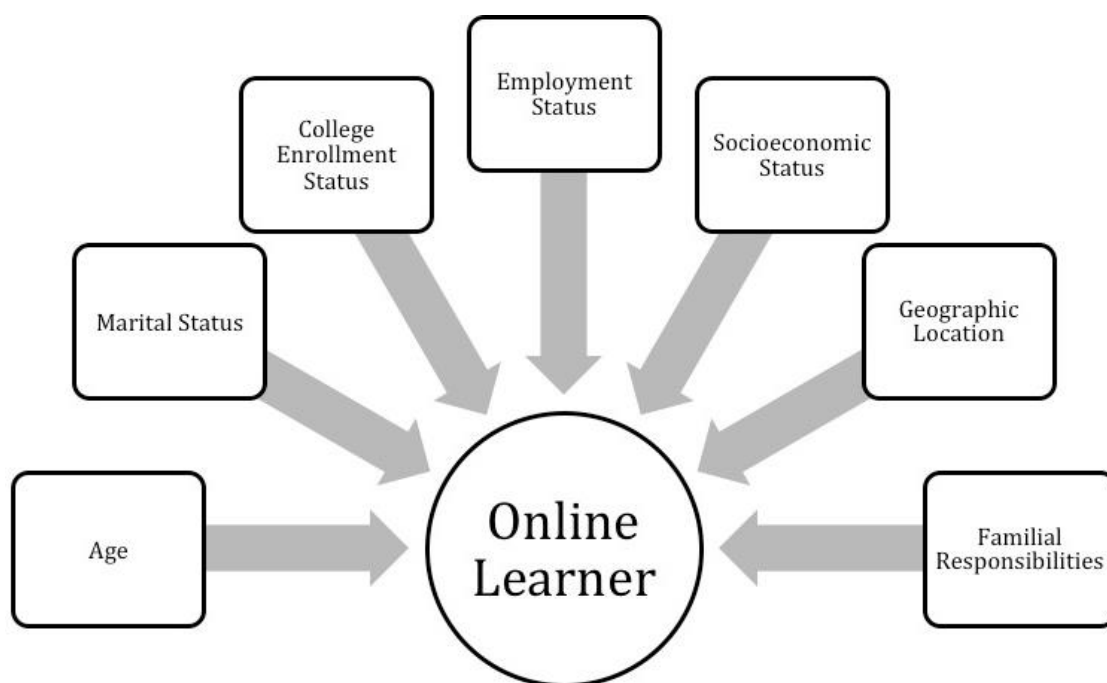
Figure 3. Online learner characteristics (Colorado & Eberle, 2012; Johnson, 2015; Kummerow et al., 2012; Quinn & Stein, 2013; Radford, 2011; Xu & Jaggars, 2013).

Females and Online Learning

Secreto (2013) indicated that both male and female students are enrolling in online learning programs or courses, with females making up a larger share of enrollments. According to many different studies, the female enrollments in online programs include up to 80 % of total enrollments (Artino, & Jones, 2012; Cho & Shen, 2013; Jost, Rude-Parkins, & Githens, 2012; Puzziferro, 2008). According to Amro, Mundy, and Kupczynski (2015), the link between gender and performance in an online environment is uncertain, and the higher number of female online students makes it difficult to link gender to student success.

Course completion rates and the measurement of performance in online courses indicate that females are more apt to complete an online course or program and perform

better than their male counterparts (Stone & O'Shea, 2012; Xu & Jaggars, 2013). Some

researchers indicate that females perform better than males in online courses and can

adapt to the online learning environment more seamlessly than males when managing

their time and communicate effectively online (Wladis et al., 2014; Xu & Jaggars, 2013).

Other researchers indicate that gender has no significant influence on performance in an

online classroom (Cochran et al., 2014; Wladis, Conway, & Hachey, 2017; Zhao, Chen,

& Panda, 2014). Xu and Jaggars' (2013) study showed that online female students were

better equipped at managing their time, communicating, and motivated to learn which

contributed to a higher performance level than their male counterparts.

Implications

The attrition of online students in fully online courses or programs has presented

issues for higher education institutions. Exploring the perceptions of female students

who have persisted through an entire program to graduation will provide the college with

strategies that can assist with improving student retention. The analysis of documents

such as the mission statement, college catalog, and online student handbook in addition to

interviews with female graduates of fully online programs provided insight into the

processes and procedures at the college to assist online students persistence to graduation.

Data gathered through documents analysis and interviews was used to create professional

development opportunities for online faculty at the college to assist with strengthening

online program and course design and delivery.

Summary

Tinto's theory of student departure and SDT theory provided a sound basis for exploring the perceptions of female students who have successfully graduated from a fully online allied health program. As online enrollments increase and online learning becomes commonplace in higher education the persistence of learners becomes a strategic focus for academic administrators. The persistence of students in an online learning environment is challenging, and many factors need to be explored and taken into consideration to overcome the challenges of retaining online learners who are predominantly female.

The persistence rates for fully online allied health students at the college are inconsistent. Exploring the perceptions of female students who have graduated from their program provided insight into the student's experiences at the college. The following section describes how a case study approach was implemented to interview graduates of the fully online allied health programs to understand what assisted the students in reaching graduation. Section 2 outlines an overview of the methodology of the research study. The research design and approach will be presented with an overview of the study participants. The participant section addresses the sample for the study, gaining access to the research site, examines the researcher-participant relationship, and protecting the rights of participants. Data collection will be examined with documents and semistructured interviews as the primary methods for collecting data. The role of the researcher will also be examined. The analysis of data will also be explored, and methods for ensuring the validity of data will be presented.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

The purpose of this research was to understand the characteristics and perceptions of students that persisted to graduation in fully online allied health programs at a career college. I looked to understand the insights, skills, abilities, and attitudes of female students who have completed a fully online allied health program. Also, I explored the types of support services that assisted students in graduating from a fully online allied health program. I intended to understand the perceptions of female students who have graduated from a fully online program using a case study approach.

Qualitative research concentrates on understanding the experiences and feelings of participants (Merriam, 2009). Using a case study approach I explored the perceptions of female students who have completed a fully online allied health program at a career college. Case study research involves making sense of a particular issue, process, or place at a given instant (Creswell, 2012). The case for this study was female graduates that have completed a fully online allied health program at the college.

The case study approach was a suitable method to use for examining educational processes, programs, and processes to improve practice (Merriam, 1998). Case studies provide an in-depth study of real-life events to understand better a significant issue (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014). Using the case study method, I sought to identify and understand, without manipulation, the perceptions of fully online students after the completion of their academic program through interviews and a variety of evidence such as mission statements and program documents (see Yin, 2014).

Employing a case study approach allowed me to examine the skills, abilities, and attitudes of online students to understand better what teaching practices and support services contributed to their persistence to graduation. The results of the investigation provide a deeper understanding of what factors and experiences contributed to the persistence of fully online allied health students who continued to graduation.

Using a case study approach, I provided an in-depth description of the female students' experiences in fully online allied health programs at the college. The use of the case study was an appropriate approach to examining the perceptions of female fully online students. Yin (2014) generalized that a study that asks *what* research questions is exploratory and fits with the case study approach. Employing the case study approach for the research allows for the examination of a variety of evidence such as interviews or observations to investigate experiences without manipulation (Yin, 2014). Therefore, a case study approach to the research assisted me in exploring the perceptions of female students to explore how they persisted to graduation in fully online allied health programs.

An exploration of the students' experiences that influenced persistence in a fully online program assisted me in identifying themes regarding the development of strategies and processes that will increase retention. The research targeted providing higher education administrators and faculty developers with guidance to analyze fully online students' experiences in order to assist with developing training to aid in the persistence of students. The results of the research will assist online leaders with developing the

faculty with a focus on providing fully online students with a learning experience that promotes student retention.

Quantitative research uses the collection of data and statistics to test hypotheses, make predictions, and study cause and effect (Creswell, 2012). Many of the persistence studies completed have taken a deductive approach to examine the persistence of online students (Beck & Milligan, 2014; Wladis et al., 2014; Xu & Jaggars, 2013). Qualitative research is exploratory and seeks to understand human behavior and participant perspectives (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). Employing a qualitative approach to researching online female persistence provided an in-depth exploration of the problem.

Creswell (2012) presents five different approaches to qualitative research that include narrative study, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study, with each approach being different in what is to be accomplished by the research. I considered phenomenological and grounded theory approaches for researching online persistence. Phenomenology focuses on understanding and describing the essence of individuals' lived experiences and the emotions attached to the experience (Creswell, 2012). Although the research examined a specific phenomenon, the research into the perceptions of online female students in an allied health program focused on providing explanation and analysis of the experience for the particular case. Grounded theory focuses on developing a theory about a specific phenomenon experienced by many individuals (Creswell, 2012). The examination of the perceptions of student experiences in online programs did not fit with the development of a nonexistent theory because individual experiences would be lost when looking at a large number of individuals.

Case study research is an inquiry into phenomenon in a real-life context to understand complex issues (Yin, 2014). Researching online female perceptions to answer *what* and *how* questions aligns with the case study approach as best suited for these types of questions (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014). Case study research was the best fit for studying the experiences of online females in fully online allied health programs at a 2-year college.

Participants

The case for this study was students who attained a certificate in medical coding or an associate of science degree in medical office administration by taking only online classes at a career college. Nonprobability purposeful sampling provided a convenient approach to selecting the population for this study that met the specified characteristics of being female and completing a fully online allied health program at a career college.

The population for this study was students who had attained a certificate in medical coding or an associate of science degree in medical office administration by taking fully online allied health classes at a career college. The population included graduates who had completed a fully online allied health program over the past 3 years at the college. I sent a letter to the vice president of education requesting permission to recruit participants from the college. Working with the vice president of education at the college assisted in obtaining the information needed to reach out to the targeted population and form the sample for the study.

Sample Size and Type

Robinson (2014) indicated that the sample size for a qualitative study that uses interviewing must take into account the practicality of completing the research. A key decisional consideration for this study was to use a sample size range that was ideal and practical for a small study. A small sample size allows for "an intensive analysis of each case" and prevents the researcher from being overwhelmed with data collection (Robinson, 2014, p. 29). The sample was based on the inclusion criteria of being a female who completed a fully online allied health program at a career college and who graduated between 2015 and 2018.

For the research I employed purposeful sampling to select participants from the population. A purposeful sample provided an "information-rich" case for the study (see Gentles, Charles, Ploeg, & McKibbon, 2015, p. 1778). The criteria for selecting the participants in the study relied on two determinants. Firstly, each participant must have graduated from a fully online allied health program at a career college, and secondly, each participant had to be female. Purposeful sampling provided a convenient approach to selecting the participants for this study who met the specified characteristics. Employing purposeful sampling provides a nonrandom technique to deliberately choose individuals who possess specific qualities or characteristics (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The goal of the study was to have approximately 12 and at least 10 graduates as the target sample size to represent the population. I reserved the right to be flexible and expand the sample size and add additional individuals that met the specified criteria, if needed, to the sample. The goal of 12 graduates was met for the study.

Each interview followed the interview protocol created with experts and other qualitative researchers at the college. Conducting 12 interviews provided a sufficient sample size for saturation and redundancy from the sample. After 12 interviews, no additional topics or ideas emerged, so no further interviews were needed to clarify and expand on topics. The data collected during participant interviews provided the rich descriptions needed for the study (see Jacob & Fergerson, 2012; Yin, 2016).

Access to Participants

I worked with the vice president of education and registrar to obtain the e-mail addresses of female graduates of fully online allied health programs from the past 3 years for possible participation in the study. The registrar provided such a list with first names and e-mail addresses. Using this list, I contacted female graduates of the fully online allied health programs by e-mail and invited them to participate in the research.

Letter of invitation and notice of consent. The e-mail invitation provided prospective participants with an overview of the study and the requirements for participation. The e-mail invitation outlined the procedures of the study that included a recorded 45–60 minute interview with me on the phone, in person on the college campus, or via virtual web conferencing software. Potential participants received a follow-up e-mail with the reminder invitation to participate within 5 days of receiving the initial letter of invitation to participate.

Once participants agreed to participate in the study by replying "yes" to the letter of invitation e-mail, a notice of consent that outlined the expectations for participation in the study followed in another e-mail. All potential participants were asked to indicate

their understanding of the consent and agreement to participate by responding with, "Yes, I consent." I sent follow up e-mails for scheduling once an individual consented to participate. I informed all individuals contacted as potential participants if they would be participating or not participating in the research study. Once the participant consented, I made an appointment to conduct the interview. Participants received a reminder e-mail about their appointment 1 day prior to the actual interview.

Researcher–Participant Relationship

As the researcher, I employed strategies to create a safe and respectful environment for both potential participants and participants throughout the research. Through respectful and considerate communications and interactions, individuals were made aware that the information they provided would be a valuable part of the research study. The letter of invitation outlined the nature of the study, discussed why the individual was chosen to receive the invitation, and provided a clear explanation of the proposed research. I used a conversational approach in the interview to assist in establishing a relaxed environment for the participant. Participants were made to feel comfortable throughout the interview process and were able to take breaks if needed. I followed the interview protocols to ensure that all of the valuable information provided by participants was kept confidential. The interview protocol also assisted in maintaining adequate time for the participants to share experiences and respect for the expertise of the participants.

Ethical and Confidential Protection of Participants

As a criterion to beginning my research, I completed the National Institutes of Health (NIH) training course "Protecting Human Research Participants" in June of 2016 to better understand the need for the ethical protection of research participants. Additionally, a review of Walden University's frequently asked research ethics questions for researching one's own work setting, and educational settings was conducted before a decision was made to include graduates from my current college. Data collection for the study was from graduates of my college within the past three years. The pool of graduates never had me as a faculty member.

Steps were taken to protect the participants from harm and protect any private information shared during interviews. A letter to the Vice President of Education was sent via email requesting permission to recruit participants from the College. Upon approval from the Vice President of Education at the College, data collection for the study began with an email invitation to graduates of fully online allied health programs using emails that were stored in an Excel spreadsheet and coded to protect the confidentiality of the participants. Precautions were set in place to ensure participants are safe from harm and comfortable with participating in the research. All participants who agreed to participate were provided a notice of consent form to return via email and indicated that they understand the expectations for participation and that they consented to participate and had the opportunity to ask questions about the potential risks and benefits of the study.

All recorded interviews and notes were password protected and stored appropriately. All participant names are confidential, and pseudonyms were assigned to interview transcripts for analysis of data. A locked desk drawer in the researcher's private home office was used to store any paper records and notes. After five years, I will dispose of any digital data and paper records associated with the research.

Data Collection

When collecting data for a qualitative research study, researchers interact with the participants in a one to one setting and analyze documents to validate findings (Marshall, Poddar, Fontenot, & Cardon, 2013). Combining both interviews and document analysis assists in gathering rich data (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). This qualitative research study incorporated the use of document analysis and semistructured interviews to provide a comprehensive analysis of the case. Analysis of the mission statement, the college catalog, and online student handbook provided insight into the operations and goals of the college and assisted in identifying any themes or patterns related to the data collected in interviews. Semistructured interviews gave me the opportunity to interact with online female graduates and collect data about their experiences at the college. Through the use of subject matter experts and other qualitative researchers my interview protocol was reviewed for wording, grammar, and context to the research questions.

The review of the literature and the use of experts assisted in developing the protocols used for gathering and analyzing data in this research study. The data collection instruments, document review and interviews, were intended to gather data that would sufficiently address the research questions of the study. The interview protocol

assisted in providing data that relates to the perceptions, perspectives, and experiences of female graduates of fully online allied health programs.

The interview protocol included questions, which provided insight into the research questions for this project study. The interview protocol was developed through a review of other interview protocols. I presented the draft protocol to a panel of experts at the target college site. Feedback from other qualitative researchers at the college from the college's Center for Teaching and Learning helped to determine if the protocol questions were designed to obtain the information I was seeking to answer the research questions and if they aligned to the research questions. The expert review assisted the researcher in determining if the questions were appropriate for the project study. The expert review also showed alignment between the interview protocol and the research questions.

Combining document analysis with semi-structured interviews assisted in minimizing bias and establish credibility for the research study (Glenn, 2009). The combination of document analysis and interviews to collect data allowed for the triangulation of data and increased the validity of my research.

Archival Documents

The review of written records is a method for collecting data for qualitative research (Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). The analysis of the mission statement, catalog, and student handbook offered insights into the processes and procedures that drive the online experience at the College. The factors identified in the literature review that impact retention and the characteristics of online learners (Figure 3) were the focus

of the document analysis and assisted in providing the connections to how online learners

receive support from the College. An analysis of the mission statement, college catalog,

and student handbook assisted in providing the context of the research site, suggested

questions to be asked during the research, provided supplementary data, and assisted with

verifying discoveries from interviews (Glenn, 2009). Analyzing documents created by

the college assisted with making better connections with what influenced a student's

experience in the online allied health programs and complemented the data findings from

interviews (Yin, 2016).

The factors that affect retention (the learning environment, interaction with

faculty, interaction with classmates, institutional support, and institutional policy) were

the focus of the document analysis along with the characteristics of online learners

presented in Figure 3 (Shaw et al., 2016; Xu & Jaggars, 2013). The analysis of the

various documents assisted with identifying the focus of the college and what support

services are available to students.

The analysis of archival documents was conducted both before and after the

semistructured interviews. The analysis of archival documents was guided by the

research questions of the study to understand what is recorded that supports the

persistence of female students enrolled in fully online allied health program. The review

of archival documents provided information about the support services available at the

college and provided insight into the background of the college, standard operating

procedures for online students, and how the college addressed the factors that affect

online retention. I conducted the document analysis before the semistructured interviews

and examined documents to explore the factors that may influence retention and the characteristics of online learners. The document analysis after the semistructured interviews compared the themes found in the documents with the themes found after analysis of the interviews.

Document analysis also included personal reflection notes. Personal reflection notes were recorded during each interview to assist with remembering responses and to verify the transcripts. My personal notes were used when analyzing the interview transcripts and assisted with providing meaning to the information given by the participants. My reflection notes supplemented the data from the interviews with participants and the document analysis. Data from the analysis of documents and my personal reflection notes were categorized and stored in a password protected file..

Semistructured Interviews

One of the most common methods of collecting data in a qualitative study is through the use of the interview (Merriam, 2009). Interviews allow researchers to ask detailed questions and probe for additional information during the session to record both verbal and non-verbal data (Yin, 2014; Creswell, 2012). Semistructured interviews involve the use of an interview protocol but allow the researcher to follow the conversation and stray from the guide if needed during the interview (Creswell, 2012). Using semistructured interviews provided flexibility to respond to the situation at hand and gave the interviewee the opportunity to discuss their experiences in detail.

The interview protocol was designed to provide a guide while conducting the interviews, but I was able to ask additional questions when needed for clarification during

the process. Each question in the interview guide was intended to provide data that assisted with identifying graduate insights, skills, abilities, and attitudes that contributed to success as an online student, and what support services assisted in being a successful online student. Participants also had the opportunity to share information related to the research questions in addition to the interview questions presented in the guide.

Semistructured interviews were conducted on the phone or using web conferencing software. Interviews took place in a private conference room on the college campus. Interview data was protected at all times. The data from the interviews were recorded and stored in a password-protected mp4 file. Reflection notes were created during the interview process. All notes were assigned a participant number to maintain the confidentiality of participants. Each recorded interview was between 45 to 60 minutes. All participants knew that interviews would be recorded through the Informed Consent document. Audio recordings of interviews and data collected for the study remain confidential and protected in a password-protected file folder on a non-networked computer.

Data collection for the study occurred over eight weeks using semistructured interviews and document analysis. The use of semistructured interviews allowed participants to share their individual experiences with fully online programs at the college. The interview protocol provided an interview guide to assist with interviewing in a flexible manner that resulted in more of a conversation between the interviewer and interviewee.

Data was transcribed from recordings within a week of the interview to assist with an accurate understanding of the answers provided by participants and stored in a password-protected Microsoft Word file. Each interview transcript was assigned a number to protect and remove participant identification. Once all interviews were completed, the data were coded to identify themes by placing responses to the interview questions into one file and identifying each participant, starting with Participant 1. All data was organized systematically in electronic files stored in a password-protected file on my personal computer.

Role of the Researcher

As an Academic Chair at the College for the past eight years, my role encompasses all of the administrative duties of my respective departments - Business, Hospitality, Culinary Arts, Criminal Justice, and General Education. The primary focus of my position at the college is to provide leadership to the various department directors and coordinators to accomplish the mission of the College. As an Academic Chair, I do not have any teaching duties, do not assign grades to students, and have limited one on one interaction with students taking online courses. The potential participants for the study did not have had me for any classes during their studies at the college.

A possible bias in the study was that participants are graduates of fully online programs at the College where I work. Potential participants in the study did recognize me as the Academic Chair but were made aware that this research is separate from that role at the College. I clearly explained my role as the researcher with each participant once they consented to participate in the study, so they had an understanding of the

research relationship. Participants had the option to refuse to participate in the study and opt out of the study at any time. The research did not cause undue harm to any participants, was private, and did not negatively impact participants in any way. My role as the researcher was to explore female graduate perceptions of their fully online learning experiences and learn about what assists students in persisting to graduation.

Data Analysis

Inductive data analysis allowed the researcher to synthesize data and generate generalizations, models, or frameworks (Creswell, 2012). Using an inductive approach assisted with the emergence of themes and concepts in the data as opposed to a deductive approach that starts with a specific premise (Yin, 2016). Creswell (2012) presents a six-step process for analyzing and interpreting data: (a) organizing data, (b) explore data for initial coding, (c) use codes to develop themes and descriptions in the data (d) represent the findings in visual or narrated form, (e) provide an interpretation of themes through reflection, and (f) specify validation strategies for the findings (Creswell, 2012).

Documents were analyzed to identify processes and procedures related to online courses at the college that may influence the experience of fully online students in allied health programs. Documents included the mission statement, the college catalog, and student handbook. This research study involved a comparison of archival documents with the factors identified in the literature review such as personal attributes, the learning environment, and external circumstances that impact retention and assisted with discovering the characteristics of learners at the college. Shaw et al. (2016) maintained that the interaction between faculty and students is a critical component to student

persistence. Document analysis was helpful in acquiring information about the interaction between online faculty and students at the college.

Analysis of interview data occurred through the reading and rereading of transcripts to ensure accuracy and thoroughness while recognizing any unwelcome bias (Yin, 2016). A notebook was used to store reflective thoughts and summaries for each transcript. Codes were assigned to assist with further reducing and interpreting the data to shed light on the research questions of the study. An analysis of the codes assisted with identifying any emerging themes in the data. Reading and rereading interview transcripts, notes, and materials with an analytical eye assisted in interpreting collected data to identify and solidify themes. Themes were summarized and a narrative was prepared to describe the findings of the interviews.

Data collected from the review of documents and through interviews was examined many times with the goal of solidifying themes and making connections to what influences the persistence of fully online learners at the college. Data collected through document analysis and the semistructured interviews were triangulated with each other to provide robust findings and improve the reliability and validity of the research (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2016). A narrative was used to summarize the data analysis that describes both the interview themes but also the connections to any of the reviewed documents (Merriam, 1998, 2009).

Data Analysis Results

Upon obtaining IRB approval # 07-30-18-0534428 from Walden University, the data collection process began by soliciting information from the College. The

information needed from the college included copies of the mission statement, college catalog, and the online student handbook in addition to a spreadsheet with potential participants contact emails and first names from the College Registrar. Upon receipt of all materials from the college, the process of analysis began with a review of the archival documents and contacting potential interview participants.

A total of 12 semistructured interviews were conducted using virtual conferencing software with the participants in a location convenient to them and the researcher in a private conference room on the college campus. Within a week of occurring, transcription of interviews occurred, and participants were sent transcripts for review and a check for accuracy. Using both transcript review and member checking assisted with getting feedback from participants and helped to clarify any questions.

The alignment of interview questions to research questions and themes to the research questions, factors that impact retention, and the characteristics of online learners were a focus of data analysis. Throughout the process of data collection, the implementation of a topical analysis for all of the data took place and topics were organized according to information found through document review and interviews. Reflective notes included thoughts and summaries for each interview transcript and archival document and assisted in identifying reoccurring words. During the transcription of interviews and document review, the reoccurring words became the categories and themes of this project study. Microsoft Excel was used to store the reoccurring words that became evident during the research processes. Sorting the words for similarities, differences, and frequency as related to the factors that impact retention

and the characteristics of online learners lead to different categories to represent the data. The categories provided the consistent and overarching themes that became the results of the research.

Initial Review of Archival Documents

The first steps to data analysis were to review the college's mission statement, catalog, and online student handbook to analyze any information that is specific to the online learning experience at the college. The archival documents reviewed each provided different perspectives of online learning at the college. During the review of the mission statement, the catalog, and the online student handbook notes were taken and recorded in a Word document. The notes included keywords such as balance, support, communication, student focus and additional topics specific to answering research question three. Microsoft Excel was used to store all keywords and topics for analysis. The analysis of the keywords and topics involved combining commonalities and narrowing them down from 50 entries to five emergent themes related to the persistence of online learners and what supports the online learner in persisting to graduation.

Mission statement. The mission of the college is focused on the empowerment of students in acquiring the necessary skills needed to be successful to their full potential in their careers. The mission explicitly stated that the college "integrates general studies and professional skills into a career-focused education" (Vice President of Education, personal communication, August 3, 2018). There is no mention of online education in the mission statement.

Catalog. An initial review of the catalog indicated that in 2010 the college began to offer fully online programs. The programs offered entirely online at the college include a Medical Coding Certificate, a Medical Office Administration Associate Degree, a Business Management Associate Degree, and a Business Administration Bachelor Degree. The catalog included statements indicating that online courses are a part of various programs at the college and that all students at the college will take an online course during their education.

The catalog has a section entitled Online Division that describes online education at the college. The description of online education at the college includes the following keywords that are common to online learning: convenient, flexible, and independent. Also, the description stated that the college offers a student-focused online learning experience that fosters interaction between faculty and students and interaction between student and student.

Online student handbook. The online student handbook from the college includes an in-depth presentation of what online learning at the college entails. The handbook addresses many of the factors presented in the literature that have an impact on the persistence of students in online courses that include time management, interaction, and institutional support. The handbook presents information about succeeding as an online student at the college that includes study plans and time management information as well as the characteristics of successful online students. The handbook includes explanations of policies, support services, support individuals, and student expectations that pertain specifically to achieving success in the online learning environment.

Emerging topics. Through the initial review of the mission, catalog, and online student handbook, topics emerged related to research question number three, the factors that influence retention, and the characteristics of online learners. The emergent topics include (a) tips for success, (b) flexibility, (c) institutional support, (d) student focus, and (e) learning environment structure.

Semistructured Interviews

Within seven days of completing each interview, a verbatim transcript was prepared to assist with data analysis. Member checking was employed to verify the accuracy of each transcript. Individual transcripts were emailed to each participant for review and clarification to ensure transcripts were representative of what the participants iterated during the interview. Once participants reviewed all interview transcripts, the process of coding the interview data began.

The transcripts for each interview were organized and labeled Participant 1 to Participant 12 to keep data confidential. Each transcript was read and reread to identify themes and patterns related to the conceptual framework and research questions of the study to establish different codes. Organizing codes in the interview transcripts and corresponding notes required the assignment of letters as code labels for identification purposes and ease of working with the multiple transcripts and codes. All codes were transferred to a Microsoft Excel worksheet for further organization and sorting. Broad codes were sorted in the Excel worksheet to address redundancy and any inconsistencies in the data. Commonalities between codes were noted, and the codes were narrowed down from a total of 180 individual codes to four themes related to the persistence of

online learners. In addition to the themes that emerged through the analysis of the interviews, an online student profile also became very evident.

The emergent themes include (a) strategies for success, (b) connectedness to the college, (c) preparedness for online learning, and (d) engagement with learning materials. In addition to the characteristics of online learners, the online student profile aligns with Tinto's theory of self departure and SDT. An online student profile includes characteristics common to the majority of participants. Two participants did not have any former college experience and did not attend graduation. Table 2 illustrates the relationship between the participant characteristics and the two theories that provide the conceptual framework for this research.

Table 2

Student Profile

Characteristic	Theory of self departure	Self-determination theory
Self directed		X
Driven		X
Goal oriented		X
Independent		X
Former college experience	X	
Graduation	X	
Live Sessions	X	

Secondary Review of Archival Documents

A secondary review of all of the archival documents was completed after the analysis of the interview transcripts. The secondary review was completed to provide a cross-check of the information discovered through the initial review of documents. The learning environment, faculty interaction, student interaction, support mechanisms and policies specific to online students were reexamined through the secondary document analysis. This review solidified the findings from the initial review of the background of the college, standard online policies and procedures, and the factors that impact persistence. The secondary document review approach was the same as the initial review, but took into account the interview themes. The analysis indicates a relationship between the college's approach and the perceptions of their online female allied health graduates as to what they see as crucial to their persistence to graduation. The topics of time management, flexibility, institutional support, student focus, and the structure of the learning environment are essential to both graduates and the college. The secondary review of archived documents did not alter the themes discovered through the initial review or interview analysis.

<center>**Theme Description and Support**</center>

The emergent themes from the analysis of documents and interviews were compared to see if there were any commonalities between the three analyses. All participants shared examples of what assisted them in persisting to graduation and what would have been more helpful to them in their online education coursework. Table 3 presents the emergent themes for the initial archival document review, the interview

transcripts, and the secondary document review analyses and their relationship to the

research questions.

Table 3

Relationship of Themes and the Research Questions

Theme	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4
Strategies for Success		X	X	
Connectedness to the College		X	X	
Preparedness for Online Learning	X		X	X
Engagement with Learning Materials	X	X	X	X

The themes emerged from an initial review of the archival document, interviews

and a secondary review of archival documents. The four themes and their subcategories

that emerged from coding analysis related directly to the research questions and the

conceptual framework of the study that includes Tinto's theory of self departure and

SDT. The themes identified include strategies for success, connectedness to the college,

preparedness for online learning, and engagement with learning materials. Table 4 shows

each theme that emerged, the subcategories that emerged through the analysis of archival

documents and interview transcripts, and the relationship to the research questions that

were used to frame the project study.

Table 4

Themes, Subcategories, and Research Questions

Theme	Subcategory	RQ(s)
Strategies for success	Time Management and Balance	RQ2 & RQ3
	Communication	
	Virtual Sessions	
Connectedness to the college	Faculty Interaction	RQ2 & RQ3
	Peer Interaction	
Preparedness for online learning	Online Student Profile	RQ1, RQ3, & RQ4
	College Services	
Engagement with learning materials	Virtual Sessions	RQ1, RQ2, RQ3, & RQ4
	Instructional Technologies	
	Course Structure	

The interview questions were designed to support the research questions and provide the data needed to develop and organize themes. The interview questions provided data that was specific to more than one research question due to the complex nature of online education and the variety of experiences of the participants. Table 5 indicates the alignment of the interview questions with the research questions.

Table 5

Relationship of Interview Questions and the Research Questions

Interview question	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	RQ4
2		X		
3	X			
4		X	X	
5	X			
6		X		
7	X			
8	X			X
9				X
10	X	X		X
11	X			X
12	X			X
13	X	X		
14	X	X	X	X

Perceptions of Female Graduates

The themes preparedness for online learning and engagement with the learning materials are directly related to research question one. Table 5 shows that nine interview questions provide insight into research question one. Research question one examines the perceptions of female graduates who completed a fully online allied health program.

As illustrated in Table 2, an online student is self-directed, driven, goal oriented, independent, possess former college experience, attended graduation, and attended or viewed live sessions. Two participants did not have any former college experience and did not attend graduation.   Participant 4 stated:

I have been in the workforce for the past 15 years and needed additional training to move up in my company, so this was my first time being a college student. Getting into the grove of being a college student was a struggle at first. I was determined to be successful. Consistency, practice, time management, and my faculty were very helpful. (Participant 4)

Participant 6 was a traditional student who chose to work before attending college right after high school graduation. The participant indicated:

I was not sure what I wanted to go to college for at first, so I took a year to work and investigate my options. Not wanting to leave my full-time position, I chose an online medical program because I enjoy helping others. (Participant 6)

The participants who did not attend graduation stated that they could not travel due to their work schedules, but otherwise would have been at graduation to celebrate their accomplishment. Both participants who did not attend graduation did express gratitude they were included in the ceremony and received the commencement program with their diploma.

All participants possess the characteristics of being self-directed, driven, goal oriented, and independent. Participant 9 indicated, "I am goal oriented and an

independent learner, which has helped me be successful in life and my career. My approach to online college was no different."

The virtual sessions that are available to students have a direct impact on the student online experience. The synchronous virtual sessions allow for interaction on a weekly basis for all of the online courses in the student's program of study. The virtual meetings provide connectedness to the college, but also provide an opportunity for students to engage with the learning materials presented by the faculty members. All participants indicated the importance of the sessions whether attending synchronously or listening to the recorded session.

Participant 8 noted, "The live sessions each week allowed me to ask questions and practice coding. It felt like I was sitting in class with the instructor, not sitting at home in my dining room." Participant 9 had a similar experience like participant 8 but indicated the importance of having the recorded session to study for exams, "I would attend the live sessions to practice with my instructor and classmates, but I would use the recorded session to study for each exam. It was a big help."

Having access to a synchronous session or a recorded synchronous session on a weekly basis was a bonus for online students and provided them with the ability to interact with faculty and students to enhance learning. Participant 2 stated, "I took online classes before, and they were nothing like what I experienced here. I never felt like I had a teacher on the other side at the other college. Having a weekly session changed that." Participant 7 indicated:

At first, I thought the scheduled sessions would take away from the flexibility of

an online class, but it only made it better. Even when I could not make the live

session, I still felt engaged with the class because the faculty member included the

people who were not there in the discussion. (Participant 7)

Skills and Attitudes

The themes strategies for success, connectedness to the college and engagement

with the learning materials are directly related to research question one. Table 5 shows

that six interview questions provide insight into research question two. Research

question two focuses on the shared perspectives of female graduates related to the skills

and attitudes that contribute to their success in completing a fully online allied health

program.

Time management and balance were identified as strategies for success when

taking fully online courses. Being able to balance life and school was the main factor for

many of the participants when choosing to pursue an online program. Many of the

participants were balancing a job, children, and school and chose an online program

because it did not require the commitment of traveling to a campus. Participant 11

worked full time and had her second child while completing her program and attributed

her success to "being able to juggle life to complete my assignments." Participants

implemented different methods to manage their time. Participant 7 indicated that "using

the provided course calendars and printing them out assisted with keeping track of

assignments and helped with developing a study plan each week." Participants 1 and 9

both noted that "consistent weekly deadlines in each class" as methods that assisted with

time management and balancing multiple courses at a time. Participant 2 noted that online learning "fit her lifestyle" because she could manage her class schedule around her life by "studying while waiting for my children while they were at swimming lessons." Participants used different methods to manage their time from creating paper calendars, family wall calendars, and electronic calendars to being creative with the time and place they would study. All participants realized the importance of time management and balance and indicated that finding strategies for managing all the responsibilities of life and school assisted with being successful.

Methods of communication emerged as a strategy for success in an online classroom and online program. All participants except Participant 3 indicated the importance of interacting with faculty and their student advisor as key to assisting them in being successful and graduating. Participant 3 indicated, "I had no need to contact my student advisor, but being able to contact my faculty was important to me." Email, phone calls, and text messaging are the primary methods that the college uses to facilitate communication at the college. Participant 6 indicated that "being able to reach out to and talk about the course materials with faculty helped me be successful and helped to build my confidence and the more I did interact, the more I realized that I could do this and be successful." Participant 12 indicated that "my student advisor was so helpful when I needed someone to encourage me and help me resolve a challenge that could have stopped me from succeeding, I am so glad I picked up the phone and gave her a call." Having the ability to communicate with faculty and the college was a topic that emerged

in each participant interview as something that contributed to the success of the participant in an online program.

The synchronous virtual sessions held in Blackboard Collaborate® were beneficial to student learning. Participant 2 specified, "The virtual sessions held each week for each class allowed me to interact with faculty and other students to ask questions and learn." Each virtual session is recorded and available for students to review and download. The virtual sessions were considered a central part of student learning. The virtual sessions provided students with the ability to "ask questions and receive answers immediately" from the faculty member, which was Participant 10's main reason for attending live sessions. Participant 9 noted, "I would attend sessions live if my schedule permitted, but would always review the recordings to assist with learning the materials for the class." Access to the recorded sessions was considered to be "a great study tool that I could not have done without" according to Participant 4.

Participants noted that the ability to interact with faculty through a variety of methods was essential to their success in the online classroom. Participant 8 noted, "If I had not been able to email and call my instructor, I would not have been successful in learning." Other participants indicated that faculty responsiveness to an email was important to success. For example, Participant 3 stated, "there were times that I was totally confused and if I had not heard back from my professor in a timely manner I would not have been able to complete the weekly assignments." Participants also indicated that the responses and interaction in discussion forums from faculty were beneficial in assisting them with learning. As Participant 2 indicated:

The discussion boards were not always beneficial in every class, but when a

teacher was active and responded to students, they were more helpful. Ms. X

would always provide different perspectives and ask each student a question that

helped make us think and pushed me to learn more. (Participant 2)

Interaction with faculty in the virtual sessions was essential to many of the

participants, but some participants were not able to ever attend synchronously because of

other life commitments. Participant 3, who was able to attend the live sessions, indicated,

"I would not have been successful if I didn't have the opportunity to ask questions in the

live sessions, and interact with the instructor." Participant 11 was unable to attend live

sessions because of life commitments indicated:

My schedule did not allow me to attend live sessions, but the recordings were

valuable. I could listen to the recording on my time and email the instructor with

any questions to get more insight on the topics presented. This process worked

for me. (Participant 11)

In addition to faculty interaction, peer interactions also emerged as something that

assisted students with persisting to graduation and assisted with learning in the online

classroom environment. Not all participants noted that interaction with their peers as

beneficial to assisting them with persisting to graduation, but Participant 1 indicated, "If I

would not have had a peer support system, I would have struggled with completing this

program." Discussion forums, virtual session chats, and virtual session study rooms are

the main areas mentioned by participants as opportunities to interact with their peers.

Participant 10 noted, "Discussion boards and chat sessions before class were helpful to me and gave me the opportunity to interact with my classmates." As Participant 2 noted:

The ability to have study groups with people in the online environment was helpful. I completed another degree online before this one, and that was not an option. A study session with my classmates was so helpful when we were covering hard materials. (Participant 2)

Participant 9 mentioned:

At first I was frustrated with having to complete the discussion board assignments, but as I took additional courses they were not that bad. I was able to meet people and build friendships with people by interacting in the class and then taking things out of the classroom to a study room or text messages. (Participant Nine)

The instructional technologies used by participants were provided to allow students to engage with the learning materials in the courses. Participants used the typical software used in online classrooms such as a learning management system and productivity applications, but participants used other technologies that allowed them to engage with the learning materials. Participants used eBooks, encoders, online learning activities, journals, and wikis to learn the competencies in their courses.

Participant 3 indicated, "Our courses used some really cool technologies that assisted me with learning. I like being able to read only the things I needed when using my Smart Book from McGraw Hill." The Smart Book from McGraw Hill incorporates

adaptive learning that allows students to answer questions and only requires them to read materials they do not understand.

Many of the participants talked about the different types of learning activities that incorporated different types of technologies from the workplace. Participant 11 indicated, "Having access to an encoder and being able to look up diagnostic codes was beneficial and prepared me for the workplace. I have not taken my coding manual off of the shelf in months!" Participant 6 noted, "Learning different software packages were a great assistance when I started working. I specifically do coding, but at times I will step in to make appointments. It is nice to have learned this in school."

Journals and wikis were used to help enhance the student experience by giving them an opportunity to share different aspects of each course. Participant 5 indicated,

> At first, I was not really keen on writing in a journal or sharing my thoughts in a wiki, but the faculty member made me comfortable, and I became a better writer. I also realized the importance of concise and correct writing in my field of study once I graduated and was working. (Participant 5)

Archival Document Support

All four of the themes: (1) strategies for success, (2) connectedness to the college, (3) preparedness for online learning, and (4) engagement with the learning materials are directly related to research question three. Table 5 shows that two interview questions provide insight into research question three. Research question three focuses on the archival documents that support the persistence of female students enrolled in fully online allied health program.

Through the review of the mission, catalog, and online student handbook, topics emerged related to research question number three. The topics include (a) tips for success, (b) flexibility, (c) institutional support, (d) student focus, and (e) learning environment structure. The online student handbook provides a broad overview of many aspects of online learning at the college and information relation to the topics that emerged related to research question 3.

The online student handbook includes a section dedicated to time management as an online learner. Time management strategies such as keeping a calendar, setting up a weekly routine, deciding how much time for each assignment, and finding creative methods for fitting education into your life are included in the handbook. Participant 5 indicated, "The handbook was helpful at the beginning of my studies, and when I took my first courses, it provided information that was of assistance when I was becoming comfortable as an online student." While all participants indicated that they received the handbook at the beginning of their studies, Participants 2 and 6 indicated that they did not review the handbook in depth and only referred to it when they were looking for a specific answer about something.

The online student handbook contains a section entitles "Who should I Contact" that outlines the various individuals to contact that can assist with different aspects of the student's education. The three most contacted individuals at the college indicated by participants are technical support, faculty, and student advisor. Participants 4, 5, 8, and 10 included the library and financial aid as people they contacted, but all participants

agreed, "I would contact my student advisor or faculty first to ask a question before contacting others directly."

The online student handbook describes virtual sessions as one of the methods for how online students can learn materials for online courses at the college. The sessions provide a virtual classroom setting for faculty and students to interact synchronously on a weekly basis. Students are not required to attend in real time but are encouraged to participate or review the recorded session. The online student handbook provides the purpose of virtual sessions at the college and presents specifics about the importance of attending the live sessions or reviewing the recordings and asking questions. Participant 2 and four referred to a training course that they participated in at the beginning of their online program that provided information about how to use the virtual software. Participants 2 and four also mentioned that the training course provided specifics about how faculty would use the software to facilitate interaction with them and present materials for learning.

The online student handbook provides information about sending professional emails. The handbook outlines some of the needed components needed in a professional email such as an opening and salutation. The handbook also indicates the importance of including the class they are referring to in their email. The handbook also indicates that faculty will respond to email within 24 to 48 hours of receipt.

The online student handbook includes information about discussion board interactions and how to have a meaningful experience with faculty and peers in a discussion board. The meaningful discussion board section includes specifics about how

to ask good questions to others and how to interact to enhance learning in a discussion forum.

The online student handbook also includes a section that outlines the desired characteristics of an online student. Table 6 illustrates the online student characteristics that the college expects students to develop and possess so they will be successful in the online environment.

Table 6

Online Student Handbook Characteristic of an Online Student

Characteristic
Is self-directed and self-motivated
Possesses basic computer skills
Possesses time management skills
Is not afraid to ask questions
Does not procrastinate
Makes education a priority
Fits education into life creatively
Can work in a fast-paced environment

Note. Adapted from *Online Student Handbook*

Online learners encompass many different characteristics that influence their success. All of the characteristics that emerged from the research interviews and the

examination of the online student handbook align with Tinto's theory of self departure and SDT.

The online student handbook consists of an online division policy section that outlines the participation expectations, enrollment requirements, and academic requirements for the online student. These expectations and requirements specifically state how much time online students should be engaging with the learning materials to be successful. The policies also provide guidelines for meaningful discussion posts. All of the expectations and requirements show how they are related to being a successful online student.

The online student handbook at the college provides information about the majority of services available to online students at the college. The handbook provided a comprehensive overview of the services available to support online students that align with the four themes that emerged during participant interviews.

Experiences with Program Services

The themes preparedness for online learning and engagement with learning materials are supported by interview questions directly related to research question four. Table 5 shows that six interview questions provide insight into research question four. Research question four is focused on the experiences with the services offered by the college to assist participants in persisting to graduation.

According to the online student handbook and college catalog, all college services available for on-campus students are available to online students. According to the online handbook online students have access to the following college services: (a)

technology support, (b) tutoring, (c) career services, (d) library, (e) financial aid, and (f)

counseling. Participants were aware of most of the services offered at the college and

knew whom to call if they were needed assistance with locating or asking about a specific

service.

The most common services mentioned were tutoring, technology support,

financial aid, and career services. Only five of the twelve participants, participants one,

two, five, seven, and eight mentioned the library. Participant 6 indicated, "I was aware of

many of the different services and knew if I needed help I could contact my student

advisor. I had some financial aid questions once, and she pointed me in the right

direction." Participant 2 and three indicated that they were aware of the tutoring services,

but did not take advantage of them. Participant 1 mentioned, "I wish I would have taken

advantage of the tutoring. I think it could have made some of my courses a little easier."

Participant 12 noted, "I knew the services existed. I had a technical issue with an eBook

and was able to get it resolved quickly. It gave me peace of mind knowing the services

existed when I needed them."

All of the participants mentioned the course structure during the interview. The

consistency of the course presentation was a common theme with all of the participants.

Participant 1 stated, "Having a consistent look and feel for each course assisted me with

becoming comfortable with online learning." Many of the participants mentioned the

ease of navigating the learning management system and the consistency from course to

course as a positive aspect of their learning. Participant 9 shared,

Navigating my classes was made easy with all of the training, and it was easy to find things. I knew exactly where to go to see the syllabus, course materials, and assignments because they were in the same place in each class. Each class had a similar set up which made it easier for me. (Participant 9)

Participants who had online courses at another college where impressed with how easy it was to navigate each course and how going from class to class made it easier to concentrate on learning material and not finding material. Participant 2 indicated,

Online courses at other places made me skeptical about taking additional online classes, but I cannot commit to going to a campus for classes. My online courses here were so much better. It was so easy to find assignments and materials. The course structure kept me from becoming frustrated and quitting again. (Participant 2)

Conclusion

The participants in the study represented students who completed a fully online program at a technical college in an allied health field. All of the participants were female and completed either a Certificate or Associate of Science program at a career college that focuses on preparing students for specific careers. The experiences of the participants shaped their individual experiences and learning. All participants were full-time students, working either full time or part time jobs, and many of the participants were raising a family while completing their online program.

The emergent themes supplied the needed information to address the research questions proposed for the study. The theme analysis revealed the perspectives, skills, and attitudes of female graduates and revealed the factors that contributed to their success

in the online classroom that directly relates to their persistence to graduation and research

questions two and three. Further analysis revealed the importance of faculty interaction

and peer interaction and how it relates to connectedness to the college that is directly

related to research questions two and three. The theme analysis also revealed factors

dealing with preparedness for online learning and engagement with learning materials

that directly relate to research questions one, two, three, and four. The theme description

and support provides the details needed to show the connection between each theme and

research question.

Evidence of Quality

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the study and prevent bias in the

research, strategies were employed to establish credibility. Member checking was used

to assist in establishing the credibility of the study. Member checking acted as a control

process for the accuracy, credibility, and validity of qualitative research (Harper & Cole,

2012). Participants were asked to review summaries of the draft findings to verify the

accuracy of recorded data. Participants were asked to suggest additions to the draft

findings, make corrections and/or comment on the analyzed data.

Another method for increasing the validity and reliability of a qualitative research

case study is through the process of triangulation. Data triangulation involved the use of

different methods for the collection of data to provide more robust data and assist in

confirming the results (Virginia, 2016). Denzin (2009) categorized data triangulation as a

method for researchers to correlate people, time, and space; investigator triangulation to

allow for the involvement of several researchers to complete the study; theory

triangulation to employ the use of multiple theories in the interpretation of the data; and methodological triangulation to allow for the use of various data gathering methods that can include observations, interviews, questionnaires, and documents that are applicable to qualitative research.

This research study used both theory and methodological triangulation to assist with a greater breadth and depth of understanding (Yin, 2016). Data collection for the study involved the use of an interview protocol that incorporates questions that were derived using Tinto's theory of student departure and Deci's SDT. The study employed methodological triangulation by using both semistructured interviews and document analysis to understand both the student experience and the environment that has shaped the student's experience. Once interview data was collected, the researcher read the interview transcripts multiple times and used cross-checking with written notes to assist with data triangulation for accuracy and validity (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016).

Discrepant Cases

Once data for the interviews and document analysis were collected and reviewed the data was analyzed to determine if any discrepant cases do not fit with the established themes. All of the data gathered fit with the established themes and was related to all of the participant data collected.

Based on the information revealed during the research, professional development for online faculty members would be the best way to impact the persistence of students in online courses. The goal was to create a professional development training for online faculty that incorporates best practices for online education and capitalizes on the areas

revealed through the research that assisted students in persisting to graduation such as faculty and student interaction and the use of live virtual sessions to enhance connectedness and learning.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

I conducted this case study to investigate the perceptions of female students to discover what assisted them in persisting to graduation in a fully online allied health program. Upon the completion of collecting and analyzing data, and following a review of the results with my committee chair, a professional development activity for online faculty was determined to be an essential first step to improving persistence at the college. The professional development activity incorporates best practices that align with the strategies for success online: how to stay connected to online learners, how to prepare online learners, and how to engage learners with materials online. The professional development will be beneficial for both new and experienced online faculty. The best practices for the training emerged through an analysis of archival documents and interviews of fully online students who were successful and persisted to graduation.

Providing training for online faculty will prepare them to facilitate online classes that assist students with persisting to graduation by providing an engaging learning experience. The overall goal is to develop online faculty to teach in an online classroom, where they offer a learning experience that incorporates both content and strategies for success, connectedness, preparedness, and engagement. At the conclusion of training, the online faculty will have additional skills that will assist in conducting an online course that contributes to students persisting to graduation.

This section includes the rationale for the training, a review of literature related to professional development generally and to professional development for online faculty,

and an in-depth description of the training. This section also includes a detailed

description of the professional development activity with goals. Also, required resources,

roles, and responsibilities of stakeholders involved in project implementation, along with

an evaluation plan and project implications are part of this section.

Rationale

The purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions of female graduates

of fully online allied health programs to determine what assisted them in persisting to

graduation. Study findings showed that learners have specific strategies that assist them

in completing their online program. The findings indicated that online female graduates

employed different strategies for success, connected to the college in various ways, were

prepared for online learning, and engaged with learning materials as critical aspects that

impacted their persistence. Strategies such as time management and actively

participating in the learning were essential to all of the participants, with faculty and

student interaction as another significant influence on their ability to persist to

graduation. These findings indicated the need for professional development for both

experienced and nonexperienced online faculty that will present instructional strategies

that will impact student persistence and improve the student experience overall.

The results of the analysis of interview transcripts and archival data combined

with the literature review related to persistence helped define the project for this research.

The research findings led to the need for professional development for both experienced

and nonexperienced online faculty. Through the lens of the female online student, it

became evident that online persistence is complex. The research indicated the need for

training that focuses on meeting the needs of online students through a variety of instructional techniques and attention to the personal attributes that impact staying on track to graduation.

Throughout the career of a higher education instructor, professional development is an ongoing process that involves different learning activities (Elliott, 2017). Implementing professional development that will address aspects that impact online persistence can assist higher education institutions in retaining online students as enrollments in online courses increase. This professional development training will equip online faculty with pedagogical techniques and knowledge needed to provide online students with a student-centered learning experience that positively influences student achievement and persistence to graduation.

Review of the Literature

Faculty members are the frontline support for courses offered in both on campus and online and are an exceptional resource in higher education (Dillon & Walsh, 1992; Coswatte Mohr & Shelton, 2017; Schrum & Benson, 2002). Professional development offers support and guidance for faculty and assists with preparing them for the role of educator; it is designed to improve instruction (Elliott, Rhoades, Jackson, & Mandernach, 2015; Quinn, 2012; Schulte, 2015). The development of faculty is a process that can foster change in higher education (McKee & Tew, 2013). Providing professional development for faculty teaching in the online environment that is related to the results of document review and participant interviews is an essential step in improving practices to impact the persistence of online learners.

This literature review provides information about faculty professional development for both on campus and online faculty members. The review of the literature was conducted to learn more about the current literature surrounding the professional development of online faculty in higher education. The review provides an overview of the history of professional development, the need for faculty development, issues for online faculty development, and engagement in the online classroom.

History of Professional Development

The learning activities related to teaching, scholarship, and other activities that assist faculty with improving their skill set as educators are considered to be professional development (Elliott, 2017; Fishman, 2016). As an ongoing scholarly process, professional development can take many different forms and is a resource throughout a faculty member's career (Elliott, 2017; McKee & Tew, 2013). Faculty members must deal with a changing society that impacts their teaching and requires them to learn and develop to meet the needs of students and society demands (Grosemans, Boon, Verclairen, Dochy, & Kyndt, 2015; Vangrieken, Meredith, Packer, & Kyndt, 2016). The professional development of faculty has become a common practice in higher education over the years.

For over 300 years, higher education has incorporated professional development activities into their day to day operations to assist individuals with improving at their craft, but it has only been a recognized field within the last 50 years (Chism, Gosling, & Sorcinelli, 2010; Harasim, 2000; Coswatte Mohr & Shelton, 2017). The early focus of professional development initiatives was to increase research expertise and promote

faculty as scholars in their field (Eaton, Osgood, Cigrand, & Dunbar, 2015). In addition to developing faculty as scholars, professional development of the 1950s and 1960s evolved to include a focus on developing the faculty member as a teacher (Eaton et al., 2015). As professional development evolved to include additional topics, Centers for Teaching Learning were introduced in higher education as a vehicle to improve the quality of teaching and student learning (Schumann, Peters, & Olsen, 2013).

The 1970s brought the first professional organization devoted to faculty development. The Professional and Organization Development in Higher Education (POD) network was formed at the 1976 American Association for Higher Education spring conference. The mission of the POD network (2018) is to "provide professional development and a community of practice for scholars and practitioners of educational development, and to serve as a leading voice on matters related to teaching and learning in higher education" (p. 3). The POD network provides professional development opportunities through publications, conferences, virtual sessions, grants, and more that are available through membership to the network.

Higher education faculty development centers and programs that focus on assisting faculty in becoming better practitioners as well as including improving curriculum development were typical in the 1980s (Eaton et al., 2015; Eble & McKeachie, 1985; Sorcinelli, Austin, Eddy, & Beach, 2006). The 1990s expanded faculty development initiatives to include classroom assessment techniques that focus on student learning and faculty teaching ability (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Beach, Sorcinelli, Austin, & Rivard, 2016). Faculty development of the 21st century continues to evolve with changes

in demographics, technology, and the needs of students to include faculty, graduate

assistants, and postdoctoral scholars. As things evolve in faculty development, higher

education institutions need to evolve with the changes to meet the challenges of the

future.

The Need for Faculty Development

Higher education administrators continue to deal with increased scrutiny from the

media, legislature, and students surrounding graduate preparedness (Eaton et al., 2015).

Developing the individuals who interact with students the most through innovative

faculty development initiatives is a critical response to the changing landscape of higher

education (McKee, Johnson, Ritchie, & Tew, 2013; McKee & Tew, 2013; Shagrir, 2017).

Faculty development professionals face challenges with providing pedagogical methods

that are innovative and collaborative with shrinking budgets and less available resources

(Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013; Stark & Smith, 2016). A vital necessity for higher education

is quality prepared faculty.

The preparation of faculty is an essential factor for the success of novice faculty.

New faculty are likely to be hired with little to no teaching experience and lacking

knowledge of the teaching methodologies (Lucas & Murry, 2016). An improperly

acclimated novice faculty is more likely to be unsuccessful and struggle in their first year

in higher education (Pate, Smith, Caldwell, Horace, & Zagar, 2018; Scott, Lemus, Knotts,

& Oh, 2016). Changing accreditation requirements have created an increased focus on

effective pedagogical techniques and the need for faculty development has become more

prevalent in higher education institutions for both new and established faculty (Benito,

Green, Popely, Thai-Garcia, & Schneiderheinze, 2017; Kirpalani, 2017). Faculty development is a key strategic focus that is essential to ensuring the quality of an institution and that assists with providing faculty support for teaching, research, and service to the academic community (Austin & Sorcinelli, 2013; Welch, & Plaxton-Moore, 2017). Faculty development is an important aspect related to the success of an institution, faculty, and students.

Faculty development includes formal and informal practices to assist faculty with navigating the many responsibilities of being a higher education professional. Training activities can focus on supporting faculty and assisting with improving teaching practices, skills, and knowledge of faculty (Higgins & Harreveld, 2013; Lancaster, Stein, MacLean, Van Amburgh, & Persky, 2014). As the teaching and learning environment evolves, higher education faculty are challenged with dealing with increased content demands, new instructional methods, changes in technology, and accreditation demands (Beach et al., 2016). Rowbotham (2015) deems professional development as a vital aspect of higher education to assist with the growth of the institution, the faculty, and the students they serve. Seaman, Allen, and Seaman (2018) report that online education in higher education continues to grow, so it is imperative for administrators to have plans to prepare faculty and students for teaching and learning in the online environment.

Online Faculty Development

One of the several relevant assets of a higher education institution is the faculty members that are the front line of support for student success and satisfaction (Gregory & Martindale, 2017; Schmidt, Teräs, & Hodge, 2016; Tschida, 2016). The professional

development of online faculty requires additional layers of support to assist in fostering community and the use of technologies to be the most effective (Meyer & Murrell, 2014; Scarpena, Riley, & Keathley, 2018). With the increased number of online courses in higher education, the training of faculty is paramount, but researchers report that many faculty members express that they were unprepared to teach online (Baran & Correia, 2014; Collay, 2018; Gregory & Martindale, 2017; Hoey, 2014; Jackson, 2018). Higher education institutions should examine their professional development offerings to assist with training both novice and seasoned faculty members for online teaching.

Bigatel and Williams (2015) surveyed online students from Penn State World Campus to explore the engagement level in online courses and the involvement of their faculty in promoting engagement. The survey results indicated that faculty that participated in professional development about online teaching and engagement engaged students more in the online classroom. Bigatel and Williams (2015) concluded that professional development for effective online teaching is a necessity for the support and growth of online faculty. With the growing population of adult online learners, a shift to a more student-centered approach with student interaction and participation is more desirable in the online classroom (Bigatel & Williams, 2015; Gregory & Martindale, 2017). Online faculty can learn more about online pedagogy, communication strategies, and engagement strategies that assist them in facilitating an online classroom through targeted professional development activities about specific topics.

Various research studies provide findings that indicate the essential components of professional development for online faculty. Baran and Correia (2014), Bigatel and

Williams (2015), and Gregory and Martindale (2017) indicate some of the most common components of professional development for online faculty over the years that include but are not limited to teaching, instructional design, and technology training. Higher education institution training for online faculty needs to balance technology with pedagogy to better meet the needs of the online educator to prepare them for the online classroom (Ragan & Schroeder, 2014; Rhode, Richter, & Miller, 2017). Professional development for online faculty should imitate the online environment faculty will experience as well as take a blended approach that incorporates active learning and allows faculty to experiment with different learning elements (Elliott et al., 2015; Tobin, Mandernach, & Taylor, 2015). Rhode et al., (2017) indicate that professional development is an essential component needed to improve both the faculty and student experience in the online classroom.

Engagement in the Online Classroom

Online students are at a higher risk for feelings of isolation from the campus community which can negatively influence their ability to persist and is related to the level of engagement in the online classroom (Bigatel & Edel-Malizia, 2018; Bolliger, & Halupa, 2018). Engagement in the online learning environment requires students to actively participate through collaboration with content, faculty, and peers (Evans, Muijs, & Tomlinson, 2015; Pittaway, 2012). Students who are engaged in meaningful activities in the online classroom are more likely to be successful and persist (James, Swan, & Daston, 2015; Martin & Bolliger, 2018). Graham and McClain (2016) recommend increasing engagement in the online classroom to assist students in achieving course

goals and feeling less isolated. Lumpkin, Achen, and Dodd (2015) found that engaged

learners are more successful and exhibit a high level of satisfaction with the learning

experience.

Engaging online students in the learning experience directly relates to effective

online instruction (Kasworm & Abdrahim, 2014; Martin & Bolliger, 2018). Building an

online learning environment that fosters connectedness through the frequency of contact

between faculty and students is a critical factor in the online classroom (Bryan et al.,

2018; Naylor, Wilson-Gentry, & Wooldridge, 2016). Teaching strategies that focus on

interaction and social presences between faculty and students is a constant need in online

higher education (Armellini & DeStefani, 2015; Freeman & Wash, 2013). Quality online

learning encompasses pedagogy that fosters relationships, interaction, and a learning

environment that promotes deep learning and critical thinking (Chakraborty & Nafukho,

2015; Nortvig, Petersen, & Balle, 2018). Faculty training that encompasses techniques

that engage students in an active online learning environment can assist higher education

institutions with improving instruction.

Student interaction with content, faculty, other learners and technology provides

the framework for effective teaching strategies that increase engagement. The variety of

technologies available for online faculty can assist with creating online content that

promotes student engagement and constructing knowledge from the learning materials

(Boling et al., 2014; Boton & Gregory, 2015; Davidson & Wilson, 2013; Kanuka, 2011).

Online faculty are the front line of support for students and encompass different roles to

support interaction, motivation, feedback, and organization of learning materials (Cho &

Cho, 2014; Kuo, Walker, Belland, Schroder, & Kuo, 2014). Online learners interact with each other using collaborative methods to create knowledge and build online community to assist with creating active participation and remove the feeling of isolation (Huss, Sela, & Eastep, 2015; Tlhoaele, Hofman, Winnips, & Beetsma, 2014). The proliferation of the innovative technologies available to teach and learn online has made it paramount for learners to understand, manage, and use the technologies to assist with learning and interaction in the online classroom (Kuo et al., 2014; Boling et al., 2014; Tlhoaele et al., 2014). Bryan et al. (2018) suggested that faculty incorporate a balance of technologies in the online classroom to enable learners to engage with content, each other, and faculty to facilitate academic discourse and increase learning.

Many reasons affect a student's ability to persist in an online course, course design that includes aspects that promote engagement have been shown to assist with persistence efforts in higher education (Bigatel & Edel-Malizia, 2018; Gray & DiLoreto, 2016). Increasing the level of engagement in an online course has a positive impact on student persistence and faculty training that promotes the use of engaging learning activities is a valid approach to improving online learner persistence (Bigatel & Edel-Malizia, 2018; Hegeman, 2015; Lehman & Conceição, 2014). According to Martin and Bolliger (2018), faculty should employ pedagogical methods that foster interaction in the online classroom to influence the persistence of online learners.

Project Description

As online courses become commonplace in higher education, with over six million students enrolling in at least one online course the need for faculty development

has become a significant concern (Allen & Seaman, 2017; Terosky & Heasley, 2014). The preparation of faculty to teach online courses is an essential aspect to assisting with the success of online programs in higher education (Baran & Correia, 2014; Kerrick, Miller, & Ziegler, 2015; Coswatte Mohr & Shelton, 2017). The results of this study indicated that fully online female students that employ different strategies for success, connect with faculty and peers, are prepared for education, and engage with learning materials will persist in a fully online program. The research results were used to create a professional development training activity for online faculty that focuses on student success strategies, connectedness, preparedness, and engagement to assist with preparing faculty to meet the needs of online students and impacts persistence.

The professional development activity consists of three days of training that integrates both theoretical and hands-on activities. Each day focuses on different topics that became evident through the interviews and document review and combines lecture, discussion, and group activities that will allow online faculty to explore strategies that can be used to improve pedagogical techniques in the online classroom. The professional development activity consists of 24 hours of training delivered using a hybrid approach over a three-week period. The professional development activity will include three days of training incorporating classroom learning on campus, with online learning materials, and synchronous virtual sessions to augment materials presented in the classroom. The training will be divided throughout each day to allow for faculty to actively participate in the training that will be conducted using a collaborative approach and a simulated online environment.

Using the results of this study professional development training for online faculty will incorporate both classroom learning and online learning materials delivered over a three-week time frame. The classroom learning encompasses three 4-hour sessions that will allow online faculty to actively participate and engage with each other to learn more about effective practices in the online classroom that align with the information shared by research participants. The simulated online environment consists of learning materials that will provide faculty the opportunity to experience the online classroom, use some common online learning elements, and experience asynchronous and synchronous online learning. The online learning segment will include a weekly synchronous session for the faculty. Faculty will review the online learning materials and complete online activities at their own pace each week with an expectation of spending at least 4 hours outside of the classroom learning on campus and synchronous sessions engaging with the materials each week. This hybrid training approach will assist with scheduling the training with online faculty that historically do not come to campus and work remotely. A hybrid approach allows both experienced and non-experienced online faculty an opportunity to participate in synchronous and asynchronous training that the research participants indicated as a positive aspect of their online learning experience.

The goal of each training day is to disseminate information that aligns with the findings of the research. Each day of the training will focus on specific topics reinforced through the learning materials presented in the hybrid portion of the professional development. The training for day 1 focuses on the profile of the online student and what strategies assist online students with being successful in their courses. Day 1 training

will include an introduction to software that will be utilized to offer the synchronous

virtual sessions and how to access the hybrid learning materials for the training. Day 2

training will focus on the elements of online learning that assist online learners with

connecting to the college community. The training for day 3 will focus on the techniques

that can be used to engage online learners with materials. All hybrid materials will be

presented using a free course site from Blackboard®.

<div align="center">**Project Evaluation Plan**</div>

An evaluation plan assists measuring whether a project accomplishes the desired

outcomes and is a systematic process to collect information to assist in determining what

works, what does not work, and the sustainability of the project (Huber & Harvey, 2016).

The professional development training was developed for online faculty to assist them in

learning about strategies that assist online learners with persisting in an online course or

program. It is critical to gather feedback from participants to ensure that the quality of

training is adequate to meet the needs of participants, meets the goals for the training, and

to improve future professional development sessions. The evaluation plan will assist the

College in determining if the professional development training assists with improving

the persistence of online students through the use of specific and targeted instructional

strategies in the online classroom.

Employing methods to evaluate the project through both formative and

summative evaluations will provide accountability for the project and aid in determining

if any changes are needed. Formative evaluation will take place at the end of each

weekly session and will assist with monitoring learning to improve both teaching and

learning. Summative evaluation will take place at the end of the entire professional

development training and will evaluate the entire training processes and procedures to

guide subsequent professional development training initiatives for online faculty.

The weekly formative evaluation will take place at the end of each weekly

asynchronous session. Week one will include a 3-2-1 activity that will allow participants

to provide three things they learned in the week one training, two things they are excited

about learning more about, and one thing they are not sure will work for them in the

online classroom. Week two will allow participants to provide feedback by addressing

the muddiest point of the lesson by answering the questions, what has been the

"muddiest" point so far in this session (i.e., what topic remains the least clear to you?) at

the end of the session. Week three will conclude with a two minute paper asking

participants to address the following questions: (1) What are the most meaningful things

you have learned during this session?, (2) What questions do you still have about the

topics discussed?, and (3) Is there anything you need further clarification about from the

lesson?. Discussion of the results of each formative evaluation will take place in the next

session and participants will receive feedback and clarification on their responses.

The summative evaluation for the professional development training will be in the

form a survey sent to faculty via email requesting completion at the end of week three

which will be day 21 day of the professional development training. The summative

evaluation will use both Likert scale questions and open-ended questions. The Likert

scale question will employ a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4

(strongly agree). The open-ended questions will provide participants the ability to share

their thoughts about improving the training for the future. Key stakeholders will receive

the results of the evaluation to assist with making improvements to future professional

development training for online faculty. Table 7 illustrates the summative evaluation that

includes both the Likert scale questions and open-ended questions for the participants to

complete at the end of the training.

Table 7

Summative Evaluation

Please rate each item	1	2	3	4	5
	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The facilitator of the training was effective.	1	2	3	4	5
The training was effective at holding your interest.	1	2	3	4	5
The facilitator addressed your questions and concerns.	1	2	3	4	5
The concepts presented will improve my online courses.	1	2	3	4	5
The combination of synchronous and asynchronous training was effective.	1	2	3	4	5
The material presented is immediately useful.	1	2	3	4	5

Open Ended Questions

What were the best aspects of this professional development or activity?

What could be done to improve this professional development activity?

What additional trainings specific to online teaching would you like to see in the future?

Project Implications

The project provides the college with a solid plan that can reinforce and increase the skill set of online faculty to assist with the persistence of online learners. Knowledgeable online faculty who are experts in their field and knowledgeable in instructional strategies are more like to have satisfied students and greater success in the classroom (Shaha, Glassett, Rosenlund, Copas, & Huddleston, 2016). The professional development training will provide faculty with strategies based on the four themes derived from the study findings: strategies for success, connectedness to the College, preparedness for online learning, and engagement with learning materials. The professional development training incorporates instructional strategies directly related to the research findings to assist with improving the online learning experience for both faculty and students. The study findings and professional development training can also assist other online colleges struggling with online persistence and provides strategies for training faculty for teaching online courses.

Through the use of a simulated online course environment, both the non-experienced and experienced faculty member will experience the online classroom as a student during the professional development training. Providing faculty with instructional strategies and training using a combination of synchronous and asynchronous training will give them the opportunity to experience the online classroom in the same way as their students. The training provides faculty with the opportunity to see the implementation of different instructional strategies and interact with faculty to

enhance their online teaching skill set. The training will better equip faculty for success in the online classroom.

Effective online instruction and student success are related and have an impact on society. The study findings provide strategies for success and teaching to assist in preparing students and faculty for success online that are beneficial to students, faculty, and society. Students who achieve goals and graduate with a degree have an increased earning potential and are more apt to give back to the community (Baum et al., 2013; Eitzen, et al., 2016; Shea & Bidjerano, 2016; Tinto, 2012). The study findings identify approaches to assist students in reaching their goals and graduating. The publication of the study findings and professional development training will provide access to potential training topics and methods of training that can be implemented with online faculty to improve online instruction and student persistence at similar colleges. Also, the findings can assist administrators, faculty, and support staff internally and externally with meeting the needs of online learners to increase persistence and graduation rates in fully online courses and programs. Sharing the results of the study at conferences and through published works in recognized journals and conference proceedings will assist online faculty and administrators outside of the local site. Distributing the findings of the study will assist others with enhancing online instruction to impact student success.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The purpose of this project study was to gain insight into the skills, abilities, and attitudes of female students who persisted in a fully online program at a career college to understand what assisted them with being successful. Also, the project study explored what services assisted the online students in being successful. Through the review of documents and interviews, the data produced was the basis for professional development training. Through the research and the resulting project I intended to understand the perceptions of female students who have graduated from a fully online program and provide professional development training for online faculty to improve online student persistence and success.

Project Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

The project strengths include the approach to the training, the collaborative nature of the training, and the ease in following and implementing the professional development. Providing an approach for faculty to experience online learning from a student's perspective is an experiential learning opportunity for faculty. The project was designed to use technologies similar to what is standard across online courses and programs and give faculty the opportunity to experience these technologies from the perspective of an online student.

The project uses a collaborative methodology that allows the faculty to have a voice in training and to share their experiences. Including both new and experienced

online faculty in training and providing the participants with opportunities to collaborate and share their personal experiences is a positive aspect of the training. The collaboration also provides opportunities for online faculty to make connections, feel less isolated, and become a part of a community of online faculty.

The implementation of the professional development is straightforward and easy to follow for anyone who undertakes the initiative. The project description and outline include all of the necessary direction and learning materials for someone to implement the training. Presentations, online content, and evaluations are all part of the project description and provide the plan for implementing the project at any organization.

Limitations

Possible limitations for this project include the amount of time that faculty will need to devote to completing the training, the training was designed as specific to a single institution, and the timeline for the training may be difficult to coordinate between new faculty, full-time faculty, and adjunct faculty. Time to complete professional development training can always present issues for colleges. For this specific project, faculty will be expected to create time in their schedules to participate in the online synchronous sessions for this training and find time in their schedules to review online learning materials for the training. The time needed to complete the training may be a deterrent for some faculty members, and they may not complete the training

This professional development training is limited in the scope of what was used to determine the training topics. The formulation of the training is specific to one technical

college. Other colleges will need to customize the training to their specific needs and use topics that would be of value for their organization's faculty members.

Another limitation for the professional development training is the timeline for implementation. If the training is for new online faculty, hiring timelines for both adjunct and full-time faculty members could create issues with completing the training. The 3-week time frame is not conducive to an adjunct hire or an emergency hire that is close to the start of an online course. If a college would want to use this training for new hires, the limited amount of time between the hire and start date may not allow for completion of the training.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Another approach for this project would be to create an online faculty handbook for all new and existing online faculty members at the college. The faculty handbook would be a position paper that presents information that coincides with the research completed and also takes into the account the literature surrounding online persistence. The handbook would include the practices, methods, and strategies faculty could apply to complement the implementation of an online classroom that is student-centered. The faculty handbook would provide a comprehensive guide for faculty that addresses the resources and support services available that could impact the persistence of online students. The faculty handbook would include many of the topics presented in the professional development training and be customizable with institution-specific information. The handbook would be specific to new and experienced online faculty and

be based on evidence from the research and literature that supports online learner persistence.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

Throughout this doctoral journey and project study, I was able to develop my skill set as a practitioner and researcher. As a practitioner, I have expanded my scope of higher education knowledge beyond my current position to a broadened understanding of the inner workings of a higher education institution. My leadership, critical thinking, reflective thinking, and analysis skills have grown through each step of this journey. As a researcher, critical thinking became an essential skill when examining both sides of an idea and being able to synthesize many resources, research findings, and data while completing the project study. I have developed skills as a researcher to understand how to present data in support of specific interests. The skills acquired during this journey have become a natural part of my everyday interactions with colleagues and direct reports to assist with meeting the goals of my position and organization.

The creation of a professional development training project assisted me with expanding my faculty development and online course design skills and gave me the opportunity to research and learn more about the training topics. The training has provided a creative and flexible method for future online faculty at my college and others. The time it took to create the synchronous and asynchronous training has increased my respect for those who design and develop online courses on a continuous basis. The creation of professional development training has also shown me the

importance of evaluation and feedback and how critical it is to assess the success of any project.

Professional development for faculty at my college is a critical strategy that is supported by a significant investment in a Center for Teaching and Learning. As an academic leader, I collaborate with the individuals responsible for developing faculty who teach in the online and face-to-face modality. The results of this research and my recommendations for training will assist the college with preparing faculty to facilitate engaging online courses that are student focused. This professional development training incorporates a different approach than the majority of trainings at the college. An essential characteristic of an effective leader is their willingness to change and be open to change even though change can put leaders and others in a vulnerable position. As a leader, I will have to collaborate with others to manage the change associated with implementing this training for online faculty. My role as the leader is to work with all involved to mitigate any challenges, address any issues that may occur, and ensure the training prepares faculty for the online classroom. The result of the professional development training is to equip faculty with the skills needed to provide an engaging online experience that assists online students with persisting to graduation.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

Higher education institutions have the responsibility to provide a high-quality learning experience that assists students in meeting their goals of graduation. Faculty and administrators need to provide the same quality of instruction and support for both campus and online students to promote academic success. The project study and research

results are vital to assisting others with providing high-quality online learning

experiences and assisting with supporting students in the online classroom. The

synchronous and asynchronous professional development training will assist faculty with

understanding the needs of online students who persisted to graduation and what

strategies work to promote persistence in online courses. The training will equip faculty

with the strategies, methods, and instructional tools needed to facilitate quality online

courses that engage students with learning materials. The intent for the training is to

provide faculty with the competencies required to facilitate online learning and improve

the persistence of online students.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

The objective of this project study was to investigate the perceptions of online

female graduates to learn what contributed to their persistence to graduation. Throughout

the collection of data, all graduates were willing to share their insights about their online

learning experiences and expressed excitement about participating in the project. The

participants wanted to be able to share their experiences with online learning to improve

the experiences of future online students. The professional development that resulted

from the research will provide faculty with training to assist students with persisting to

graduation.

The social change that professional development training will have centers on the

ability to impact both college campuses and students. With online student persistence

rates being historically higher than their on-campus counterparts, colleges need to focus

on methods and strategies to assist faculty in implementing online learning that impacts

persistence. The professional development training will assist in meeting the demand for higher online persistence and increase graduation rates for online students. Increased persistence positively impacts the college and increased graduation rates positively impact the student. The training impacts different areas of society and creates social change for the college and the students pursuing online programs.

The professional development is the starting point in providing faculty training that addresses online student persistence. Training of online faculty must continue to be a focus for administrators and should be ongoing. Using this professional development as a starting point and providing additional training in the future to additional online faculty can assist with the persistence of online students in other programs of study.

Additional research that expands to other programs of study, degree levels, and male graduates would be an area to explore to assist with developing other training opportunities that impact persistence. Future research could expand on this project and influence the development of additional professional development aimed at improving online instruction to impact persistence. Also, future researchers could explore methods for gathering data through quantitative methods to identify correlations between online classroom experiences and persistence.

Conclusion

The focus of this qualitative case study was to explore the lived experiences of female students who completed fully online allied health programs at a career college. Through the completion of document review and interviews, the experiences of 12 students who completed a fully online program at a career college were used to formulate

professional development training. The case study findings supplied the needed

information to develop training for online faculty that will impact the persistence of

online students.

Appendix A contains the contents of the professional development training. The

professional development training focuses on online faculty who facilitate online courses

using the Blackboard learning management system and Blackboard Collaborate.

Professional development training that is comprehensive and includes topics that will

assist with student persistence is crucial to the health of a college and the success of

graduates. Professional development training for online faculty based on sound research

is a valuable investment for a college. This project study was a process that allowed for

the investigation of what influences the persistence of online female students and

contributed to research in the field of online education.

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Appendix A: The Project

Professional Development Activity

Professional development for faculty includes many different aspects, can be presented through a variety of channels, and should be faculty-centered (Schmidt, Tschida, & Hodge, 2016; Strawser & Buinag, 2018). Professional development provides faculty with opportunities to come together as a collaborative group and learn about topics that foster improvements in pedagogy and is widely accepted as a method for faculty to learn and grow in the profession (Kennedy, 2016). A professional development activity for faculty that incorporates a combination of synchronous and asynchronous online training with in-person training on campus was considered the best approach for this project study.

Background

A technical college is experiencing challenges with retaining female Allied Health students who are completing either a certificate program or an associate degree in the online environment. According to the Vice President of Education at the college (2016), "female students enrolled in fully online Allied Health programs are not persisting to graduation." Through communications with college stakeholders about persistence, a qualitative research study was completed to learn more about what assisted students in graduating from a fully online program. The primary objective of the research was to examine the perceptions of female graduates to understand the skills, abilities, and experiences that impacted their persistence in fully online programs at the college. As a result of the research, it was clear that fully online female students use a variety of

strategies, build connections with faculty and peers, come with prerequisite skills needed for college that impact success online, and engage with the learning materials.

Project Goals and Description

As the higher education population becomes more diverse with older students, first-generation students, and students with disabilities, the flexible nature of online education for both teaching and learning has become a critical aspect in higher education for both students and faculty (Wynants & Dennis, 2018). Professional development for faculty focuses on improving the skills of a faculty member to assist with developing their teaching skills (Kennedy, 2016; Schmidt, Tschida, & Hodge, 2016). The focus of this professional development is to assist faculty in meeting the needs of their online students. The training will explore: (a) different strategies that assist with student success online, (b) methods that promote interaction between faculty and students and students and students, (c) techniques that promote student preparedness for the online classroom, and (d) engagement strategies that impact student learning.

The hybrid training consists of three weeks of learning that incorporates both classroom learning and online learning for 24 total hours of training. Providing faculty with flexible options for completing the training is considered a best practice strategy for delivering professional development to adult professionals (Elliott et al., 2015; Gregory & Martindale, 2017). Each week will consist of classroom learning on campus, asynchronous online learning, and the use of synchronous online learning. Classroom learning on campus will take place on day 1 of each week and incorporate the findings of the research and be a combination of lecture, discussion, and group activities. Using a

learning management system, Blackboard Course Sites®, the asynchronous online learning will allow faculty the ability to have the student experience in the online classroom which is considered a clear benefit for training online faculty (Herman, 2012; Terosky & Heasley, 2014). The asynchronous materials will be available for faculty to review on day 1 of the professional development training. The synchronous aspect of the training will take place on day 3 of each week using Collaborate Ultra® software that is part of the Blackboard Course Sites® and will allow faculty to experience the variety of ways that virtual synchronous sessions can be used to augment online learning environments. The hybrid approach to the training provides online faculty with a flexible and collaborative experience in a simulated online learning environment.

The on-campus classroom learning consists of three 4-hour interactive sessions intended to engage faculty with learning about online teaching strategies through collaboration and discussion. The asynchronous learning materials will be available through the learning management system for faculty on the first day of training. The simulated online environment will provide faculty with opportunities to experience common online learning elements and complete online assessments that are common to the online classroom. Day 3 of each week will consist of a one-hour synchronous virtual session at an agreed upon time with the faculty trainees and be used to present, review, and discuss the uses of virtual sessions in the online classroom. Each week will incorporate the Day 1 and Day 3 training periods over the three-week training activity.

The primary goal of each day of this professional development training is to disseminate information that aligns with the findings of the research. The classroom

learning on campus and synchronous virtual sessions will augment the materials

presented asynchronously. Day 1 focuses on the profiles of the online learner and the

strategies that assist them with learning and succeeding in online courses. Day 1 will also

include an overview of the training, expectations of the faculty participating, and an

introduction to the technology used for the training. Day 2 focuses on making

connections to the college community and how faculty can foster connections with

students, faculty, and college services for online learners. Day 3 emphasizes online

pedagogical techniques that can be used to engage online learners with learning

materials.

Professional Development Syllabus

Length of Programming: 3 weeks total, 3 days on site, 1 virtual hour per week, weekly

asynchronous learning materials - 24 total hours of training

Location: Classroom and Blackboard CourseSites ®

Description: This professional development training will provide both experienced and

non-experienced online faculty with the opportunity to collaborate with others to learn

more about teaching strategies and techniques to assist students with being successful in

the online classroom. The training allows faculty to experience both synchronous and

asynchronous elements of the online environment.

Methodology: The training incorporates a collaborative approach that allows for the

sharing of ideas and strategies that work in the online classrooms. The asynchronous

learning materials provide faculty with the ability to review materials at their own pace

during the week. The synchronous session each week gives faculty the opportunity to

participate and share information in a virtual environment. Each element of the training provides faculty with the opportunity to experience the online classroom as a student.

Materials: All learning materials will be provided and made available in handouts, presentations, and electronic files.

Course Expectations: Faculty members are expected to participate in all of the activities of the training, attend all training sessions (on campus and virtual), and complete all weekly assessments presented in the course.

Evaluation: Faculty members will complete an evaluation activity at the end of each campus session and a summative feedback form at the end of the three weeks of training.

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Project Outline

NOTE: On campus sessions will be scheduled on day 1 of the week for 3 hours,

synchronous meetings will be scheduled on day 3 of the week for 1 hour and self- paced

online learning materials will be available from day 1 of the training until day 21 with an

expectation of at least 4 hours each week over the 3 week training period.

Week 1 Day 1 Agenda - On Campus

Activities	Time Frame (minutes)	Learning Materials
Introduction Icebreaker - My name is? • Go around the group and ask each person to state his/her name and attach an adjective that not only describes a dominant characteristic, but also starts with the same letter of their name e.g. generous Graham, dynamic Dave. Write them down and refer to them by this during the training session.	25	PowerPoint Presentation Flip Chart Paper and Markers
Agenda • Who am I? • Layout of training • Purpose of training • Preparedness for online learning • Strategies for success • Wrap Up – Review of Topics Covered • Next Steps – Online Training	5	PowerPoint Presentation
Describe the purpose of the training • Learn more about what factors that influence the persistence of online learners • Experience the aspects of the online classroom as a student	5	
Outline the layout of the training • Synchronous sessions • Asynchronous sessions	5	
Break	10	
Preparedness for Online Learning • Online Student Profile and College Services	50	

| Activities	Time Frame (minutes)	Learning Materials
o Faculty will work in groups to develop an online student profile and a list of college services that could assist students with being successful in the online environment • Discuss the diversity of the online learner		
Break	10	

Strategies for Success
• Time Management and Balance
    o Discuss concepts of time management and balance with an emphasis on what assists that online student in being successful
• Communication
    o Discuss different modes of communication in the online classroom and come up with a list of what does and does not work
	50	

Break	10	
Strategies for Success • Virtual Sessions o Discuss the purpose of virtual sessions	20	

Wrap Up
• Review of topics covered
• Next Steps – Online Training
    o Accessing the Blackboard Course Sites ®
    o Accessing the Course
    o Accessing the Learning Materials
    o Accessing the Discussion Board
    o Accessing the Virtual Session
• Have faculty list the following on a sheet of paper:
    o 3 things I learned in today's training
    o 2 things I am excited about learning more about
    o 1 thing I am not sure will work for me in the online classroom
	20	PowerPoint Presentation
		Blank sheets of paper for 3-2-1 activity

Week 1 Day 3 - Live Virtual Session

Activities	Time Frame (minutes)	Learning Materials
Welcome and Introduction to the session agenda • Ground rules for participation • Guided tour of the virtual classroom • Review of Session 1 topics • Guided tour of the online course site • Using the Virtual Session • Wrap Up	5	PowerPoint Presentation
Ground rules for participation • Discuss etiquette in the virtual classroom	5	
Guided tour of the virtual classroom • Discuss the areas of the virtual classroom from a student perspective and how they will interact with the online classroom	10	
Review of Session 1 topics	5	
Using the Virtual Session • Share the desktop and discuss the different areas of the virtual classroom from a faculty perspective and how to use in the virtual classroom	20	
Guided tour of the online course site • Share the desktop and go over the learning materials available in the course site • Review the online assignments with the faculty	10	
Wrap Up • Remind faculty to review online learning materials • Remind faculty to participate in the week 1 discussion forum • Introduce Week 2 topics	5	

Week 1 Day 1 and Day 3 Presentation
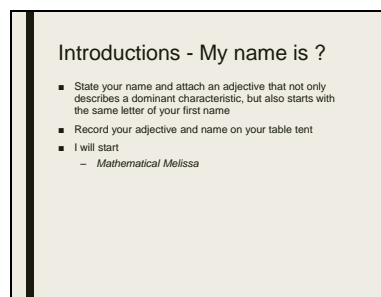
Agenda

- Who I am?
- Layout of the Training
- Purpose of the Training
- Preparedness for Online Learning
- Strategies for Success
- Wrap Up - Review of Topics Covered
- Next Steps - Online Training
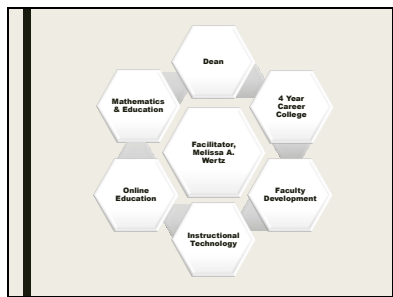
Layout of Training

- Synchronous Online Learning
  - Real Time instruction
  - Students & instructors present at the same time
  - Day 1 & 3 each week for a total of 4 hours each week
- Asynchronous Online Learning
  - Time Independent
  - Flexible
  - Participate at your convenience
  - Approximately 4 hours each week

Layout of Training

- Synchronous Training – On Campus
  - Day 1 each week
  - 3 hours of training with breaks
  - Between 8:00 am and 12:00 pm
- Synchronous Training – Virtual
  - Day 3 each week
  - 1 hour of training
  - Virtual software
- Asynchronous Training - Blackboard
  - 4 hours each week
  - Review Learning Materials
  - Complete Assessments

Purpose of the Training

- Learn more about what factors influence the persistence of online learners

- Experience aspects of the online classroom as an online student

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Preparedness for Online Learning

- Who is the Online Learner - Group Activity
  - Divide into groups of 3-4 to answer the following questions:
    - What characteristics are common to most online learners?
    - Develop a profile of the online learner

Online Learner Characteristics

(Colorado & Eberle, 2012; Johnson, 2015; Kummerow, Miller, & Reed, 2012; Quinn & Stein, 2013; Radford, 2011; Xu and Jaggars, 2013)

Online Student Profile

- Online student profile aligns with Tinto's Theory of Self Departure and Self Determination Theory (SDT)

Characteristic	Theory of Self Departure	Self Determination Theory
Self directed		x
Driven		x
Goal oriented		x
Independent		x
Former college experience	x	
Graduation	x	
Live Sessions	x	

Online Learner Diversity

- Multifaceted
- Consists of
  - more females
  - older students with additional responsibilities
  - military personnel
  - students labeled as non-traditional because they are not directly entering college within the same year of high school graduation

(Radford, Cominole, & Skomsvold, 2015; Shea & Bidjerano, 2014; Soares, 2013; Wladis, Conway, & Hachey, 2013, 2016; Wladis, Wladis, & Hachey, 2014).

Strategies for Success

- Time Management and Balance
  - Important to realize that there will be variability for each student (Yang, Baldwin, and Snelson, 2017).
  - Being able to balance life and school is a main factor for many online students.
  - Different methods to manage time :
    - Creating paper calendars
    - Family wall calendars
    - Electronic calendars
    - Get creative with the time and place to study.
    - Find strategies for managing all the responsibilities of life and college

Strategies for Success

- Communication
  - *What methods of communication can be used in the online classroom?*
  - *Open lines of communication between students, faculty, and others at the college is important to online student success.*
  - *Email, phone calls, and text messaging are the primary methods used to facilitate communication online.*
  - *What if I do not want to give out my personal phone number?*
    - Google Voice – phone calls and texting
    - Skype – phone calls and video calls
    - mysms - text from computer

Strategies for Success

- Virtual Sessions
  - *Uses:*
    - Clarifying complex concepts
    - Interaction with peers
    - Ask questions
    - Tutoring
    - Guest Speakers
  - *Ability to "ask questions and receive answers immediately" from the faculty member*
  - *Recordings provide another study tool for students*
 - *Interact with classmates and faculty in real time*

Wrap Up – Review of topics Covered

- Purpose of the Training
- Layout of the Training
- Preparedness of Online Learning
- Strategies for Success

Next Steps - Online Training

- Accessing the Blackboard Course Sites ®
  - *Email 1 sent to your college email address*
    - Click enroll now and enter your registration information
  - *Email 2*
    - Verification of registration – Click Login to enter the course and access the learning materials

Next Steps – Online Training
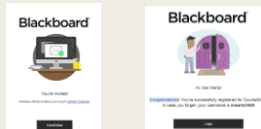
Next Steps - Online Training

- Accessing the Course
  - *Click Courses on the menu on the left*
  - *Click the name of the course to access*

Follow this link to learn more about Navigating Blackboard Ultra: help.blackboard.com
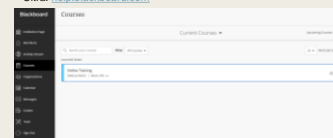
Next Steps – Online Training

- Accessing the Learning Materials
  - *Click the course content area to access learning materials*


Next Steps – Continuing the Training

- Discussion Board Assignment
  - *Click the Course Content for the week*
  - *Click the weekly discussion link*
  - *Click type a response*
  - *Enter your response to the discussion prompt*
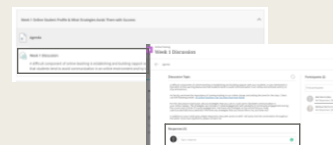
Next Steps – Online Training

- Accessing the Virtual Session
  - *Click the join session, then course room*

Check out the following web site information about using the virtual classroom:
help.blackboard.com/Collaborate/Ultra/Participant
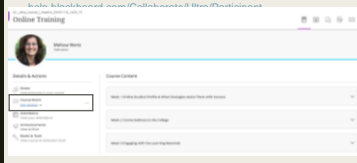
3-2-1 Activity

- Please list the answers to the following on a sheet of paper and return prior to leaving the session:
  - *3 things I learned in today's training*
  - *2 things I am excited about learning more about*
  - *1 thing I am not sure will work for me in the online classroom*

  Do not forget to check your email for the invite to the course – you will receive this by 5:00 pm today. You should register by 5:00 pm tomorrow.

WELCOME TO WEEK 1 DAY 3

Professional Development Training
for Online Teaching Success

Agenda

- Ground rules for participation
- Guided tour of the virtual classroom
- Review of Week 1 Day 1 topics
- Using the Virtual Session
- Guided tour of the online course site
- Wrap Up & Next Steps

Ground Rules for Participation

- Virtual Classroom Etiquette
  - *Raise your hand*
  - *Do not interrupt*
  - *Be respectful of others*
  - *Keep you microphone turned off*
  - *Make sure you are in a quiet environment free of distractions*
  - *Ask questions*

Guided Tour - Virtual Classroom

- Collaborate Panel
- Chat, Participants, Share Content, & Settings
- Sound Check
  - *Audio*
  - *Video*
- Raising your hand
- When to Chat

Review - Week 1 Day 1 Topics

- Layout of the Training
- Purpose of the Training
- Preparedness of Online Learning
- Strategies for Success
- Q & A

Using the Virtual Session

- Collaborate Panel
  - *Primary Content*
    - Sharing
  - *Secondary Content*
    - Polling
    - Timer
  - *Breakout Groups*

Guided Tour - Online Course Site

- Purpose of the tour
- Course Elements
- Online Assignments

Wrap Up & Next Steps

- Q & A
- Review online learning materials
- Participate in the week 1 discussion forum
- Start thinking about how you can use this synchronous tool to augment your online classroom, we will revisit this topic in week three
- Week 2 Topics
  - *Connectedness to the College*
    - Faculty and Student Interaction

Week 1 Online Learning Materials & Assessment

Preparing to Teach Online

Things will be different in the online classroom. It is important to realize that online teaching will be similar and different than on-campus teaching experience. You should build on your skill set and be open to new ways of doing things in the online environment. Your role as a faculty member changes when you teach online. You are more the "guide on the side" as opposed to the "sage on the stage" when teaching online.

Whether you are preparing for the first online course or the 100th online course, each experience brings new and exciting challenges.

Know your tools.
It may seem obvious, but we find it prudent to suggest that you must become very familiar with the hardware and software you and your students will be utilizing. In this case, become as familiar with the learning management system as you can. Learn about the available tools and how to get help if you need it.

Know your students.
The majority of online students fall into the non-traditional heading - adults, mid-twenties or older, and with families - but you will also encounter younger more traditional students in your online classroom. They are often looking to advance in their career, or they may be seeking their first college degree. They value relevant course work that is practical, and they can relate to their lives. The asynchronous approach to learning fits into their lives, and they will work hard to meet the expectations of the course and faculty member. Your population may vary, but it is highly likely to be a diverse one.

Who are the learners?

Busy Schedules

Students choose online courses because they have busy schedules and can participate in class at any time from home or work. They can review lectures and other learning materials as many times as they like. Whether their barriers are parking issues, lack of course availability nearby, or work and family constraints, adults want to improve their skills and knowledge through courses that fit into their busy schedules.

Lifelong Learners

Online education fulfills the needs of today's lifelong learners. The online environment offers and promotes the opportunity for adults to pursue their educational goals throughout their lives. These non-traditional students also bring valuable experiences to chats and discussions that can enhance the learning experience for all students.

Self-Direction

Online students depend on their time management skills, self-motivation, and self-discipline. Most students hone these skills as they work through the course with their classmates and instructor. Online learning supports communication that encourages students to participate and develop their learning skills.

Plan ahead
Initial course development for online teaching usually requires a bit more time. Work in conjunction with the Center for Teaching and Learning Staff as you venture into this new medium of teaching and learning.

Anticipate some snags.
Technology is not fail-safe, and there are times when you will need to contact someone to assist you with a technical issue. To serve the faculty and students during these times helpdesk systems are put in place to provide the best possible way to resolve the technical problems in the online environment.

Teaching in the Online Environment
Teaching in the online environment is continually evolving. In many respects, it is similar to traditional teaching. Nevertheless, as compared to most teaching in traditional contexts, it is different in the following ways:
- Learners participate in learning activities from anyplace in the world at any time using a computer and the Internet.
- Students interact with each other, with instructors, and learning materials.
- Faculty act as facilitators of learning by guiding support and instruction.

Faculty members provide the necessary guidance for the use of synchronous and asynchronous tools. Synchronous tools are real-time communication such as chat and virtual sessions where students and faculty communicate at the same time. Asynchronous tools allow for delayed communication such as email and discussion forums. Faculty may also use phone conversations and text messaging to interact with students.

Faculty and students can interact with a variety of content with the Internet from libraries, museums, library resources, books, videos, and more that enhances the learning experience with so many readily available resources. The online learning environment allows the learner to influence what is learned, how things are learned, and in what order.

Communication Tools
Online interaction between faculty and students is a crucial aspect to the success of an online class. Appropriate levels of communication and cooperation can transform a static online experience into an engaging experience. A learning management system provides a variety of tools that assist faculty and students with communicating that are readily available and easy to use. The following tables show the different types of communication tools available for online courses.

Tool and Type	Key Features	Main Uses
Announcements	Asynchronous Send and receive information at any time Faculty member to all students	Welcome message Important changes Updates & Reminders Summaries
Email Class	Asynchronous Send and receive information at any time Faulty to student(s) Student to student(s) Student to faculty	Individualized communication Private - only between the sender and receiver Ask specific questions Provide feedback Arrange appointments for tutoring
Online Chat	Synchronous Interact in real time with faculty and other students through messages	Individual meetings Group collaborations Office Hours
Discussion Boards	Asynchronous In-depth conversation over time Thoughtful interaction	Faculty posed questions Students make an initial post and respond to classmates Graded assessment Peer-review Simulations Informal conversation.
Virtual Software	Synchronous Dynamic interaction Real Time Audio Video Application sharing Whiteboard Can be recorded and downloaded for access and review anytime, anywhere.	Review topics Clarify difficult topics Build community Student presentations Collaboration with peers Tutoring Study Groups

Orienting Students

Assisting the student in becoming familiar with the online learning environment is an essential function for the online faculty member.

- Repeat, Reinforce, Reiterate
- Provide detailed instructions and directions
- Provide student expectations
- Let the students know you are available
- Provide contact information
- Know where to get help – technical support
- Provide a detailed schedule
- Be real and supportive
- Model the behavior you expect

Orienting Students to the Tools

- Students need to know how to use the system tools to participate. Fortunately, there are several easy ways to help students understand how to use the tools at the outset of the course and save you and the class, valuable time as the course progresses.
- It is essential to provide students with the appropriate direction for navigating the course web site when necessary.
- Require Students to view appropriate materials dealing with the Learning Management System
- Encourage students to explore the content items in the menu and the course tools available.

Help Students Focus on the Course

- As soon as possible, you want students to focus on your course objectives, assignments, components, required texts and readings, syllabus, schedule, etc. Don't be afraid to be redundant.
- If necessary, encourage students to examine the Welcome/Introductory video or audio provided.
- Remind students to review the Syllabus and remind them that the Announcements will periodically provide relevant information.
- Encourage students to discuss specific course questions via the chat room or email, either in groups or with the entire class.

Establish Behavioral Expectations

- As in the face-to-face environment, students in online courses seek guidance about how to participate in the course. They appreciate suggestions about how to conduct themselves, how to interact with others, and how to utilize different features of the learning environment. They also like to know the instructor's preferences about what to do in case of an emergency. It is, therefore, beneficial to include some explicit statements and explanations in the Syllabus.

- Have a plan on how you and students will interact and communicate in the online classroom.

Meaningful Interaction in the Online Environment
Your role as the online facilitator is to create activities, interactions, and opportunities for students to come together in a virtual learning community. Just as you use specific tools to construct a building, you will also utilize various tools to create community in your online course.

What should I do to build community in my online classroom?
- ✓ Make the course as student-centered as possible.
- ✓ The faculty member establishes goals. The faculty member is not the center of attention.
- ✓ Try to maintain a "non-authoritarian" style.
- ✓ The most important thing is for the instructor to take extra effort to make the entire course a community-like atmosphere.
- ✓ Start by reaching out to the students (introductory emails, etc.) and continue that throughout the course. Offer encouragement and feedback regularly.
- ✓ Always introduce yourself at the beginning of the course. At the very minimum post a photo, and if possible, do a 2-3 minute video introduction.
  - Engaging Introductory Video - One that makes students feel welcome and comfortable. The idea is to not come across as speaking from the Ivory Tower, but rather to appear as human and approachable as possible. Consider encouraging students to do the same.
- ✓ Allow social chatter, either on a discussion board or chat room
- ✓ Use discussion to encourage "outside of class" interaction.
  - To promote student relationship/friendship building create a discussion board specifically devoted to just chatting.
- ✓ Create study rooms for student to use for study groups and tutoring. Allow for interaction between students outside of the classroom to assist with building relationships.

Week 1 Assessment

Discussion Board

For this discussion board post, discuss teaching strategies that you use or intend to use to facilitate your online classes. The strategies you provide can include (1) Strategies to prepare students for success in your online classroom (2) Strategies for communication and (3) Strategies for synchronous course activities.

Are there any strategies that you have used successfully/unsuccessfully? Are there any strategies that you would like to try, but have not? Incorporate references to the materials presented in our sessions and the online learning materials.

In addition to your initial post, please respond to two peer posts as well!

Week 2 Day 1 Agenda - On Campus

Activities	Time Frame (minutes)	Learning Materials

Session Agenda
• Week 1 Review and Q & A
• Connectedness to the College
   o Faculty Interaction
   o Student Interaction
• Wrap Up
	5	PowerPoint Presentation

Week 1 Review and Q & A • Review online discussion topics and learning materials • Review topics presented in week 1 • Address topics presented in the 3 2 1 that needed further clarification	15	
Break	10	
Connected to the College – Learner Engagement • Discuss the importance and need for engaging students with the online classroom	10	
Connectedness to the College - Faculty Interaction • Introduce additional communication techniques applicable to the online classroom • Discuss the importance of faculty responsiveness • Discuss the use of discussion boards and synchronous sessions to increase interaction	40	
Break	10	
Connectedness to the College - Peer Interaction • Discuss techniques for using discussion boards to increase student interaction • Discuss techniques that allow students to interact asynchronously and synchronously in the online classroom with their peers	50	
Break	10	
Activity – Think Pair Share • Break faculty into groups of 4-5 and complete the following:	25	

Activities	Time Frame (minutes)	Learning Materials
o Think ▪ The feeling of isolation can be a common problem in the online classroom. Online students who feel isolated from the college community and others in the online classroom struggle with persisting to graduation. Feelings of isolation could lead to students opting to withdraw from the online classroom, peers, faculty, and higher education. o Pair ▪ Within your group come up with three solutions that could be employed in the online classroom to assist with helping students feel less isolated and feel more connected to your online classroom. o Share ▪ Be prepared to share one of your solutions with the whole group		
Wrap Up • Review of topics covered • Reminder faculty to complete online assessment • Review of online learning materials for the week • Muddiest Point o Have faculty answer the following question prior to leaving the session: What has been the "muddiest" point so far in this session? That is, what topic remains the least clear to you?	15	Blank Sheets of paper for Muddiest Point activity

Week 2 Day 3 - Live Virtual Session

Activities	Time Frame (minutes)	Learning Materials
Agenda • Review the importance of Faculty and Peer Interaction • Support from College Staff • Week 2 Online Activities • Wrap Up	5	PowerPoint Presentation
Review of Session 1 topics • Muddiest Point • Learner Engagement • Faculty Interaction • Peer Interaction	20	
Support from College Staff • Break faculty into groups of 4-5 in breakout rooms to brainstorm an answer to the following: o Outside of a faculty member, what areas of the college would students need support from to be successful as an online learner? • Have each faculty group share their ideas to compile a list of support areas that are needed for online learner success	30	
Wrap Up • Remind faculty to review online learning materials • Remind faculty to complete Quiz 2 online that reviews the week 2 materials • Introduce Week 3 topics	5	

Week 2 Day 1 and Day 3 Presentation
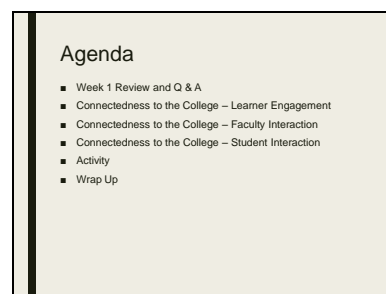
Week 1 in Review

- Purpose of the Training
- Layout of the Training
- Preparedness of Online Learning
- Strategies for Success
- Use of Virtual Sessions
- 3-2-1 Topics (if applicable)

Learner Engagement

- Engagement is vital for learner satisfaction, course completion, and preventing feelings of isolation (Bolliger & Halupa, 2018; Hew, 2016)
- Considered one of the most significant factors in a student's academic success (Buelow, Barry, & Rich, 2018; Martin & Bolliger, 2018)
- 7 Best Practices for Engagement
  - *encourages contact between students and faculty*
  - *develops reciprocity and cooperation among students*
  - *encourages active learning*
  - *gives prompt feedback*
  - *emphasizes time on task*
  - *communicates high expectations*
  - *respects diverse talents and ways of learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1991)*

Faculty Interaction

- Communication Techniques
  - Have a Plan
  - Remember, Less is More
  - Be Clear
  - Be Courteous – Watch your Online Tone
  - Personalize
  - Employ Innovative Methods for Communication
    - VoiceThread
    - Google Hangouts
    - Wikis
    - E-Portfolios
    - Podcasts

(Martin & Bolliger, 2018; Zhang, Hurst, & McLean, 2016)

Faculty Interaction

- Faculty Responsiveness
  - Have a plan for how quickly you respond to students – include in your syllabus
  - Respond in 24 hours if possible
  - *Timely*
  - *Assists students with making improvements and learning*

(Chickering & Gamson, 1991; Martin & Bolliger, 2018; Zhang, Hurst, & McLean, 2016)

Faculty Interaction

- Discussion Boards
  - *Asynchronous*
  - *Allow for student – faculty interaction and student – student interaction*
  - *Assign roles to students to allow them to*
    - Give direction
    - Summarize
    - Provide critical response to peers
  - *Reflection*
    - Self and group

(Huss, Sela, & Estep, 2015; Tlhoaele, Hofman, Winnips, & Beetsma, 2014; Truhlar, Williams, & Walter, 2018)

Faculty Interaction

- Synchronous Sessions
  - *Live interaction*
  - *Real time*
  - *Provides an opportunity for students to ask questions and interact*
  - *Must be relevant and interactive*
  - *Opportunity to clarify, highlight, and facilitate an exchange of ideas about challenging course topics*

(Acosta-Tello, 2015; Watts, 2016).

Student Interaction

- Discussion Boards
  - *Allows students to formulate their response and synthesize materials*
  - *Guidelines for success – 10 minute Brainstorm with a partner*
    - What do you think will assist students in being successful in an online discussion? What strategies or methods can you use to make the experience engaging?

Student Interaction

- Discussion Board Guidelines
  - *Prepare – read and review learning materials*
  - *Provide a baseline for the length of an adequate post*
  - *Free of misspellings and grammatical errors*
  - *Organize your thoughts*
  - *Research to find supporting materials for you post*
  - *Include only the most essential points in your post*
  - *Each post should offer some new content that takes the topic further*
  - *Be respectful of others ideas and opinions – you can disagree with others respectfully*
  - *Post early - do not wait until the last minute*
  - *Create a schedule for yourself to check the discussion boards and respond*

Student Interaction

- Asynchronous Techniques
  - *Emails*
  - *Text messages*
  - *Discussion boards*
  - *Blogs*
  - *Wikis*
- Synchronous Techniques
  - *Phone*
  - *Live tutoring sessions*
  - *Chats*
  - *Virtual software*

Think Pair Share

- *Think*
  - The feeling of isolation can be a common problem in the online classroom. Online students who feel isolated from the college community and others in the online classroom struggle with persisting to graduation. Feelings of isolation could lead to students opting to withdraw from the online classroom, peers, faculty, and higher education.
- *Pair*
  - Within your group come up with three solutions that could be employed in the online classroom to assist with helping students feel less isolated and feel more connected to your online classroom.
- *Share*
  - Be prepared to share one of your solutions with the whole group

Wrap Up

- Review of topics covered
  - *Connectedness to the College – Learner Engagement*
  - *Connectedness to the College – Faculty Interaction*
  - *Connectedness to the College – Student Interaction*
- Review of online assessments for week 2
- Review of online learning materials for the week

Muddiest Point

- Answer the following question prior to leaving the session: What has been the "muddiest" point so far in this session? That is, what topic remains the least clear to you?

  Do not forget to review the online learning materials and complete assessments.

WELCOME TO WEEK 2 DAY 3

Professional Development Training
for Online Teaching Success

Agenda

- Review of Week 2 Day 2 topics
- Review the importance of Faculty and Peer Interaction
- Support from College Staff
- Week 2 Online Activities
- Wrap Up & Next Steps

Review of Week 2 Day 1 Topics

- Muddiest Point
- Connectedness to the College – Learner Engagement
- Connectedness to the College – Faculty Interaction
- Connectedness to the College – Student Interaction

Support from College Staff

- Outside of a faculty member, what areas of the college would students need support from to be successful as an online learner?
  - *In your breakout rooms, take 10 minutes to brainstorm a list of support areas in your college.*

Support from College Staff

- Group Results:
  -
  -
  -
  -
  -
  -
  -
  -
  -
  -

Support from College Staff

- Financial Aid
- Student Support Center
- Writing Center
- Student Advisor
- Faculty Advisor
- Tutors
- Library
- Technical Support
- Career Services
- Registrar

Wrap Up and Next Steps

- Review online learning materials
- Participate in the week 2 discussion forum
- Complete Quiz 2 online that reviews the week 2 materials
- Introduce Week 3 topics

Week 2 Online Learning Materials and Assessment

Guidelines for Online Success
Here are some guidelines for making things go smoothly for students and faculty. These are just examples of the kinds of information you might want to put into your course syllabus to assist your students with navigating their learning path. These guidelines do not cover all of the topics that your students need. The guidelines provide a starting point to assist students with engaging with the online course materials, faculty and peers.

Participation
In online courses, students seek interaction with other students and with the instructor. Interaction is significant to learning online. Class participation is imperative and relates to success online. Reviewing learning materials, interacting with faculty online in discussions, live virtual sessions, and communication with others is key to being an active and engaged learner.

Email
To manage the amount of email I will receive from students, I am asking you to be thoughtful about what you are sending. Think about the questions you have and group them when sending. Make sure you have exhausted all resources (recorded sessions, learning materials, assignment instructions, etc.) before sending the email. Expect a response within 24-48 hours. Please include the course number and the subject of the message in the subject line. Please use email etiquette when sending your email - do not forget to sign the email with your name.

Online Conduct
Students are expected to behave as professionals in the online classroom at all times. Ethical and civil conduct in discussion posts, emails, chats, and virtual sessions is an expectation for all classroom participants.

Access to Course
Access to each unit will begin on Monday and remain open throughout the course. Assignments and discussion responses are to be turned in and completed by the indicated due dates. Assignments are due on Day 3 and Day 7 during the week. Check your course calendar for important dates.

Personal Involvement and Time
Taking classes online is not easier. It is imperative that you set a routine and come up with strategies to balance courses, work, and personal commitments. As you complete additional online courses, it becomes easier to maintain balance and be successful. Capitalize on the flexible and convenient nature of online learning, be creative with your time, and have a solid plan about how you will fit your online courses into your life. Use the resources provided to assist with time management.

Grammar & Spelling

Grammar and spelling are essential in the online classroom setting. Please be conscious of grammar and spelling in all communications in the online classroom. Use the Grammarly extension (it is free) in the Chrome browser to check your grammar and spelling for everything you write.

Technical Problems and Assignment Delivery

Technical issues do occur. Have a backup plan for a computer or Internet service issue. You are responsible for having a working computer and Internet connection at all times. A backup plan could be going to the library, coming on campus to use a computer, going to a friend, or using public Wi-Fi. Work on your assignments early and do not procrastinate because inevitably you will experience technical issues when you do get behind. The key to resolving technical problems and assignment delivery is to COMMUNICATE with your instructor about the issue early and not right before the assignment due date.

Online Tone

"Online tone" is a term that gets tossed about quite a bit in online faculty training, and having "proper tone" is a critical part of being a successful online faculty member. So what is it? When we discuss tone, we are referring to the writer's attitude toward the reader and the subject of the message. Your tone should be confident, courteous, and sincere with nondiscriminatory language. Be careful, however, that you aren't overconfident, cocky, arrogant, or downright nasty! ;-)

Why is "tone" so critical?

- The online classroom has increased verbal communication: both "student to faculty" and "student to student."
- Students look to faculty as a role model of proper classroom etiquette. The more attention we pay to how our written messages sound, the more likely the students will as well.
- A classroom where everyone feels welcome and free to speak up and contributes not only ensures that students contribute, but faculty have a better understanding of the students' level of comprehension of the course material.
- Written communication is a large part of working in a professional environment so modeling this for our students will encourage them to be conscious of their writing and increase learning.
- Creating and maintaining an environment where students are encouraged to contribute, the entire class (including the instructor) can benefit from the unique experiences of our students, who bring a wide range of career and personal experiences to the classroom.

Conveying Tone is Tricky Online

In a traditional class setting, we can rely on our tone of voice and body language, as well as those of the students, to help convey what we mean when we comment, as well as to judge how our class receives the message. In an online setting, we must rely on our written communication to convey not only the "spoken" message (the words), but the "unspoken" message (tone and body language) as well.

No matter how much emphasis you place on proper online communications and proper online etiquette, spats or flame wars will erupt from time to time. Although they can occur for a variety of reasons, many of them happen because of a lack of patience with language skills or miscommunications due to lack of body-language signals. Most of the problems occur when students or faculty say (write) something that comes across as harsh and overly blunt. For example, when we correct someone in person, we often soften the communication with a smile or an expression of concern on our face. Without the visual cues, those same corrections can come across as too hard-edged.

Tone Dos and Don'ts

Think about how students will perceive your statement without your vocal inflection or body language. If the statement could be taken the wrong way or may be ambiguous, try re-phrasing it. Some people have suggested reading your message out loud to yourself is an effective tool. However, it's also important to remember that the tone we use is not necessarily the tone the student will "hear" when they read the message. Instead, look at your message and imagine the most offense your words could cause if a student misinterprets your tone and how you would feel if you received that same message. If your note passes that test, it's most likely all right.

Don't make a correction without making a positive statement as well; for example, "You posted your bio in the wrong place" almost invariably gets interpreted by a student as: "You posted your bio in the wrong place, stupid." Instead, "I appreciate your response, (student), and realize many faculty do ask that you post your bios in the (forum). However, I prefer that you post your bio to the thread I've established in the (correct forum). Please do so…Thanks! ;-)"

Never publicly humiliate or correct a student under any circumstances. The fact that you cannot see the other person doesn't change how s/he (and the other students in the class) responds to public correction. The adage "praise in public, correct in private" holds true not only in the f2f environment but in the online environment as well.

Don't use ALL CAPS to convey your message. In online terms, that's considered shouting. You wouldn't (or shouldn't!) yell at the students in a f2f classroom, right?

Strive to make your messages as grammatically correct and error-free as possible, and make your words easy to read and visually attractive. The presentation of our

messages can say quite a bit about how you "really" feel about the class. For example, if you don't take the time to edit, why should the students think you are putting much effort into leading the class or that you care about their learning?

Be patient with spelling and grammar mistakes in the public forums. While it is imperative that all online communication is understandable, maintaining rigorous standards regarding spelling and grammar in the discussion forum tends to hamper the spontaneity we are striving for as students engage in exploring the topics. It is doubtful we would interrupt a f2f discussion to correct students' grammar, and online students need that same opportunity to talk with one another. If you feel you must coach a student in this area, however, it is necessary to do so via a private message.

While humor can be a valuable teaching tool, online students cannot always tell if we are kidding or not based on our body language/facial expression or tone of voice. Emoticons can backfire if misinterpreted. We also cannot tell if a joke has "bombed" or offended until they tell us – and they may not - in the online classroom. There is a place for humor, but only if non-offensive.

One of the most critical advantages of the asynchronous environment is the time we are given to think before we speak. While we may write a note when we are angry, defensive, or not thinking clearly, it is best to then place it in the drafts folder for a second look the next day. In most instances, the second look results in deleting the message or in a significant rewrite where our focus is on resolving the situation rather than escalating the problem.

You now have some idea of what proper tone is, why it is necessary, and some "dos and don'ts" to help you maintain a respectful and professional learning environment. However, this is an area where even experienced online faculty members make mistakes. Therefore, if you do post a message that offends, students are far more forgiving if you don't bluff or tell the students it's THEIR fault they misunderstood. Instead, acknowledge your mistake, apologize, and move on. Our students know we're human beings! ;-)

What do we mean by "Interaction?"
The literature on online instruction calls to promote interaction to enhance participant learning. Interaction often leads to more student effort, more student learning, and more student satisfaction with the learning experience.

Generally, in learning situations, interaction refers to the "mutual or reciprocal action or influence" that occurs:
- ✓ Between learner and instructor
- ✓ Among learners
- ✓ Between learners and the content, they are attempting to learn

Why should we encourage interaction in online courses?
- ✓ Increase participation
- ✓ Increase engagement
- ✓ Develop communication skills
- ✓ Encourage feedback from peers
- ✓ Enhance retention of material
- ✓ Increase motivation
- ✓ Develop teams and team dynamic
- ✓ Assist with the discovery of new knowledge
- ✓ Encourage the exploration of new concepts

Collaboration

What types of collaboration are meaningful in an online learning environment? Here are a few that can assist with increasing interaction in the online classroom.
- ✓ Peer Reviews
  - Excellent tool for students in any class with papers
  - Use Document Sharing and the editing features of Word
  - Doesn't have to be limited to papers either.
  - Critiquing each other's work - Evaluation being high in Bloom's taxonomy.
- ✓ Threaded Discussions
  - Most commonly used strategy, but it is also essential to building both collaboration and community
  - Always require students to respond to other students
  - Create questions that are open-ended
  - Two level questions solicit deeper-level responses (more than two can confusing)
- ✓ Debates
  - Can be done synchronously
  - Inductive inquiry: get info, gather data, make predictions and synthesize
- ✓ Discussion Groups
  - One possibility, if there are enough groups in the class, would be to have an expanding group activity, where you start with individual groups discussing a topic, then combine two groups, etc. with each round.
  - Social collaboration - Build bonds that lead to a sense of community.
- ✓ Brainstorming/Brainwriting
  - Each person writes down an idea and sends it to the next person, who adds to or modifies it and sends it to the next person, etc.
  - Informal exploration and discussion
  - Discussing "what if" ideas
- ✓ Creative Group Activities and Projects
  - Group chats or email discussions
  - Projects involving research and creativity
  - Work shopping paper drafts, building spreadsheets/databases, etc.

Discussion Boards

Tips to maximize the use of discussion boards in your online class:
- Make the discussion valuable to meeting the learning outcomes of the course
- Make the discussion non-threatening to the learner
- Make the discussion challenging for the learner, i.e. not boring or predictable
- Create an encouraging environment
- Provide realistic and meaningful questions for discussion
- Provide feedback and guidance when necessary in the appropriate manner
- Discussions should expand on information presented in materials and the textbook
- Provide discussion summaries
- Provide specific guidelines for response postings to the learners
- Post stimulating discussion questions, reword if necessary after discussion begins

Week 2 Assessment

Online Quiz – Answers highlighted in yellow
1. The tone of our written words can sometimes come across in the wrong way to the receiver of the information.
   a. True
   b. False
2. Which of the following are key to success in an online class?
   a. Engagement
   b. Communication
   c. Interaction
   d. All of the above
3. Which the following are synchronous methods of communication you can use in your online class? Choose all that apply.
   a. Chat
   b. Discussion Board
   c. Virtual Classroom
   d. Email
4. Synchronous communication is delayed.
   a. True
   b. False
5. Promoting _____ increases participation in the online classroom.
   a. Interaction

Week 3 Day 1 Agenda - On Campus

Activities	Time Frame (minutes)	Learning Materials

Session Agenda
• Week 2 Review and Q & A
• Engaging with Learning Material
   o Virtual Sessions
   o Instructional Technologies
   o Course Structure
• Wrap Up
	5	PowerPoint Presentation

• Week 2 Review and Q & A o Review muddiest points	15	

• Engaging with Learning Materials
   o Have faculty brainstorm ideas about how to use a synchronous session for an online classroom
   o Discuss the different methods for using Virtual Sessions in an online classroom
	30	

Break	10	

• Engaging with Learning Materials
   o Define instructional technology
   o Have faculty work together in groups of 2-3 and come up with a list of instructional technologies that could be used to increase engagement in the online classroom
   o Have each group report out on the top three instructional technologies discuss in their groups
   o Discuss the different types of Instructional Technologies that are available that can be used to engage students
	50	

Break	10	
• Engaging with Learning Materials o Discuss the importance of a clear and concise classroom structure in the online classroom	25	
Wrap Up • Review of topics covered • Preview of upcoming Week 3 Assessment • Preview of upcoming Week 3 Virtual Session	25	Blank sheets of paper for 2 minute paper

Activities	Time Frame (minutes)	Learning Materials
• 2 Minute Paper ○ Give faculty 2 minutes to record answers to the following questions: What are the most meaningful things you have learned during this session? What questions do you still have about the topics discussed? Is there anything you need further clarification about from the lesson?		

Week 3 Day 3 - Live Virtual Session

Activities	Time Frame (minutes)	Learning Materials
Agenda • Review the importance of engagement in the online classroom • Incorporating different engagement techniques in a synchronous session • Wrap Up	5	PowerPoint Presentation
Review the importance of engagement in the online classroom • Virtual Sessions • Instructional Technologies • Course Structure	10	
Engagement Techniques • Present different techniques that can assist with increasing engagement in both asynchronous and synchronous online learning	35	
Wrap Up • Remind faculty to review online learning materials • Remind faculty to participate in the week 3 discussion forum • Remind faculty to complete Quiz 3 online that reviews the week 3 materials • Remind faculty to complete training evaluation by day 21 of the training (the end of week 3)	10	

Week 3 Day 1 and Day 3 Presentation

WELCOME TO WEEK 3 DAY 1

Professional Development Training
for Online Teaching Success

Agenda

- Week 2 Review and Q & A
- Engaging with Learning Materials
  - *Virtual Sessions*
  - *Instructional Technologies*
  - *Course Structure*
- Wrap Up

Week 2 in Review

- Connectedness to the College
  - *Learner Engagement*
  - *Faculty Interaction*
  - *Student Interaction*
- Q & A

Virtual Sessions

- What we know?
  - *Provide real time interaction*
  - *Must be relevant and interactive*
  - *Opportunity to clarify, highlight, and facilitate an exchange of ideas about challenging course topics*

(Acosta-Tello, 2015; Mercer, Pisutova, & Rogers, 2018; Watts, 2016).

Virtual Sessions

- Brainstorm – 10 minutes
- How do you see the synchronous virtual session fitting into your weekly plans for your online class to assist students with learning?

Virtual Sessions

- Engaging online learners to elicit participation and engagement
  - *Agenda*
  - *Involve the learner*
  - *Review upcoming assignments*
  - *Have students lead discussion*
  - *Student introductions and wrap up*
  - *Make it personal*
    - Learn their names
    - Incorporate student discussion posts

(Martin & Bolliger, 2018; Martin, Wang, & Sadaf, 2018; Mercer, Pisutova, & Rogers, 2018; Olt, 2018).

Virtual Sessions

- Other Uses
  - Student tutoring – peer and faculty
  - Student presentations
  - Group work
  - Feedback meetings

Instructional Technologies

- What is Instructional Technology
  - *Often referred to as Educational Technology*
  - Supports teaching and learning
  - Technological processes and resources
  - Facilitates learning
  - Enhances learning
  - Engages learners
  - Extends learning
  - Does not replace instruction

(Gagne, 2013; Januszewski, & Molenda, 2013; Henrie, Halverson, & Graham, 2015)

Instructional Technologies

- Have faculty work together in groups of 2-3 and come up with a list of instructional technologies that could be used to increase engagement in the online classroom
- Have each group report out on the top three instructional technologies discuss in their groups

Instructional Technologies

- Examples
  - Google docs
  - MS SharePoint
  - Podcasts
  - Smart Textbooks
  - Publisher technologies – MH Connect, Cengage Mindtap
  - Aleks
  - Hawkes Learning
  - Quizlet
  - Quia games
  - Simulations
  - Applications

Course Structure

- Clear and consistent presentation of learning materials
- Ease of navigation – ease of finding course materials
- Includes learning objectives
- Clearly stated assessment instructions
- Connections between learning materials and assessments
- Clear instructions on how to connect to and use additional resources outside of the learning management system
- Clear description of support offered – technical and people
- Consistency between each course offered at the college

(Jaggars, & Xu, 2016; Vai, & Sosulski, 2016)

Wrap Up

- Review of topics covered
  - *Engaging with the Learning Materials*
    - Virtual Sessions
    - Instructional Technologies
    - Course Structure
- Preview of upcoming Week 3 Assessment
- Preview of upcoming Week 3 Virtual Session

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2 Minute Paper

- Take the next two minutes to record answers to the following questions:
  - *What are the most meaningful things you have learned during this session?*
  - *What questions do you still have about the topics discussed?*
  - *Is there anything you need further clarification about from the lesson?*

WELCOME TO WEEK 3 DAY 3

Professional Development Training
for Online Teaching Success

Agenda

- Review the 2-minute paper
- Review of engagement in the online classroom
- Incorporating different engagement techniques
- Wrap Up

Engaging with Learning Materials

- Virtual Sessions
- Instructional Technologies
- Course Structure

According to Chickering and Gamson (1987),

Learning is not a spectator sport. … They must talk about what they are learning, write about it, relate it to past experiences and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves.

Engagement Techniques

- Recorded sessions – do not forget about the students who are not able to attend
- Provide opportunities to work through problems or scenarios
- Incorporate active learning activities
  - *Collaboration*
  - *Think – Pair – Share*
  - *Brainstorming*
  - *Concept Mapping*
- Provide opportunities for students to collaborate and not be passive

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Wrap Up

- Q&A
- Review Week 3 learning materials
- Complete week 3 assessment
- Complete training evaluation by day 21 of the training (the end of week 3)

Week 3 Online Learning Materials and Assessment

Virtual Sessions

Online learning should be engaging and provide learners with different opportunities to interact with learning materials and accomplish the goals of a course. Implementing asynchronous and synchronous learning strategies can assist learners with learning and with persisting in an online course or program. Using synchronous learning technologies provide a method for learners to interact with faculty in real time.

As the faculty member, you are in control of the synchronous experience for the students and making it an interactive experience that engages students in discussion, learning, and collaboration. Take the following tips into account to assist you in creating an effective non-passive synchronous learning experience for students.

1. Practice - be prepared for the synchronous learning environment by practicing with another individual.
2. Orient learners to the synchronous classroom - provide learners with the resources needed to participate and interact in the synchronous classroom.
3. Engage - plan your time in the synchronous sessions of your online class to include opportunities for students to interact; use the technologies available in the synchronous session to have learners become presenters, share whiteboard content, and lead the experience.
4. Check for understanding - use the technology to periodically check for learner understanding (polling and breakout rooms) and stimulate conversation between learners.
5. Prepare, Prepare, Prepare - plan your sessions that include your presentation, notes, multimedia, polls, application sharing, questions; have a lesson plan that outlines the anticipatory set, lesson content, questions, checkpoints, and concluding activities.
6. Use support personnel - depending on the number of participants, it may be necessary to enlist the assistance of another faculty member, teaching assistant, or technical support individual to assist with managing the live chat area to assist with technology issues
7. Be positive - creating a positive learning environment by being enthusiastic will set the tone for the session; your attitude will come through with the tone of your voice.
8. Record - record your sessions for learners to use in the future and also allow for learners who could not attend the ability to review the session; include a reminder to record in your notes.
9. Technology preparation - make sure your technology works appropriately, check your sound, web cam, and microphone prior to the session
10. Join early - join the session early to set up the presentation and make sure the technology works and greet learners; this is a great way to interact with learners.

Instructional Technology
Choosing technology tools that add to the online learning experience is important. Faculty members need to make sure they are enlisting additional technology tools that will assist students in mastering the goals of a course. The following tips can assist with finding the right balance between technology and pedagogy.

Tip 1 Teaching first, technology second
  ✓ Technologies need to align with the teaching methods for the course

✓ Learning outcomes should drive what technologies are used in the online classroom
✓ Online learning experiences and technology need to work together not detract from each other and impede teaching and learning.

Tip 2 Keep it simple
✓ Use the basics and add to your toolbox as you become more comfortable in the online environment.
✓ Focus on what is essential and avoid flashy tools.

Tip 3 Work with your learners to get feedback on instructional tools
✓ Ask for feedback from your learners.
✓ Include learners in assisting with using the tool in the online classroom.

Tip 4 Have a back up plan
✓ Technology is great when it works, but it does sometimes fail.
✓ Have backup plan for when there are glitches.
✓ Enlist the assistance of your students when issues arise.

Tip 5 Review old tools and research new tools
✓ Technology changes rapidly so it is important to evaluate the old and new instructional tools.
✓ Employ a sound strategy for incorporating new tools into your online classroom to minimize risk for learners and yourself.

Online Course Structure

The structure of your online course is an element of online learning that can either assist students in persisting or interfere with their persistence. Course design that does not consider the learner experience will most likely fail. As you approach the design of the online learning experience think about how your students will experience the course through the use of the learning management tools, multimedia, and other elements in the online classroom.

Just as we plan for an on campus learning experience, it is vital to do the same for an online classroom. The online classroom planning needs to take into account the organization of materials in the learning management system. Keeping things simple and consistent each week is important for the learners. We do not want our students going a scavenger hunt each week to find learning materials and assignments. Being clear and consistent will assist learners with avoiding frustrating and will assist with the faculty member with presenting an organized and easily navigable online course.

Announcements and Course Structure

Announcements provide a way for online faculty to send information to all students and are an important component of the course structure. Announcements are a great place for welcome messages, changes, updates, reminders, summaries, directions, and more in the online classroom. Use announcements to provide clarification to help motivate and engage students with the content and the course. Since announcements can be used on a weekly basis and most systems have a feature that will email the announcement directly

to all students they are an excellent method for communicating information. Announcements can assist faculty in providing direction so learners understand the structure of the online course and are not confused with navigating the course.

Ask yourself the following questions to assist with designing your course:
1. Is the course well organized?
2. Is the course easy to navigate?
3. Is the course visually appealing?
4. Did I use more than text to present the materials - Did I incorporate graphics, videos, websites, podcast, etc.?
5. Did I include directions on how to get started?
6. Did I chuck the materials into manageable learning units?
7. Is each week set up the same way?
8. Do my instructions make sense?
9. Did I include all of the necessary instruction to complete assignments?
10. Did I include learning outcomes for the students?
11. Did I use relevant and recent resources?
12. Do my links open in a new window or tab?
13. Do I provide opportunities for interaction between students and students and student and faculty?
14. Do I use a variety of assessment techniques?
15. Do I clearly state grading policies and procedures?
16. Do I outline student expectations?
17. Do I include a calendar of assessments and due dates?
18. Do I include assessment rubrics?
19. Do I include participation requirements?
20. Do I include instructions on how to access instructional technologies (Alex, Connect, Hawkes, Mindtap, etc.)?
21. Do I provide information about technical support?
22. Do I provide information about how to use the learning management system?
23. Do I provide information about how to use the virtual software?
24. Do I have contact information for other services at the college (tutoring, tech support, etc.)?
25. Can you think of other questions you should be asking?

Answering these questions will assist with providing a well designed course that is focused on the learning and helping learners be successful online. It is also highly suggested that you collaborate with other faculty members to ensure our online courses are well developed and easily navigated to maximize student learning.

Best Practices for Online Teaching

Facilitating an online course requires faculty to provide students with the best possible learning experience to prepare them to achieve course goals. Just as classroom faculty

should have a plan for the classroom, an online faculty member needs a solid plan for the online class.

Boettcher and Conrad (2016) present 14 principles that are considered best practices for online teaching. Incorporate the following best practices into your teaching.

Best Practices for Online Teaching

Best Practice	Description
1	Be present.
2	Create a supportive environment.
3	Develop expectations for communication and the amount of time on task each week.
4	Use a variety of experiences.
5	Use both asynchronous and synchronous activities.
6	Ask for informal feedback early and often.
7	Prepare discussion posts that promote deep learning.
8	Find digital resources.
9	Incorporate customized and personalized learning.
10	Have a solid closing and cumulative activity.
11	Assess yourself and student learning throughout the course.
12	Make connections between content.
13	Develop and use a clear plan for your course.
14	Design experiences to help learners become experts.

Week 3 Assessment

For this assessment you will be creating and submitting a MS Word document that allows you to reflect over the last three weeks of learning. Create a reflection paper for submission. As you reflect over the three weeks of training, think about how you will incorporate the concepts and strategies discussed in this training into your own online courses.

Submission Specifications:
- 2-3 pages of content with a title page
- Double spaced
- Times New Roman
- 12 point font