FORTRESSING FACULTY: IMPROVING ONLINE FACULTY TRAINING PROGRAMS

by

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Abstract

A 2002 report from the National Center for Education Statistics reported that between 73-75% of undergraduate students today have one or more of the characteristics of a nontraditional student. While online courses provide access to higher education for underserved and underprepared students, the greater challenge is determining the intrinsic or extrinsic motivators for keeping these students in the classes (Belanger & Jordan 2000; Carr, 2000; Kearsley, 2000). Faculty selection and preparation to teach underprepared learners has become even more paramount as this student population increases. Faculty who teach courses with high numbers of underprepared learners need more than just the appropriate degrees and training; they also need personalities and core beliefs that will enable them to interact with their students appropriately and empathetically (Eney & Davidson, 2006). As online classes become more of the standard method for course delivery in higher education, underprepared educators present a problem for colleges and universities that are increasingly using online classes to serve these underprepared students. The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the relationship between online faculty training programs and the ability of instructors to assist at risk learners in benefiting from the university's learning community.

Dedication

To my Literacy Action and DeVry University students—this dissertation is dedicated to you. Because of who you are, I have become the educator that I am today. Always keep reaching for the stars because nothing is impossible.

To my children—Alicyn and Niles—thank you for understanding the long weekends, late nights, and residencies disguised as family vacations but never once complaining.

To my husband—Tony—thank you for tirelessly working part time jobs. You sacrificed almost a decade of your life to help me live my dream. Words will never express the gratitude that I feel for you.

To my parents—you told me to "Forget about money--get an education. That's the one thing that no one can ever take away." Mom and Dad, I heard you. I got it.

To my Crossroads family—thank you for always putting in "knee time" (often at a moment's notice).

To my greatest cheerleaders—Steve, Pam, Lisa, Amy, Ginger, Susan, and Tae—thank you for being there during some of my darkest hours with a single flickering candle.

To Heather—thank you for showing me that one person really can make a difference in changing a family's legacy forever.

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us."--Ralph Waldo Emerson

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It has been said that time is the most valuable natural resource in the world; and, all of the names that you see above gave the ultimate sacrifice of time to help me reach my dream of becoming the first person in my family to hold the title of Dr.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

McCabe and Day (1998) estimated that more than 2 million students each year would drop out of postsecondary education without the opportunity to enroll in developmental education programs. Smittle (2003) stated, "These students present enormous challenges to developmental educators that often far exceed those presented by traditional college students" (p. 10). Since the 1960s, community colleges have borne the brunt of the expenses for delivering higher education to underprepared students.. Early research from Bogue (1950), Pittman (1960) and Medsker (1960) about these students revealed that these at-risk students were high school graduates with low C or below GPAs' with significant skill learning gaps (especially in English and mathematics), poor study habits, low levels of self motivation, no home support to encourage continuing in school, unrealistic and ill-defined goals, and were from homes with few advantages and minimal standards of living. Many of these students were the first of their family to attend college (Merson, 1961). Surprisingly, a 2005 Challenging the Odds study from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSE) reinforced this research and also revealed that while these students are more engaged in learning they tend to have lower grades and persistence rates than traditional students.

McCabe (2000) reported that "poverty has the highest correlation with educational underpreparedness at every level, from preschool to graduate school" (p. 12). Hardin (1988) identified six categories of students who enroll in developmental studies: poor choosers, adult learners, ignored students, foreign students, handicapped students, and "users" who lack clear-cut goals and are attending college more for purposes of avoidance than achievement. A 2003

report from the U.S. Department of Education revealed that over 40% of first-year students at public 2-year colleges were enrolled in developmental courses. Faculty selection and preparation to teach underprepared learners has become even more paramount as this student population increases.

According to research from Astin (1982), Tinto (1993), and McCabe and Day (1998), creating learning communities improves student engagement, persistence, and academic achievement. Integrating these communities into developmental education courses involves linking or clustering classes around interdisciplinary themes, regrouping students into unmodified courses based on academic majors, and implementing team-taught approaches. Despite the apparent need for these programs, there has not been sufficient and uniform progress in developmental education over the last few decades (Morrison, 1999). Student dropout rates and dissatisfaction are high while overall degree completion rates remain low (Morrison, 1999). Unlike the traditional college freshman, the remedial or developmental student is often labeled as "at-risk, underprepared, low-achieving, developmental, disadvantaged, nontraditional, and skill-deficient" (Saxon & Boylan, 1999) and often enters college and developmental programs with negative attitudes about education in general.

A large number of students in developmental classes are recent high school graduates who can be divided into two categories: those who lacked good instruction and were never taught the basics in high school and those who were exposed to good instruction but did not absorb the material. Adelman (1999) identifies academic intensity, quality of secondary school curriculum, and the opportunity to learn as the key degree completion factors. Anger and resentment of being placed in developmental studies is most common among high school

students who graduate with strong precollege academic indicators such as test scores, class rank, and academic GPA but who lack the college entry skills to be successful in traditional freshman-level courses. Moving students beyond this anger and resentment presents a tremendous challenge for developmental studies faculty.

A final and often overlooked component central to the developmental students' academic success is the faculty assigned to teach in the developmental studies program. Faculty members assigned to developmental studies courses must understand that they are the bridges between students' high school educational experiences and the rigorous expectations of college-level courses. Faculty members who do not understand the significance of this bridge create a false learning opportunity—in other words, the students have access to the resources, but do not have the appropriate support to achieve the desired goal (Casazza, 1999). Educators at career higher education institutions are frequently hired as practitioners and, as a result, seldom have an educational pedagogy background. While these instructors are experts in their respective fields, they often do not know how to transfer this knowledge into the online classroom—especially to developmental learners. These faculty members have repeatedly expressed concerns over their students' lack of preparation and motivation to do college work, language difficulties that would be better served in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes rather than in a traditional college-level course, and students with undiagnosed learning disabilities.

Background of the Study

Boylan, Bonham, Claxton, and Bliss (1992) concluded that the dropout rates in developmental courses for all institutions averaged about 25%, and students who actually completed their first developmental course successfully (with a grade of C or better) at either

colleges or universities were more likely to fulfill their remedial (developmental) requirements within 1 year. In 2000, 28% of entering freshmen enrolled in one or more developmental reading, writing, or mathematics courses (Parsad & Lewis, 2003). In 2002, almost 78% of returning adult learners were enrolled in online-based education courses (Parker, 2003). As the attraction to distance education programs grew, so did the need to transition existing faculty and to train new faculty to meet the needs of this new student population.

Statement of the Problem

As online classes become more of the standard method for course delivery in higher education, online educators are unprepared to connect with online underprepared learners and subsequently build online learning communities as a means to improve at-risk student retention; this presents a problem for colleges and universities that are increasingly using online classes to serve these underprepared students.

Faculty Profile

According to Olcott and Wright (1995), many full-time faculty members are reluctant to participate in teaching online courses. Stevens and Wright (1999) conclude that part-time faculty accounts for 64.3% of all faculty at 2-year institutions: "Although part-time faculty enhances flexibility of coping with sudden shifts in enrollment and course offerings, they have earned fewer graduate degrees or credits and have less teaching experience than full-time instructors"(Conrad & Hammond, 1982, p. 49). Another concern is most part-time faculty lack training in adult education. Knox (1986) asserted that most adult education instructors are subject matter experts, but have little experience or training in the process of teaching or engaging nontraditional adult learners—especially underprepared or at-risk learners.

Faculty who teach courses with high numbers of underprepared learners need more than just the appropriate degrees and training; they also need personalities and core beliefs that will enable them to interact with their students appropriately and empathetically. According to Eney & Davidson (2006), "It is critical to provide a supportive environment and professional development opportunities that allow part-time faculty to focus on quality teaching and learning while also giving them a stake in the institution's mission" (p. 1).

Learner Profile

Disadvantaged, underprivileged, nontraditional, underprepared, remedial, developmental, at-risk, high-risk, low achieving, disenfranchised are all synonyms used to describe the typical learner at an open-door college (Parsad & Lewis, 2003; Pobywajlo, 1989). These students had frequently fallen behind during their early elementary years only to later graduate in the bottom one third of their high school class (Campbell, 1981). The end result once these students decided to attend college was that they often lacked a solid educational base for success (Kraetsch, 1980). Additional characteristics of this new student population were that they ranged in ages from 20–70; they were single parents preparing for careers; they were unsure of their academic skills, and they were frequently the first in their families to attend college. The very characteristics that drove these students to higher education are the same characteristics that impact their ability to succeed in the college classroom (Astin, 1982).

Today, this new student population has begun to dominate the online classroom—and like in the traditional classes, they are frequently the last to enroll in the class (often appearing days and sometimes weeks after the course has begun), fail to purchase a textbook (because they

feel that they will be able to "just get by"), participate in online discussions erratically, neglect to hand in weekly assignments, and eventually disappear from the classroom entirely.

Institution Profile

The university included in this study is one of the fastest growing private Midwestern liberal arts universities and is (hereinafter referred to as The University). The mission statement of The University is to develop students academically, socially, and spiritually to contribute meaningfully to their communities and professions. Student enrollment at The University has grown 375 % over the past 13 years, from a student count of 2,318 in 1989 to 8,768 in 2002. Currently, The University has 150 full-time instructors and 700 adjunct instructors, and 8,768 students.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the relationship between online faculty training programs and the ability of instructors to assist at risk learners in benefiting from the university's learning community.

Research Questions

This research investigates the role of online faculty training/orientation workshops in preparing instructors to (1) identify student weaknesses and (2) subsequently build online learning communities as a means to improve at-risk student retention. In essence, the goal of the research was to determine the relationship between learning communities and faculty assigned to teach online courses.

In this study, the researcher attempted to provide answers to the following research questions:

Question 1: What methods do faculty use to determine student weaknesses in online students?

Question 2: What methods are used to build learning communities in online education?

Question 3: Does the current faculty training for online instructors offer enough support to meet the challenges in the online classroom?

Study Variables

The dependent variables of this study are faculty training for teaching online, student persistence/retention, and learning communities. The independent variables are faculty motivation for facilitating online courses and faculty assigned to teach online courses.

Significance of the Study

A 2002 report from the National Center for Education Statistics reports that between 73-75% of undergraduate students today have one or more of the characteristics of a nontraditional student. For the purpose of this study, a nontraditional student is defined as a student with one or more of the following characteristics: did not enroll in college immediately after completing high school graduation or may have a GED or other high school completion certificate, are typically in their mid-20s or older, attend school part-time, commute to class, have substantial work experience, have dependents other than a spouse, and are single parents. (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Carr, 2000; Cross, 1980; Horn, 1996). While online courses provide access to higher education for underserved students, the greater challenge appears to be determining the intrinsic or extrinsic motivators for keeping these students in the classes (Belanger & Jordan 2000; Carr, 2000; Kearsley, 2000). According to Carr (2000), distance education institutions have a 70% or higher dropout rate. Nontraditional learners who enroll in distance education programs are

generally older and select distance education in an attempt to balance work and family responsibilities (Carr, 2000). The primary reasons these students opt to take online courses can be attributed to the lack of student attrition in online classes—a lack of finance, underpreparedness for higher education, and a lack of time (Bolam & Dodgson, 2003; Wlodkowski, 2003). Adult learners departing these programs "repeatedly and emphatically mentioned competing priorities and not having enough time to meet the demands of family, work, and school" (Wlodkowski, 2003, p. 11). A study by Wlodkowski, Mauldin, and Gahn (2001) reported that 60% of adults in accelerated online programs reported a conflict between work and class. Fifty-nine percent report that "their family responsibilities were too great [and had a significant impact] on their ability to complete the program" (Wlodkowski et al., p. 10).

Attrition is viewed as an institutional failure by some administrators but Diaz (2002) stated that:

> many online students who drop a class may do so because it is the 'right thing' to do. In other words, because of the requirements of school, work, and/or family life in general, students can benefit more from a class if they take it when they have enough time to apply themselves to the class work…they may be making a mature, well-informed decision. (p. 3)

Jackson (2001) argued that the greatest challenge for undergraduate students in distance courses is discipline and motivation. According to Visser (2002), "it is often motivational problems, and not the instruction itself, which lay at the root" of low completion rates (p. 95).

Some in academia question the resources expenditure verses the return to offer developmental education courses and have suggested eliminating these programs (Breneman &

Haarlow, 1998). Underprepared learners who enroll in developmental education courses are frequently low-income workers and first-generation college students (Thayer, 2000). A 2000 study by the Department of Commerce reported that workers with a high school diploma or equivalent earned $27,666, which would barely place a family of four above the poverty level in many states. This study is significant because online courses can increase access to higher education for underprepared students, but it takes a comprehensive faculty development plan to prepare faculty to improve student attrition rates in these classes. This study contributes to the existing knowledge base of online student attrition and retention by exploring how online learning communities, as well as faculty motivation and training, can be factors of improving student retention in online courses.

Definition of Terms

The following terms, for the purpose of this study, are defined to provide a common understanding:

1. *Attrition*: Students who dropout of the program or withdraw from the course before completion. Some predictors of student attrition are gender (Pascarella, Duby, & Iverson, 1983; Stage & Hossler, 1989), race (Stage & Hossler, 1989), high school achievement (Braxton, Duster, & Pascarella, 1988), educational expectations (Bean, 1982; Metzner & Bean, 1987), and parents' educational attainment. "Life circumstances interact with predisposing characteristics (e.g., educational preparation, socioeconomic and demographic status, and motivational and perseverance attributes) to influence completion" (Powell, Conway, & Ross, 1990, p. 6).

2. *Retention:* Students who remain in the program or course until completion.

3. *Resiliency:* Coping process that requires the ability integrate risk (stressful life events) and protective factors (skills, personality factors, and environmental support) (Werner & Smith, 1992).

4. *Persistence*: Student's behavior resulting in progressing through a course or degree program by remaining continuously enrolled (Kember, 1995; Pugliese, 1994; Tinto, 1993).

5. *Remedial or developmental students*: Students who lack basic academic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics critical for college-level work (Roueche & Roueche, 1999).

6. *Nontraditional students*: Students who do not enroll in college immediately after high school graduation. They are typically in their mid-20s or older, attend school part-time, commute to class, have substantial work experience, have dependents other than a spouse, are single parents, and may have a GED or other high school completion certificate (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Carr, 2000; Cross, 1980; Horn, 1996).

7. *ESL or ESOL:* English as a Second Language or English for Speakers of Other Languages.

8. *Underserved students*: Students whose demographic, geographic, or economic characteristics impede or prevent their access to higher education

9. *Underprepared students*: Students who are academically weak and poorly prepared for the academic rigors of higher education (Maxwell, 1979).

10. *Learning community:* can apply to many educational strategies. Learning communities "represent an intentional restructuring of students' time, credit, and learning experiences to build community, enhance learning, and foster connections among students, faculty, and disciplines (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, and Gabelnick, 2004, p.20).

Assumptions and Limitations

It was assumed that faculty assigned to teach online possessed strong intrinsic motivators to facilitate distance education courses, and they were not experienced in working with at-risk and academically underprepared learners. This study made the assumption that students enrolling in online classes had the necessary computer skills and technology to successfully navigate the distance education classroom.

The faculty participants for this study were those individuals who are currently teaching or have taught online courses at a The University and chose to complete the research instrument. Faculty participants were recruited via personal invitation as a convenience sample. There were 185 student participants and 92 faculty participants invited to participate in the study.

Limitations of the study are most students in online classes lack basic computer skills required for successfully navigating the online classroom and only select online courses because they have no other options, limited access to faculty and therefore limited generalizability, and longitudinal data is not available.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter 2 focuses on the theoretical framework of underprepared/developmental students, student retention, and faculty motivation. Chapter 3 is a nonexperimental quantitative and qualitative designed study with descriptive statistics and non-parametric chi-square analyses. Chapter 4 discusses the results and Chapter 5 discusses the implications of the findings and makes recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework of Assimilation and Acculturation

Park and Burgess (n.d.) defined assimilation as "a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life." Gordon (1964) pointed out that "cultural assimilation, or acculturation, is likely to be the first of the types of assimilation to occur when a minority group arrives on the scene" (p. 77).

Although immigrants and minority groups in the United States are expected to become assimilated and acculturated, there are problems associated with using an assimilation or acculturation framework to design minority student retention programs: (1) An assimilation or acculturation framework focuses only on students assimilating into the mainstream culture (Hurtado, 1997); (2) it uses a cultural deficit model that "suggests that cultural patterns of marginalized groups are essentially inferior and predispose students within those groups to poor academic performance" (Rendón, Jalomo, & Nova, 2000, p. 10); (3) it suggests that students who adopt mainstream cultural norms are in a better position for educational advancement than those who do not adopt these traits (Nieto, 1996); (4) it does not have a grounded, historical perspective but views minority students from a deficit perspective and measures their level of acculturation and integration (Hurtado, 1997); and (5) there is no connection between theory and practice. According to Rendón et al. (2000), the lack of connection between theory and practice is the greatest weakness in using an assimilation or acculturation framework to design programs to help minority groups (e.g., minority students) succeed: "Theories developed without using

minority student perspectives and/or without 'member checks' from the field may miss important details and nuances about the connection between student cultural realities and collegiate experiences" (p. 11).

Factors Impeding Minority Student Retention

Minority students are underrepresented in higher education, and in 1997, 22.8% of all associate degrees were awarded to minority students (Ntiri, 2001). There are a number of factors that contribute to these dismal numbers: lack of financial aid, lack of family support, the absence of role models who have graduated from a university or college, low admission test scores, and academic underpreparedness (Lee, 1991; London, 1989; Ntiri, 2001).

Lack of Financial Aid

Today, there are fewer grants and scholarships for students attending universities and colleges, and this lack of financial aid has a significant influence on whether minority students attend or remain in university or college. Many minority students are reluctant to use student loans to fund their higher education (Lee, 1991; London, 1996; Thomas & Thurber, 1999), and many of them must work full-time and carry a full academic load to remain eligible for grants and scholarships. When the need to work outweighs the need to learn, these students reduce their academic load to part time or drop out all together (Lee, 1991).

Lack of Family Support

Higher education presents new academic and personal challenges to any first-time student, and these challenges are compounded for first-generation college students (Mitchell, 1997). First-generation students are the first members of a family to pursue advanced training or

higher education, and they are often pressured by their families to give up their pursuit of higher education, which can alienate students from their families (London, 1996). In addition, these students are frequently plagued by doubts about their academic and motivational abilities. Without the support of their family, many of these students feel that they are not college material (Mitchell, 1997).

Lack of Role Models

First-generation college students arrive on campus without educational role models who have shown them the basic skills of inquiry most university staff and professors take for granted. An assignment or task as simple as conducting research at the library or registering for the correct prerequisite course becomes a daunting task for a student who has never been taught these skills.

Low Admission Test Scores

Traditional admission tests (e.g., SAT and GRE) measure cognitive variables that may not adequately reflect a minority student's aptitude for higher education (Lee, 1991; Sedlacek,1996). Moore, Jensen, Hsu, and Hatch (2002) argue that SAT, GRE, LSAT, and other standardized academic achievement tests are invalid, biased, and adversely impact minority students. Sedlacek(1996) suggests that noncognitive variables such as positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, ability to understand and deal with racism, long range goal setting and planning, and the presence of a strong support person are more viable indicators of student success.

Academic Underpreparedness

A National Center for Educational Statistics (1996) report acknowledges that minority students living in urban areas experience disproportionate levels of poverty and unfavorable school climates, and as a result, they are not prepared for higher education. The failure to push minority students in the classroom is often a system-wide problem. For example, in 1992, Dr. Corkin Cherubini of the Calhoun County School System in Morgan, Georgia, discovered years of institutional racism. Cherubini questioned why a predominately African-American school district had no African-American students in advanced courses and why African-American students were being pushed into vocational or special education courses. Cherubini found that these students were stereotyped as underachievers, and even if they qualified for advanced or gifted classes, they were less likely to be placed in these classes (Oakes, Selvin, Karoly, & Guiton, 1992). Excluding these students from more challenging courses implied that they were inferior or incapable of completing a more rigorous curriculum. As a result of this type of environment, it is difficult for minority students to feel that they belong in a university or college (Lent, Hackett, & Brown, 1999; Ntiri, 2001).

Characteristics of Underprepared Learners

Many career and community colleges utilize an open-door admission policy to increase access "for students who during previous generations might not have been considered college material" (Deegan, Tillery, & Associates, 1985, p. 27), and as a result, enroll between 36 and 41% of these students in one or more developmental studies courses (Parsad & Lewis, 2003; QUIRK, 2005). Developmental education focuses on not only enhancing students' academic performance but also takes into account "a variety of noncognitative or developmental

factors…[such] as locus of control, attitudes toward learning, self-concept, autonomy, ability to seek help, and a host of other influences having nothing to do with students' intellect or academic skills"(Boylan & Saxon, 1998, p. 7). According to Bettinger & Long (2005), "The purpose of remedial education is to provide underprepared students with the skills necessary to succeed in college"(p. 19). Many of these students are academically, emotionally, or culturally underprepared for college-level course work (Pobywajlo, 1989). Academically underprepared learners are the easiest to identify because they are high school dropouts, have low high school grade point averages, and frequently have undiagnosed (and or untreated) learning disabilities (Parsad & Lewis, 2003; Pobywajlo, 1989).

Emotionally Underprepared Learners

Emotionally underprepared learners lack confidence in their academic skills, have a difficult time handling personal problems outside of school, and have learned to associate formal education with failure so they are extremely reluctant, even to the point of appearing hostile, of entering a class as what they deem as a waste of time (Saxon & Boylan, 1999). A 1992 study by Boylan et al. (1992) concluded that the dropout rates in developmental courses for all institutions averaged about 25%, and students who actually completed their first developmental course successfully (with a grade of C or better) at either colleges or universities were more likely to fulfill their remedial (developmental) requirements within 1 year.

Culturally Underprepared Learners

Culturally underprepared learners are the most difficult to identify because they can easily assimilate into the college culture without fully understanding the "specific skills, knowledge, and modes of communication associated with college-going behavior" (Valdez,

1993, p.33). These learners bring their own cultural coping skills which are frequently misaligned with the accepted academic and nonacademic behavior of the university (Lareau, 1987). According to an l996 study by Napoli and Wortman, academic and social integration has a direct correlation with student success. Culturally underprepared learners do not have the social network or resources to learn "strategies, linguistic codes, and cultural competencies that ease the transition into higher education" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, p. 34).

Skill-Deficient Learning Models

Developmental education courses are frequently designed around a skill-deficient model with the short-term goal to teach students a skill set that they have not mastered (Stahl, Simpson, & Hayes, 1992). While this model has been the developmental education norm, it frequently produces students who can "learn to excel on reading [and standardized tests] to the degree necessary to exit a developmental program but still not fully function as independent learners in the academic milieu of higher education" (Stahl, Simpson, & Hayes, p. 2) In order for students to be successful using the skill-deficient learning model, they must be able to immediately transfer their new skills to college-level work. This skills transfer occurs very infrequently because most developmental studies students are not simultaneously enrolled in college-level courses.

Course Delivery and Underprepared Learners

Another challenge for students in developmental or remedial studies courses is the mode of course delivery. Many developmental students are not audio learners and do not have strong reading comprehension skills. These students do not understand why they have such a difficult time in academic classes so they become reluctant to learn anything. Lamire (1998) concluded that students in developmental studies courses were more likely to be either iconic (visual) or

hands-on learners. Traditional college instructors typically use a lecture (audio) based teaching format and incorporate few, if any, visual reinforcements (Deubel, 2003).

Classroom Instruction and Evolving Faculty Roles

In the past few decades, the awakening of the constructivist movement has forced many educators to "move from faculty-centered to learner-centered instruction, traditional faculty and student roles are being redefined" (Boettcher & Conrad, 1999, p. 87). This paradigm shift has forced students to adopt a more active role in their educational experiences, and as a result, online students "are assuming more responsibility for their learning, and are even assuming some responsibility of their fellow students" (Boettcher & Conrad, p. 87). Over time, these students form their own learning communities and the role of the faculty member shifts once again from facilitator to consultant. In the consultant role, the faculty member introduces the content but the students determine the activities and topics (Boettcher & Conrad).

Learning Communities and Underprepared Students

Learning communities are an intentional shift from the traditional student retention practices and developmental education. Astin (1982) and Tinto (1993) attribute learning communities to improving academic achievement, student engagement, and persistence.

Learning communities intentionally restructure students' time, credit, and learning experiences to build community among students and faculty and to build curricular connections across disciplines, professional and technical programs, and skill areas. According to Malnarich (2005), "In the context of developmental education, learning communities restructure curriculum where student need is the greatest [thus] creating learning environments that engage students in the hard, persistent, and challenging work associated with academic success" (p.52).

Learning Styles and Underprepared Students

For the underprepared student who may be accustomed to passive learning, this shift in learning roles can create apprehension and confusion (Morrison, 1999). Turnbull (1986) suggests that instructors can help underprepared students build learning communities by "helping them analyze the causes of their failures and understand the vital role of effort in academic success or failure" (p. 8). Learning communities are more than instructional strategy—they are the frameworks that foster "social and intellectual connections among people and ideas" (Kozeracki, 2005, p. 57). According to Tinto's 1975 student departure model, a student's decision to stay in or drop out of a university or college is directly influenced by his or her degree of academic and social integration. Tinto suggested that students who decide to stay in school have become part of at least one subculture that gives them a sense of community and support (Tinto, 1993). In 1993, Tinto revised the student departure model to show that there are many subcultures within any university or college community, and students who decide to stay in school have become socially integrated into the campus. Although the revised 1993 model is not widely accepted in higher education, it does reveal the transformation and transition that occur when students enter the world of higher education. Tinto's model was not designed with underprepared student retention as its primary goal, but it does address the primary tenet of a successful developmental studies program: to build an interactional system that results in social and academic integration.

According to Tierney (2000), successful retention and achievement programs share the following characteristics: (a) They contain innovative programs and activities that seek to affirm and validate individual student cultural identities (collaborative relations of power); (b) they contain contextualized social and academic activities that create connections between home,

community, and school (home, community, and school connections); (c) they are grounded in students' experience and reality and provide students with an opportunity to integrate their local lives into the fabric of the institution while challenging them to use their university education to make positive changes in their home and local environments (local definitions of identity); (d) they foster a spirit of academic excellence within target populations by maintaining high academic expectations of student performance (challenge over remediation); and (e) they have strong, validating, holistic support structures (formal and informal) that, instead of narrowly focusing on any real or perceived skill gap, view students, especially at-risk students, as individuals with the capacity for academic success.

Faculty Recruitment and Learning Communities

Faculty who thrive in learning community are usually those who can cross boundaries and successfully engage in four distinct learning community cultures—the collegial, the managerial, the developmental, and the negotiating. The collegial culture is "characteristic of the faculty who find meaning in the academic disciplines, faculty teaching, research and scholarship, and a long tradition of autonomy and self-governance" (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 2004, p.273). The managerial culture represents administration and "values organization, implementation, and evaluation" (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 2004). The developmental culture represents student services. This culture supports student personal and professional development. The negotiating culture, characterized by collective bargaining and unionization, emerged when the managerial culture was no longer able to meet the personal and financial needs of faculty and staff (Bergquist, 1992).

The first faculty teaching recruited to teach in these learning communities should be volunteers and "they often set the tone, critically influencing how their colleagues perceive the program" (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, & Gabelnick, 2004). The selection process for learning communities is often a combination of happenstance, networking, and invitation. Ultimately, how faculty are invited to participate has a tremendous impact on how the learning community is perceived and integrated into the college culture at large.

Faculty Preparation in Teaching Underprepared Adult Learners

According to Kozeracki (2005), "For many faculty, the knowledge they gained in their graduate programs is significantly different from the knowledge they need to teach developmental classes" (p. 43). Most graduate courses that prepare faculty to teach developmental or at-risk learners are geared for the K–12 classroom, and few faculty members have enough understanding of adult learning pedagogy to transfer these skills into the developmental classroom. Kozeracki (2005) suggested that the tenets of faculty hiring committees is also compounding the problem of staffing the developmental classroom as these committees tend to recruit for and hire instructors with subject specific degrees such as English or literature rather than education.

Many colleges attempt to correct this skill set mismatch by offering faculty development courses, but a national study conducted by Murray (2001) showed "no evidence that faculty development at most community colleges is anything more than a random group collection of activities lacking intentional coordination with the mission of the college or the needs of faculty members" (p. 497). Grubb and Associates (1999) report that developmental instructors are

frequently overloaded and isolated since many developmental faculty members are adjunct professors.

Characteristics of Excellent Teachers

Wilson, Wood, and Gaff (1975) observed that one primary characteristic of effective faculty was that they were grounded and centered in their actions, thoughts, and beliefs. What students remember most about these faculty members is how they affected the way the students felt about a subject, task, or their self image. Rouche and Baker (1987) expanded upon this observation and developed The Teaching for Success model to provide a conceptual framework.

The Teaching for Success model identifies 13 characteristics of excellent teachers: commitment, goal orientation, integrated perception, positive action, reward orientation, objectivity, active listening, rapport, empathy, individualized perception, teaching strategies, knowledge, and innovation. "Without a doubt, at-risk students, who are more likely to withdraw either from classroom interaction or from the institution with only slight provocation, will be dramatically affected by such faculty-student experiences" (Rouche and Rouche, 1993, p.103).

Adjunct Faculty and Teaching Online

In 1998, about 43% of courses nationwide were taught by adjuncts (Parsad, & Lewis, 2003) but just five years later, more than 60% of instructors at community colleges were adjuncts (Parsad & Lewis, 2003). Using adjunct professors in online courses is not necessarily a bad thing. Adjuncts can relieve the workload of full-time faculty while keeping program costs relatively manageable (Hickey, 2005).

Most online programs rely heavily—some institutions at 90% or higher—on adjunct instructors to facilitate courses (Hickey, 2005). Unlike the traditional teaching model of

providing the instructor with the textbook and suggested syllabus, facilitating online courses requires implementing different instructional strategies and approaches that the majority of traditional instructors do not have (Moore & Kearsley,1996). Frequently, most adjunct instructors receive little—if any—training before they teach their online class, resulting in instructors being frustrated, unprepared, isolated, and disillusioned (Dooley, 1995; Gehlauf, Shatz, & Frye, 1991).

Faculty Motivation and Extrinsic Factors

According to NREL (2001), "Mounting evidence suggests that when people are coerced, they function with diminished capacity and often react with resistance, resentment, and a loss of energy—the antithesis of motivation" (p. 6). Many institutions still believe that extrinsic motivators such as bonuses, fringe benefits, time off, overtime/overload pay, and salary increases will ensure faculty participation and buy-in to the student retention program. While these motivators work to energize and galvanize the faculty during the early months of the retention program, they frequently not have any long-term effects (Hopkins, 2005).

Building Faculty Training and Development Programs

For the adjunct instructors that do receive university led online training it is, for the most part, "piecemeal and strongly associated with the efforts of key individuals, not with the university community" (Simone, 2006, p. 2). Effective distance education training programs should recognize that instructors need time to become familiar with the learning platform, the pedagogy of the online classroom, and their role as online facilitators (Simone, 2006). An effective online training program is built around a learning community model which encourages instructors to share experiences, expertise, and stories of success and failures.

The institutional motivation of faculty development programs was to reignite the passion and desire to teach; but, many of these programs are opertating with major design flaws. Menges (1997) lists four key components necessary in designing a faculty development program that will motivate faculty. First, development must be collaborative and include primary stake holders (senior administrators, faculty, and program designers). Second, teaching must be valued and this must be the priority of the faculty development program. Third, the faculty development program must have faculty branding in that it should reflect the goals, perceptions, and beliefs of the faculty. Finally, the faculty development program must allow faculty to set goals, measure progress, and receive feedback when the goals are attained.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

For this dissertation research, the researcher used a nonexperimental quantitative designed study with descriptive statistics and non-parametric chi-square analyses. Analyses were conducted based on a survey of students exiting the online program at The University as well as faculty currently teaching in the online program at the same institution. The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the relationship between online faculty training programs and the ability of instructors to identify student weaknesses in the online classroom. Personal characteristics were divided into background information about the participant (i.e., education level, online teaching experience, prior training, etc.) and information about the participants' thoughts of how to build online learning communities to improve academic persistence of at-risk/underprepared learners. The independent variables of this study were faculty motivation for facilitating online courses, faculty assignments to teach online courses, and student withdrawal from online courses. The dependent variables of this study were faculty training for teaching online, student persistence/retention, and learning communities. Since the independent and dependent variables are dichotomous, categorical values with no intrinsic ordering, chi-square analyses were used to examine the relationships between the variables.

Selection of Participants

For the purpose of this study, it is important to realize that the data from this study was collected on two separate instances and under two separate circumstances. Participants of this study were students who withdrew from The University online program and The University online faculty currently teaching in this program. Data for this information was drawn as part of a previously conducted student exit study and from surveys drawn from currently teaching

faculty. Students in this study had taken and withdrawn from graduate or undergraduate postsecondary courses and faculty participants in this study are currently teaching or have taught graduate or undergraduate postsecondary online courses at The University. For the purpose of this study, online courses are defined as courses completed entirely on the Internet.

The faculty participants for this study were those individuals who were currently teaching or have taught online courses at The University and who chose to complete the research instrument. Faculty participants were recruited via personal invitation as a convenience sample. There were 185 student participants and 92 faculty participants invited to participate in the study.

Participants were assured that all information collected in this instrument is confidential. The researcher had no possible way to access the name, email address, computer name, login name, or server name, all of which could have been collected either overtly or covertly. Each participant was informed of this policy.

Research Questions

The design of this study included two components. The first component assessed why students withdrew from online programs, and the second component assessed the role of faculty training/preparation for facilitating online classes. Each of these components was reviewed in relationship to the following research questions:

Question 1: What methods do faculty use to determine student weaknesses in online students?

Question 2: What methods are used to build learning communities in online education?

Question 3: Does the current faculty training for online instructors offer enough support to meet the challenges in the online classroom?

Research Instruments

The instrument used in this study was a web-based survey located on the Internet at http://www.zoomerang.com/members/zoomerang.zgi?1663. A copy of the file is also included in Appendix A. The instrument collected responses though radio buttons, form fields, drop-down form fields, and text form fields. No information about the identity or location of the participant was collected either overtly through direct questions or covertly through form submission via the Internet (e.g., computer name, etc.). The data collected was stored on the Web site for use in various statistical tools (e.g., Microsoft Excel, SPSS, or another statistical software program).

Research Design

This research study used a nonexpermential descriptive quantitative and qualitative method to examine whether a relationship existed between online student persistence and online faculty motivation/preparation in facilitating online courses at The University. While online courses provide access to higher education for underserved students, the greatest challenge is determining the intrinsic or extrinsic motivators for keeping these students in the classes. This study contributed to the existing knowledge base of online student attrition and retention by exploring how online learning communities, as well as faculty motivation and training, were factors in improving faculty preparation for working with at-risk students in online courses. The study design was deemed appropriate because it successfully tested for a relationship between the dependent variables faculty training for teaching online, student persistence/retention, and learning communities and the independent variables of faculty motivation for facilitating online courses and faculty assigned to teach online courses.

Data Collection

The survey was Web-based as this offered the researcher several advantages including low cost, quick turnaround times', better flexibility; and the opportunity to minimize data coding errors as answers are recorded and stored electronically (Simsek & Veiga, 2001). Though this is a relatively new medium for the collection of research data, several benefits and deficits have been attributed to this methodology already. In the early adopter days, Watt (1997) pointed out the speed with which a survey can be generated, distributed, and responses received. He also mentioned an often overlooked attribute of Internet survey research is the relative ease with which the survey instrument can be modified, if deemed necessary; an act that would be cumbersome, expensive and perhaps impossible with the traditional mail survey protocol. The survey was made available online and another pretest was conducted to ensure the Web-based interface operated successfully and that the data were being collected correctly.

Ethical Considerations of Internet Research

The Internet has afforded researchers the ability to collect data from a culturally and geographically diverse population relatively easily, but this new convenience is not without ethical and legal considerations of such research (Frankel, 1999):

> The ability of both researchers and their subjects to assume anonymous or pseudonymous identities online, the complexities of obtaining informed consent, the often exaggerated expectations, if not the illusion of privacy in cyberspace, and the blurred distinction between public and private domains fuel questions about the interpretation and applicability of current policies governing the conduct of social and behavioral research involving human subjects. (p.2)

Confidentiality of Data

The researcher managed data collection by storing all information collected on a login- and password-protected computer. The researcher burned compact discs (CDs) as a data collection back-up, and stored these CDs in an off-site safety deposit box. Upon approval from the Capella University School of Education, all data related to the current research will be permanently deleted from the hard drive using Paragon Disk Wiper 7.0.

This study was ethically sound because it utilized "procedures which are consistent with sound research design and which do not unnecessarily expose subjects to risk" (Capella University, 2006); it ensured equitable selection of survey participants, and as appropriate "there are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects and to maintain the confidentiality of data" (Capella University, 2006).

Confidentiality and Informed Consent of Human Participants

The researcher observed all security and confidentiality rules necessary to protect the human subject information and ensured that subjects willingly agreed to participate in the study. Any surveys received with private or otherwise identifiable information were altered to maintain the respondent's anonymity.

Informed consent refers to "a person's voluntary agreement, based upon adequate knowledge and understanding of relevant information, to participate in research or to undergo a diagnostic, therapeutic, or preventive procedure" (Capella University, 2006). The researcher obtained participant consent utilizing The Participant Consent Form, which is located in Appendix A and was seen along with the Survey Letter when the respondent accessed the hyperlink for the survey.

Scientific Objectivity, Conflict of Interest, and Study Benefits

To ensure scientific objectivity, relations between the researcher and intended participants, the researcher and mentor/research supervisor, and the relationship between mentor/research supervisor and research participants were carefully scrutinized "for potential conflicts of interests (including dual-role relationships"(Capella University, 2006). To avoid observer bias, the researcher maintained focus on the integrity of the process rather than seeking to prove the hypothesis (Capella University, 2006). The benefits of this study will contribute to the existing knowledge base of online student attrition and retention by exploring how online learning communities, as well as faculty motivation and training, can be factors of improving faculty preparation for working with at risk students in online courses.

Research Justice

The faculty invited to participate in this survey were invited because they had first-hand experience on the level of preparation that they received for working with at-risk learners in the online classroom. Their responses have not only help transform online faculty training programs, but also provided insight into strategies that current faculty are using to meet the increasing demands of the underprepared learner in the online classroom.

Validity and Reliability

A valid and reliable study is defined as one in which similar results and conclusions would be reached if another researcher conducted a second study utilizing comparable methods of data collection and analysis. The following precautions were taken to ensure study reliability. First, all aspects of the study design were reported. Second, three methods of data collection

were used to construct and reinforce themes; and, third, a systematic approach that could be duplicated by subsequent researchers was used to conduct the study.

Face validity, which provides a casual assessment of item appropriateness, was achieved by distributing this survey to via email using convenience sampling to selected family, friends, and neighbors who were K-12 educators but are not and have not been involved in teaching adult learners in online classes. While face validity is not the most scientific method it offered the researcher the opportunity to gauge the readability of the survey questions.

Content validity "is a subjective measure of how appropriate the items seem to a set of reviewers who have some knowledge of the subject matter" (Litwin, 1995, p.35). Content validity was achieved by distributing this survey via email using convenience sampling to selected adult educators and by posting the survey preview link in the message board of the Yahoo Online Teaching and Learning group. While content validity does not offer a scientific measure of a survey instrument's accuracy, it does create "a good foundation on which to build a methodologically rigorous assessment of a survey instrument's validity" (Litwin, 1995, p.35). This researcher used face validity by pre-testing this survey and content validity to measure the survey instrument's accuracy.

Data Analysis Plan

The first goal of the study was to describe all the independent and dependent variables. All variables are categorical thus this goal was obtained by reporting the frequency of each response for each question. The second goal was to examine the relation among the independent variables and the dependent variables. This was achieved by using chi-square tests of independence for all the sets of independent and dependent variables. Since all the variables are

categorical, with no meaningful order, chi-square analysis test of independence was the appropriate test to examine the association between the independent and dependent variables. The alpha level for all statistical tests was set at $\alpha = .05$. Chi-square examined the difference between observed data values and expected values, given row and column frequencies. When the chi-square was significant, standardized residuals greater than 1.0 were used to determine the significant differences among the cells by noting which cells have observed values that are dramatically different than their expected values.

Summary

In summary, the purpose of Chapter 3 was to present the methods that were used in the research study. First, the research topics, data collection, and data analysis were briefly introduced. The key research questions were reviewed. Finally, validity and reliability of the study were emphasized. Chapter 4 presents the findings from the data of the research study. A table of descriptive data for all variables has been presented, so that other researchers can replicate our findings.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter discusses the findings of the research. The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the relationship between online faculty training programs and the ability of instructors to assist at risk learners in benefiting from the university's learning community. All of the survey data were exported from the Zoomerang survey tool into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet so that the data could be sorted and tables and charts constructed.

Faculty Demographics

Ninety-two faculty members participated in the study. Fifteen percent (n = 14) of the faculty who participated in the survey were between the ages of 25-34; 22% (n = 20) of the faculty who participated in the survey were between the ages of 35-44; 39% (n = 36) of the faculty were between the ages of 45-54; 20% (n = 18) of the faculty were between the ages of 55-64; and 4% (n = 4) of the faculty were between the ages of 65-74.

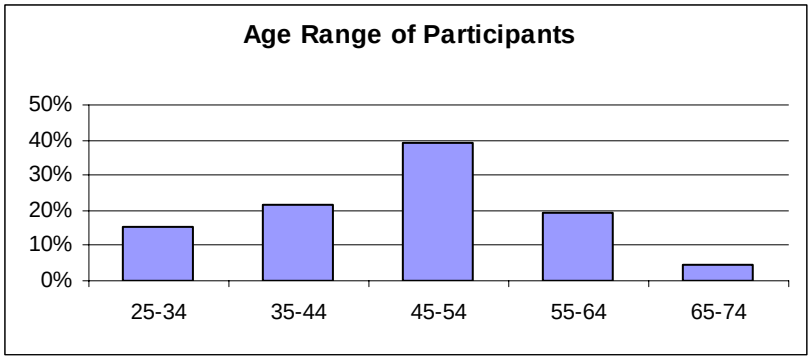

Figure 1. Age of participants.

The education level of the participants included master's degrees and doctorate degrees. Specifically, 55% (n = 51) of the participants held master's degrees and 45% (n = 41) held

doctorate degrees.

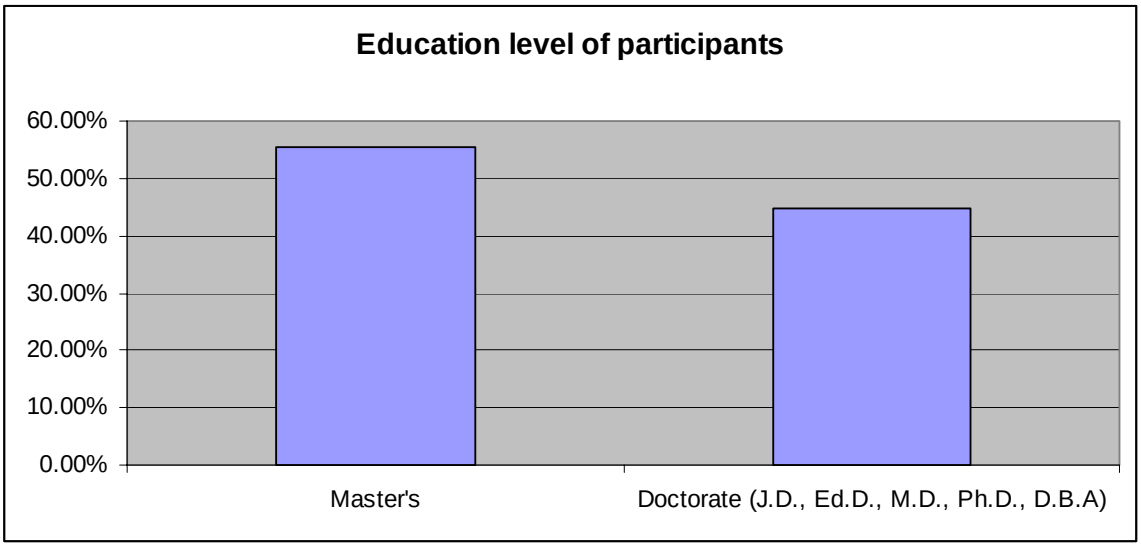

Figure 2. Highest degree held.

Ninety-five percent (n = 87) of faculty stated they teach for between one and five online institutions; 1% of faculty (n = 1) stated they teach for between six and ten online institutions; and, 3% of faculty (n = 3) stated they teach for eleven or more online institutions.

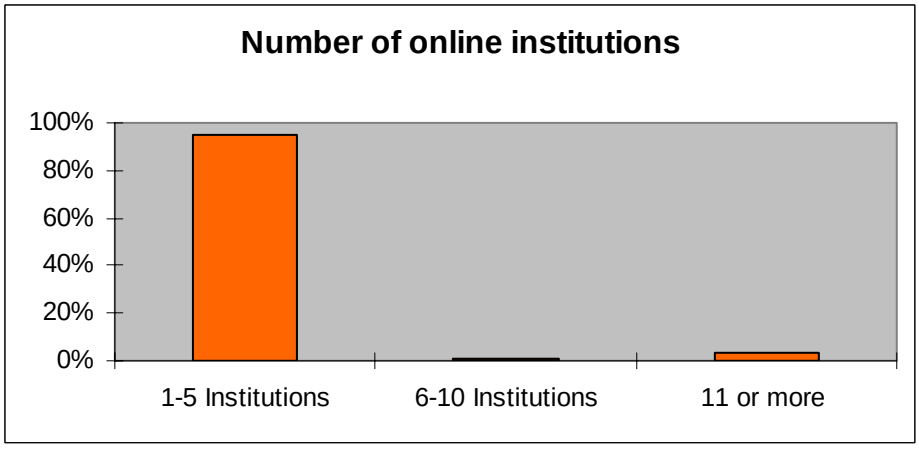

Figure 3. Number of online institutions.

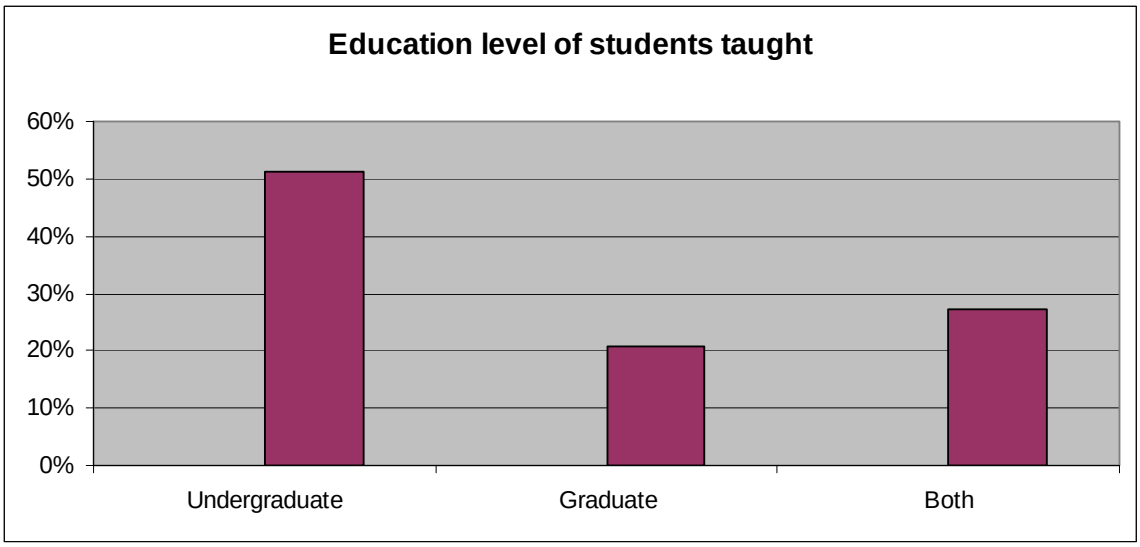

Figure 4. Level instructors teach.

Fifty-one percent (n = 47) of the faculty teach undergraduate level students; 21% (n = 19) of the faculty teach graduate level students; and 27% (n = 25) of the faculty teach both undergraduate and graduate level students.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 was *What methods do faculty use to determine student weaknesses in online students?* The table below summarizes the data collected from the survey. Eighty-seven percent (n = 80) of the faculty used assignments, 82.6% (n = 76) used threaded discussions, 26.1% (n = 24) used exams/quizzes, and 15% (n = 14) used student initiated email to determine weaknesses in online students.

Table 1

Methods Used to Determine Student Weaknesses

Identification method	*n*	*P*
Assignments	80	87
Threaded discussions/online Discussions	76	82.6
Exams/quizzes	24	26.1
Other	14	15

Research Question 2 was *What methods are used to build learning communities in online education?* Likert (summated rating scale) was used to score characteristics for building learning communities in the online classroom. Reponses were scored on a scale from 1 to 3, where 1 was the *most important* and 3 was the *least important*. Seventy-seven participants (83.7%) assign students to groups or learning teams, and 69 participants (75%) believe this is the most important characteristic for building learning communities in the online classroom.

Table 2

Strategies for Building Online Learning Communities

Responses	1	2	3
Allow students to work on projects and assignments as learning teams	69	6	17
Assign students to a study group	7	67	18
Assign students a study buddy (study partner)	16	19	57

Table 3

Assignment to Groups or Teams

Questions	Yes	No
Do you assign students to groups or teams?	77	15
Do you allow students to select the group or team?	47	45

Research Question 3 was *Does the current faculty training for online instructors offer enough support to meet the challenges in the online classroom?* Of the faculty, 69.6% (n = 64) responded that they have not taken any courses that prepared them for working with at-risk, ESL, or students with disabilities.

Table 4

Training for Online Faculty

Courses	*n*	*P*
Teaching ESL students	12	13
Working with underprepared or at-risk students	21	22.8
Working with students with disabilities	17	18.5
I did not take any courses that prepared me for working with at-risk, ESL, or students with disabilities	64	69.6

When asked *What student weaknesses do you face in the online classroom?* The majority of the faculty 78.3 % (n = 72) responded time management skills; 77.2% (n = 71) responded

writing skills; 55.4% (*n* = 51) responded critical thinking; 17.4% (*n* = 16) responded math skills; and, 14% (*n* = 13) reported technology, platform familiarity, and computer skills in general.

Table 5

Online Students' Weaknesses

Student weaknesses	*n*	*P*
Time management	72	78.3
Critical thinking	51	55.4
Writing skills	71	77.2
Math skills	16	17.4
Other	13	14

In order to deal with this lack of student preparation in the online classroom, 30.4% (*n* = 28) of the faculty modify their teaching style; 28.3% (*n* = 26) refer students to student services or academic advisors; and 73% (*n* = 67) of the faculty uses consistent feedback and encouragement when dealing with this lack of preparation for online education

Table 6

Dealing With Lack of Student Preparation

How do you deal with this lack of student preparation in the online classroom	*n*	*P*
Refer to student services or academic advisors	26	28.3
Modify teaching style (i.e., teach at a lower level)	28	30.4
Other	67	72.8

When asked about training and faculty orientation, 97.8% (*n* = 90) of the faculty participated in some form of training program for teaching online. Eight percent (n = 7) participated in a program that lasted less than 1 week; 10% (*n* = 9) participated in a program that lasted at least 1 week; 17% (*n* = 16) participated in a program that lasted 2 weeks; 32% (*n* = 30) participated in a program that lasted 3 weeks; 14% (*n* = 13) participated in a program that lasted four weeks; and 16% (*n* = 15) participated in a program that lasted 5 weeks or longer.

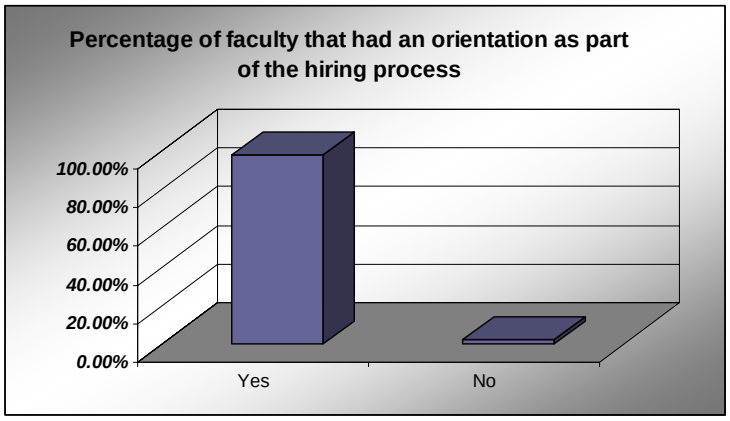

Figure 5. Hiring process.

Eight percent (*n* = 7) participated in a program that lasted less than 1 week; 10% (*n* = 9) participated in a program that lasted at least 1 week; 17% (*n* = 16) participated in a program that lasted 2 weeks; 32% (*n* = 30) participated in a program that lasted 3 weeks; 14% (*n* = 13) participated in a program that lasted 4weeks; and, 16% (*n* = 15) participated in a program that lasted 5 weeks or longer.

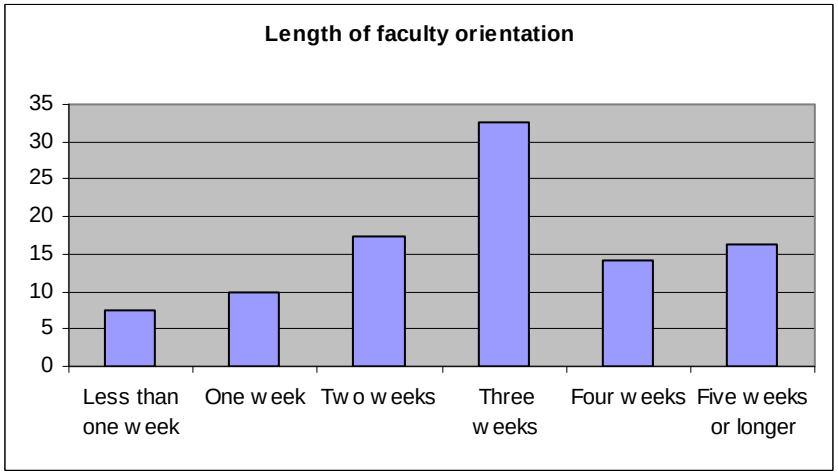

Figure 6. Faculty orientation.

Eighty-nine percent (n = 82) of the faculty felt that the training program they participated in prepared them for the challenges of teaching online; and, 9% (n = 8) felt the program did not prepare them for the challenges of teaching online. Sixty-five percent (n = 60) of the faculty was exposed to tools and techniques for building online learning communities during their training program; and, 33% (n = 30) of the faculty was not.

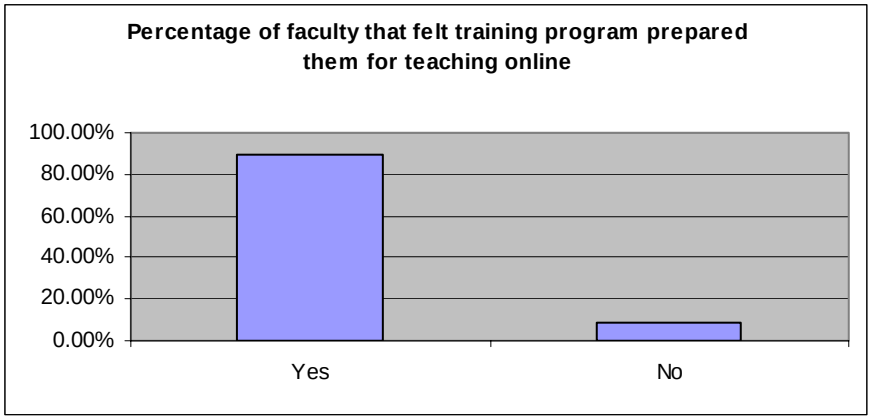

Figure 7. Prepared for teaching online.

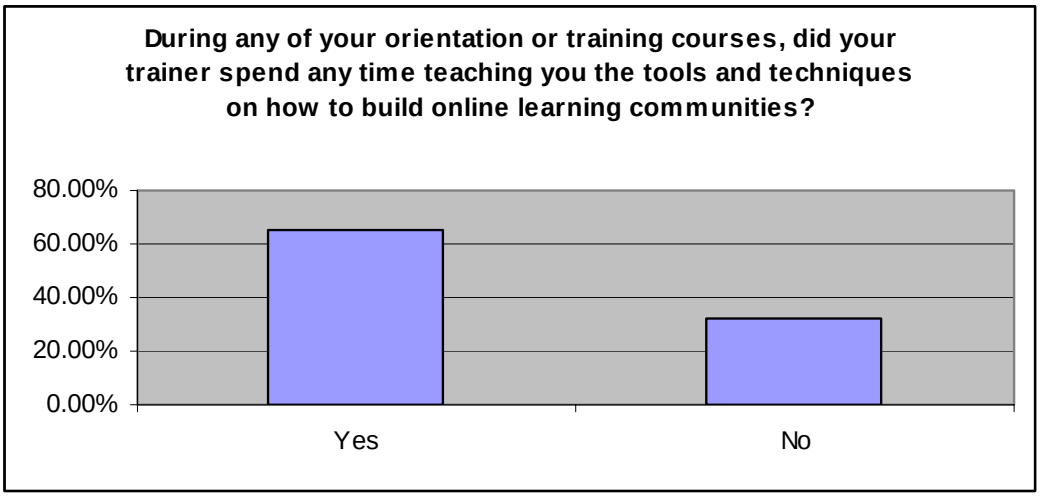

Figure 8. Responses to trainer giving teaching tools.

In order to examine the relations among the variables, several sets of chi-square analyses were conducted. First the level of education for each participant was compared to several measures of faculty training. The chi-square test examining level of education in relation to whether or not participants had any course to prepare them for ESL students, underprepared or at-risk students, and/or students with disabilities was examined. None of these three chi-square analyses were significant: ESL, χ^2 (1) = 0.17, ns; at-risk, χ^2 (1) = 3.31, ns; and students with disabilities, χ^2 (1) = 3.42, ns. However, when combined to reflect whether participants took courses for any of these special populations versus taking no courses, the chi-square analysis was significant, χ^2 (1) = 4.25, $p < .05$. Participants with a Doctorate were more likely to have taken a course than participants with a Master's degree.

Table 7

Chi-Square Analysis for Highest Degree and Course Work for Special Populations

Question 5: I did not take any courses that prepared me for working with at-risk, ESL, or students with disabilities.					
			No Courses	Yes Courses	Total
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	24	17	41
		Std. Residual	-.8	1.3	
	Master's	Count	40	11	51
		Std. Residual	.8	-1.1	
Total		Count	64	28	92

A chi-square analysis was conducted to examine the relation between highest degree and taking additional required courses beyond the initial training orientation. There was no association between highest degree earned and taking additional required courses, χ^2 (1) = 1.00, ns.

Table 8

Chi-Square Analysis for Highest Degree and Additional Course Work Beyond Initial Orientation

			Question 19: Were there other training courses that were required of you beyond initial orientation?		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	15	24	39
		Std. Residual	-.6	.5	
	Master's	Count	25	26	51
		Std. Residual	.5	-.4	
Total		Count	40	50	90

The next chi-square analysis examine the relation between highest degree earned and whether or not the orientation trainer spent time teaching tools and techniques on how to build online communities. This analysis was not significant, χ^2 (1) = 0.00, ns.

Table 9

Chi-Square Analysis for Highest Degree and Tools and Techniques on How to Build Online Communities

			Question 23: During any of your orientation or training courses, did your trainer spend any time teaching you the tools and techniques on how to build online learning communities?		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	13	26	39
		Std. Residual	.0	.0	
	Master's	Count	17	34	51
		Std. Residual	.0	.0	
Total		Count	30	60	90

In terms of faculty training, the final chi-square analyses examined the topic in which participants wanted additional training in relation to highest degree earned. Neither the chi-square for more examples/scenarios of how to identify challenges, χ^2 (1) = 0.34, ns, nor the chi-square for identifying more campus resources to resolve challenges, χ^2 (1) = 0.55, ns, were significantly related to highest degree earned.

Table 10

Chi-Square Analyses for Highest Degree and Topics in Which Participants Wanted Additional Training

			Question 25: More examples/scenarios of how to identify challenges		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	20	21	41
		Std. Residual	-.3	.3	
	Master's	Count	28	23	51
		Std. Residual	.3	-.3	
Total		Count	48	44	92

			Question 25: Identify more campus resources to resolve challenges		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	31	10	41
		Std. Residual	.3	-.5	
	Master's	Count	35	16	51
		Std. Residual	-.3	.4	
Total		Count	66	26	92

The second set of chi-square analyses examined highest degree of participants in relation to student persistence. The first chi-square analysis examined highest degree in relation to time management as a problem with students in the online community. There was no association between highest degree earned and time management as a problem with students in the online community, χ^2 (1) = 2.46, ns.

Table 11

Chi-Square Analyses for Highest Degree in Relation to Time Management as a Problem with Students in the Online Community

			Question 7: Time management		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	12	29	41
		Std. Residual	1.0	-.5	
	Master's	Count	8	43	51
		Std. Residual	-.9	.5	
Total		Count	20	72	92

The next chi-square analysis examined highest degree in relation to critical thinking as a problem with students in the online community. This analysis was not significant, χ^2 (1) = 0.09, ns.

Table 12

Chi-Square Analyses for Highest Degree in Relation to Critical Thinking as a Problem With Students in the Online Community

			Question 7: Critical thinking		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	19	22	41
		Std. Residual	.2	-.2	
	Master's	Count	22	29	51
		Std. Residual	-.2	.1	
Total		Count	41	51	92

The next chi-square analysis examined highest degree in relation to writing skills as a problem with students in the online community. This analysis was not significant, χ^2 (1) = 0.67, ns.

Table 13

Chi-Square Analyses for Highest Degree in Relation to Writing Skills as a Problem with Students in the Online Community

			Question 7: Writing skills		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	11	30	41
		Std. Residual	.5	-.3	
	Master's	Count	10	41	51
		Std. Residual	-.5	.3	
Total		Count	21	71	92

The next chi-square analysis examined highest degree in relation to math skills as a problem with students in the online community. This analysis was not significant, χ^2 (1) = 0.01, ns.

Table 14

Chi-Square Analyses for Highest Degree in Relation to Math Skills as a Problem With Students in the Online Community

			Question 7: Math skills		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	34	7	41
		Std. Residual	.0	.0	
	Master's	Count	42	9	51
		Std. Residual	.0	.0	
Total		Count	76	16	92

The final chi-square analyses examining student persistence examined the relation between highest degree and how participants handle the lack of student preparation. The first chi-square examined whether or not participants referred students to student services or academic advisors and the second analysis examined whether participants modified their teaching style. The chi-square analysis for referring students to student services was significant, χ^2 (1) = 4.57, $p < .05$. Participants with Master's degrees were more likely to refer students to academic advisors than participants with Doctorates. However, there was no relation for modifying teaching style, χ^2 (1) = 0.05, ns.

Table 15

Chi-Square Analyses for Highest Degree and Methods to Deal With Lack of Preparation in the Students

			Question 12: Refer to student services or academic advisors		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	34	7	41
		Std. Residual	.8	-1.3	
	Master's	Count	32	19	51
		Std. Residual	-.8	1.2	
Total		Count	66	26	92

			Question 12: Modify teaching style (i.e. teach at a lower level)		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	29	12	41
		Std. Residual	.1	-.1	
	Master's	Count	35	16	51
		Std. Residual	-.1	.1	
Total		Count	64	28	92

The final set of chi-square analyses with highest degree earned was examined in relation to learning communities. Participants were asked how important they thought it was to 1) assign students to work on projects as learning teams, 2) assign students to a study group and 3) to assign students as study partner. A "1" was labeled as not important, a "2" was somewhat important, and a "3" was very important. There was no association between highest degree earned and importance of assigning student to learning teams, χ^2 (1) = 0.15, ns; importance of assigning students to study groups, χ^2 (1) = 1.24, ns.; or to importance of assigning students study partners, χ^2 (1) = 1.67, ns.

Table 16

Chi-Square Analyses for Highest Degree and Importance of Learning Communities

			Question 13: Allow students to work on projects and assignments as learning teams			Total
			1	2	3	1
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	31	3	7	41
		Std. Residual	.0	.2	-.2	
	Master's	Count	38	3	10	51
		Std. Residual	.0	-.2	.2	
Total		Count	69	6	17	92

			Question 13: Assign students to a study group			
			1	2	3	Total
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	2	32	7	41
		Std. Residual	-.6	.4	-.4	
	Master's	Count	5	35	11	51
		Std. Residual	.6	-.4	.3	
Total		Count	7	67	18	92

			Question 13: Assign students a study buddy (study partner)			
			1	2	3	Total
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	8	6	27	41
		Std. Residual	.3	-.8	.3	
	Master's	Count	8	13	30	51
		Std. Residual	-.3	.8	-.3	
Total		Count	16	19	57	92

Two final chi-square analyses examined the relations between highest degree earned and whether the participants assigned students to groups or teams, and whether they allowed students to select their groups or teams. There was no significant association between highest degree and whether or not participants assigned students to groups or teams, χ^2 (1) = 0.92, ns. However, there was a significant association between highest degree and whether participants allowed students to choose their own groups or teams, χ^2 (1) = 4.31, $p < .05$. Participants with a Master's degree were more likely to allow students to choose their own groups or team than participants with a Doctorate.

Table 17

Chi-Square Analyses for Highest Degree and Creation of Learning Communities

			Question 15: Do you assign students to groups or teams?		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	5	36	41
		Std. Residual	-.7	.3	
	Master's	Count	10	41	51
		Std. Residual	.6	-.3	
Total		Count	15	77	92

			Question 16: Do you allow students to select the group or team?		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 6: What is the highest degree that you have earned?	Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)	Count	25	16	41
		Std. Residual	1.1	-1.1	
	Master's	Count	20	31	51
		Std. Residual	-1.0	1.0	
Total		Count	45	47	92

The second set of chi-square analyses assessed the relation between faculty assignments and faculty training, student persistence and learning communities. First the delivery mode for each participant was compared to several measures of faculty training. The chi-square test examining delivery mode in relation to whether or not participants had any course to prepare them for ESL students, underprepared or at-risk students, and/or students with disabilities was examined. The first two chi-square analyses were not significant: ESL, χ^2 (2) = 2.09, ns; at-risk, χ^2 (2) = 4.95, ns. However, the chi-square for the relation between delivery mode and preparation for teaching students with disabilities was significant, χ^2 (2) = 6.99, $p < .05$. Participants that used a blended delivery mode were more likely to have taken a course to prepare them to work with students with disabilities than participants using synchronous delivery mode. In addition, when combined to reflect whether participants took courses for any of these special populations versus taking no courses, the chi-square analysis was significant, χ^2 (2) = 6.80, $p < .05$. Participants using the blended delivery mode were more likely to have taken one or more of the three types of courses than not take any courses at all.

Table 18

Chi-Square Analysis for Delivery Mode and Course Work for Special Populations

			Question 5: Teaching ESL students		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	8	0	8
		Std. Residual	.4	-1.0	
	Asynchronous	Count	50	7	57
		Std. Residual	.1	-.2	
	Blended	Count	21	5	26
		Std. Residual	-.3	.8	
Total		Count	79	12	91

			Question 5: Working with underprepared or at-risk students		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	7	1	8
		Std. Residual	.3	-.6	
	Asynchronous	Count	47	10	57
		Std. Residual	.5	-.9	
	Blended	Count	16	10	26
		Std. Residual	-.9	1.6	
Total		Count	70	21	91

			Question 5: Working with students with disabilities		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	8	0	8
		Std. Residual	.6	-1.2	
	Asynchronous	Count	49	8	57
		Std. Residual	.4	-.8	
	Blended	Count	17	9	26
		Std. Residual	-.9	1.9	
Total		Count	74	17	91

			Question 5: I did not take any courses that prepared me for working with at-risk, ESL, or students with disabilities.		
			No Courses	Yes Courses	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	7	1	8
		Std. Residual	.6	-.9	
	Asynchronous	Count	43	14	57
		Std. Residual	.6	-.8	
	Blended	Count	13	13	26
		Std. Residual	-1.2	1.8	
Total		Count	63	28	91

A chi-square analysis was conducted to examine the relation between delivery mode and taking additional required courses beyond the initial training orientation. There was no association between delivery mode and taking addition required courses, χ^2 (2) = 1.29, ns.

Table 19

Chi-SquareA for Delivery Mode and Additional Course Work Beyond Initial Orientation

			Question 19: Were there other training courses that were required of you beyond initial orientation?		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	4	4	8
		Std. Residual	.3	-.2	
	Asynchronous	Count	26	29	55
		Std. Residual	.4	-.3	
	Blended	Count	9	17	26
		Std. Residual	-.7	.6	
Total		Count	39	50	89

The next chi-square analysis examine the relation between delivery mode and whether or not the orientation trainer spent time teaching tools and techniques on how to build online communities. This analysis was not significant, χ^2 (2) = 3.92, ns.

Table 20

Chi-Square Analysis for Delivery Mode and Tools and Techniques on How to Build Online Communities

			Question 23: During any of your orientation or training courses, did your trainer spend any time teaching you the tools and techniques on how to build online learning communities?		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	1	7	8
		Std. Residual	-1.0	.7	
	Asynchronous	Count	22	33	55
		Std. Residual	1.0	-.7	
	Blended	Count	6	20	26
		Std. Residual	-.8	.6	
Total		Count	29	60	89

In terms of faculty training, the final chi-square analyses examined the topic in which participants wanted additional training in relation to delivery mode. Neither the chi-square for more examples/scenarios of how to identify challenges, χ^2 (2) = 0.42, ns, nor the chi-square for identifying more campus resources to resolve challenges, χ^2 (2) = 0.12, ns, were significantly related to delivery mode.

Table 21

Chi-Square Analyses for Delivery Mode and Topics in Which Participants Wanted Additional Training

			Question 25: More examples/scenarios of how to identify challenges		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	5	3	8
		Std. Residual	.4	-.4	
	Asynchronous	Count	29	28	57
		Std. Residual	-.1	.1	
	Blended	Count	13	13	26
		Std. Residual	-.1	.1	
Total		Count	47	44	91

			Question 25: Identify more campus resources to resolve challenges		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	6	2	8
		Std. Residual	.1	-.2	
	Asynchronous	Count	41	16	57
		Std. Residual	.0	-.1	
	Blended	Count	18	8	26
		Std. Residual	-.1	.2	
Total		Count	65	26	91

The second set of chi-square analyses examined delivery mode of participants in relation to student persistence. The first chi-square analysis examined delivery mode in relation to time management as a problem with students in the online community. There was no association between delivery mode and time management as a problem with students in the online community, χ^2 (2) = 2.69, ns.

Table 22

Chi-Square Analyses for Delivery Mode in Relation to Time Management as a Problem With Students in the Online Community

			Question 7: Time management		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	0	8	8
		Std. Residual	-1.3	.7	
	Asynchronous	Count	12	45	57
		Std. Residual	.0	.0	
	Blended	Count	7	19	26
		Std. Residual	.7	-.3	
Total		Count	19	72	91

The next chi-square analysis examined delivery mode in relation to critical thinking as a problem with students in the online community. This analysis was not significant, χ^2 (2) = 1.40, ns.

Table 23

Chi-Square Analyses for Delivery Mode in Relation to Critical Thinking as a Problem With Students in the Online Community

			Question 7: Critical thinking		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	4	4	8
		Std. Residual	.2	-.2	
	Asynchronous	Count	23	34	57
		Std. Residual	-.5	.5	
	Blended	Count	14	12	26
		Std. Residual	.7	-.6	
Total		Count	41	50	91

The next chi-square analysis examined delivery mode in relation to writing skills as a problem with students in the online community. This analysis was significant, χ^2 (2) = 10.10, $p < .01$. Participants that used a blended delivery mode were more likely to say no than participants that used an asynchronous delivery mode.

Table 24

Chi-Square Analyses for Delivery Mode in Relation to Writing Skills as a Problem With Students in the Online Community

			Question 7: Writing skills		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	3	5	8
		Std. Residual	.8	-.5	
	Asynchronous	Count	7	50	57
		Std. Residual	-1.7	.9	
	Blended	Count	11	15	26
		Std. Residual	2.0	-1.1	
Total		Count	21	70	91

The next chi-square analysis examined delivery mode in relation to math skills as a problem with students in the online community. This analysis was not significant, χ^2 (2) = 1.34, ns.

Table 25

Chi-Square Analyses for Delivery Mode in Relation to Math Skills as a Problem With Students in the Online Community

			Question 7: Math skills		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	6	2	8
		Std. Residual	-.2	.5	
	Asynchronous	Count	49	8	57
		Std. Residual	.3	-.6	
	Blended	Count	20	6	26
		Std. Residual	-.3	.7	
Total		Count	75	16	91

The final chi-square analyses examining student persistence examined the relation between delivery mode and how participants handle the lack of student preparation. The first chi-square examined whether or not participants referred students to student services or academic advisors and the second analysis examined whether participants modified their teaching style. The chi-square analysis for referring students to student services was not significant, χ^2 (2) = 0.66, ns. There was also no relation for modifying teaching style, χ^2 (2) = 4.67, ns.

Table 26

Chi-Square Analyses for Delivery Mode and Methods to Deal With Lack of Preparation in the Students

			Question 12: Refer to student services or academic advisors		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	6	2	8
		Std. Residual	.1	-.2	
	Asynchronous	Count	42	15	57
		Std. Residual	.2	-.3	
	Blended	Count	17	9	26
		Std. Residual	-.4	.6	
Total		Count	65	26	91

			Question 12: Modify teaching style (i.e. teach at a lower level)		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	7	1	8
		Std. Residual	.6	-.9	
	Asynchronous	Count	42	15	57
		Std. Residual	.4	-.6	
	Blended	Count	14	12	26
		Std. Residual	-.9	1.4	
Total		Count	63	28	91

The final set of chi-square analyses with delivery mode was examined in relation to learning communities. Participants were asked how important they thought it was to 1) assign students to work on projects as learning teams, 2) assign students to a study group and 3) to assign students as study partner. A "1" was labeled as not important, a "2" was somewhat important, and a "3" was very important. There was no association between delivery mode and importance of assigning student to learning teams, χ^2 (4) = 1.99, ns; importance of assigning students to study groups, χ^2 (4) = 1.70, ns.; or to importance of assigning students study partners, χ^2 (4) = 0.82, ns.

Table 27

Chi-Square Analyses for Delivery Mode and Iimportance of Learning Communities

			Question 13: Allow students to work on projects and assignments as learning teams			
			1	2	3	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	6	0	2	8
		Std. Residual	.0	-.7	.4	
	Asynchronous	Count	43	3	11	57
		Std. Residual	.1	-.4	.1	
	Blended	Count	19	3	4	26
		Std. Residual	-.1	1.0	-.4	
Total		Count	68	6	17	91

			Question 13: Assign students to a study group			
			1	2	3	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	0	7	1	8
		Std. Residual	-.8	.5	-.5	
	Asynchronous	Count	4	41	12	57
		Std. Residual	-.2	-.1	.2	
	Blended	Count	3	18	5	26
		Std. Residual	.7	-.2	-.1	
Total		Count	7	66	18	91

			Question 13: Assign students a study buddy (study partner)			
			1	2	3	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	2	1	5	8
		Std. Residual	.5	-.5	.0	
	Asynchronous	Count	10	13	34	57
		Std. Residual	.0	.3	-.2	
	Blended	Count	4	5	17	26
		Std. Residual	-.3	-.2	.3	
Total		Count	16	19	56	91

Two final chi-square analyses examined the relations between delivery mode and whether the participants assigned students to groups or teams, and whether they allowed students

to select their groups or teams. There was no significant association between delivery mode and whether or not participants assigned students to groups or teams, χ^2 (2) = 0.46, ns, or whether participants allowed students to choose their own groups or teams, χ^2 (2) = 0.6, ns.

Table 28

Chi-Square Analyses for Delivery Mode and Creation of Learning Communities

			Question 15: Do you assign students to groups or teams?		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	2	6	8
		Std. Residual	.6	-.3	
	Asynchronous	Count	9	48	57
		Std. Residual	-.1	.1	
	Blended	Count	4	22	26
		Std. Residual	-.1	.1	
Total		Count	15	76	91

			Question 16: Do you allow students to select the group or team?		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 2: What delivery mode do you use in your course?	Synchronous	Count	4	4	8
		Std. Residual	.1	-.1	
	Asynchronous	Count	27	30	57
		Std. Residual	-.1	.1	
	Blended	Count	13	13	26
		Std. Residual	.1	-.1	
Total		Count	44	47	91

The third set of chi-square analyses assessed the relation between teaching level (undergraduate, graduate or both) and faculty training, student persistence and learning communities. First the teaching level for each participant was compared to several measures of faculty training. The chi-square test examining teaching level in relation to whether or not participants had any course to prepare them for ESL students, underprepared or at-risk students, and/or students with disabilities was examined. All three chi-square analyses were significant: ESL, χ^2 (2) = 7.10, $p < .05$; at-risk, χ^2 (2) = 13.93, $p < .001$; and students with disabilities, χ^2 (2) = 11.30, $p < .01$. Participants who taught at the graduate level were more likely to have taken any of these three courses than participants who taught both levels. In addition, when combined to reflect whether participants took courses for any of these special populations versus taking no courses, the chi-square analysis was also significant, χ^2 (2) = 13.09, $p < .001$. Again, participants

who taught at the graduate level were more likely to have taken one or more of the three types of courses than not take any courses at all; and they were more likely to have taken one or more of these courses than a participant that taught at the undergraduate level only.

Table 29

Chi-Square Analysis for Teaching Level and Course Work for Special Populations

			Question 5: Teaching ESL students		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	43	4	47
		Std. Residual	.3	-.9	
	Graduate	Count	13	6	19
		Std. Residual	-.9	2.2	
	Both	Count	23	2	25
		Std. Residual	.3	-.7	
Total		Count	79	12	91

			Question 5: Working with underprepared or at-risk students		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	39	8	47
		Std. Residual	.4	-.7	
	Graduate	Count	9	10	19
		Std. Residual	-1.5	2.9	
	Both	Count	23	2	25
		Std. Residual	.8	-1.5	
Total		Count	71	20	91

			Question 5: Working with students with disabilities		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	40	7	47
		Std. Residual	.2	-.4	
	Graduate	Count	11	8	19
		Std. Residual	-1.2	2.5	
	Both	Count	24	1	25
		Std. Residual	.7	-1.6	
Total		Count	75	16	91

			Question 5: I did not take any courses that prepared me for working with at-risk, ESL, or students with disabilities.		
			No Courses	Yes Courses	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	38	9	47
		Std. Residual	.9	-1.3	
	Graduate	Count	7	12	19
		Std. Residual	-1.7	2.7	
	Both	Count	19	6	25
		Std. Residual	.3	-.5	
Total		Count	64	27	91

A chi-square analysis was conducted to examine the relation between teaching level and taking additional required courses beyond the initial training orientation. There was no association between teaching level and taking addition required courses, χ^2 (2) = 2.10, ns.

Table 30

Chi-Square Analysis for Teaching Level and Additional Course Work Beyond Initial Orientation

			Question 19: Were there other training courses that were required of you beyond initial orientation?		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	24	23	47
		Std. Residual	.6	-.6	
	Graduate	Count	6	13	19
		Std. Residual	-.9	.8	
	Both	Count	10	13	23
		Std. Residual	-.1	.1	
Total		Count	40	49	89

The next chi-square analysis examine the relation between teaching level and whether or not the orientation trainer spent time teaching tools and techniques on how to build online communities. This analysis was not significant, χ^2 (2) = 3.80, ns.

Table 31

Chi-Square Analysis for Teaching Level and Tools And Techniques on How to Build Online Communities

			Question 23: During any of your orientation or training courses, did your trainer spend any time teaching you the tools and techniques on how to build online learning communities?		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	19	28	47
		Std. Residual	.9	-.7	
	Graduate	Count	3	16	19
		Std. Residual	-1.3	.9	
	Both	Count	7	16	23
		Std. Residual	-.2	.1	
Total		Count	29	60	89

In terms of faculty training, the final chi-square analyses examined the topic in which participants wanted additional training in relation to teaching level. Neither the chi-square for more examples/scenarios of how to identify challenges, χ^2 (2) = 0.16, ns, nor the chi-square for identifying more campus resources to resolve challenges, χ^2 (2) = 1.69, ns, were significantly related to teaching level.

Table 32

Chi-Square Analyses for Teaching Level and Topics in Which Participants Wanted Additional Training

			Question 25: More examples/scenarios of how to identify challenges		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	24	23	47
		Std. Residual	-.2	.2	
	Graduate	Count	10	9	19
		Std. Residual	.0	.0	
	Both	Count	14	11	25
		Std. Residual	.2	-.2	
Total		Count	48	43	91

			Question 25: Identify more campus resources to resolve challenges		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	33	14	47
		Std. Residual	-.2	.3	
	Graduate	Count	16	3	19
		Std. Residual	.6	-1.0	
	Both	Count	17	8	25
		Std. Residual	-.3	.4	
Total		Count	66	25	91

The second set of chi-square analyses examined teaching level of participants in relation to student persistence. The first chi-square analysis examined teaching level in relation to time management as a problem with students in the online community. There was no association between teaching level and time management as a problem with students in the online community, χ^2 (2) = 0.88, ns.

Table 33

Chi-Square Analyses for Teaching Level in Relation to Time Management as a Problem With Students in the Online Community

			Question 7: Time management		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	12	35	47
		Std. Residual	.5	-.3	
	Graduate	Count	4	15	19
		Std. Residual	-.1	.0	
	Both	Count	4	21	25
		Std. Residual	-.6	.3	
Total		Count	20	71	91

The next chi-square analysis examined teaching level in relation to critical thinking as a problem with students in the online community. This analysis was significant, χ^2 (2) = 7.99, p <

.05. Participants that taught at the graduate level were more likely to say that critical thinking skills are not a problem then they were to say it is a problem.

Table 34

Chi-Square Analyses for Teaching Level in Relation to Critical Thinking as a Problem With Students in the Online Community

			Question 7: Critical thinking		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	18	29	47
		Std. Residual	-.7	.6	
	Graduate	Count	14	5	19
		Std. Residual	1.9	-1.7	
	Both	Count	9	16	25
		Std. Residual	-.7	.6	
Total		Count	41	50	91

The next chi-square analysis examined teaching level in relation to writing skills as a problem with students in the online community. This analysis was not significant, χ^2 (2) = 2.09, ns.

Table 35

Chi-Square Analyses for Teaching Level in Relation to Writing Skills as a Problem with Students in the Online Community

			Question 7: Writing skills		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	8	39	47
		Std. Residual	-.9	.5	
	Graduate	Count	6	13	19
		Std. Residual	.8	-.4	
	Both	Count	7	18	25
		Std. Residual	.5	-.3	
Total		Count	21	70	91

The next chi-square analysis examined teaching level in relation to math skills as a problem with students in the online community. This analysis was significant, χ^2 (2) = 8.07, $p < .05$. Participants who teach both levels were more likely to say math skills were a problem than that they were not a problem.

Table 36

Chi-Square Analyses for Teaching Level in Relation to Math Skills as a Problem With Students in the Online Community

			Question 7: Math skills		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	42	5	47
		Std. Residual	.5	-1.1	
	Graduate	Count	17	2	19
		Std. Residual	.3	-.7	
	Both	Count	16	9	25
		Std. Residual	-1.0	2.2	
Total		Count	75	16	91

The final chi-square analyses examining student persistence examined the relation between teaching level and how participants handle the lack of student preparation. The first chi-square examined whether or not participants referred students to student services or academic advisors and the second analysis examined whether participants modified their teaching style. The chi-square analysis for referring students to student services was not significant, χ^2 (2) = 4.67, ns. There was also no relation for modifying teaching style, χ^2 (2) = 3.11, ns.

Table 37

Chi-Square Analyses for Teaching Level and Methods to Deal With Lack of Preparation in the Students

			Question 12: Refer to student services or academic advisors		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	33	14	47
		Std. Residual	-.1	.2	
	Graduate	Count	17	2	19
		Std. Residual	.9	-1.5	
	Both	Count	15	10	25
		Std. Residual	-.7	1.1	
Total		Count	65	26	91

			Question 12: Modify teaching style (i.e. teach at a lower level)		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	34	13	47
		Std. Residual	.3	-.4	
	Graduate	Count	15	4	19
		Std. Residual	.5	-.8	
	Both	Count	14	11	25
		Std. Residual	-.8	1.2	
Total		Count	63	28	91

The final set of chi-square analyses with teaching level was examined in relation to learning communities. Participants were asked how important they thought it was to 1) assign students to work on projects as learning teams, 2) assign students to a study group and 3) to assign students as study partner. A "1" was labeled as not important, a "2" was somewhat important, and a "3" was very important. There was no association between teaching level and importance of assigning student to learning teams, χ^2 (4) = 3.65, ns; importance of assigning students to study groups, χ^2 (4) = 7.04, ns; or to importance of assigning students study partners, χ^2 (4) = 8.69, ns.

Table 38

Chi-Square Analyses for Teaching Level and Importance of Learning Communities

			Question 13: Allow students to work on projects and assignments as learning teams			
			1	2	3	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	33	4	10	47
		Std. Residual	-.4	.5	.4	
	Graduate	Count	17	1	1	19
		Std. Residual	.7	-.2	-1.4	
	Both	Count	18	1	6	25
		Std. Residual	-.2	-.5	.6	
Total		Count	68	6	17	91

			Question 13: Assign students to a study group			
			1	2	3	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	6	29	12	47
		Std. Residual	1.3	-.9	.9	
	Graduate	Count	1	15	3	19
		Std. Residual	-.4	.3	-.4	
	Both	Count	0	22	3	25
		Std. Residual	-1.4	.9	-.9	
Total		Count	7	66	18	91

			Question 13: Assign students a study buddy (study partner)			
			1	2	3	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	8	14	25	47
		Std. Residual	-.1	1.3	-.7	
	Graduate	Count	1	3	15	19
		Std. Residual	-1.3	-.5	1.0	
	Both	Count	7	2	16	25
		Std. Residual	1.2	-1.4	.2	
Total		Count	16	19	56	91

Two final chi-square analyses examined the relations between teaching level and whether the participants assigned students to groups or teams, and whether they allowed students to select their groups or teams. There was no significant association between teaching level and whether or not participants assigned students to groups or teams, χ^2 (2) = 6.91, $p < .05$; such that participants that taught at the graduate level only were less likely to say no than participants that taught at the undergraduate level. In fact all 19 participants that taught at the graduate level said yes. There was also a significant association between teaching level and whether participants allowed students to choose their own groups or teams, χ^2 (2) = 9.04, $p < .05$. In this case, participants that taught at the graduate level were more likely to say "no", that they do not allow students to select their group or team, than "yes"; and participants that taught at both the

undergraduate and graduate level had the reverse pattern, they were more likely to say “yes” than to say “no”.

Table 39

Chi-Square Analyses for Teaching Level and Creation of Learning Communities

			Question 15: Do you assign students to groups or teams?		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	12	35	47
		Std. Residual	1.5	-.7	
	Graduate	Count	0	19	19
		Std. Residual	-1.8	.8	
	Both	Count	3	22	25
		Std. Residual	-.6	.2	
Total		Count	15	76	91

			Question 16: Do you allow students to select the group or team?		
			No	Yes	Total
Question 3: What level of students do you teach?	Undergraduate	Count	23	24	47
		Std. Residual	.1	-.1	
	Graduate	Count	14	5	19
		Std. Residual	1.6	-1.5	
	Both	Count	7	18	25
		Std. Residual	-1.5	1.4	
Total		Count	44	47	91

Student Demographics

Two hundred thirty students were surveyed about the reasons why they left the online university. Of the 230 students that participated in the survey, 11.3% (n = 26) were under the age of 25; 25.2% (n = 58) of the students who participated in the survey were between the ages of 26-30; 21.7% (n = 50) of the students were between the ages of 31-35; 11.3% (n = 26) of the students were between the ages of 36-40; 15.7% (n = 36) of the students were between the ages of 41-45; 6.5% (n = 15) of the students were between the ages of 46-50; 7% (n = 16) of the students were over 50; 1.3% (n = 3) did not respond to the question.

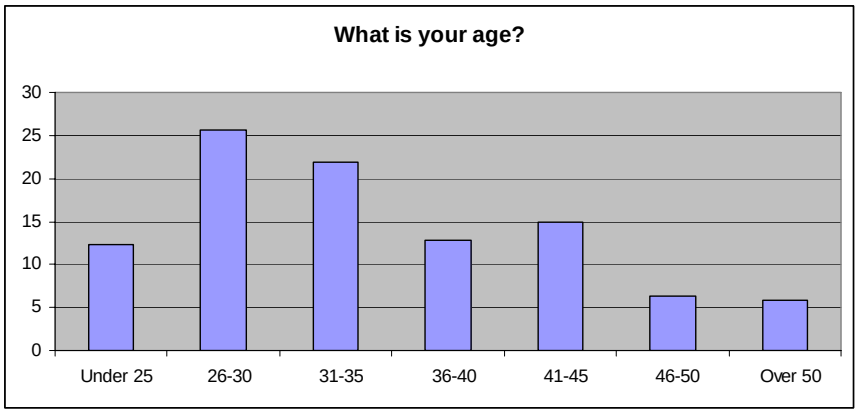

Figure 9. Students' ages.

The majority of the students at the university were White (83.5%, *n* = 192), 9.6% (*n* = 22) of the students were African American; 0.9% (*n* = 2) were Hispanic; and, 5.5% (*n* = 13) were Other or did not respond to the question. Female students made up 54.3% (*n* = 125) of the students who participated in the online withdrawal survey and 36.1% (*n* = 83) were male; while 9.6% (*n* = 22) did not answer the question.

Table 40

Racial Composition of Participants

	f	*P*
African American	22	9.6
Hispanic	2	.9
White	192	83.5
Other/No answer	13	5.7

Table 41

Gender Composition of Participants

Gender	*f*	*P*
Male	83	36.1
Female	125	54.3
No answer	22	9.6

These students were surveyed about the reasons they left the university from April 2001 until May 2004; 35.2% (*n* = 81) reported that family responsibilities had a major role in their decision to withdraw from the university. 28.7% (*n* = 66) reported that work conflicts had a major role in their decision to withdraw from the university. 19.1% (*n* = 44) withdrew because they felt the pace of the program was too fast; and, 20.9% (*n* = 48) withdrew because of personal problems.

Table 42

Why Did You Choose to Leave the University?

Scale 1-3: 1=Not a factor; 2=Minor factor; 3=Major factor	*N*	*M*	Std. Dev	Not a Factor	Minor Factor	Major Factor
Family responsibilities were too great	172	1.99	0.88	35.20%	20.00%	35.20%
Conflicts with job	171	1.85	0.87	43.50%	17.80%	28.70%
Felt the pace of the program too fast	172	1.62	0.82	52.60%	18.30%	19.10%
Personal problems	166	1.61	0.85	56.10%	10.40%	20.90%
Cost	168	1.43	0.71	59.60%	16.50%	13.50%
Did not like online learning	167	1.43	0.73	61.70%	13.00%	14.30%
Technical problems	171	1.37	0.70	69.60%	8.70%	11.70%
Decided to change major	169	1.37	0.75	70.90%	4.80%	13.90%
Health-related problems	171	1.35	0.70	69.60%	7.40%	12.60%
Felt alone or isolated	165	1.26	0.60	70.90%	10.00%	7.40%
Decided to attend another college	165	1.26	0.64	73.50%	3.50%	10.90%
Study group problems	168	1.32	0.63	67.00%	12.60%	9.10%
Felt courses were not challenging	168	1.26	0.63	75.70%	4.30%	8.70%
Attitude of staff seemed impersonal	166	1.19	0.50	73.00%	9.60%	5.20%
Academic advising seemed inadequate	167	1.18	0.52	76.50%	5.70%	5.20%
Curriculum seemed of poor quality	165	1.12	0.40	77.80%	6.10%	2.60%
Faculty seemed to be of poor quality	166	1.10	0.39	79.60%	4.30%	3.00%

Table 43

How Many Modules Had You Completed?

How many modules had you completed?	*F*	*P*
Less than 1 module	57	31.7
1-3 modules	83	46.1
4-6 modules	29	16.1
7-10 modules	6	3.3
Over 10 modules	5	2.8
Total	180	100.0

The students were surveyed on the number of modules (courses) completed at the time of withdrawal from the university and 31.7% (*n* = 57) had completed less than one module; 46.1% (*n* = 83) had completed between 1 and 3 modules; 16.1% (*n* = 29) had completed four to six modules; 3.3 % (n=6) had completed seven to ten modules; and, 2.8% (*n* = 5) had completed over ten modules.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Restatement of the Problem

A 2002 report from the National Center for Education Statistics reported that between 73-75% of undergraduate students today have one or more of the characteristics of a nontraditional student. While online courses provide access to higher education for underserved students, the greater challenge is determining the intrinsic or extrinsic motivators for keeping these students in the classes (Belanger & Jordan 2000; Carr, 2000; Kearsley, 2000). A 2003 report from the U.S. Department of Education revealed that over 40% of first-year students at public two-year colleges are enrolled in developmental courses. Faculty selection and preparation to teach underprepared learners has become even more paramount as this student population increases. Faculty who teach courses with high numbers of underprepared learners need more than just the appropriate degrees and training; they also need personalities and core beliefs that will enable them to interact with their students appropriately and empathetically (Eney & Davidson, 2006). Online educators especially are unprepared to connect with online underprepared learners and subsequently build online learning communities as a means to improve at-risk student retention. As online classes become more of the standard method for course delivery in higher education, underprepared educators present a problem for colleges and universities that are increasingly using online classes to serve these underprepared students.

Purpose

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine the relationship between online faculty training programs and the ability of instructors to assist at risk learners in benefiting from the university's learning community.

Population, Methodology, and Data Analysis

The study population consisted of 230 students and 92 adjunct online faculty members. In order to collect data, all faculty members were surveyed using a written survey instrument with a Likert rating. All of the survey data were exported from the Zoomerang survey tool into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet where data was sorted and tables and charts constructed.

Summary of Findings

The survey data from student participants revealed that students exiting the online program at The University had similar characteristics to underprepared, at-risk adult learners. The survey data from the faculty participants revealed that the overwheleming majority of the faculty members do not know how to recognize the early warning signs that adult at-risk learners display in the online classroom. In this section the findings in the study are discussed by research questions.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 asked, What methods do faculty use to determine student weaknesses in online students? Most faculty reported (87%) that they used assignments to determine whether students had weaknesses in their writing. Approximately 2% of faculty used threaded discussions to judge students' weaknesses. Fewer instructors relied on quizzes or tests (26.1%) or student initiated e-mails (15%). The responses to Question 1 then showed that instructors were most likely to determine a student's weakness by judging their writing either in assignments or in threaded discussions. The fact that many faculty do not rely on some type of pretest to determine student weaknesses shows that instructors may not be aware of how to gauge the skills of their online students.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked, What methods are used to build learning communities in online education? In response to this question, online faculty reported that 83.7% of the participants assign students to learning groups. Seventy-five percent of participants felt that these learning communities were the most important characteristic in having a successful online classroom. The fact that many faculty use learning groups and learning teams as a primary means in building online learning communities shows that there is a significant faculty preparation gap between what is taught in the faculty training program versus what is actually required of the instructors in the classroom.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked, Does the current faculty training for online instructors offer enough support to meet the challenges in the online classroom? More than one half (69.6%) of all respondents stated that they have not had any training in working with at-risk, ESL, or students with disabilities. This response shows the level of unpreparedness of instructors for dealing with at-risk students. Universities and colleges that are offering online classes need to train online instructors in dealing with all types of students. Otherwise, these students are likely to withdraw from classes out of frustration. It is important for universities and colleges to ensure that online instructors are adequately prepared to assist all types of students in their online classes.

Conclusions

Conclusion One

The average length of faculty training programs for preparing new faculty to teach online courses was 3 weeks, but, 69.6% of the faculty did not receive any training on working with at-risk, ESL, or students with disabilities. Boettcher and Conrad (1999) suggest that while online students usually take a more proactive student role and drive the flow of information in the classroom, this creates an almost unrealistic expectation for the instructor of the at-risk or ESL student. Instructors teach how they were taught and since they were not taught to recognize the warning signs of at-risk adult learners, they often dismiss these students as lazy, uncooperative, or unresponsive.

Conclusion Two

Approximately 35.2% of the students withdrawing from the university reported that family responsibilities were too great and 28.7% reported that work conflicts were a major factor in their decision to withdraw from the university. As Tinto's model (1975) of student departure indicates, students seldom withdraw (even when overwhelmed) if there is a strong support system either at home or at school, and they feel connected to something within the school. Clearly, universities and colleges need to connect online students with the institution so that students feel a part of the institution's life. Hence, it seems important for online instructors to set up learning communities where students can develop a sense of semblance with their fellow students. This sense of semblance would help students to remain connect to the institution.

Conclusion Three

The more online courses a student successfully completes the less likely the student becomes to withdraw from the institution. Thirty-one percent of the students reported that they had completed less than one module and 46.1% had completed between 1 and 3 modules. The instructors in the first two or three required modules (courses) set the tone and expectations for the remainder of a student's academic journey because students will use their first experiences (as well as a host of outside influences) as pivotal points for deciding whether to remain in or withdraw from their academic programs.

Conclusion Four

While few professional educators would say that they entered into higher education for monetary gain, this is exactly the reason many scholar-practitioners teach online courses. Using extrinsic motivators such as bonuses, fringe benefits, time off, overtime/overload pay, and salary increases can not be the only strategy used to engage and motivate reluctant faculty to buy into a university wide student retention program.

Conclusion Five

The staffing model for online faculty uses a scholar-practitioner approach. Therefore, while these faculty are experts in their professions, they are not always prepared to work with at-risk adult learners. New faculty training programs can prepare these faculty to facilitate the courses but they need additional training on how to work with at-risk adult learners in the online classroom. Resource allocation has been the primary reason that most institutions do not invest in building faculty development programs. The reality is these programs are frequently the last programs funded and the first programs cut. In order for these programs to be effective, they

cannot be piecemeal efforts coordinated and deployed by one or two key individuals within the college or university.

Conclusion Six

Student retention programs must have buy-in at all levels—from faculty to student services to recruiting. Learning communities are a good start for improving student retention but they cannot successfully meet the goals of an effective student retention program and simultaneously meet the needs of the students in the community.

Recommendations

Recommendation One

New faculty training programs need to devote a significant amount of time on preparing new faculty to recognize the early warning signs of at-risk adult learners in the online classroom; and take the appropriate steps for early intervention. Such training will help instructors come up with better assignments in order to assess student skills.

Recommendation Two

There needs to be a more coordinated effort between admission counselors, faculty, and new students for at least the first three courses. Admission counselors should set a realistic expectation of how a typical online class will work; and, faculty should clearly articulate in their syllabi what they expect from the students. There should also be a core group of faculty assigned to the courses that have a high percentage of new students. Admission counselors should conduct new student follow-ups with this core faculty group during Weeks 2 and 4 of an 8-week class and in Weeks 2, 4, and 6 of a 16-week class.

Recommendation Three

Core faculty should be selected from current faculty and these selections should be made based on previous student feedback, faculty evaluations, and faculty interest. The staffing trend of most universities is to reserve the most experienced instructors for the upper level and graduate courses but this is not the best approach for staffing courses with a high percentage of new students or for developmental courses with a high percentage of at risk students. Placing new faculty who are often unfamiliar with the course platform, sequence of courses, university policies, and student population frequently delays aligning university resources for the at-risk student until later in the student's program.

Recommendation Four

A better strategy to engage and motivate reluctant faculty is to allow professional autonomy, develop faculty niches, establish clear policies and fair compensation, and provide professional development.

Allow professional autonomy. Not everyone is motivated by the same thing. Faculty members should have the academic freedom to modify parts of the campus retention program that will best fit the needs of their students, their schedule, and their personality.

Develop the niche. Faculty members should receive assistance to find their niche within the college. In this way, they would feel a greater connection to the college as a whole. A faculty niche communicates autonomy, requires a community context, provides tacit recognition of worth, and is a mark of efficacy (Wergin, 2001).

Fair policies and compensation. Policies concerning workload, promotion, and tenure should "(a) fairly compensate faculty for work valued by the institution and (b) align external

rewards with institutional values" (Hopkins, 2005, p. 5). These policies must be communicated clearly in the beginning so there are no disappointments at the end.

Provide professional development. Some colleges restrict professional development to full-time faculty for the sake of cost, but a successful retention program includes full-time and adjunct faculty. Therefore, all faculty members should have the opportunity to participate in faculty and instructional development programs.

Recommendation Five

Faculty development programs should start as quarterly training enrichment workshops and fall under the auspices of new faculty training. The content of these workshops should focus on the core practices of learning communities—fostering community, diversity, active learning, curricular integration, reflection, and assessment.

Recommendation Six

Institution wide student retention programs should be implemented to support building strong learning communities with primary stakeholders from the following departments—admissions, student services, financial aid, faculty recruiting, and faculty training.

Conclusion

Creating, implementing, and sustaining an online faculty training program that not only prepares faculty to teach online but also teaches the faculty how to recognize and meet the needs of the at-risk online student is a three-step process. First, an effective online faculty training program requires a collaborative effort between faculty and student services. These two institutional resources must recognize their role as stake holders; and, as a result, be strategically aligned so that they function as a solid unit to meet the needs of the at-risk student in the online

classroom. Second, an effective online faculty training program is conscious of the impact of race, class, and culture in the life of the at-risk student, and it seeks positive ways to validate and integrate the student's experiences and culture into the framework of a university or college. Finally, an effective faculty training program is assessment driven, and it constantly evaluates its program components to ensure that faculty are prepared to meet the needs of the evolving student population in the online classroom. Simply stated, the more time, money, and resources allocated to building and sustaining online faculty training programs the better prepared the faculty are to not only recognize the needs of at-risk students but also help the students to develop learning communities within the online classroom.

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Informed Consent/Assent

This research is being completed as part of a dissertation study entitled "Learning Communities: Building Bridges for Online Student Retention." This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Joshua Fischer, Dr. Rita Marie Conrad, Dr. Joseph Graham, and Dr. Judy Edwards at Capella University School of Education and by the primary investigator, Annise Mabry, a Ph.D. candidate at Capella University.

The purpose of this study is to add to the body of existing knowledge related to the impact of learning communities in relationship to attrition and retention for at-risk students in online courses. In support of this intention, the goal of this research effort is to examine the role of online faculty training/orientation workshops in preparing instructors to identify student weaknesses and subsequently build online learning communities as a means to improve at-risk student retention.

The questionnaire is designed in phases of varying length. Complete each phase and click "I Consent to being a part of this Study" to go on to the next phase. There are four (4) phases and each phase will take about 30 minutes to complete. Participation in this study is voluntary and study participants who elect not to participate wil not be penalized. Study participants will be free to withdraw from the study by not fully completing the questionnaire.

The primary intended benefit of ths study is to determine the relationship between the factors being studied (faculty preparation for teaching online courses, faculty experience in teaching online courses, and learning communities as at-risk student retention motivators). Provided there is a significant correlation within the study, the benefit of the study would be vast to individuals and departments in higher education responsible for preparing faculty to teach online courses.

Due to the manner of collection of the data, the subject is protected by the anonymity of the Internet. The questionnaire is housed entirely on the study's websites. As a result, personal contact between the subject and researcher will not take place in reference to completion of the questionnaire. Additionally, the data will be collected from a web-based form that will NOT collect any traceable or personally identifiable information (IP address, email, name, computer name, etc.).

For additional information please contact the appropriate party for the following information:

Study related questions: Annise Mabry annise@summergrove.net
Research supervisor: Joshua Fischer joshua.fischer@faculty.capella.edu

Researcher participants' rights: Capella University, 225 South 6th Street, 9th Floor, Minneapolis, MN 55402 Phone: 612-339-8650

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Instructions: Select or type a response to each question. You must respond to each question to submit the survey.

Faculty Demographics

1. How many online institutions do you teach for?
   - ☐ 1 to 5
   - ☐ 6 to 10
   - ☐ 11 or more

2. What level of students do you teach?
   - ☐ Undergraduate
   - ☐ Graduate
   - ☐ Both

3. What delivery mode do you use in your course?
   - ☐ Synchronous
   - ☐ Asynchronous
   - ☐ Blended

4. What is your age?
   - ☐ 25-34
   - ☐ 35-44
   - ☐ 45-54
   - ☐ 55-64
   - ☐ 65-74
   - ☐ 75-85

5. Have you had any courses in education that prepared you for (check all that apply)
   - ☐ Teaching ESL students
   - ☐ Working with underprepared or at-risk students
   - ☐ Working with students with disabilities

6. What is the highest degree that you have earned?

☐ Associate's
☐ Bachelor's
☐ Master's
☐ Doctorate (J.D., Ed.D., M.D., Ph.D., D.B.A)

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1. What student weaknesses do you face in the online classroom? (check all that apply)

   ☐ Time management

   ☐ Critical thinking

   ☐ Writing skills

   ☐ Math skills

   ☐ Learning disability

   ☐ Other

2. Are there subcategories/subcomponents of the weaknesses that you defined? If so, please describe here:

3. How do you identify these weaknesses in the online classroom?

   ☐ Assignments

   ☐ Threaded Discussions/Online Discussions

   ☐ Exams/quizzes

   ☐ Other

4. Please describe the methods used to identify any of the items that you checked in item 3.

6. How do you deal with this lack of student preparation in the online classroom? (check all that apply)

☐ Refer to student services or academic advisors

☐ Modify teaching style (i.e. teach at a lower level)

☐ Other

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The term *learning community* can apply to many educational strategies. Learning communities "represent an intentional restructuring of students' time, credit, and learning experiences to build community, enhance learning, and foster connections among students, faculty, and disciplines (Smith, MacGregor, Matthews, and Gabelnick, 2004, p.20)

7. How do you build learning communities in the online classroom? (rank in the order of classroom use. Only rank those that you have used.)

   ☐ Allow students to work on projects and assignments as teams

   ☐ Assign students to a study group

   ☐ Assign students a study buddy

   ☐ Other

8. What other methods not available to you would be helpful in establishing learning communities?

9. Do you assign students to groups or teams?

   ☐ Yes

   ☐ No

   ☐ Does not apply

10. Do you allow students to select the group or team?

    ☐ Yes

    ☐ No

    ☐ Does not apply

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Preparation for Online Teaching

11. Did your hiring process include a faculty orientation?

    ☐ Yes, Proceed to Question 12

    ☐ No, Skip to Question 13

12. If "Yes" on 11, how long did the orientation last?

    ☐ Less than one week

    ☐ One week

    ☐ Two weeks

    ☐ Three weeks

    ☐ Four weeks

    ☐ Five weeks or longer

13. Were there other training courses that were required of you beyond initial orientation?

    ☐ Yes, Proceed to Question 14

    ☐ No, Skip to Question 15

14. Please describe these additional training sessions and provide their duration.

15. Have there been elective training courses that you have taken from the institution for which you teach?

    ☐ Yes, Proceed to Question 16

☐ No, Skip to Question 17

16. What types of elective training courses have you taken from your institution?

17. During any of your orientation or training courses, did your trainer spend any time teaching you the tools and techniques on how to build online learning communities?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't remember

18. During your training course, did your trainer show you how to identify at-risk or underprepared learners in the online classroom?

☐ Yes

☐ No

☐ Don't remember

19. Do you feel that your trainer prepared you for the challenges of teaching online?

☐ Yes

☐ No

20. What could have been included in your online training course that would have prepared you for the challenges of teaching online?

☐ More examples/scenarios of how to identify challenges

☐ Identify more campus resources to resolve challenges

☐ Other, Please describe:

21. If you have not participated in additional elective training courses, why not? (check all that apply)

- ☐ Lack of time
- ☐ Too many additional teaching responsibilities
- ☐ No new content covered
- ☐ Other

APPENDIX B: CONTENT VALIDITY SURVEY

Dear Colleagues:

I am a student at Capella University who needs to have the reliability and validity of my doctoral research instrument checked. I am hoping that you will be able to help me with the "content validity" of the instrument. Content Validity is defined as the "Measure of a survey's accuracy that involves formal review by individuals who are experts in the subject matter of a survey." From what I know of you, you have a background in post secondary or adult education. If you do not, please respond to me and let me know. I will move you to a different group in the review process.

If you are able to help me out, this is what I'm looking for in your response:

- What is your honest reaction to the survey (don't get the opinions of others).
- Does it make sense?
- Are the questions clear?
- Is there anything offensive to you in the material?
- Do the directions clearly guide the participant in completing the survey?
- Does the survey seem to probe the concept of multi-age grouping well?
- Is there anything you would add or state differently to make it clearer?
- Are there sub-topics that are in the survey that need additional development?
- Are there corollary topics that should be included in the survey?
- What other comments, if any, do you have about the survey?

Please reply with your responses to each question/statement to this e-mail address.

Here is the link to the study: http://www.zoomerang.com/recipient/survey-intro.zgi?p=WEB225Z8HGE66E (Please note that you are not being asked to complete the survey at this time.) I have also attached the survey as a MS Word file for your convenience.

Thanks so much for your help. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask me.

Annise Mabry, Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX C: FACE VALIDITY SURVEY

Dear Friends:

I am a student at Capella University who needs to have the reliability and validity of my doctoral research instrument checked. I am hoping that you will be able to help me with the "face validity" of the instrument. Face Validity is defined as the "Most casual measure of a survey's accuracy, usually assessed by non-experts" in the field. Not to say that any of you are non-experts in your own fields. ;-D However, most of you, from what I know of you, do not have a background in post secondary or adult education. If you do, please respond to me and let me know. I will move you to a different group in the review process.

If you are able to help me out, this is what I'm looking for in your response:

- Your honest reaction to the survey (don't get the opinions of others).
- Does it make sense?
- Are the questions clear?
- Can you understand it generally without having a background in the field?
- Anything you would add or differently to make it clearer?
- Is there anything offensive to you in the material?

Thanks so much for your help. If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask me.

Here is the link to the study:
http://www.zoomerang.com/survey.zgi?p=WEB225Z8HGE66E or you may view the survey questions in the MS Word file attached.

Sincerely,

Annise Mabry, Doctoral Candidate