

Student Dissatisfaction with Online Learning

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Abstract

Effective distance learning is currently one of the most discussed topics in higher education. As many studies seek to evaluate the effectiveness of distance learning and compare it with traditional education methods, this study was conducted to determine what factors may lead to a student's dissatisfaction with a distance learning course. Furthermore, the results of this study are intended to assist educators in understanding the negative perceptions a student may have about distance learning and how to improve these perceptions. As many studies identify that student's dissatisfaction is directly related to feelings of frustration, isolation, and anxiety, this study was directed at determining which components of a distance course may cause these negative emotions. The results of the study establish a set of guides for future measurement tools that may assist educators in determining what improvements could be made to enhance a distance learning course. In addition, the review of literature suggests the separation of dissatisfaction items and recommends organization into separate studies focusing on emotions such as frustration, isolation, and motivation that students encounter within a distance course.

Keywords: distance learning, dissatisfaction, online learning.

Student Dissatisfaction with Online Learning

Effective distance learning is currently one of the most discussed topics in higher education. As many studies seek to evaluate the effectiveness of distance learning and compare it with traditional education methods, this study was conducted to determine what the most common factors are that lead to a student's dissatisfaction within an online distance learning course. The research conducted was originally organized into sub-categories which were identified as: technological methods and tools, student's expectations, instruction, course design, interaction, communication, and scheduling. In addition, information about individual participant's previous experience with distance learning was obtained, along with some general information about how often they participated in the distance course.

The popularity of distance learning in higher education is rapidly growing to meet the demand of student scheduling and diverse needs. Daugherty and Funke (1998) suggest that distance learning can possibly provide a catalyst for the reconceptualization of education. Technological advancements in hardware, software, and cyber-space environments have provided educators with new and innovative ways to instruct through the use of the Internet and provide an engaging student-centered experience.

As various technological advances become both available and affordable, higher learning institutions are taking advantage of this opportunity to provide students with the flexibility they desire and through a media they are familiar with. Online programs in higher education institutions can increase enrollment while meeting the needs of a diverse society; however these institutions must acknowledge that not every student will make a good online student. Whipp and Chiarelli (2004), suggest that when learners must work in an unfamiliar context, the student

becomes concerned about the many challenges that exist such as: technology management, organization, and social interactions.

Failure to follow certain pedagogical online standards or guidelines may result in a distance course that fails to meet the course objectives. Web-based technology alone is not sufficient enough to ensure learning; however, using correct pedagogical processes in conjunction with the technology increases success (Jung, 2001). As many current studies support how effective distance learning is compared to traditional instruction, one must also consider negative experience may affect a student within one of these distance courses. In some cases, dissatisfaction may lead to student reluctantly to continue taking online courses. One of the obvious benefits of distance learning is schedule flexibility, which leads to increased student enrollment. A negative experience in a distance class may not only discourage a student from taking additional courses, but frustrated students may advise others against enrolling in a distance course because of their negative reviews.

As distance learning continues to provide student-centered learning opportunities, educators must consider what improvements can be made in the virtual environment to help meet diverse student learning styles. As many believe that technology is the heart and soul of online learning, other factors that often contribute to a successful online program are overlooked. As this study seeks to identify issues within a virtual classroom, technology is only one of the components evaluated. Educators must also consider the activities, assessments, and projects that are offered as part of the learning process. As these activities may be affective in traditional classrooms, they may not yield the same results when administered online. Interaction and communication are also vital components in any distance learning course. It is quite difficult to facilitate a traditional class without some interaction, but if a distance course does not provide

interactive opportunities among students, the feeling of isolation may occur. Cooperative learning and collaboration occur frequently in the traditional classroom, but poor online course design may fail to provide the same results.

Literature Review

Distance learning has recently gain popularity in higher education and studies seek not only to determine its effectiveness compared to that of traditional learning, but to understand the various challenges an online student faces. Relevant topics such as: dissatisfaction, lack of interaction, lack of learner support, the separation from the instructor, and motivational issues commonly found in studies related to distance learning will be discussed.

The primary focus of this study was not to provide evidence that distance learning is of equal quality compared to that of traditional learning; however, it is relevant that the U.S. Department of Education acknowledged the growth of popularity and its (distance learning) effectiveness in comparison to traditional education in its 2009 meta-analysis study. (U.S. Department of education, 2010). Since distance learning can be classified as an effective means to instruct, the standards to which online instruction is held should be similar to that of traditional classroom standards.

Nobel (2001), states that the perception of many students in distance learning is that the form online delivery is second-rate. Many students may enter a distance course with the notion that they are receiving an education that is not nearly as effective as the traditional seated courses they have become comfortable with. Several issues that often fuel this perception include: delayed feedback, lack of immediacy, student isolation, and lack of learner community support (Power and Gould-Morven, 2011).

Power and Gould-Morven (2011) advise that, “OL (Online Learning), despite its growing recognition, is often associated with high rates of student dissatisfaction and isolation, withdrawal, and attrition” (p.19). The authors refer to distance learning as a paradox that is both “booming and busting” at the same time by increasing its availability to students and stumbling upon obstacles that possibly prevent the students from learning (Power and Gould-Morven, 2011). With the conflict of distance learning and its opportunity to improve higher education, one must also consider the fact that distance learning is not always supported or recognized consistency across the field of education. The authors refer to this idea as the “head of gold, feet of clay paradox” (Power and Gould-Morven, 2011). The authors also discuss other considerations involving the various stakeholders involved in the distance learning program. Students, teachers and administrators all share responsibility in the program, yet each have different perceptions of how and why distance learning should be used and evaluated (Power and Gould-Morven, 2011).

Interaction is often a key factor to consider when assessing distance learning because a lack of interaction may lead to a feeling of isolation. Knowles (1990) quotes, “learning is a very human activity. The more people feel they are being treated as human beings – that their human needs are being taken into account – the more they are likely to learn and learn to learn” (p. 129). In addition to literature elaborating on student’s feeling of isolation while online, current literature also assesses other emotional factors such as frustration and isolation that are directly related to interaction.

Garrison (2007) quotes, “Higher education has consistently viewed community as essential to support collaborative learning and discourse associated with higher levels of learning (p. 61). Harasim (1990) suggests that distance learning online is an appropriate environment for

collaborative learning and group interaction; however, Capdeferro and Romero (2012) report that online student frustration occurs often when collaborative learning activities are used.

Specifically, students reported that it was difficult to organize groups, identify common goals, and determine equal commitment to an activity, as well as having issues with different levels of quality work produced (Capdeferro and Romero, 2012). As the literature concentrates on a common theme of student frustration, students were more frustrated with goal attainment issues than with technology, course design, or how a particular subject was taught on-line. Borges (2005) suggests that one student's frustration with either school or personal issues can negatively affect the entire group they are working in.

Garrison (2007) addresses four issues that are commonly found within online communities that have surfaced due to research on social, cognitive, and teaching presence online. These issues are related to the transformation from personal to purposeful relationships, cognitive presence from exploration to resolution, and distinctions between facilitation and direct instruction (Garrison, 2007). Student social presence is identified as open and effective communication, as well as group cohesion. If students find a common purpose or identify common goals, they are likely to work together. Social presence, however, may not be an issue if group work fails to be incorporated into a distance course, but neglecting to utilize group work could lower the chances that students will learn from each other (Garrison, 2007).

Ludwig-Hardman and Dunlap (2003) discuss the importance of learner support strategies within a distance learning course to prevent the many factors that lead to attrition within the course. Focusing on the interaction and support component of a distance course, the goal of this strategy is to prevent the "feelings of isolation, lack of self-direction and management, and eventual decrease in motivation levels" (Ludwig-Hardman and Dunlap, 2003, p.1). The authors

allude to the fact that most students find dissatisfaction within a distance course due to a lack of interaction, isolation, and instructional ineffectiveness (Ludwig-Hardman, 2003). The literature supports the use of a conceptual framework for learner support that includes the interrelated elements of identity, individualism, and interpersonal interaction (Ludwig-Hardman, 2003).

Vonderwell (2002) conducted a qualitative case study on the perspectives of asynchronous communication within distance learning courses. While exploring both positive strategies and barriers often found within distance learning that occur between students and faculty, methods of creating effective design of asynchronous communication are suggested. Similar to the current study, students found many of the tasks difficult due to factors that are not uncommon in distance courses. Even though the instructor committed to responding to emails within 48 hours, student participants were disappointed with the lack of immediate feedback which they may have received in a traditional classroom. The online class offered a non-graded help forum styled support area; however, it was reported that very few students used this tool (Vonderwell, 2002).

Initially, student's feedback about the use of discussion boards was positive because the students believed they could express themselves more openly than in a traditional classroom; however, students also reported that they were uncomfortable with the group activities and did not use e-mail as often to communicate with each other to complete assignments (Vonderwell, 2002).

Deimann and Bastiaens (2010) studied student motivation within distance courses based on volition, or the ability to stay task-focused and ward off distractions. As motivation typically accounts for the student's ability to get started, volition is the ability to keep them on task and face the challenge of conflicting responsibilities such (e.g., family, job) (Deimann and Bastiaens,

2010). As a result of these responsibilities, negative emotions can occur that will affect how a student feels about their education or the activities they need to complete. The study used a Volitional Persona Test (VPT) which was based upon the Volitional Components Inventory developed by Kuhl and Fuhrmann (1998), as well as the Academic Volitional Strategy Inventory developed by McCann and Turner (2004).

The results identified several benefits of monitoring one's volition such as: delay of gratification, dropout rates, and role conflicts (Deimann and Bastiaens, 2010). Gibson (1996), as stated in Deimann and Bastiaens (2010), suggests that several studies provide insight on a connection between low emotional support systems in distance learning that lead to decreased motivation. The importance of a student's ability to stay focused affects their success in a distance learning course. A distance learning student may not realize that factors beyond the virtual classroom may indeed affect their perception about the course.

The aforementioned literature and studies have identified a variety of research topics that have sought to support or discredit distance learning as a viable delivery of knowledge in higher education. As a majority of studies in regards to student dissatisfaction have focused on student emotions, this study seeks to identify components that are controlled by the course designer or facilitator.

Method

Study Design

Once a construct was developed to determine what factors may be relevant to research, a series of questions were developed to determine what the most common issues may be within a distance course (see Appendix A). These questions were arranged in specific categories which were identified by the institution's peer review process of distance learning development adapted

from the Quality Matters® rubric. QM® is a third party company that offers consultation and training for higher learning institutions that are developing distance courses. The training and evaluation is based on a series of standards that are compiled into a rubric. In order to help determine if there was any correlation between the evaluation standards and the survey results, the categories were kept consistent with the QM® standards. A rating scale survey was made available on the Internet to students to complete if they met the pre-requisite of having a poor experience within a distance courses.

Participants

Students at a local community college were given the opportunity to complete an on-line survey in regards to their dissatisfaction with a distance course. Participants were asked to complete the survey only if they had a poor experience course delivered online. The students who completed the survey, along with the class they evaluated and the program they participated in, were held anonymous. 29 students visited the survey site, however only 21 completed the entire survey. Out of the 21 participants, 9 had reported that they had only taken one distance course prior to completing the survey. Furthermore, 9 students reported that they had taken between 2 and 3 distance courses, while the remaining students had experience of 4 or more classes online.

Instrument

The instrument used to collect data was a rating scale survey created and administered online. A 4-point rating scale was used for 33 of the survey questions. Students were asked to rate each question by identifying if they “Strongly Agreed”, “Somewhat Agreed”, “Somewhat Disagreed”, or “Strongly Disagreed” with a statement. An additional question was asked to determine the students experience with distance learning by answering how many distance

classes they attended. Two additional questions were asked to determine how often the students participated within the distance course. The survey was sub-divided into specific categories that represent the various components of a typical distance course. Many of these categories were identified through the Quality Matters® rubric for distance learning evaluation. The categories were identified as: technology, expectations, instruction, design, interaction, communication, and scheduling.

The first set of questions was to determine how and if technology played a part in the student's dissatisfaction. Factors such as comfort, accessibility, and proper use of technology were questioned. Next, questions were asked to identify the course outcomes and what was expected of the student. The instruction component sought to identify what materials were used to foster learning and how the instructor conducted learning activities. The design component specifically looked at online navigational options and how the course was designed and administered within the learning management system.

The survey continued with an interaction component that identified common activities that allow students and faculty to collaborate. A communication component determined what communication methods were used and if effective communication occurred regularly. The final component was incorporated to determine the frequency at which students participated within the course on a weekly and hourly basis.

Procedure

This study was designed as a survey to gather information and perceptions of students who were at one point dissatisfied with an experience they had within a distance learning course held online. The survey was administered online through a web-based survey service. 10 faculty members at the institution were given the URL link to the survey and asked to post it

within their course announcements. The courses that the survey was offered in varied between traditional, hybrid, and online courses. Once the survey closed, data was collected through the survey site and relevant data was entered into Win Steps for assessment.

Results

Initial Results

The first survey question evaluated participants experience with distance learning by asking how many courses they have taken online prior to participating in the survey. The initial results of the survey reported 55% of students had only experienced one distance course, and their dissatisfaction was from their first attempt at the distance course. The number of students decreased as the amount of distance learning class experienced increased.

The next series of questions sought to provide information in regarding technology usage within the course. The survey results described a split between student comfort levels with technology. It was also found that a majority of students were confident that they had access to the tools to complete the work online. When evaluating the course facilitator's use of technology, 54% of participants agreed that the instructor lacked the knowledge to use the technology effectively. It was also reported that only 26% agreed that the technology used to administer the course was outdated.

Students were then asked to evaluate the expectations of the course. This section focused on course policies and procedures, as well as learning outcomes and subject matter. 59% of students reported that the course policies were unclear. 77% of students believed that the workload expected of them was adequate enough to keep them engaged, and more than half found value in the course in regards to providing them with subject matter relevant to their potential career.

The third component of the survey primarily focused on the instruction and how it was conducted. There were no significant findings in regards to specific course objectives, but only 30% believed that the course materials used for instruction were outdated. A majority of students also agreed that their instructor was knowledgeable in the subject matter and facilitated activities that adequately prepared them for assessments. Surprisingly, the participants were divided equally in regards to feedback on assignments or projects.

The survey assessed various questions in regards to course design and features within the learning management system used to facilitate the course. 61% of students reported that the interface of the course was adequately designed; however, there were no significant findings in regards to learning outcomes or objectives being identified within the course structure. The students were also divided equally on their opinion of easily locating instructions to get started in the course and navigating the interface to find assignments.

The next set of components focused on interaction and communication within the distance course. In regards to communication, overall the vast majority of students did not find any issues with communication or communicating tools used within the distance course. 70% of students were properly introduced to the course facilitator through a self-introduction reading assignment or discussion forum. 80% of students reported that they did participate in an introductory assignment during the first week of class. 85% of students recall the use of communication etiquette guidelines to clearly identify expectations within discussions and e-mails between students and instructor. 70% of the students also agreed that their facilitator interacted regularly within the course activities; however, the students were evenly divided in regards to their opinion on the overall lack of interaction among students within their class.

As reported by Capdeferro and Romero, student frustration occurred often when group activities were used in an online class (2012). The current study specifically asked students to rate their comfort level with any group activities they encountered while taking the course. 61% of students disagreed that they felt uncomfortable with group projects or activities within the course they were dissatisfied with, while no students reported “strongly agreed” on this subject.

The last question on the survey asked the student why they decided to take the online class and how often they participated in the weekly activities. The students were evenly split when asked if they took the course online because of their travel distance from home. Out of the 21 students who completed the survey, only 8 of them claimed they took the distance course because it was the only available section, whereas 14 students took the course because it was the only class section that fit into their schedule.

Students were also asked about their participation within the course and how much time on average they participated in activities or completed assignments. The majority of students reported to have spent 4 or more days a week visiting the course site. Nearly 43% of students reported that they spent 7 or more hours on classwork each week.

As noted earlier, the questions within the survey were negatively worded due to the construct of student dissatisfaction. When evaluating student feedback per category, it was found that interaction and communication were the least likely reasons for student dissatisfaction within an online course at this institution. In all survey categories, the majority of students in each category disagreed more often than agreed to the negative statements. Therefore, the summarized results of the survey categories report that most students who claimed to be dissatisfied with the online course actually rated the categories positively. Furthermore, this may lead one to believe that no one category contributes to student dissatisfaction more than another.

Specifically, the category for design was close to being split equally in student's perception of how the course design may have contributed to their poor experience.

The intent of this study was to possibly determine which category most likely contributed to student dissatisfaction within an online distance learning course. After initial results were reviewed, the measurement tool was evaluated for its effectiveness in determining these outcomes. The results of the overall study initially reported that the student participants were .49 more problematic than the questions asked within the survey. Student in fit and outfit were measured at 1.13 and 1.11 respectively. The initial measurement survey reported a student separation of 4 groups with a reliability of .95. Item measurement reported an in fit of 1.01 and an outfit of 1.11. Items were identified to be too closely related with a separation of 1.22 and a reliability of .60.

When item dimensionality was reviewed, the initial raw variance explained by measures was valued at 47.2%, which was 12.8% below expectation. When the items were closely compared, it was determined that questions 31 & 32 could not be directly linked to student dissatisfaction since these questions only collected data that determined why the student took the class. Next, student fit was evaluated and reported three extreme participants within the study. Students 107 and 118 disagreed with almost all questions, which possibly meant they had no issues within the course that they claimed they had been dissatisfied with. It was determined to revise the data based on the findings and possibly improve the overall results of the study. During the second data analysis, questions 31 & 32 were removed, along with participants 118 and 121.

Revised Results

A revision of data resulted in a measure of .62, which increased the student as being more problematic than the items. This also resulted in a minor decrease in student separation and reliability. Student separation decreased from 4.2 to 3.9, and student reliability decreased from .95 to .94. However, there was an increase in item separation from 1.2 to 1.36, and an increase in item reliability from .6 to .65 (Figure A). In an attempt to continue to improve reliability and separation for items, further investigation into item misfit order found that several items related to technology were problematic for this survey. It was then determined to remove the technology component of the survey which included the first 6 questions.

Initial Data	Measure	S-Infit	S-Outfit	S-Sep	S-Rel	I-Infit	I-Outfit	I-Sep	I-Rel
Initial Data	0.49	1.13	1.11	4.2	0.95	1.01	1.11	1.2	0.6
Rev 1	0.62	1.02	0.99	3.9	0.94	1.01	0.99	1.36	0.65
Rev 1	Removed questions 31 & 32 / removed students 18, 21 & 7								

Figure A

Revision 2 of the data provided yet another measure increase to .71. Due to the removing of the technology questions, student separation increased to 4.04, while student reliability was unaffected. This revision also yielded a slight increase in item separation and reliability, resulting in 1.67 and .74 respectively. Further review of item fit categorized course design questions to be very closely related to those of technology (Figure B). Therefore, the final results of this survey were presented with the removal of both technology and course design questions. It is the opinion of the researcher to further investigate these elements separate from the one used within this survey.

Initial Data	Measure	S-Infit	S-Outfit	S-Sep	S-Rel	I- Infit	I-Outfit	I-Sep	I-Rel
Initial Data	0.49	1.13	1.11	4.2	0.95	1.01	1.11	1.2	0.6
Rev 1	0.62	1.02	0.99	3.9	0.94	1.01	0.99	1.36	0.65
Rev 2	0.71	1.03	0.96	4.04	0.94	1.02	0.96	1.67	0.74
Rev 1	Removed questions 31 & 32 / removed students 18, 21 & 7								
Rev 2	Table 10.1 showed significance in items related to technology - removed questions 1-6								

Figure B

The final results of the survey included an overall measure that the students were .70 more problematic than the items within the survey. The final student in fit was reported as 1.05, with an outfit of .97. The student separation resulted in 3 different groups, with a reliability of 93%. The removal of 2 students and a series of questions found unrelated to student dissatisfaction were removed to result in an item separation of 1.91 and a reliability of .75. Due to the revised data, there was an overall increase of .71 for item separation and a .15 increase in item reliability for this survey. The final raw variance explained by these measures resulted in 55.3%.

Initial Data	Measure	S-Infit	S-Outfit	S-Sep	S-Rel	I- Infit	I-Outfit	I-Sep	I-Rel
Initial Data	0.49	1.13	1.11	4.2	0.95	1.01	1.11	1.2	0.6
Rev 1	0.62	1.02	0.99	3.9	0.94	1.01	0.99	1.36	0.65
Rev 2	0.71	1.03	0.96	4.04	0.94	1.02	0.96	1.67	0.74
Final	0.7	1.05	0.97	3.7	0.93	1.02	0.97	1.91	0.78
Rev 1	Removed questions 31 & 32 / removed students 18, 21 & 7								
Rev 2	Table 10.1 showed significance in items related to technology - removed questions 1-6								
Rev 3	Questions 17-21 regarding design removed due to close connection with technology								

Figure C

Once a variable map was generated from the final data, the results inferred that there were three item groups identified within this study. A personal category separates items into course elements that are typically unavoidable in a traditional class, however can be a vital component of dissatisfaction if not incorporated into a distance course. Specifically, this category involved the use of a self-introduction and etiquette guidelines for expected behavior

while contributing to online activities. The next section involved interaction and the various items that center on adequate and timely communication within a distance course. The final section involved subject specific expectations and goal oriented items. This section may be considered problematic due to the fact that these items are not specific to online learning, but may vary from subject to subject. This study did not account for the various subjects that were offered online.

Discussion

Implications

As noted earlier, the majority of students who completed the survey had only taken 1 distance learning class before completing the survey. The summary of the various categories also showed that even though the survey was for those who had a poor experience, the majority of students disagreed with the negative questions, thus having more satisfaction than dissatisfaction. Based on these survey results, it may be determined that the majority of students who completed this survey have not yet had enough online experience to fully determine that their experience was poor because there were no other courses to compare with. It may also be relevant that the questions were negatively written, which may have led to some confusion for participants.

Based on the initial results, technology was determined to have its own category for evaluation purposes. From the data collected, it is evident that the rapid growth of technology will always pose issues with education and the instructors who use it regularly. The results of the survey reported that the student participants were split in regards to technology usage within a distance course.

Limitations

As determined from the results of this survey, there are several limitations to consider. As noted, the negative statements may have been more difficult for students to understand when taking the survey. Future studies should attempt to avoid negative statements while continuing to use the rating scale provided in this study.

The limited convenience sample of 21 students severely affected the overall results of this survey. Future studies may wish to involve all students regardless if they were pleased or dissatisfied with their online experience. By restricting the survey to those with a poor experience limits the true perceptions of what dissatisfaction may be. Specifically, dissatisfaction may need to be clearly defined into a variety of emotions such as frustration or confusion. It also must be considered that a student may have a positive experience, yet want to contribute their opinions of items that may need improved.

The small sample size did not provide adequate data to provide accurate results. Increasing the sample may yield more desirable results. In addition, increasing the number of participants who have more experience with distance learning may improve findings.

Future Research

Looking ahead, distance learning will continue to be a primary focus in educational technology. As enrollment increases in distance learning courses, future studies will continue to seek out what improvements can be made to increase student satisfaction, raise completion rates, and promote online program success. As this particular study failed to provide a solid foundation for which direction educators must go to begin improving distance learning in regards to the categories selected for the survey, additional questions have been posed that may lead to a more enhanced collection of data.

Student emotions.

A suggestion for future research is to begin by identifying direct emotions that are linked to dissatisfaction such as frustration, isolation, confusion, attrition, or anxiety. Furthermore, student motivation and volition should be considered a factor in determining how a student feels about distance courses. It is highly recommended that a qualitative research approach be used to provide information about these subjects.

Online readiness.

Additional information should be collected to determine the student's perception of online readiness. Such a question may seek to determine if a student believed they were properly prepared to take such a course. Some students become frustrated with online learning because they believe they were not properly prepared or familiar with the technical skills they required to be successful (Swift, Wilson and Wayland, 1994). Furthermore, students may indeed fail to possess skills such as self-direction, self-discipline, ability to work independently, or the ability to manage time (Hancock, 1993). Information about student's work habits may help to determine what caused their frustration within a distance course.

Question clarification.

It is suggested that the various items within the survey be evaluated and possibly reworded for clarification purposes. It is highly recommended to avoid negative questions which may be hard for students to understand and answer properly. Questions regarding course, module, or lesson objectives should be carefully considered since many students have difficulty determining the difference between them. As it is necessary for educators to have set objectives to identify learning outcomes, students may not think of these outcomes as a reason for their dissatisfaction.

Interaction and collaboration.

The current survey asked students to rate their comfort within any group activities used within the course. The results of this survey imply that a majority of students did not believe that online collaboration within groups led to their dissatisfaction. However, the survey did not question if online groups were formed or utilized within the course. Therefore, the specific question may not have been relevant to the participants. Additional questions may specifically look at the various group interactions, frequency of interactions, and through which media the interaction took place in order to determine if online collaboration was a true enhancement or hindrance.

The interaction based questions within this survey only rated the student's perception of how that interaction or lack of may have led to the poor experience. Similar to the question about group activities, not enough information was gathered about the student's interaction within the course to make a sound argument for this category. Vonderwell quotes, "An increase in the amount of communication messages alone does not necessarily imply an increase in the quality of learning (2003, p.78). Additional survey questions may seek to determine if communication, interaction, and group activities were not only meaningful, but if they contribute to student frustration or anxiety and why.

Online experience.

As stated earlier, a majority of student participants reported that they had only experienced one distance course prior to taking the survey. As this is a significant issue to consider, increasing the sample size may provide more valid results. Possibly, the survey should be only administered to students who have taken a certain amount of distance courses so that they can be more confident in their perception that the course was in fact a disappointment. Without any other distance courses to compare with, students may simply believe they had a

poor experience because they didn't know what to expect. Deimann and Bastiaens (2010) state that distance education is radically different from seated classes because the student is responsible for their own learning. Peters (2002) suggests that students in an online environment are expected to be capable of self-management and the ability to organize, control and evaluate their own work. Currently there is no way to determine if students who had a poor experience were ready for online delivery.

Subject matter.

Subject matter and the topic of instruction is another factor that may contribute to a student's dissatisfaction. If a student was not interested in a particular course or topic, they may have been disappointed about the course, not because it was online, but because they had no interest in the topic. As a majority of students within this study claimed that the course subject matter was relevant to their specific program, future work should identify the courses for comparison. In addition, the student may be asked if their course facilitator was a full-time or adjunct professor. Power and Gould-Morven (2011) elaborates upon the idea that more full-time faculty are still teaching in the classroom, while more adjunct professors are given the task of facilitating online courses. As most full time faculty members are paid to be available beyond regular scheduled class time, this may have a profound impact on the interaction and communication components within a distance course. Part-time professors may or may not contribute additional hours to instruction if they are only paid on an hourly basis.

Technology.

Within the survey, it was determined to remove both technology and course design questions since they affected the overall reliability of the study. Based upon the results, technology may be classified in its own category since many online programs would fail to exist

if technology was not available. As current distance education courses center on technology, many of these educational media developments are used within the traditional classroom as well to promote more student-centered activity or the “flipping” of a classroom. As it was the intent of the researcher to determine if technology was one of the contributing factors to student dissatisfaction, additional questions may need to seek out what technology is not working well within a distance course.

Conclusion

Distance learning can be described as a paradox of issues that will continue to challenge the student, educator, and administrators at all levels of education. As found evident in the previous sections of this study, a distance learning program can increase enrollment by offering flexible scheduling options, yet if the student encounters a poor experience, the feeling of isolation may discourage the student from continuing on in the program. As retention becomes a vital part of an institution’s strategic planning and funding, distance learning can increase the opportunity for students to remain engaged in their education by using the various technology tools that they feel comfortable with. Furthermore, if a distance course is not meeting the student’s expectations, the online course very well could discourage the student.

Interaction is one of the core components of a successful distance learning course; however, students differ in their opinions of how much interaction is meaningful. One student may have a feeling of isolation due to a lack of adequate interaction, while another may become frustrated with the extreme amounts of communicating they must participate in to be successful. As distance learning is often considered a student-centered learning experience, an online course facilitator must consider the diversity of the students within the course and be cognizant of their opinions in regards to interaction. This also may affect how group activities succeed or fail.

Ideally, everyone in an online group would have the same motivations in regards to interaction and communication, but this is not always the case.

Distance learning has existed well before the age of technology, yet technology no doubt plays a vital part in the use of online learning as the most practical of distance education methods. As this study sought to determine if technology, or a lack of, resulted in a poor experience within a distance course, the findings were not clear enough to make a claim. As technology finds ways to improve the classroom experience, both traditional and virtual classrooms share the benefits. Due to the results, it is likely that the students within the study found no issues with technology online since many of them may use the same technology in their seated courses. The use of a learning management system, drop boxes, online videos, discussion boards, and computers are all commonly found in both traditional and online classes. It is likely the consistency between both forms of learning modes resulted in a student's perception of technology not affecting their overall experience.

As the survey used within this study offered students 33 items to rate in order to determine where their dissatisfaction may have occurred when taking an online course, it was evident that more information is required to make this determination. As the reviewed literature supports the use of qualitative research to grasp a true understanding of student's perceptions about a meaningful or poor online experience, future studies should follow this design by obtaining individuals feedback on their poor experiences. In addition, it must be acknowledged that student emotion plays a vital role in their interpretation of a successful or failed online experience. Student frustration and isolation are among the more common emotions associated with poor online learning experiences, yet the questions in this survey did not relate as closely as expected.

Motivation and volition must also be considered as an integral part of the distance learning system, and future survey questions may seek to obtain more usable information that could help interpret how and why a poor learning experience occurred. In summary, distance education will continue to be a primary focus of research by educators and administrators in order to identify ways to improve distance learning experiences. As distance learning continues to grow in popularity because of its flexibility for students and higher education institutions, so will the opportunities to continue building a better online program through constructive criticism, positive feedback and research into the field of educational media.

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Appendix A

Distance Learning Dissatisfaction Survey					
The purpose of this survey is to determine what are the most common factors that contribute to student dissatisfaction in a distance learning course. Please complete this survey ONLY if you have been dissatisfied with a distance learning course or components of a DL course that you					
Directions: Read each survey question carefully, and choose the best possible answer in the circles provided.					
<i>The following survey questions are to determine your prior experience within distance learning.</i>					
How many distance courses have you taken prior to the course you were dissatisfied with?		<input type="radio"/> 0 to	<input type="radio"/> 2 to	<input type="radio"/> 4 to	<input type="radio"/> 6+
<i>technology used within the distance learning course.</i>		1 Agree	2 Agree	3 Disagr	4 Disagr
1	I was uncomfortable with the technology used to facilitate the distance learning course.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
2	I had inadequate access to the technology to complete the work (computer, Internet, headphones, etc.)	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
3	The course facilitator lacked the knowledge to use technology properly.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
4	The course facilitator failed to use technology effectively	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
5	The technology used within the course was outdated.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
6	There was no technical support features or options available when I needed assistance with a technological issue.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
<i>The following survey questions are related to the expectations of the distance learning course.</i>		1 Agree	2 Agree	3 Disagr	4 Disagr
7	Course policies were not provided or were unclear at times	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
8	The workload for this course was more than expected.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
9	Workload was insufficient to keep me interested in this course.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
10	The course provided subject matter irrelevant to my career or program of study.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
11	The course or lesson objectives were often unclear.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
<i>The following survey questions are related to the instruction of the distance learning course.</i>		1 Agree	2 Agree	3 Disagr	4 Disagr
12	The course materials were outdated.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
13	The instruction failed to prepare me for the assessments (tests, quizzes, projects, etc.)	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
14	The instructor / facilitator lacked knowledge of the subject matter offered within this course.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
15	I received little or no feedback on assignments or projects.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
16	Grades for discussions, tests, and /or projects were not returned in a reasonable time frame.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4

<i>The following survey questions are related to the design of the distance learning course.</i>		1 Agree	2 Agree	3 Disagr	4 Disagr
17	It was difficult to locate instructions on how to get started at the beginning of the course.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
18	The course learning objectives or outcomes were unclear.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
19	The individual lesson objectives or outcomes were unclear.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
20	The course interface inside the Learning Management System (LMS) was poorly designed.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
21	The Learning Management System (LMS) was difficult to navigate and to locate assignments and for communication tools.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
<i>The following survey questions are related to the interaction within the distance learning course.</i>		1 Agree	2 Agree	3 Disagr	4 Disagr
22	The instructor / facilitator failed to provide a self-introduction to the class explaining their education/ qualifications.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
23	The course lacked an introductory assignment in which I was to introduce myself to the class.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
24	The instructor failed to provide a set of guidelines on proper etiquette for discussion boards, e-mail, etc.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
25	There was an overall lack of interaction among students within the class.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
26	The instructor / facilitator failed to interact within the course activities (discussions, wikis, etc.)	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
27	I was uncomfortable with the required group projects or activities within this course.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
<i>The following survey questions are related to the communication within the distance learning course.</i>		1 Agree	2 Agree	3 Disagr	4 Disagr
28	There was an insufficient amount of communication(s) (e-mails, forums, video chat, etc.)	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
29	The course lacked a designated area other than e-mail to post questions for help or feedback.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
30	The instructor / facilitator failed to respond to e-mails within an adequate time. (typically within 24 hours)	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
<i>The following survey questions are related to scheduling for the distance learning course.</i>		1 Agree	2 Agree	3 Disagr	4 Disagr
31	I elected to take the on-line course because I lived far away from the campus and it was financially feasible.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
32	I elected to take the on-line course because it was the only class section available.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
33	I elected to take the on-line course because it was the only class section that fit into my classwork schedule.	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2	<input type="radio"/> 3	<input type="radio"/> 4
34	How many days a week on average did you visit the course site?	<input type="radio"/> 1	<input type="radio"/> 2 to	<input type="radio"/> 4 to	<input type="radio"/> 6 to 7
35	How many hours a week on average did it take you to complete course assignments?	<input type="radio"/> 1 to	<input type="radio"/> 3 to	<input type="radio"/> 5 to	<input type="radio"/> 7 +