

Online Orientation and Leadership:
An Examination of Student Success and Locus of Control in an Online Environment

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ABSTRACT

Using a two-phased mixed method this researcher sought to investigate the relationship between student success and online orientation quiz scores as well as to describe the characteristics of successful students in an online learning environment. The findings of the quantitative phase indicated that the quiz scores differed between the successful versus non-successful students. Although the relationship was statistically significant it was considered weak due to the confidence interval. However, it did provide a basis for determining the qualitative sample. During the qualitative phase student interviews brought a deeper understanding to the concept of success, where locus of control emerged as the most important underlying motivator in the students' concept of achievement. The findings corroborated prior research indicating that students with internal locus of control have better success in their personal and professional lives, though not always academically. The current research was important because prior research on locus of control and online education was inadequate. The relationship between locus of control and leadership was also explored, though prior research was limited there as well. Recommendations for leadership in higher education or businesses to increase an awareness of locus of control during orientations may increase overall performance, satisfaction and retention of students and employees.

Keywords: online education, locus of control, leadership, orientation, online orientation, Mindsets, retention, persistence, motivation, resilience, mixed methods

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, especially my husband, Eddie. This dissertation would not have been possible without all of their continued support and encouragement.

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CHAPTER ONE

OVERVIEW

This two phased mixed method study investigated the relationship of student success and online orientation quiz scores through quantitative analysis. This analysis was followed by an exploration of the characteristics of successful online students through interviews and qualitative analysis. Statistical significance was determined between student quiz scores and student success, though the relationship was considered weak. The interviews provided much more in-depth understanding of the concept of student success. The most significant theme – locus of control – emerged as a major characteristic that appeared to contribute more consistently to the students' perceptions of their own success. Those with internal locus of control exhibited more persistence, internal motivation, and resilience, and attributed their success to their own efforts, as compared to those with external locus of control, who gave up easily when confronted with obstacles, and blamed others for their lack of success. This research finding was significant and added to the body of knowledge because prior research on locus of control in an online learning environment was limited.

This study was significant in the field of leadership as well, since prior research on leadership and locus of control was also limited. Research on leadership and locus of control found that locus of control seemed to be one of the main psychological variables that distinguished leaders from non-leaders, and leaders with internal locus of control were found to have higher self-efficacy, lower anxiety levels and were more optimistic than those with external locus of control (Popper et al., 2004). Also, managers with a

more internal management strategy seemed to work better in a more risk-taking dynamic environment, whereas a manager with a more external, conservative approach seemed better suited in a more rigid business structure (Miller et al., 1982). Interestingly, managers with more internally motivated characteristics were more likely to maintain their leadership style regardless of the environment, whereas managers with more external characteristics adjusted their management style on the transactional-transformational continuum, based on how they interpreted the organizational environment (Shivers-Blackwell, 2006).

Julian Rotter, who developed the concept of locus of control in his social learning theory, emphasized that human personality and behavior, including locus of control, could be changed through people's interaction with their environment or in how they think (Mearns, 2009). Results of this study pointed to increasing student success in an online environment through incorporating a locus of control survey and focused activities in an online orientation to help students become more aware of their unconscious locus of control, and those who were more "external" encouraged to think more "like an internal" in order to take control of their education. Including a locus of control survey in business orientations for managers might yield a better fit between managers and certain business environments. Incorporating a locus of control survey for employees, identifying those employees who are more internally or externally motivated, and adjusting management techniques and/or the environment appropriately could increase employee retention, performance and satisfaction as well as company profits.

Introduction

Online education has become increasingly popular because of the convenience of time and travel. Online enrollment in 2008 increased by 12 % as compared to the previous year; during this time there were almost four million students who were taking at least one online course according to a report by the Sloan Foundation (Allen & Seaman et al., 2008). A more recent study by Allen and Seaman (2011) claimed that even though the enrollments in online courses have slowed down lately, the total number of students enrolled in at least one online course exceeded 6 million. This number has increased to 7.1 million as reported by Allen and Seaman (2014), thus increasing the total number of students in higher education who were taking at least one online course to 33.5%. While the number of students taking online education courses has been steadily increasing, the number of students who do not complete their online programs is significantly higher when compared to those taking courses in more conventional delivery models (Lee & Choi, 2011; Hannum et al., 2008., Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003). Online student retention is one of the major challenges for administrators and educators of online programs (Clay et al., 2009; Diaz, 2002; Lee & Choi, 2011). High attrition may pose questions as to the effectiveness and quality of an institution's online programs (Poelhuber et al, 2008; Moore and Kearsley, 1996 as cited by Lee & Choi, 2011). Retention rates also affect institutions' profitability and ability to stay in business (Liu et al. 2009, Lee & Choi, 2011). If retention improved, administrators could make more effective and accurate future budget plans and avoid wasting resources (Diaz, 2002, Lee & Choi, 2011). Studies have shown the positive effect of voluntary orientations to online student success and retention, and many researchers have recommended that higher

education institutions make orientations mandatory before allowing students to enter their online courses (Bozarth, Chapman, & LaMonica, 2004; Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003).

Based on theoretical models of retention by Tinto (1975) and Kember (1995 as cited by Lee & Choi, 2011) it was determined that the leading cause for drop out in both face-to-face and online delivery models was “unsuccessful integration into the social life of the institution and/or unsatisfactory compatibility to the academic demands” (Lee & Choi, 2011, p. 594). Lee and Choi then proceeded to analyze existing studies on post-secondary online student retention from peer-reviewed journals that covered ten years of online education evolution, from 1999 to 2009. They identified 69 factors that contributed to students’ decisions to drop out of online programs and classified these factors into three main categories (a) Student factors, (b) Course/Program factors and (c) Environmental factors (2011). The authors found that previous research on factors such as student age, gender and marital status did not necessarily show any statistically significant effects on retention (Lee & Choi, 2011). Student retention is even more complex since the multiple factors identified are integrated with two significant and constantly changing variables – human behavior and time (Woodley et al. 2001; Holder 2007; Lee & Choi, 2011). These two variables are especially significant considering that most students enrolled in online courses are part-time students who have to integrate the responsibilities of work, home and their social life with the demands of their studies (Kember, 1995 as cited by Lee & Choi, 2011). Lee and Choi noted that only three out of 35 of the empirical research studies that were conducted used a mixed method to study this complex issue. The authors further supported the use of mixed methods by stating

that mixed method research is a powerful design because it utilizes the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative data allowing the researcher to “develop a complex picture of social phenomenon, including both outcomes and process” (Greene and Caracelli, 1997, Lee & Choi, 2011, p. 596). Out of the 52 strategies that the authors identified as instrumental in decreasing student drop out, one of the Institutional Support Strategies recommended was to implement an orientation (Clay et al. 2009, Frydeberg, 2007, Lee & Choi, 2011). An important factor supporting this recommendation is that students will often get discouraged and drop out of classes if they fail to complete their first online course (Pollhuber et al, 2008; Moore and Kearsley, 1996 as cited by Lee & Choi, 2011).

In this study the mandatory online student orientation (OSO) was a non-credit course that the students were required to complete. The orientation would generally take no more than a few hours to complete. The primary goals of the orientation were to introduce the students to the online environment, lesson plan format and technology that were used in online courses, as well as showing how to navigate through the online lessons and complete the assignments. The presentations explained the tools, requirements and support available for online students. The assignments offered an opportunity for students to practice using communication tools, such as threaded discussions, sending messages to their instructor, as well as taking an online quiz, where the multiple choice questions were based on content presented in the lesson presentations.

Based on recommendations from previous studies listed above the researcher identified the need for implementing orientations to improve online student success and retention, taking into account that student attrition in online education was and continues to be a major concern for administrators as well as educators. The researcher also

discovered a lack of mixed method approaches to review the complex issues of student retention, and therefore decided to fill the gap by pursuing this two-phased sequential mixed method study. In this study the researcher combined quantitative and qualitative research strategies by triangulating data sources in order to generate a greater understanding of a mandatory orientation and the relationship between the orientation and online student success. The first phase of this study used quantitative empirical inquiry based on mandatory online orientation data gathered from the participating secondary institution to see if there was a correlating relationship between the orientation quiz grades and student success. The second phase followed up with qualitative pragmatist interpretive data, where student interviews were analyzed and the themes found were integrated with the data analysis. By triangulating the data this study strengthened and reinforced the findings from both approaches while minimizing their limitations (Creswell, 2009). This combination of empirical and interpretive paradigms offered a deeper insight into the understanding of the effects of online orientation to student success. The results of this study also offered higher education administrators methods to improve online student success and subsequent retention.

Data generated by the research, although not generalizable because of using only one site and a small sample size, has shed some light on the important issue of whether success in a mandatory online orientation quiz is related to student academic success in an online environment.

The implications of this study may challenge current online education practices and have implications on a national level as the United States tries to improve its overall education attainment in comparison with other Organization for Economic Co-operation

and Development (OECD) countries through distance learning (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011).

In 2008 the United States ranked fifth out of 36 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) member and partner countries in the proportion of 25- to 64-year-olds with a postsecondary degree (OECD 2010, table A1.3a). Some have proposed that one way to improve Americans' educational attainment overall may be to bring a broader base of Americans into postsecondary education (Hebel 2010; Jaschik 2009). It has been suggested that the flexibility of distance education courses and programs may be particularly helpful in encouraging Americans with family and work obligations to pursue and complete postsecondary credentials (Kolowich 2010). (National Center for Education Statistics, p. 1)

This research was interdisciplinary because it integrated information from different disciplines – social psychology, education, history and philosophy - to create new meanings and understandings (Repko, 2008). By implementing a mandatory online orientation and improving student success and retention a transactional approach to online education may become transformational as all parties become involved in raising motivation and inspiring all participants to reach their fullest potential, higher education administrators, faculty, staff and students alike (Northouse, 2013).

The researcher's qualifications to conduct this research were based on extensive research conducted as part of an M.Ed. program, as a student in the Doctor of Arts

program, as well as many years of experience working in higher education as an assistant director, academic advisor and retention committee member.

Statement of Purpose/Research Goals

There has been an increase in demand for online courses and programs, but with the increase in online education there has also been a high online student attrition rate (Hannum et al., 2008, Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003). Studies have shown that orientations increase student success and retention and many researchers have suggested that orientations should be mandatory in higher education.

Research Questions

Phase I – Quantitative Research Question. Is there a relationship between online orientation quiz scores and online student success? A subset of the quantitative research question was: Is student success associated with higher quiz scores?

The quantitative research question was based on the following operational definitions:

- Online Education – all courses and programs in this study were offered strictly in 100% online, with no face-to-face contact.
- Orientation quiz scores – a quiz comprised of twenty multiple and true and false questions. The questions were based on a presentation in an online orientation that was a mini version of a real course, and covered topics such as tools, techniques and processes to help students be successful in the online environment and learn how to navigate the online environment. The passing score for the orientation was 60% or above out of 100%.
- Student success – students were considered successful when they had retention and program success. Retention was defined as students who were active in their

program for two consecutive quarters, where a quarter was three months long, and who had taken at least three courses during that time. Program success was based on a 2.0 or above CGPA for undergraduates, and a 3.0 or above for master's degree students.

Phase II – Qualitative Research Question. What personal characteristics seemed to help online students be successful in an online learning environment?

Research Site

The site for the research was a small New England college, which was initially a traditional day program on a brick and mortar campus. It evolved into two divisions, the on-campus and the 100% online. The on-campus division offered mostly face-to-face undergraduate programs and a few masters programs, which were a mix of face-to-face and online courses. The 100% online division was recently developed to meet the needs of today's students and offered NEASC approved undergraduate and graduate degrees. The 100% online section recently rolled out three degree programs - Associate, Bachelor and Masters - first as a pilot, which was open to employees only, and then to the public shortly afterward. At the time of collecting data for this study the students from the on-campus and the 100% online divisions are kept strictly apart; students from one division were not allowed to take courses in the other, unless they completely switched over. This study focused only on the 100% online division using data from the three degree programs and completion of the mandatory 100% online orientation, which all students were required to take before they were able to log into their online courses.

Research Methodology and Data Analysis: An Overview

This section provides an overview of the research methodology and data analysis of this two-phased sequential mixed method design. A more thorough discussion will be presented in detail in Chapter III Research Methodology below.)

The purpose of this two phased sequential mixed method study was to better understand the relationship between online orientation quiz and the academic success of online students, where student success was defined as GPA (3.0 for graduate students and 2.0 for undergraduate students), and retention (enrollment of a student in two consecutive 12-week quarters from the time they started in three or more courses in order to be considered active and successfully retained). The students whose Online Student Orientation quiz scores were 60 or above were considered to have quiz success (QS), those whose quiz scores were below 60 were considered to have no quiz success (NQS).

The first phase was a quantitative analysis of secondary institutional data collected on undergraduate and graduate students who applied to online programs at the participating higher education institution and completed the Online Student Orientation (OSO) between June 2012 and October 2012. The analysis of the quantitative phase included Student t-test analysis using the quiz scores as dependent variables and student success as independent variables. The students were then divided into four categories – student success (in retention and the program) and success in the orientation quiz (SS/QS), student success but no quiz success (SS/NQS), no student success but quiz success (NSS/QS) and finally no student success and no quiz success (NSS/NQS).

The second phase of the sequential research study involved collecting qualitative data through interviewing randomly selected participants, one from each of the four

categories, using Seidman's time modified in-depth phenomenological interview method. The purpose behind this interview technique was that in order to understand human behavior, the behavior needed to be put into context. The three phase interview series provided an opportunity for participants to first establish the context within which they had their online experience, second to reconstruct the details of this experience and finally to reflect on the meaning of it (Seidman, 2006). The interview questions focused on the students' background, including open ended questions related to the students' mandatory online orientation, online program experiences, and reflections on the overall online experience and its meaning. The analysis of the qualitative data provided a rich context, including patterns and themes, from which to better understand the quantitative data and the relationship of the online orientation quiz score and student success.

Assumptions of the Mixed Method

Mixed method research provided an opportunity to triangulate data, strengthening and further exploring the quantitative research results (Creswell, 2009). One of the challenges of a mixed sequential research method was the time it took to collect the data in sequential order, which was why the study was limited to the June – October starts.

Limitations of the Study

Some of the limitations that may affect the study results were that the researcher worked as an Academic Advisor and was one of the Online Student Orientation (OSO) instructors for many of the students in this study. The results may have been skewed because the first group of students who started in the 100 % online programs in June consisted of employees who received the first quarter for free as an incentive to be in the pilot program. The OSO quiz grade used in this study reflected the final quiz grade;

some students requested to retake the quiz in order to improve their grades. The small student data was a convenience sample taken from only one site representing three degree programs - Associate, Bachelor and Masters - and encompassed a limited number of program start dates, therefore the data was not necessarily representative of the larger online student population and the results may not be generalizable.

Definition of Key Terms

Asynchronous

Asynchronous communication is communication that does not take place at the same time.

Constructivist Philosophy

The contemporary constructivist philosophy where “students are...considered a source of knowledge” (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 14), and “teaching responds to and supports learning” (2012, p. 20).

Distance Education

Distance education is where teaching and learning occur in different places and requires communicating through the means of technologies and “special institutional organization” (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 2). It does not necessarily mean only online courses, and can include other technology that allows sharing of information (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 24).

Leadership – Quantum

Quantum leadership is a leadership paradigm that expands the notion of leadership beyond a typical “heroic leader” image with a central control tendency, such as transformational or distributed, to a more “free control” leadership (Lazaridou, 2008,

p. 2). It is a complementary approach to leadership that is based on science, specifically “chaos theory and complexity science” and more appropriate for situations that are not very stable or predictable (p. 6). Some of the principles of quantum leadership are that reality is co-created by all of the entities through their relationship and interaction with each other, where leadership can be assumed by any one of the entities as needed, therefore allowing each of the entities the potential to be “catalytic leaders” (p. 7). The paradigm requires trust, intuitive sense, creativity and an “ethos of cooperation and integration” (p. 7). Quantum thinking is a synergetic combination of logical and associative thinking, with inspirational “Aha!” moments and in a group this method may produce a “wave-like” quality, as in an energy field (p. 8).

Leadership - Transactional and Transformational

Leadership can be divided into two basic types, transactional and transforming; most leader follower relations are transactional (Burns, 1978). Transactional leadership is based on the exchange of one thing for another (Bass, 2008), but a transforming leader goes beyond this exchange and seeks to provide a relationship with the follower that converts the followers into leaders and has the potential of converting the leaders into “moral agents” (Burns, 1978, p. 4). In this study the initial quantitative phase of the research was more transactional in nature, where the leaders, or instructors, of the online orientation (OSO) rewarded student efforts and performance with grades on two of the assignments, and the third assignment, a multiple choice quiz, was graded by the system. The learning environment was also transactional in that the course content and syllabi were developed with no student input (Hood et al., 2009). The second phase of this study provided a more transforming or as Bass (2008) would call it, transformational

mechanism of leadership as the researcher integrated the quantitative analysis with the qualitative feedback from student interviews in order to “raise the level of human conduct and ethical aspiration of both the leader and led, and thus it has a transforming effect on both” the leader-researcher and the led-students (Burns, 1978, p. 20, Hood et al., 2009).

Locus of Control

The outcomes that a person expects based on their behavior or personal characteristics (internal) versus the outcome based on the function of chance, luck or fate, or the control of others in power, or an unpredictable event (external) (Rotter, 1990).

Mindsets

A scientifically tested implicit theory on how student characteristics have the potential to change, thus potentially increasing students’ resilience when confronted with social or academic obstacles and adversities. With a proper mindset students can, with time and effort, learn new strategies and be better prepared for challenges in their academic and social life (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Motivation

Motivation is a requirement for success and completion of an online orientation and courses. Along with time and self-pacing, another primary contributor to student attrition is lack of motivation (Kim, 2004; Hannum et al, 2008). Regardless of the medium used in distance education, such as print, or moving pictures, motivation is “a more critical variable” (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 75).

Online

Learning where the Internet is the sole medium of instruction (Boston, et al. 2011).

Online Education

Courses where the content is delivered mostly (80+ %) or completely online and do not typically have face-to-face meetings are considered online (Allen & Seaman, 2011). All of the education programs in this study were offered strictly 100% online with no face-to-face contact.

Orientation

Orientation programs were traditionally developed to help students transition into college. With the increase in distance education online orientations can also “facilitate academic and social interactions, increase student involvement, enhance sense of belonging to a virtual learning community, and help retention” (Robinson, Burns & Gray, 1996 p. 7). In order for an orientation to be effective students must be introduced to the methods, technology and communication tools of the online courses. The orientation must also allow for synchronous and/or asynchronous interaction to foster social interaction and a sense of a virtual learning community, and provide information on how to reach “live” assistance when necessary. When students feel connected to other students this creates a sense of belonging that promotes the likelihood of students’ persistence to complete their programs (Scagnoli, 2001). “A good orientation can make use of both online and face-to-face methods to create a successful starting point for the new students” (Scagnoli, 2001, p. 25). For purposes of this study the online student orientation (OSO) was a non-credit course requiring generally no more than a few hours to complete. The primary goal was to introduce the students to the platform, lesson plan format, and technology that are used in the online courses, as well as to show how to navigate through the online lessons and the assignments. The presentations explained the

tools, requirements and support available for online students. The assignments offered an opportunity for students to practice using communications tools with their peers, such as threaded discussions and sending messages to their instructor, as well as taking an online quiz, where the multiple choice questions were based on the content presented in the lesson presentations.

Persistence

Persistence and completion rates describe students who eventually complete their degree, though not necessarily at the institution where they originally started (Tinto, 2012, p. 127). According to Adelman (1998) as cited by Tinto, although students enroll in a degree program many do not persist beyond their first six credits (Tinto, 2012, p. 129). Another requirement to complete and be successful in the online orientation and online courses is persistence. Persistence can be predicted based on student academic (e.g. academic) and social (e.g. personal interaction) integration (Tinto, 1997, as cited by Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003). To be successful in the orientation requires motivation and persistence.

Program Success

Program Success in this study was defined as an undergraduate GPA of 2.0 or above was considered a program success, for a graduate student a GPA of 3.0 or above was considered a program success.

Retention

Retention and graduation rates describe students who remain in the same institution where they started as freshman and receive their degree (Tinto, 2012, p. 128). Increased part-time student enrollment has expanded the US Department of Education's

definition of full-time continuous enrollment from the normal two-year and four-year institutional graduation rates to three and six years respectively (Tinto, 2012, p. 128).

In this study students who are not registered for classes in consecutive semesters will not be considered as successfully retained (Bocchi et al., 2004; Morgan & Tam, 1999; Pierrakeas et al., 2004; Xenos et al. 2002.) According to Boston, Ice and Burgess (2011) students who dis-enroll after taking two online courses may have initially attempted the online courses as “more exploratory than in the traditional university” and suggest redefining retention to include “non-exploratory students” and those who transfer in from other universities (p. 5). For the purposes of this study, if a student was enrolled in two consecutive 12-week quarters from the time they started they were considered active and successfully retained.

Student Success

Student success in this study was defined as retention and program success. Retention success was defined as being an active student in the online program for two consecutive quarters and taking at least 3 courses during that time. Program success was defined as having an undergraduate cumulative grade point average (CGPA) of 2.0 or a master’s degree student having a CGPA of 3.0 or above. Quiz success (QS) was defined as Online Student Orientation Quiz scores of 60 or above, subsequently No Quiz Success (NQS) was defined as below 60.

Synchronous

Synchronous communication is communication that occurs at the same time.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

An Historical Overview

In order to better understand online education, it is useful to examine its historical evolution. Internet and Web-based education is the fifth generation of distance education. The first four generations from which online internet and web-based education evolved were Correspondence study, Broadcast Radio and Television, Open Universities and Teleconferencing (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

First Generation: Correspondence Study

Distance education began in the United States with correspondence courses that were delivered by mail in the early 1880's through the "invention of a new technology – cheap and reliable postal services, resulting largely from the spread of the railway networks" (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 24). There were over 200 correspondence schools between 1890's and 1930's, which provided education to those who would not otherwise have had access to education, especially women. Moore & Kearsley (2012) described the following:

According to one of the first histories of correspondence teaching (Bittner & Mallory, 1933), by the year 1930, 39 American universities offered correspondence teaching; quoting Dorothy Canfield Fisher, they report that there were "about two million students enrolled in all the colleges, universities and professional schools in the United States" (Bittner & Mallory, p. 31). (p. 26).

Starting in 1941 correspondence education also became very popular in the Armed Forces. According to Watkins as stated by Moore and Kearsley (2012), “more than 7 million members of the armed services took high school courses and approximately 261,222 enrolled in college courses before USAFI [United States Armed Forces Institute] closed in 1974.” (p. 28). The USAF expanded on the previous correspondence courses by incorporating new technologies into the correspondence curriculum, such as computerized grading, “24-hour phone-in counseling service, and the use of tutorial groups” (p. 28).

Second Generation: Broadcast Radio and Television

Radio as an educational technology medium for higher education as well as K-12 education was introduced in the United States in 1921 and continued through 1930, but it received only “lukewarm interest” and “did not live up to expectations” (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 29). Radio broadcasting as an education service was more successful in other countries, especially Latin America, where it was a public service, and not subject to commercial pressures like in the United States (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

Educational television broadcasting development started as early as 1934 and by 1939, as stated by Unwin and McAleese, there were already 400 educational programs offered by State University of Iowa. After World War II, when more television channels became available, many commercial and noncommercial channels offered educational television. Eventually the commercial channels stopped these public services, but the noncommercial channels were more successful than the educational radio broadcasts because of

hundreds of millions of dollars in grants contributed by the Ford Foundation. In 1962 the construction of educational television stations was federally funded, and by 1967 the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) was set up. According to Unwin and McAleese, as stated by Moore and Kearsley (2012), one of the early educational exchange programs between six states was introduced in 1961 when transmitters aboard DC-6 airplanes were used for the broadcasting, which was a prelude to transmission of educational programs by satellite. According to the Corporation for Public Broadcasting “By the end of the 1970s, there were about 150 educational TV stations broadcasting instructional TV programs ranging from K-12 through postsecondary education throughout the country” (p. 30).

Cable television started as early as 1952 and every cable company was required in 1972 by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to provide an educational channel which was referred to as “telecourses” (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 31). “By the mid 1980’s there were around 200 college-level telecourses produced by universities, community colleges, private producers, and public and commercial broadcasting stations” (p. 31).

Third Generation: AIM and Open Universities

In the late 1960’s and early 1970’s innovative methods of organizing education brought critical change to distance education. Articulated Instructional Media Project (AIM) was an experiment by Charles Wedemeyer, which was a total systems approach, and combined a variety of communication technologies to provide high-quality low-cost education to students who were not located on campus. According to Wedemeyer and Najem, as stated by Moore and Kearsley

(2012), the multimedia approach to distance education provided people with different learning styles multiple ways to learn and interact. Learners were expected to be self-directed with some human facilitation. This approach also brought about the invention of a course design team, where the traditional task of one instructor was improved by dividing the tasks among specialists such as “instructional designers, technology experts and content experts” (p. 32).

The AIM experiment methods and achievements influenced the British government when they set up the UK Open University and as Wedemeyer later claimed “Almost an entire educational geography of an open educational system was identified in the AIM experiment” (Moore and Kearsley, 2012, p. 33). The mission of the UK Open University, like the first generation correspondence study, was to provide an open opportunity to all adults ages 18 and older who were not able to attend a conventional higher education institution – 70 percent were part-time students who were employed. There were no prerequisites for admission and the tuition costs were modest (about \$7,500 for a Baccalaureate degree in 2010). The UK Open University has served as a model for many other countries and “mega-universities” (p. 33). The United States is one of the few countries that does not have a national open university system due in part because of the “distributed political control of higher education...with each state having to deal with its own higher education establishments” (p. 34). In some cases consortiums have taken on the role of open universities in other countries.

Fourth Generation: Teleconferencing

In the 1980's real time group interaction became possible because of audio and video teleconferencing technologies, which allowed interaction in real time in different locations. This was made possible through the technology of satellite communication, which started in 1965 with the launch of the Early Bird satellite, followed by the world's first educational satellite, which was launched in 1974 (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 36). According to Moore the UK Open University propelled "an explosion of interest in distance education in the rest of the world", whereas in the United States it was the satellite technology that caused the great expansion of distance education (p. 37). Satellite technology was able to emerge because of consortiums, where a "voluntary association of independent institutions" shared the costs and the work and results of "designing, delivering, and teaching educational courses" (p. 37). This brought a new form of "market-driven distance education" in the 1980's, where as a group members of a consortium could offer a broader selection of courses than any one single institution, as well as compete against each other, bringing about a situation where "the needs of the customers (students, employees, and companies) began to dictate which courses were marketable" to teach (p. 38). In the late 1980's and 1990's satellite technologies expanded into Business TV, where training for corporations and continuing education was accomplished through large distance education organizations outside of higher education. In 1990's K-12 schools, as well as universities and business TV systems were able to provide two-way video

conferencing as they become more available and less costly with the development of fiber optic cables (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

Fifth Generation: Online Education

Just like the previous generations of technology, i.e. correspondence, radio and television, and teleconferencing, the internet expanded the horizons of distance education exponentially and brought with it virtual classes, where different communication technologies merged into one learning environment, and new organizational structures in education (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

In the 1960s and 1970s the huge mainframes computers were developed, which provided the idea for an early networking form of instruction. In 1969 the basis of what later evolved into the internet was formed when the US Department of Defense –Advanced Research Project Agency (ARPA) – linked computers from the armed forces, universities and defense contractors, forming a network. In 1980 the internet started to become part of systems at universities and its use expanded so that by 1991 what started out “with the first link between CUNY [City University of New York] and Yale” expanded to “almost 500 organizations and 3,000 nodes (all educational institutions)” (Inglis, Ling & Joosten, 1999 as cited by Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 41). Computer based instruction really took off with the invention of the Intel microprocessor (1971) and personal computers (1975). According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, by 1989 “15 percent of all households in the United States had a personal computer and nearly half of all children had access to computers at home or in school” (p. 41).

The World Wide Web expanded the use of computer networking and distance education even more, allowing access to information not only at a distance, but with different computers and operating systems. The first internet web browser, Mosaic, appeared in 1993 and opened up the field of distance education even more. According to Maddux what started out as an estimated 50 pages on the web in 1992 expanded to at least one billion by year 2000, and by 2010, according to Miniwatts Marketing Group, 77 percent of all Americans had access to the internet (Moore & Kearsley, 2012). In the 1990s universities started offering web based programs and according to their website, Jones International University claimed to be “the first fully online, accredited university” (p. 42). The internet technology also brought with it institutions, which only offered distance education courses, while other institutions have added distance education to what once was on campus class based teaching.

Online Education

While the number of students taking online education courses has grown exponentially over the past several years, so has the number of students who do not complete their online programs. The dropout rate of students who do not complete their online courses range from 20-50% (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003) , but have been reported as high as 50-70% (Hannum et al., 2008) . These high attrition rates require higher education institutions to focus on what they can do to retain the students once they have been accepted into an online program. Some of the challenges of online student retention come from the students’ sense of isolation and frustration because of a lack of self-directed skills. These skills include self-discipline, ability to work alone, time

management, motivation and persistence among others (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003). In order to be successful in the online environment students need a certain degree of self-directedness, motivation and persistence.

Online education for the K-12 students, many of whom continue on into higher education, has also increased significantly. According to Moore and Kearsley (2012), more than one million K-12 students took at least one online course in 2007-2008, and out of all of the public schools, 70 percent had at least one student enrolled in an online course. According to the Sloan Consortium 2010 report by Allen and Seaman, as stated by Moore and Kearsley (2012), out of the 4 million students who took at least one online course in 2008-2009, 89 percent took them at institutions where online enrollment was 1,000 or more, and 50 percent took them at institutions with online enrollments of 5,000 or more. Even with web-based learning and resources becoming more available to everyone through initiatives such as Multimedia Educational Resource for Learning and Online Teaching (MERLOT), Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Open Courseware project, Open Learning Initiative at Carnegie Mellon University and Connexions project at Rice University, according to Sally M. Johnstone, founding director of WICHE Cooperative for Educational Technologies (WCET) “too many students begin college or university studies with inadequate preparation” (pp. 68, 70).

Online Orientation

An orientation is the first step in a higher education institution to create a sense of community (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003). One of the factors that helps predict student success in successful programs is a student orientation to online learning (Abel, 2005, as cited by Hannum et al., 2008). Studies have shown the positive effect of

orientations to online student success and retention and many researchers have recommended that higher education institutions make orientations mandatory before allowing students to enter their online courses (Bozarth et al., 2004; Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003) . In order to be effective an online orientation should provide students with an experience that approximates an actual online course, an explanation on how to navigate the online environment, as well as tips and technical requirements necessary to succeed (Krauth & Carbajal, 1999, as cited by Ludwig-Harman & Dunlap, 2003). Along with these measures the Online Student Orientation provides additional information on how to access online resources for student information as well as the online library, time requirement expectations and how to access their student support/academic advisors as well as other institutional resources. In order to assess student understanding and retention of the content presented, one of the assignments that is part of the OSO is completing a multiple choice quiz based on the facts presented in the online presentations.

Many researchers have studied whether an orientation should or should not be mandatory (Bozarth et al., 2004; Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003). One study suggested that orientations be made mandatory. In their study the researchers found that even though there was a clear need for a student preparation program as a pre-requisite for taking online courses, and students admitted that they needed more preparation before embarking into the online world of education, few students indicated that they would voluntarily take a one credit hour orientation course, even if it did not cost them anything (Bozarth et al, 2004).

This study took the suggestions of Bozarth et al. (2004) and others to the next level and used student data from a non-credit mandatory orientation experience to examine if there was a relationship between the online orientation quiz grades and student success.

Online Student Orientation (OSO) and Quiz

The purpose of the Online Student Orientation program utilized in this study was a mini online course which provided online students an opportunity to comprehend and apply the tools and techniques of the learning management system (LMS) in order to be successful in their subsequent online courses. The course objectives listed on the syllabus included creating a learning community, applying knowledge of procedures, policies and resources available in online courses, and communicating effectively with instructor and peers. The students were expected to view several presentations as well as complete three assignments. The assignments included a writing assignment, where the students were asked to communicate with their instructor using multiple communication tools. The discussion thread was another assignment, where students participated in a threaded discussion, answering a primary question and responding to peers. The last assignment was a 20 question multiple choice quiz, where the questions were based on the content the students observed during the presentations.

Student Success

Student success depends on many factors. “Learning is a function of the activity, context, and culture in which it occurs – i.e., it is situated” (Wenger, 1998, as cited by Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003). Self-direction is one of the main factors that help online learners be successful. Interaction with advisors helps students feel connected and

scaffolds self-directedness (Ludwig-Hardmann & Dunlap, 2003). The Online Orientation instructors were also academic advisors, who interacted with students to help foster student self-directedness, motivation and persistence. Student success comes from the students' "ability to learn and improve over time" (Tinto, 2012, p. 117). This study incorporated the "student voices" through the interviews as a way of exploring the "deeper roots of student success" (Tinto, 2012, p. ix).

Retention

Student success is related to student retention according to Tinto (2012). Since "Student success does not arise by chance" (p. 9), what can an institution do to provide the best environment to help students succeed and ultimately graduate? In his book, *Completing College: Rethinking Institutional Action*, Tinto offered many insights into understanding student retention and attrition, and made suggestions on what institutions can do to improve student success and retention (2012). Tinto expressed his concern, based on data from the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (2006), stating that the United States is not keeping up with other nations in producing college graduates. Even though access to undergraduate studies has increased dramatically, from 9 million students in 1980, to almost 20 million in 2011 and the United States has one of the highest postsecondary participation rates in the world, the increase in the number of students who completed their Bachelor degrees is questionable (Bound, Lovenheim, and Turner, 2009; Radford, Berkner, Wheelless, and Shepherd, 2010; Supiano, 2011 as cited in Tinto, 2012, p. 2). Though there are many complex reasons for this disparity, one of the most pressing problems according to Tinto was that of "academic underpreparedness" (p. 118). Even though there are limits to what institutions can do to influence students'

decisions to take responsibility for their own education and success, and influence whether they decide to stay, leave or transfer, Tinto (2012) suggested the following framework that provides guidelines within an institutions control to enhance student retention:

1. Establish clear, concise and high expectations
2. Provide academic, social and, when applicable, financial support, with a focus specifically on the classroom
3. Assess performance and provide frequent feedback
4. Engage students academically and socially with faculty, staff and peers.

He pointed out that only a quarter of the all college students are enrolled full time in a residential college, many do not live on campus and most attend college only part-time, which is why the classroom is the most important college experience, where students meet their peers and faculty and “engage in formal learning activities” (p. 114). “Their success in college is built upon their success in the classroom” (p. 6). Considering that the highest rate of attrition, 38%, occurs within a student’s first year of college, whether it is a private or a public institution, the investment in the first year experience will provide the “greatest gains in retention and in turn the largest returns to the institution” (p. 97). Tinto stressed “effective institutions are intentional, structured and proactive in their pursuit of student success” (p. 103) and instead of waiting for students to request services, the institution requires new students to partake in a freshman seminar experience, as part of their first year in college. Like a required freshman seminar, which was one of Tinto’s suggestions, the 100% online orientation used in this study was a

mandatory requirement for all incoming online students, regardless of whether they were pursuing a graduate or undergraduate degree.

According to Tinto (2012) the strength of our multifaceted and diverse higher education system makes generalizations about retention and graduation rates difficult. Considering the facts above and that orientation activities, for one, typically include exposure to expectations, access to academic support, feedback and assessment as well as interaction with peers and the advisor/instructor, the mandatory online orientation used in this study provided an environment that contained all four of Tinto's conditions necessary to improve student success and retention. Completing the mini online orientation course also gave the students a sense of success and momentum to "propel them forward to program and degree completion" (Tinto, 2012, p. 124).

Locus of Control

Locus of control was a concept that came out of the Social Learning Theory developed by Julian B. Rotter. The concept described the connection people perceived between their actions and the reward, or reinforcement from the event. When the perception was interpreted as not entirely based upon the person's actions alone, but more of a result of "luck, chance or fate" the belief was labeled external control, whereas when a person believed that the result of an event was based on his or her own behavior, it was labeled internal (Rotter, 1966, p. 1). To determine a person's generalized expectations of events, or beliefs of the nature of the world, and whether their center or "locus" of control was more internal or external Rotter developed a 23 item forced-choice test with six additional questions that could be added as fillers, called the I-E scale (Rotter, 1966). The instrument was intended to be used as a "broad gauge instrument... to allow for low

degree of prediction of behavior across a wide range of potential situations” (Rotter, 1975, p. 62). The concept, which dealt with situational parameters and fairly consistent characteristics of the subjects, was used to find a variable that might help predict how reinforcements changed behaviors (Rotter, 1975). By 1990 there were at least 4,700 citations of his original research. Rotter mentioned that he was puzzled when some of the social scientists who used the I-E test “regarded these individual differences as fixed traits, or types”, and also mentioned that though there may be a “gradient of generalization from one situation to another” behavior was different in different situations (Rotter, 1990, p. 491).

Several research articles discussed the use of locus of control as an effective predictor of academic success. Pre-college ACT scores and locus of control were found to be significant predictors of first year college students as measured by their cumulative GPA at the end of their first year of college. The freshmen with internal locus of control, (i.e. internals), had a statistically significant higher GPA than the freshmen who had a more external locus of control (i.e. externals). Higher freshman grades and success in college in turn contributed to a higher retention rate into the sophomore year. Based on these results it was suggested that it may be the externals who are more at risk of not continuing college, and that intervention programs, such as tutorials and academic support should target them more. This would be especially important as courses got harder, and externals, who tended to attribute failure to sources outside of themselves, such as bad luck, difficult tests, or other people, might be more inclined to give up and not persist (Gifford et al., 2006).

Researchers Kirkpatrick et al. (2008) also found correlations between basic beliefs, causality and student success when analyzing the results of a general psychology course. In their study the difference between the grades of the internals vs. externals was significant; students who identified themselves as internals received almost a whole grade higher on their course performance than those who identified themselves as externals. Since locus of control seemed to serve as a “bridge between academic and student development concerns” (p. 486) the concept was introduced in an advanced psychology course, to demonstrate how it “is easily accessible, easily understood with minimal technical preparations, easily measured using brief inventories, and potentially changeable via brief, inexpensive interventions that can be completed within a quarter or semester” (p. 487). In order to better facilitate future understanding of causality and influence student character development, personal belief and taking responsibility for their actions two research articles, *Locus of Control and Incidental Learning: An Application to College Student Success*, (Dollinger, 2000) and *Improving the Performance of Failing Students by Overcoming Their Self-Serving Attributional Biases* (Noel et al., 1987) were added to the curricular as discussion material for ways in which students could better control their own academic destiny.

The article by Dollinger (2000), referred to above, described how researchers implemented a short 6 item questionnaire, loosely based on the I-E scale to determine students’ internal or external locus of control, as well as a short “Trivia” test about course and program information. The “internals surpass externals on incidentally acquired and seemingly-trivial knowledge” which was relevant to student success and resulted in higher course grades (p. 4). Humorous conversations issued from these activities, and

were followed up by instructors who suggested that students with external tendencies should behave “like an internal”, and become “an active agent” in their own education as well as paying attention to details, in order to succeed in college (p.4).

In a broad review on locus of control and academic achievement, locus of control was described as a “relatively enduring dispositional characteristic, although certainly modifiable through experience” (Findley & Cooper, 1983, p. 419) and internal locus of control was found to be positively related to academic achievement. In light of these findings and other research there may be reasons to believe that exposing externals to associating college performance with factors that they can control, such as effort, motivation and self-control may improve academic success (Dweck, 1975, Findley & Cooper, 1983, p. 425, Noel, 1987).

Locus of Control and Online Education

It appeared that research on online education and locus of control was somewhat limited, so the research supporting this study was expanded to include several other terms, such as distance education, as well as different forms of the I-E scale (Rotter 1966), such as Academic Locus of Control. The other terms that were used to replace online education, such as distance education, may have included many methods of delivery, such as face to face, electronic correspondence, conferencing, etc., and not just 100% online communication.

The students of a distance education introductory management course were asked to take a locus of control survey as part of a study on student satisfaction with the new flexible learning platform. Locus of control had a direct effect on course satisfaction; those with internal locus of control had higher rates of course satisfaction, whereas those

who had external locus of control were not as satisfied and may have blamed their learning difficulties on their learning environment and not on the fact that they may not have done enough independent studying or been more effective in using available learning materials (Drennan, 2005).

In an effort to help predict why the dropout rate of distance education students was so high, Gonzaga University had distance education students take a locus of control survey as part of their orientation before classes started. Based on the locus of control variable approximately 80% of the dropouts were predicted accurately. Non-completers were interviewed when they dropped the courses and the reasons they gave for not completing were based on external events such as “employment, family, and lack of computer equipment” (Parker, 1999, p. 6-7). These explanations reinforced the initial prediction of the locus of control variable and it was speculated that students with external locus of control may not have taken responsibility for their own academic progress and may not have paid enough attention to achieving their educational goals.

In another distance learning study about online dropout, which was conducted in an open university in Korea, researchers used an Academic Locus of Control (ALOC) survey, which was a revised Rotter’s I-E scale, and found that there was a positive effect between student persistence and internal ALOC students. The study also showed that there were significant differences between the students who persisted and those who dropped out. Based on this knowledge the researchers speculated that students who had external locus of control and/or who did not have sufficient self-regulation skills, were the ones who were most likely to drop out. In order to increase retention the researchers recommended assessing students’ locus of control and metacognitive self-regulation

before taking online courses in order to assess their abilities beforehand and provide the necessary instruction and support system to help them be more successful (Youngju et al., 2013).

In another study at the Korean University students who were taking a distance learning English course also took the Academic Locus of Learning survey in the beginning. Like the previous studies by Parker (1999) and Youngju et al. (2013) results indicated that students with external locus of control or insufficient metacognitive self-regulation skills had a higher dropout rate. Also, internal locus of control was positively related to online course completion. Successful students used strategies such as self-encouragement, self-monitoring and reflection to improve themselves, goal setting, asking for help, effective time management and using appropriate learning methods to overcome obstacles encountered in the distance learning environment. External locus of control students blamed their failures on external factors. The authors speculated that the unsuccessful students did not take any action when they felt demotivated, which then created a downward cycle of academic decline. They recommended, like Parker (1999) and Youngju et al. (2013), that student characteristics be reviewed prior to taking distance learning courses in order to provide extra support for those students who were more at-risk (Xiao, 2012).

A research project on how virtual teams functioned in an online environment showed how students responded differently to unconscious students based on whether they had internal or external locus of control. In a virtual learning group environment conscientious internal locus of control students would take control of the group, cooperate with others, communicate regularly and feel that the group experience was

satisfactory, all the while ignoring the unconscientious students. External conscientious students in the same situation felt victimized because their grades were going to be affected by the slackers, took it upon themselves to do the additional work rather than working with the other group members, did not communicate well with others and were resentful and angry about the group experience (Grinnell, 2012).

Locus of control had an effect on exam scores in an introduction to a visual arts course at Park University, though the results were unexpected. Even though most of the students taking the online course had a more internal locus of control characteristic, it was the external locus of control students who received higher grades on the exams. The researchers speculated that this was due to the fact that the material for the course was based more on facts, and therefore required a more surface study skill approach (Knowles, 2007).

Another unexpected result related to locus of control was described when studying characteristics of successful online learning in an online computer programming course. It was not internal locus of control that was significant; it was external locus of control that was found to be statistically significant because of its negative correlation with success. In this study the researchers recommended that online learners should be given an orientation to explain the requirements of what it meant to be an active motivated self-regulated online student. This way the prospective students can determine if they can be successful as independent learners in the online environment (Yukselturk & Bulut, 2007).

Locus of Control and Leadership

Locus of Control was a popular leadership research topic in the 1960's after Rotter' I-E scale (1966) made it possible to discern individual differences between people who were in control of their own outcomes, versus those who were controlled by more external forces, such as luck, fate, or some other powerful entity (Bass, 2008). Out of the 16 locus of control research articles mentioned by Bass (2008) 14 of them supported the fact that managers' internal or external locus of control made a difference in management styles and performance as well as subordinate productivity, influence, satisfaction and rewards. Internal locus of control along with lower anxiety levels, higher self-efficacy and more optimism, was found to be one of the main psychological variables that distinguished leaders from non-leaders (Popper et al., 2004).

Research pointed to congruence between management characteristics, operating strategies and environment, but the causal relationship was debatable. An executive's locus of control could impact his or her management strategy, which in turn could influence the structure of the organization and the environment. An internal manager might interpret environmental constraints as opportunities for innovation, whereas an external could view the same constraints as strict guidelines that could not be changed. In the first case the internal manager's strategy would work well in a risk-taking dynamic environment, in the second case the external manager's conservative method of operation would be more suited to a rigid closed structure. The initial causal relationship was then posed from another angle, stating that there was a potential of the structure and the environment influencing the executive's locus of control. This brought up the question of where a more stable environment could potentially affect the manager's personality to an

external direction, and a more dynamic environment and structure could bring about the opposite effect (Miller et al., 1982). Managers also interpreted their role requirements along the transactional-transformational continuum differently depending on their personality and whether they were internals or externals. Managers with more internal characteristics were more likely to maintain their leadership style regardless of the environment, whereas managers with more external characteristics adjusted their management style on the transactional-transformational continuum, based on how they interpreted the organizational environment. Based on these outcomes it was suggested that organizations may want to consider selecting managers based on their internal or external personality characteristics when searching for the best fit (Shivers-Blackwell, 2006).

Transformational leadership, a process that changed and transformed all parties involved, leaders and followers, often included charismatic and visionary leadership. It was distinguished from transactional leadership in that the former took into consideration the emotional, motivational, ethical and long-term goals of the followers among other things, motivating and empowering followers to go above and beyond what was expected, and sometimes transcending even their own needs to serve the needs of others. A transformational manager created a vision for the followers as well as the organization, and in many cases worked on creating an identity that was more humanitarian and just, concerned with the collective good. Also, transformational leadership had been found to be effective in a variety of situations (Northouse, 2013).

According to Howell and Avolio (1993) transformational leadership was a predictor of performance on a unit-level, transformational leaders tended to be more

successful in an innovative environment, and there was a positive relationship between locus of control and transformational leadership. The authors stated transformational leaders were more likely to reflect prior research that indicated “internally oriented leaders are more confident in their ability to influence their environments and control their destinies” (p. 900). Further evidence stated that imagination, innovation and ability to adapt were also characteristics of internally oriented leaders (Miller et al, 1982, Rotter, 1962) and that followers related internally oriented leaders with intellectual stimulation (Howell & Avolio, 1993). The authors suggested that the unit-level performance was possibly accomplished by transformational leaders pursuing “creative, risk-embracing strategies”.

Related Studies

Kelso (2009) conducted a study on whether there was a relationship between mandatory orientation attendance and student satisfaction and success as compared to the success and satisfaction of those students who did not attend the orientation. The researcher’s conclusion was that all higher education institutions offering online education should implement a mandatory online orientation that would include a “pre-assessment skills test, an overview of how the Course/Learning Management System operates, and a small demonstration course to help new students practice in the online environment prior to their first course” (Kelso, 2009, p. 101). This study incorporated Kelso’s recommendations and explored the relationship between a mandatory online orientation and student success.

One model that attempted to explain online retention was based on research done by authors Boston, Ice and Gibson (2011). In their study, *Comprehensive Assessment of*

Student Retention in Online Learning Environments (2011), they studied the effects of student demographics, grades and retention in order to determine which factors contributed significantly to student retention. Their data base included a total n of 20,569 undergraduate students who completed at least one online course at the American Public University System in 2007. Out of all of the factors, the forward method linear regression identified 45 significant predictor variables with a combined variance of 32.8%, out of which five predictors contributed to the variance for 28.2%. These five predictor variables that contributed the most to student dis-enrollment were in order of significance:

1. No transfer credit, for an adjusted r-square value of .158, which accounted for a variance total of 15.8%.
2. Total number of registrations/courses taken. This meant that the more courses a student took in 2007, the less likely they were to dis-enroll.
3. Last grade received was an "F". Out of the 3,400 undergraduates whose last grade was an "F" only approximately 37% continued to stay active, while the rest of the 63% dis-enrolled.
4. Last grade received was a "W". The adjusted r-square value was .027 and combined with the students whose final grade was "F" the two grades accounted for a total of 46.1% of all dis-enrolled students.
5. GPA of 4.0. The adjusted r-square value was .014 and accounted for 9.8% of the dis-enrolled students.

The conclusion of the study was that the presence of transfer credits explained the high amount of variance and that this topic merited more research. Also, the authors

concluded that because of the significant number of students who dis-enrolled after taking only 2 online courses, this indicated a more of an exploratory approach to online college enrollment, which differed from enrollment in traditional universities.

Limitations mentioned were that the research was limited to only one site, and therefore may not be generalizable.

The initial study mentioned above was followed up with a longitudinal study by authors Boston, Ice and Burgess in 2012. In their article, *Assessing Student Retention in Online Learning Environments: A Longitudinal Study*, the authors concluded that after the significance of transfer credits, it was the “significance of activity” that helped predict retention (Boston, Ice & Burgess, 2012, p. 1). The follow up study expanded the initial one year participant data to a five year span, from 2006 to 2010, with a total of 199,731 participants. Even though the number of participants increased significantly, the research questions remained the same: what factors influence online learning and do these factors change over time? The longitudinal study reinforced the findings of the initial study, maintaining that out of all of the predictors transfer credit was the most significant. The fact that GPA was a factor was expected; but that its significance became more meaningful as a predictor than in the initial study was a surprise. This implied that it was not simply progression through the courses that was significant, but satisfactory progress that made a difference in retention. Both studies reiterated the importance of activity as a primary catalyst and the significance of keeping up the momentum in order to increase retention.

The dissertation by Boston in 2010 was the original catalyst for all of the previously mentioned articles. In his dissertation, *Measuring Student Retention at an*

Online Institution of Higher Education (2010), the author gave detailed accounts of the methods used in the data analysis. Incorporating many of the methods mentioned in the above articles into this research expanded the body of knowledge in the field of online education.

Summary

Just as student success comes from the students' ability to learn and improve over time, an institutions framework for success is no different (Tinto, 2012, p. 117). For an institution to be successful, learn and improve there should be clear and high expectations, support as well as assessment and feedback for all its members, and active engagement of everyone in determining how the institution will meet its expectations (p. 117). According to Tinto too many decisions in higher education are made without evidence (2012, p. 117). This study attempted to provide the type of evidence necessary to help determine if there is a relationship between a mandatory online orientation and student success.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

This two-phased sequential mixed method design was conducted following the procedures listed below:

1. In the quantitative phase the researcher collected Online Student Orientation (OSO) and secondary data from the participating higher education institution.
2. The researcher also collected institutional data on GPA and retention on all students who completed the OSO from June through October, 2012.
3. The researcher matched and analyzed the data into categories of success/no success based on GPA and retention in the program, and the scores from the OSO quiz.
4. The researcher then separated the students into four groups and randomly selected one student from each group to potentially interview.
5. The researcher contacted the selected students and sent them the consent forms.
6. The researcher then interviewed the four students who agreed to the interview.
7. The researcher analyzed the interviews and came up with themes.
8. The researcher then performed an integrated data analysis matching the quantitative individual and group data with the qualitative themes generated from the interviews to provide better insight into the characteristics of student success.

Phase One: Quantitative

In the first phase the researcher entered the secondary institutional data that was already collected by the institution into an excel spreadsheet. The data was based on

undergraduate and graduate students who had been accepted into the online programs at the participating higher education institution and completed the Online Student Orientation (OSO) between June 2012 and October 2012. The information gathered was a required component of the orientation course offered by the host institution. None of this information affected the students' grade or standing in the institution. As the student names as well as the institution remained anonymous in the report, the researcher used a consent form from the higher education institution as well as the individual interview consent form for this research (see approved IRB Protocol in Appendix A). The quantitative data that was collected included the program of interest (undergraduate or graduate), the cohort start date and the OSO quiz grades among others. The student OSO quiz grades were categorized into success for those students whose quiz scores were 60 or above, and non-success for those with quiz scores below a 60. Student success was based on retention and program success. If the student completed at least two consecutive academic quarters and had taken a minimum of three courses they were considered active and a success in retention. An academic quarter at the research site was 12 weeks long and included two 6-week intensive courses for all students and for the undergraduates, a third 11-week course. Program success was based on CGPA (2.0 or above for undergraduate students and 3.0 or above for graduate students).

The Variables

Based on Creswell's (2009) definition of variables, the independent variable is a predictor variable and causes or influences outcomes, and the dependent variable, which is dependent on the independent variable, shows the effects or outcomes of the independent variable. Due to the fact the study was primarily a qualitative one the

statistical analysis was limited to doing a Student t-test, where the researcher isolated the independent variable, student success, which was based on CGPA and retention, and the effects these scores had on the dependent variable, the OSO quiz scores. Then the researcher separated out the four categories which were generated. These categories were:

1. SS/QS - Student success (i.e. retention and program success) and OSO quiz score success (60 or above)
2. SS/NQS - Student success and no quiz score success
3. NSS/QS - No student success but quiz score success
4. NSS/NQS - No student success and no quiz score success

In order to randomly select the students from each group for interviewing, all of the student names for each group were printed on strips of paper and placed in four separate bowls and someone other than the researcher selected a name. The selected participants were contacted by phone and email and informed about the research through the Introduction Letter and the Interview Participation Consent form. They were asked to sign the Interview Consent form before the interview was conducted. If the student declined, withdrew, or did not respond to the request another name was chosen.

Phase Two: Qualitative

The second phase of the sequential research study involved collecting qualitative data through interviewing the selected participants based on Seidman's time modified in-depth phenomenological interview method. The interviews were conducted via Skype or face to face, depending on where the participant resided, and was recorded digitally. The method consisted of an interview, which required approximately an hour, and consisted

of three separate shorter interviews each lasting about 15 - 20 minutes, with a short break in between. The open-ended questioning format explored and built upon the participant responses, eventually reconstructing their experience in the online orientation and program. The purpose behind the interview technique was that in order to understand human behavior, it needed to be put into context. The three phase interview series provided an opportunity for participants to first establish the context within which they had their online experience, second to reconstruct the details of this experience and finally to reflect on the meaning of it (Seidman, 2006). The interview questions focused on the student background, and included open ended questions related to the students' mandatory online orientation, online program experiences, and reflections on the overall online experience and its meaning.

All of the interviews were digitally recorded using a mixture of face-to-face interviews as well as Skype. The recordings were done using a small Sony voice recorder as a backup, a program called Audacity, when using the laptop in a face-to-face interview, or CallNote when using Skype. The backup Sony recorder proved to be invaluable when the Skype connection had been disconnected and the CallNote recording did not continue once reconnected. Also, the backup recorder was used when making a quick follow up call after an interview, and was vital in recording that cell phone conversation.

Following Seidman's method the interviews were transcribed word for word, including any repetitions of words, laughs, coughs, or words like "you know", "also" or "so" to convey a full flavor of the interviewees' consciousness. Following Seidman's method the researcher read the transcriptions and made notations on a paper copy, and

marked interesting words, concepts and text with brackets or by circling the words or underlining the text. Once identified the words and concepts that seemed most significant were entered into an Excel spreadsheet, identified within the context of the interview, respecting the intent of the interviewee, and then analyzed for possible themes. The researcher then sorted the data by concepts as well as themes as part of the analysis of the thematic connections between the interviews as well as to aid with the integrated data analysis with the phase one quantitative and group analysis.

Once transcribed, student profiles were created staying “in the words of the participant” in order to “present the participant in context” (Seidman, 2006, p. 119). The analysis also included coding and labeling excerpts, searching for patterns and connections in order to categorize the excerpts thematically. The next step was to interpret the connections that emerged between the different participants, and to explore expected and unexpected outcomes from the interviews (Seidman, 2006). The researcher then performed an integrated data analysis matching the first phase quantitative statistical and group analysis with the themes generated from the second qualitative interview phase where applicable. The analysis of the qualitative data provided a rich context from which to better understand the quantitative data and the relationship between the online orientation quiz scores and student success.

Interview Questions

Based on the three series interview structure (Seidman, 2006) the profiles conveyed the participant’s stories, the context of their experiences, including any conflict and possible resolution, with a beginning, middle and end where applicable. The interview series followed the following guidelines:

Interview I: Educational History Background

Question: What was your early educational experience like, up to the time that you were accepted into the online degree program and took the online orientation? Give as many details and stories as possible. How did your early educational experience lead you to apply to the online degree program?

Interview II: Online Orientation and Online Course Experience Details

Question: Reconstruct your online orientation and online course experiences. Give as many details and stories as possible.

Interview III: Reflection on Experiences and Meaning of Them

Question: Given what you have said about your educational life history and your orientation and online experiences, how would you describe where you are now as a college student and your feelings of success in your present life?

The three part interview structure intentionally brought the participants through their life experiences, first in a more general manner, and then more focused, in order to then have them put their actual experience and the meaning of it in a more comprehensive context. During the interviews there was never any mention of why certain students had been selected for the interviews, except that they had completed the online orientation, and a possible connection between the participants' success or non-success as a student in the program and the orientation was not brought up either. Any mention of any names, locations, institutions or businesses have been switched, abbreviated to one letter or switched to another letter to provide anonymity to the participants as well as to conceal the original names of individuals and locations. It is worth noting that in order to stay as close as possible to the words of the students, the

profiles were written in the first person, and brackets were added where necessary to help transitions in the stories.

All of the interviews were conducted in October, 2013. On average they lasted about 68 minutes each with 30 pages of double spaced text, and were presented in the order that they were held, starting with C., then L., R. and S.. Out of the four interviewees three were Caucasian females, who had been accepted into the graduate program, two of the women were 43 years old, and one was 62, with an average age of 49, which was a close representation to the average age of all graduate student orientation completers. The fourth interviewee was the only male, age 37, who according to the secondary institutional data was Asian-American and had been accepted into the undergraduate program. His age also closely represented the average age of the undergraduate orientation completers, and thus served as a good representation of this population. In both cases the age population of the students was more of the non-traditional age student population. Two of the four interviews were conducted face-to-face, as the interviewees lived in the neighborhood and preferred to meet face-to-face. The other two interviews were conducted via Skype because of where they lived.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF DATA

This study endeavored to determine whether there was a relationship between the online orientation quiz and student success. Success was defined in three ways: Student Success (SS) was a combination of Retention (student active in two quarters and had taken a minimum of three courses), and GPA (undergraduate student received a CGPA of 2.0 or above, and a graduate student received a CGPA of 3.0 or above). Quiz success (QS) was a grade of 60 or above. In this chapter data were analyzed in the following four sections: Descriptive Analysis of the Demographic Data; Analysis of the Results of the Quantitative Phase; Analysis of the Results of the Qualitative Phase and Integrated Data Analysis.

Analysis of the Demographic Data

There were a total of 252 participants, which included undergraduate and graduate students, who completed the 100% online mandatory orientation. The initial cohort which started in June 2012 included 204 students or 81% of the total participants, of which 5 were in the associate degree program, 28 in the bachelor degree program and 171 in the graduate degree program. The July cohort included 17 or 7%, of which 1 was in the associate program, 2 in the bachelor program and 14 in the graduate program. The September cohort had 24 or 10% of the total participants, of which 6 were associate degree students, 6 were bachelors and 12 were graduate degree students. The October cohort had 7 or 3 % of the total participants, of which 2 were in the associates program and the other 5 were in the graduate program. The reason why the June participant

number was so large was that it was a pilot project, where the first quarter courses were offered to employees only and were free of charge (See Table 1 below).

Table 1
Number of Online Orientation Completers per Cohorts and Programs

Cohorts	Participants	Percent (rounded)	Programs		
			AS	BS	Graduate
June	204	81%	5	28	171
July	17	7%	1	2	14
September	24	10%	6	6	12
October	7	3%	2	0	5
Total	252		14	36	202

Out of the total 252 participants there were 202 graduate students, 36 bachelor degree students, and 14 associate degree students. Out of all of the students the majority, 153 or 61 %, were female as compared to 99 or 39% males. There were 116, or 58% female graduate students, 26 or 72% female bachelor and 11 or 79% associate degree students (See Table 2 below).

Table 2
Number of Online Orientation Completers by Gender per Programs

Programs	Participants	Gender			
		Female	Female % per Program	Male	Male % per Program
AS	14	11	79%	3	21%
BS	36	26	72%	10	28%
Graduate	202	116	57%	86	43%
Total	252	153	61%	99	39%

The average age for all of the students was 38 years, for the graduate students the average age was 39 years, for bachelors it was 36 and for the associates it was 31. It was

interesting to note that the ages for the whole participant group ranged from 18 to 72 years old. When broken down the age range for the associate degree students was from 18 to 56, and was very close to the bachelor degree age range, from 19 to 55, leaving the graduate degree students with the largest age range difference of 23 to 72 years of age. The average age of the undergraduate participants, both associate and bachelor degree students, was non-traditional, when compared to the traditional age group for undergraduates of 18-24 (See Table 3 below).

Table 3
Number of Online Orientation Completers by Age per Programs

Programs	Participants	Age	
		Average in Years	Age Range in Years
AS	14	31	18-56
BS	36	36	19-55
Graduate	202	39	23-72
Total	252	39	18-72

When looking at the participant group by region, the largest proportion of students, 103 (41%) came from the South, followed by a close tie between the Mid-West region at 60 (24%) and the West at 56 (22%). The smallest region represented was the North East at 33 (13%) participants. The majority of the participants who identified their ethnicity represented the non-minority group 138 (approx. 55%) as compared to the minority of 91 (approx. 36%). Those who identified themselves as Other were 23 (9%) of the total participant number (See Table 4 below).

Table 4
Number of Online Orientation Completers by Region and Ethnicity

Demographics	Participants (n=252)	% per Demographics
Region		
South	103	41%
Mid-West	60	24%
West	56	22%
North East	33	13%
Ethnicity		
Non-minority	138	55%
Minority	91	36%
Other	23	9%

The incoming GPA was based on the number of students who provided official high school transcripts or transcripts from other higher education institutions that were used in evaluating the students' applications. There were a total of 232 (92%) students with official transcripts, 6 (2%) students with GED's and another 14 (6%) students who did not provide official transcripts for various reasons. Out of the 232 who had official transcripts the average GPA was 3.00. For the associate degree students the average GPA was 2.64, for the bachelor degree students it was 2.81 and for the graduates it was 3.06. There were 23 (9%) students who had transfer credits for a total of 715.5 quarter credits. Out of these students who had transfer credits 17 (2 associate at 28 quarter credits and 15 bachelor students at 638.5 quarter credits) were undergraduates and 6 (for a total of 49 quarter credits) were graduate students.

Analysis of Group Data

The 252 orientation completers were divided into four groups (SS/QS, SS/NQS, NSS/QS and NSS/NQS) based on their success (SS) or no success (NSS) in the program and their success in the orientation quiz (QS) or no success in the quiz (NQS). The

definition of student success as mentioned above was a combination of retention (2 quarters or more with a minimum of three courses taken) and program GPA, with a 2.0 or above for an undergraduate and a 3.0 or above for a graduate degree student. The orientation quiz grade success was based on a grade of 60 or above. The groups were configured as follows with the percentages rounded (See Table 5 below):

1. SS-QS had 85 (34%) participants.
2. SS-NQS had 4 (2%) participants
3. NSS-QS had 154 (61%) participants
4. NSS-NQS had 9 (4%) participants

Table 5

Number of Online Orientation Completers by Groups (Student & Quiz Success) and Programs

Groups	Students (n=252)	% of Students	AS	% of all AS	BS	% of all BS	Grads	% of all Grads
SS/QS	85	34%	2	2%	7	19%	76	38%
SS/NQS	4	2%	0	0%	0	0%	4	100%
NSS/QS	154	61%	8	57%	27	75%	119	59%
NSS/NQS	9	4%	4	44%	2	22%	3	33%

Note. Student Success (SS) where success is retention success (active in 2 quarters) and program success (Undergraduate GPA 2.0 and above, Graduate GPA 3.0 and above); No student success is NSS; Orientation Quiz Success (QS) is a score of 60 or above; No quiz success (NQS) is a score below 60.

The first group, SS/QS, consisted primarily of 76 graduate students, which accounted for 38% of all graduate students, followed by 7 bachelor degree students, i.e. 19% of all bachelor students, and 2 associate degree students, i.e. 14% of all associate degree students (see Table 5). The gender difference of the SS/QS group was almost identical to the whole participant group ratio, 51 (60%) out of the 85 participants were female (See Table 6). The average age was just slightly under the whole participant

group age, with an average age of 37 years and an age range from 18-72 years old (See Table 7). Like the overall participant group, the majority of the participants in the SS/QS, 30 students, also came from the South region. This was followed by 24 students from the West, 18 from the Mid-West, and 13 from the North East (See Table 8). The majority of the students, 54, described themselves as a non-minority ethnicity, while 20 identified themselves as a minority ethnicity, and 11 as Other (See Table 9). Out of the 85 students in the SS/QS group 84 had official transcripts, with an average incoming GPA of 3.05. and 5 students had transfer credits (4 bachelor students and 1 graduate student).

The second group, SS/NQS, had the smallest number of students, 4, which accounted for 2% of the total participants (See Table 5). They were all graduate students and 3 (75%) of them were females (See Table 6). The average age was 34 years and the difference in ages between the youngest, 29, and the oldest, 42, was the smallest age difference in all of the groups (See Table 7). In this group only 1 participant was from the South region, 2 were from the North East, and 1 was from the Mid-West (See Table 8). Out of the 4 participants, 3 of them identified themselves as non-minority, and 1 as Other (See Table 9). All of the participants in the SS-NQS had official transcripts, and their incoming GPA was the highest of all of the groups, at 3.07. None of these students had any transfer credits.

The third group, NSS/QS, was the largest group of all of them. The total group size of 154 students, which accounted for 61% of all of the participants, consisted primarily of graduate students, 119, which accounted for 59% of all graduate students, followed by 27 bachelor degree students, i.e. 75% of all bachelor students, and 8

associate degree students, i.e. 57% of all associate degree students (See Table 5). The gender difference of the NSS/QS group was identical to the whole participant group ratio, 94 (61%) out of the 154 participants were female (See Table 6). The average age was just slightly above the whole participant group age, with an average age of 39 years and the ages ranged from 19-66 years old (See Table 7). Like the overall group, the participants in this group followed the same order under Regions, where the majority of the participants in the NSS/QS, 70 students, i.e. 45% of the group, also came from the South region. This was followed by 38 students, i.e. 25% of the group, from the Mid-West region, 29 students, i.e. 19% from the West and 17 students, i.e. 11% of the group, from the North East (See Table 8). As opposed to the whole group, half of the NSS-QS group identified themselves as non-minority. Minority ethnicity accounted for 67, or 44% of the group, and the other 10 students, or 10% of the group, under Other (See Table 9). Out of the 154 students in the NSS/QS group 137 had high school or other higher education official transcripts, 6 had GED's, and 12 had no transcripts on file because of not having continued with their programs after completing the online orientation. The average incoming of 3.01 was slightly above the overall incoming GPA. Out of the whole group of 154 students 18 of the participants had transfer credits (13 bachelor students and 5 graduate students).

The fourth group, NSS/NQS, had the second smallest number of students, 9, which accounted for 4% of the total participants. They consisted primarily of undergraduate students, 4 of which were in the associate degree program and 2 in the bachelor program. The 3 remaining students were graduate students (See Table 5). The majority of the NSS/NQS were females, though the ratio of 5 (56%) to 4 (46%) was the

most equal out of all of the groups (See Table 6). The average age matched that of the SS/NQS group, 34 years, though the difference in ages, from 19-49 years was larger (See Table 7). The representation of the different regions was fairly evenly distributed, with 3 students from each of the West and the Mid-West regions, 2 students from the South region and 1 from the North East (See Table 8). Out of the 9 participants, 4 identified themselves as non-minority, 4 as minority and 1 as Other (See Table 9). Seven of the 9 participants in the NSS/NQS had high school or higher education official transcripts, one had a GED and 1 did not have an official transcript in their file. Their incoming GPA was the lowest of all of the groups, at 2.47. None of these students had any transfer credits.

Table 6

Number of Online Orientation Completers by Gender per Groups (Student and Quiz Success)

Groups by Student & Quiz Success	Participants (n=252)	Gender		Female % per Program	Male % per Program
		Female	Male		
SS/QS	85	51	34	60%	40%
SS/NQS	4	3	1	75%	25%
NSS/QS	154	94	60	61%	39%
NSS/NQS	9	5	4	56%	46%
Total		153	99		

Table 7

Number of Online Orientation Completers by Age per Groups (Student and Quiz Success)

Groups by Student & Quiz Success	Participants (n=252)	Age	
		Average in years	Age Range in years
SS/QS	85	37	18-72
SS/NQS	4	34	29-42
NSS/QS	154	39	19-66
NSS/NQS	9	34	19-49

Table 8

Number of Online Orientation Completers by Region per Groups (Student and Quiz Success)

Groups by Student & Quiz Success	Partici- pants (n=252)	Regions							
		South	% from South	Mid- West	% from Mid- West	West	% from West	North East	% from North East
SS/QS	85	30	35%	18	21%	24	28%	13	15%
SS/NQS	4	1	25%	1	25%	0	0%	2	50%
NSS/QS	154	70	45%	38	25%	19	12%	17	11%
NSS/NQS	9	2	22%	3	33%	3	33%	1	11%

Table 9

Number of Online Orientation Completers by Ethnicity per Groups (Student and Quiz Success)

Groups by Student & Quiz Success	Participants (n=252)	Ethnicity					
		Non- minority	% Non- minority by Group	Minority	% Minority by Group	Other	% of Other by Group
SS/QS	85	54	64%	20	24%	11	13%
SS/NQS	4	3	75%	0	0%	1	25%
NSS/QS	154	77	50%	67	44%	10	6%
NSS/NQS	9	4	44%	4	44%	1	11%

Analysis of the Results of the Quantitative Phase

The experimental research design of the quantitative phase endeavored to explore the research question: Is there a relationship between online orientation quiz scores and online student success? The subset was: Is student success associated with higher quiz scores? Student success was identified as success in retention (i.e. student was active in two quarters and took at least 3 courses) and program success (i.e. undergraduate student CGPA was 2.0 or above or graduate student CGPA 3.0 or above). Students with online quiz scores that were 60 or above had quiz success, whereas those with quiz scores below 60 did not. The 252 sample of students were grouped based on the independent variable student success (SS) (n=89) or no student success (NSS) (n=163). The orientation quiz score (dependent variable), which ranged from a minimum of 40 to a maximum of 100 for both groups, had an average score of 77.70 and a median of 80 for the SS group, as compared to the average quiz score of 75.03 and a median of 75 for the NSS group of students. The research question was analyzed using Microsoft Office Excel two sample Student t-test, assuming equal variances, after meeting assumptions of a t-test, to determine whether the differences in the means of the quiz scores between students who were identified as successful and not successful were statistically significant. A one tailed t-test was performed on orientation quiz scores as a function of the type of student (success vs. no success). Results indicated that the quiz scores differed depending on the type of student, $t(250) = -1.74, p < 0.04$ and $\alpha = .05$. Specifically the data suggested that students who were successful had higher quiz scores ($M = 77.70, SD 12.04$) than students who were not successful ($M = 75.03, SD 11.42$). The 95% confidence interval (CI) suggested that the true difference in the quiz scores lie between -5.69 and 0.36.

Since 0 was contained in this interval, it suggested that the relationship between student quiz scores and success, though statistically significant, was determined to be relatively weak.

Analysis of the Results of the Qualitative Phase

The qualitative data analysis phase followed the quantitative analysis in an attempt to explore: What personal characteristics seemed to help online students be successful in an online learning environment? All of the 252 orientation completers were grouped into four categories (SS/QS), (SS/NQS), (NSS/QS) and (NSS/NQS) based on their success (retention and program success) and online orientation quiz success (score 60 or greater). The student names were sorted by groups, printed, cut into strips of paper and put into individual bowls, from which the names of students to be interviewed were randomly selected. One participant from each of the four categories was then interviewed in order to gather the qualitative data and used for the integrated data analysis. There were 85 students in the SS/QS category, 4 in SS/NQS, 154 in the NSS/QS and 9 in the NSS/NQS category.

The purpose of the qualitative phase was to infuse the dry statistical data by adding a human dimension to the numbers and to “Come to know the experience of the participants through their stories” (Seidman, 2006, p. 119). The words and concepts that were meaningful, essential or significant were identified, categorized by words in the Excel spreadsheet with comments from the interviewees in the same row, in order to stay true to the interviewees meaning within the context of the interview. Interviewee profiles were then created focused around the primary categories of Education, Online Program

and Technology, Orientation, Student Life History, and Success. Through creating the profiles and analyzing the interviews the following overarching themes were identified:

1. Value of Education
2. Meaning of Success
3. Locus of Control (internal vs. external)

Out of the three themes locus of control was the most important one that emerged and appeared to have a strong effect on the participants' value of education and meaning of success.

Analysis of C.'s Profile (SS/NQS)

Overview

C. was the first person interviewed. Her selection for the No Quiz Success was based on her quiz score of 55%, which was below the successful threshold of 60%. She was successful as a student because she completed four courses in the first two quarters of the program and had a CGPA above 3.0. She agreed to come to the small college campus as she lived in the neighborhood. The first face to face interview was conducted in the library. C. was no longer enrolled at the college. Based on the secondary institutional data and her interview C. was a Caucasian 43 year old woman, who started her graduate program in September, 2012. She was the first person selected out of four from the Student Success/No Quiz Success group (SS/NQS) and readily agreed to the interview by phone when contacted by the researcher. Her interview took place all in one day with two five minute breaks in between using a modified version of Seidman's three interview series. Her selection for the Student Success category was based on the fact

that she completed four graduate courses in the span of two quarters, and her CGPA was 3.17.

Student Life History

Out of all of the interviewees C. offered a closer look into her family background than most of the others who were interviewed. She grew up the youngest of four in a very close knit multicultural family, which presented “different cultural challenges sometimes”, but overall had “a very well rounded upbringing”. C. mentioned she had always intended to continue on to college, even though she completed her undergraduate degree with some delay. After her associates degree she traveled to Europe and ended up staying there longer than she had intended. Upon her return she got a full time position in the accounting area, and took advantage of promotion opportunities that came her way, which further delayed completing her education. As she put it “friends of mine who had their bachelors or masters we were sort of making the same income anyway.” After getting married and having children she had an opportunity to work out of her home for a while, which allowed her to spend more time with her children. When she finally went back to work full time for the defense industry she realized that education was valued more than experience and that if she wanted to advance she had to complete her education. With the help of the tuition reimbursement plans offered through her employer she was able to complete her bachelor’s degree in an accelerated hybrid program, and once that was done, she applied to the accelerated online graduate program. Unfortunately after completing only four courses and half way through her fifth course she got laid off and could not afford to continue to pay for the courses. Being laid off made her “step back and re-evaluate my skill set versus what was out there in the market

place.” She was laid off for six months and had since found another position, where she planned to get a project management certificate and do what she loves best “overseeing a process from cradle to grave”.

Education

During the interview C. often commented on how her opinion about the importance of education changed when she changed jobs from the private industry to the military. “In private industry experience at a certain point I feel outweighs education, but changing into the arena for the department of defense I realized it doesn't matter how much experience you have, the core of all of their promotions is education based.” She commented about education that “you just learn to appreciate the doors it can open for you and until you actually get into a career and into the work world, you know... I view education differently when I was younger, than when I'm older”. With her varied experience she found that she had more to “bring to the table” and got more out of school, because she was able to apply what she learned. She mentioned how returning back when she was older was not easy, “the longer you wait to return to go back to school the more difficult it is”, but once she made the “conscious decision to return” she was more “focused and goal oriented” and that the commitment to going back to school made her more invested in her education, “other than money ...in succeeding.”

Online Orientation

When asked about her online orientation experience she said “it went very smoothly”, then added, “the overall experience of the orientation was fine and in line with what I expected it to be”. She continued “It was a nice overview of what to expect with the online and the online program in terms of preparing me, because there was

nothing, with the courses or things that really surprised me, or that I wasn't prepared for that, that I recall off hand", but when pressed for specific details she stated that "I don't recall it specifically".

Online Program and Technology

When asked about her online program experience C. started out by stating that, "Overall, I had a good experience". She mentioned she had some "hiccups" during the program, "that's to be expected when you are in a new program." The frustrations of some of the technology issues she faced, along with being laid off and no longer receiving tuition reimbursement were some of the factors that contributed to her dropping out of her fifth course and the graduate program. Some of her problems occurred already in her third course, when she had trouble accessing certain parts of her course on her computer, but was able to work around it with the help of the instructor, who sent her copies of the material she could not access. The fourth course instructor was not willing to do that, but she managed to work around that. However it was the fifth class, with a math lab requirement that she had issues accessing, and even after spending hours with the help desk she was unable to resolve the technology issues. "When I was trying to juggle a lot of things, to spend a few hours and not accomplish anything and move on to the next thing and the same thing happens became rather discouraging." She continued, "I experienced a lot of delays, and then that also contributed to me dropping the class, because at that point I was never going to be able to catch up especially with an accelerated program". Having to be "self-reliant" and not having the technical support that she was used to at work made a big difference, it is "a down side of online, because... it can be a

challenge and an obstacle if you are not computer savvy.” In conclusion she mentioned, “I’m a little bit older, so computers isn’t something I grew up with like my daughters.”

Another downside to the issues of online education was the sense of isolation. C. mentioned working on a lot of her assignments late at night, and “it’s not like I can pick up the phone at two thirty in the morning and call a friend and say, “Hey, you know I’m not quite sure...” (laughs). She continued, “I think it really depends on your personality and your schedule to see if that is a good fit for you or not. I don’t have a whole lot of flexibility with my schedule so really my only option would be to return to online.” She mentioned that some courses seemed better suited for online, like history type courses, where you were graded on your interactions “through your writings and your postings on the bulletin boards and such, rather just communicating in a classroom, so it can be more involved in that way.” On the other hand courses like math or science it was easy to “get caught up in one area”, and even with online prompts. “I still don’t think it entirely substitutes human interaction and somebody explaining it to me.” In conclusion, “Any time you return to school you’re always going to face challenges, it just depends on what type of challenges. I think online lends itself to certain challenges and actually having to physically be accountable at a certain time at a certain place has its own, you know, set of negative elements as well.”

Success

“As far as success for my present life I think that you just learn to appreciate the doors education can open for you and until you actually get into a career and into the work world. I view education differently when I was younger, than when I’m older. More and more people are returning back to school because they feel the pressures of

competing with the younger generation.” When asked about online orientation and program experience she mentioned, “I definitely feel that it is a sense of accomplishment because when I was younger and went to school I just kind of went through the motions and it's not necessarily something I even overly thought about” (Personal Correspondence, C., October, 2013).

Value of Education Theme

In reviewing C.'s interview there was evidence of a change in her value for education from when she first started college. After she completed her associates degree she had “a huge hiccup of... 15 years” before completing her bachelors. Making money and “fulfilling financially the obligations” as well as being able to work from her home to, “spend more time at home with the kids” became a priority. Her earlier experience with education was based on more of an external locus of control when she stated that because “different promotions came my way” and she, “did not find it necessary in the sense that friends of mine who had their bachelors or masters were sort of making the same income anyway.” She elaborated that, “when I was younger and went to school I just kind of went through the motions and it's not necessarily something I even overly thought about. It's just, “OK, I'm out of high school alright, now I'm just automatically going to sign up. All of my friends are looking at colleges. It's just something that's automatic.”

Once she went back to work full time in the defense industry where they, “focused a huge amount...on education, more so than experience” her views on the value of education started to change. This “flip-flop” situation made her realize that, “I had really minimal education for the jobs that I was performing” and that “I will never move

any higher than that because everything was very education based.” As a result she continued, “So I definitely want to get my master's because it opens up a lot of opportunities”.

The shift from an external motivation for education started to change when C. described her return back to school, “when I really had to be very disciplined about it, it has to be something that becomes more of a goal, and then an achievement. The internal value of education became evident when C. described some of her online educational experience, “the papers became more meaningful. In applying what I’ve learned, having had a lot of different careers and situations, made it almost easier to elaborate on different ways I would do things, or different plans I would put in place, because I sort of already know what works and what doesn't a little bit more.” She continued, “Having the experiences completes the whole process. I can see the whole picture rather than just the pieces of it”. Overall she commented, “I’ve made a conscious decision to return, which I believe is a lot harder than just continuing for a lot of different reasons. I have a little bit more invested, other than money (laughs) ...in succeeding.” As for her future she mentioned that, “the only way to keep the doors opening is to really advance myself”. She continued that she “would like to see my future be project management, overseeing a process from cradle to grave, kind of putting it all together”.

Meaning of Success Theme

When following C.’s meaning of success there was also a significant change that was evident in the interview. Her initial value of success was expressed in monetary gains. She started out by stating she did not feel the need to continue her education because by, “climbing the ranks and different opportunities that I had” she was, “sort of

making the same income anyway.” Her value of success was also evident in the importance she placed on her children and taking advantage of work opportunities at home that also provided her the ability, “to spend more time at home with the kids, but it was very difficult for me.” The importance of money and the need to supplement her income after running her own consulting company became priority when she stated that it was really difficult, “fulfilling financially the obligations the way I had before, so I landed a spot at an air force base as a contractor.” It was her work at in the defense industry that started the gradual shift in the value of education as well in the meaning of success. In the defense industry, “the core of all of their promotions is education based” rather than experience, which she called “a flip flop” situation. It propelled her into looking to education for her next steps in success. As she stated, “I quickly realized that OK, I am a financial analyst, but I will never move any higher than that because everything was very education based.” This realization spurred her on to completing her undergraduate degree and starting the online graduate degree.

It was during her online graduate courses that she encountered some real frustrations with certain technological aspects of the online courses, but also her change in perspective on education and success. As she stated, “I definitely have a different appreciation for education.” She continued, “As far as success for my present life...I think that you just learn to appreciate the doors education can open for you and until you actually get into a career and into the working world I think you view education differently when you are younger, than you do when you're older.” She mentioned that a reason to return back to school is because of feeling, “the pressures of competing with the younger generation.” I definitely feel that taking the online program and orientation is a

sense of accomplishment, because when I was younger and went to school I just kind of went through the motions and it's not necessarily something I even overly thought about.” She continued, “When I returned later I really had to be very disciplined about it, it has to be something that becomes more of a goal, and then an achievement, because it's a lot harder to do.” As she was able to apply her prior work experience to what she learned in her courses her, “papers became more meaningful” and she was able to, “get more out of school. You can almost connect the two.” Even though the decision to return to school was hard, but the change in meaning of success was well expressed when she concluded, “I have a little bit more invested, other than money (laughs) ...in succeeding.” As she spoke of her future goals she focused on her desire to do, “project management, overseeing a process from cradle to grave” and that she would like to, “continue with the organizational management, kind of putting it all together” without mentioning profit and income as her primary goals.

Locus of Control Theme

Throughout C.'s interview there was a sense of her being in control of her destiny, even when she described the experience of being laid off for six months. As she put it she, “completed four courses and during my fifth I got laid off, so I wanted to sort of step back and re-evaluate my skill set versus what was out there in the market place.” During this time she was, “going to a career center”. In her online graduate program her persistence, flexibility, and external sense of control helped her through the initial technological problems she ran into starting in her third course. As she stated, “I specifically remember the first three courses, it went very well, first the orientation and then the first two courses, everything went very smoothly. Then in the third course that I

took, the third and fourth, and the fifth, the fifth would have been a math course, so, getting into the lab and all that lab access sort of compiled the issue.” Despite frustrating efforts to get access to course materials she persisted through the third and fourth course. She mentioned doing work-arounds with her instructors initially, but as she explained, “When it came to the fifth class and the tab in the course didn't open, and then coupled with not being able to access the math lab, it just became really frustrating to me. Getting laid off, and now I was no longer getting tuition reimbursement, so there were a lot of things that lended to my decision to just OK, I have to take a break in this.” She mentioned the importance of degrees and the need for “self-improvement” in order to “keep the doors opening to really advance yourself”. “Education is definitely going to continue accelerating and... you're going to need more and more levels of education in order to get the jobs that you want. It's definitely a measuring stick.” As for herself she said she, “would like to see my future in a program” in project management.

Analysis of L.'s Profile (SS/QS)

Overview

L. was the second person interviewed. Her selection for the Quiz Success was based on a score of 85%, which was above the successful threshold of 60%. She was successful as a student because she had taken four courses during her first two quarters in the online graduate program and had a CGPA above 3.0. She was the first interview that was conducted via Skype because of her location. She readily agreed to be interviewed upon contact, but because of her busy schedule the interview was postponed several times. Once the interview took place it lasted over two hours and was by far the longest interview out of all of the ones conducted. Based on the secondary institutional data and

her interview L. was the same age and ethnicity as C., a Caucasian woman of 43 years old, who started the program in June, 2012 as part of the first cohort of students in the pilot project, which was for employees only. She was finishing up the program, had doubled up on her final courses, and was going to be graduating after the completion of her last two courses in a couple of weeks after the interview. She was the first person randomly selected out of a group of 85 students from the Student Success/Quiz Success group (SS/QS). Her selection for the Student Success was based on the fact that, like C., she had completed four graduate courses in the span of two quarters, and her CGPA was 4.0.

Student Life History and Education

L. also offered a close look into her family background. Her animated responses to the her educational life history questions were often intermingled with many personal stories that revealed interesting details of her personal and professional life history as well. She started out by stating that “I learned early on that I am sort of an academic freak” and then proceeded to explain that because of a combination of a local school closing, and tests scores she received at the end of third grade, she was fortunate enough to be chosen into an advanced educational program in elementary school. She explained that as a more verbal person she “did really well on reading comprehension and vocabulary and analogy, and executive reasoning and things like that, and uh, bombed the math...which that day involved algebra. “Couldn’t make heads or tails of it.” So when she was retested for math, “this time I aced the math, it was geometry”, and even though she hadn’t had geometry yet, she stated, “I could kind of eyeball the stuff, and kind of

figure some things out and estimate.” She admitted that math was still a challenge for her and added, “I don't have spatial analysis”.

Her first experience with computers came in sixth grade, “I was teaching dyslexic kindergarteners. There were two of us as teacher’s aides, and somebody donated a computer. So this big huge square box thing sat in the corner and two of the guys in our class with manuals actually programmed the computer so the rest of us could use it, so that was pretty cool”. Even though she stated her junior high and high school experiences were “pretty unremarkable”, she added off hand, “I tested out of the first year college with advanced placement testing, um and I did a lot of academic decathlons. I graduated second from my high school.” L. also elaborated on another computer experience that occurred during that time. She was still in the accelerated program in high school when she became the editor of the journal for her creative writing class, and had to learn how to assemble student submissions. “I had an amazing chemistry and physics teacher. She taught me how to use Macintosh, and Adobe Page Maker and all that stuff to layout the little journal and the pages, and it was a lot of fun. So she taught me how to use the computer and I took a typing class.” L. mentioned many scholarships that she was awarded in high school, one of them being a thirteen day leadership camp that she went to at the age of seventeen. “I had written an essay that won an award, so I got to stay at the Ritz Carlton...It was the first time I had been away from my parents, and there were students from all over the country, all 50 states were represented.” Upon graduating from high school at seventeen she continued, “I actually won a speaking contest at the baccalaureate level, and I gave the baccalaureate presentation. There were 16,000 people there from all 32 schools in the district and their family members. Kinda

petrifying, cause I don't like speaking in front of large groups." For a moment L. reflected "It's kinda weird for a lecturer and, and a lawyer, but you know when I was in college I did a lot of research papers, and eventually got better with that. You know, you try not to think about it."

About her transition to college after graduating from high school L. explained, "Based on the high school experiences, one of the things I received was a fellowship, so as soon as I turned 18 the summer right before college started, I moved onto campus. It was three months where they paid for room, board, and side trips. It was only 18 students allowed. It was a microcosm of the campus. So they picked the top 100 of the 21,000 students entering, and of that 100 they took 18. And the 100 had to replicate the percentages of the majors, so if it was 50% pre-med, 50% of the students were pre-med." She described that in that program they took side trips, which included ballet and theatre performances, cook outs, visiting different research labs, and how "they gave us a computer shake down (laughs...)" "So in addition to that though, they brought in mobile homes with computers in them. So three times a week we would take computer classes. We were also doing a humanities core for a lecture, Philosophy, English, a bunch of other stuff, but one of the things we were working on was computers, so they had these Macs, and we learned, Paint and all kinds of, I can't remember. There's a very basic database with Macintosh. It's terrible, I can't remember what it is right now, but everything about it, spreadsheets. And then we would spend some hours of the week in the mainframe lab, and we were actually programming and doing mainframe stuff and then a couple of hours a day we worked with the actual computers at the most current generation of the PC clones era. And so that was fun. So we had this crash course for three months before we

actually got underway with the main courses.” When reflecting on her summer crash course and especially the computer experiences, she mentioned that “every student would benefit from something like that cause it helps you learn how everything works together.”

Her exposure to computers grew during her time in college, and especially when she worked on her senior thesis, which doubled up as her program thesis as well. “Our dataset came from the census, but it came from the census during an era where the data was on a wheel, and the code book was missing. Although the instructions were there, it was an odd mixture of things. L. continued to learn more and more about computers, as she put it, “I ended up meeting a mentor, my advisor, my first week of undergraduate, and she was working on this stuff and we worked together and my focus is white collar crime. So thanks to her I learned a lot more about computers then I would have normally, because if someone hacked into campus, or things went wrong they would call her, we would drive over together and I kept a little notebook.”

After college L. continued, “I graduated, and was Phi Beta Kappa actually, which was crazy cause I didn't have any time to really study, cause I was working two jobs and over forty hours a week, between the two I was working at a law firm. So, I intended to go to law school and, at the time, if you were under 25, and hadn't lived out of the house for two years, you could not sign off on a law school loan in your own name.” She went on to describe some of her disappointments after graduation, “So here I am, I'm about ready to turn 21, and I cannot do anything. Still living at home. I had to move out of the house. I moved onto the campus which at the time did not yet have a law school, unfortunately. Probably would never have left had that not been the case, so in any event

that threw my plans under a bus. I was really kinda devastated about that and I could have done better on the LSAT.”

Despite the disappointment about her law school plans she explained that she applied to several schools after graduating from college, and in the process shared some family adversity that she endured as well. “I could get into L. U. of S. and some other top notch schools and other ones I couldn't afford I didn't apply, because they would not allow working at night, I didn't even bother, it was just too expensive.” She continued, “...but I had applied to Y. and I had gotten some favorable communication, and once my mother saw that, she slashed all the recommendation letters coming from my faculty with their signatures across the seal. I was trying desperately to get away from my very violent abusive mother, and that didn't work. So I was not too happy, so one day I took my stuff, we had talked about me moving out, because if I couldn't get it co-signed, I needed to leave to start the two years, and my dad wanted desperately to co-sign, and my mother didn't and that eventually led to a divorce filing. My dad had scholarships from a GI bill and the FDA and his father paying for his schooling. And he paid for my mother's schooling, but my mother is just too cheap to help anyone, even though they definitely have the resources. It's a very bizarre situation, so, instead of going to law school, I ended up staying at J.'s place on campus” Her mentor, J. was instrumental in helping her get accepted into the university, and getting her senior thesis published. As L. recollected her mentor's influence, she continued, “I got to give you an idea of how bad my growing up years were. I fell asleep in a coma for 72 hours at J.'s house cause I was dealing with bronchitis, and my mother would come yelling and screaming into the room every couple of hours threatening to kill someone. And we went through this cycle every night, so I

was always sleep deprived. In high school I started falling asleep in class at the back of the room. I was probably the person least likely to graduate. I ended taking naps the last two hours of the day in the chemistry lab next to the beakers.”

L. recounted the details of her application and acceptance into graduate school and what her mentor had told her, "I've taken care of everything. You just have to take the GRE's, give your talk, and show in time to start school." She continued, "So, it was very interesting. I have a lot of test anxiety to begin with. I took the GRE's, went fine. We got our talk. I was scared shitless - 200 people - all white collar criminologists. All the people who I was reading from in journals, they were in the audience. Terrified. Anyway, got through that. Then I was really fortunate. We had this very angry teddy bear of an Italian instructor, and his TA's all quit en mass. There were four TA's. Then they were trying to replace them with four more, so even though we don't feed masters students at the university until the Ph.D. students are fed, in terms of TAships, I got a TAship right out of the gate, cause everyone else said no.”

When discussing her graduate experience and TAship she continued, "It went well, so I finished dealing with my masters, and I started law school finally, and I went to Loyola at night, and part way through my schooling there, I bought a laptop because some of the students already had them in the very first year and then started, you know, using the laptop for taking notes and stuff.” When describing some of her computer experiences in law school she mentioned that, "We had to take tests showing we could do things the old way on paper and in the library and do it online. So eventually I dealt with passing the bar exam and practicing law.”

She recounted an experience she had during law school, after which, “I was actually offered a job in IT department at P.” “I was rotating helping 60 lawyers in the legal department and they had all different software packages. And they were driving me nuts. All the lawyers used what they wanted, so we had people doing Word Perfect, and Word on Mac, and Word and Word Perfect on IBM clones, all different versions, Delta Writer, Crystal Display Writer, any software, Lotus Writer. It was just a nightmare. So, (clears throat) this was exhausting, I so I put the software that I found into Word for Word Verbatim, and you had 80 packages to choose from that you could dump it in, and it would come out in the right software at the back end. So all these lawyers negotiating contracts, who needed to be able to red line electronically, once I helped them with that, word got out. So the IT department was trying to get me to move from legal to IT. And so that was kind of an interesting thing.”

About her first online experience she recounted, “...an opportunity to teach arose at I. as an adjunct, and the first encounter I had with online was they needed a local tutor for the online student.” Along with her law practice she ended up teaching for other colleges as well, “All online. Different platforms.” She explained how she ended up in the graduate online program, “And then around the time that I applied for the CJ chair, which was what gave me the full time position that allowed me to participate in the online pilot program.” “I'd always wanted to do a master's program, so I thought “Oh, great idea, we'll try it.” So it was more of a hobby. Of something I always wanted to do.” She mentioned that taking the graduate program online also became, “... a teaching aid.” As she learned the online LMS she was able to help her students figure it out too, “while I figure this stuff out, when people are pestering me with questions about their

LMS, I'll actually be able to log in and do stuff as me on mine, so they can see how it works without freaking out that they're going to lose their assignment, or upload the wrong thing.”

In her experience at teaching online she explained some of the problems her students had with their orientations, or “hybrid”, as she called it, “People would go through that, struggle with it, then they wouldn't pass the hybrid exercise, and they never ever touched down in their class. They were stuck in the membrane of the hybrid class. So it was kind of an interesting process.” She explained that she and another instructor would, “Help them, demonstrate it and get them through it. And if they do it on their own, unsupervised, it seems to take them approximately 3 hours. And, this is probably not true for the online program, but for I. the online lecture does not match the test questions, so invariably they would fail and if their score was too low they would be discouraged, and they would be locked out of getting into their real class, which would be a problem.” With the problems her students were having in passing the orientation, L. proposed some changes, “Guys, this is very simple to figure out. The problem is we need to pipeline them through the hybrid consistently. We need to do something before the class starts, maybe the week before. I'll give a little pep talk, I'll line them all up in a certain region, and we'll crunch them through it. That way I can make sure they're really uploading the assignment, cause they would upload in the hybrid instead of typing a Word document. They weren't reading the directions. They would type in the post-it shaped attachment box, not realizing it was a transmittal cover, it wasn't the real thing. And then they didn't understand that they needed to talk about the experience they had trying to send the instructor an email in the other document, so then they would fail that.

And after they failed the hybrid, which wasn't a class...wasn't even the substance, imagine how psyched out they were that they can never do this. And most of our students don't have a computer. They don't have a Kindle, you're lucky if they have Smartphone. If they have a Smartphone they might share it with other relatives. It's a very low tech environment. They don't know how to use computers, much less take an online class.”

L. explained the problems with their orientation and students in more detail, “We had to do something to bridge the gap to the hybrid, cause students were sitting there at home, waiting for someone to call them to come to class. They looked at it, and they thought they needed to show up to use the computer in the classroom to do the online class at a preset time with an instructor name listed. And when they didn't see that, and when they saw multiple labs, they didn't know which one they were supposed to go or did they have to go, was it mandatory, or what. If they had classes that started at the beginning of the quarter a lot of students were on vacation and break, cause we have year round school. By the time they would get back into town, they didn't have enough days to login, and then that of course had consequences. Consequences with financial aid as to the number of units pursued, consequences with the registrar, regarding graduation, academic probation, where a cancellation counted as a drop in terms of the completion rate. Then some of the students would fail classes. They weren't turning in enough homework, they weren't meeting the drop dead late bubble deadlines, or I had two students that plagiarized and that was just automatic like, OK, what's going on here. And so, the great thing is that when they plagiarize online, we have to mete out the justice locally. So we had one student that went rather postal, and we had to get with the legal

department to deal with that, because they didn't seem to understand, it's like, we're not saying you're a liar, we're telling you that your online instructor indicated that there is a chance of plagiarism. Anyways, the point was, it was very difficult, cause there was a big learning curve, and the students didn't know how to appeal grades.” One of the specific experiences she recalled was when, “on the last night, the shell of the class closed an hour and half early. My cell phone, on a Sunday night, while I'm trying to upload my own assignments, was going nuts. Panicky students, tearful calls, text messages, "Are you there? Are you there? Is the school open? Can I stop by?" It was a nightmare, so we had to figure out an incomplete process”. “There were a lot of challenges. But what I learned is that the students did poorly on the hybrid and unlike the one for the online program, which was better than the one I. used. The one for the online, the questions tracked the presentation, the one for I., it didn't track their reality, so they were basically making random guesses.” L. continued, “Students never figure out where their books are...and if they are returning after a time their email is disabled and it makes them reset their password to the shuttered email that has to be reactivated. There is a whole series of steps and work-a-rounds, there's a bunch of tricks that have to be danced around to make it all kind of work, and then they have other issues.” She added, “You know, and then there were some questions that the answer is not in the slide, and so they would invariably miss that. And because it's an east coast, and they're in a different time zone, they never really understood that 12 o'clock midnight was not the same where they were. So every quarter a bunch of people trying to submit stuff at 11 o'clock, 12 o'clock. "My shelf is gone". I've even seen people try to upload assignments through the calendar. I've seen the strangest things, where the dots are not connecting, and I've had to

deal with people having a heart attack on me if their quiz or test crashes while they're taking it, if the connection goes down, and calling the support, registering the complaint, logging it and emailing the dean, to email the online dean to email the online instructor to reset the link, or if it's too late an incomplete, you know all the steps, it's a really strange process." L. summarized her teaching experience by saying, "I teach exclusively online for L., I teach hybrid for L. I teach business for D., S. and A. It's one day a week online, one day a week on site, so it's a true 50/50 blend, and then, you know teaching my own students. I teach them onsite, but I also run the lab, so it's kind of a strange, plus being an online student myself. So I see it from every different conceivable angle."

When asked how her early educational experience led her to apply to the online graduate program she responded, "Yeah. I had always wanted to do a master's. I thought about doing it in tandem with the JD, because L. offered that, many schools do. But it seemed to take an awful lot longer, and the cost. And I've always been very self-conscious about mathematics. Law school is a man eater, they dump the bottom third of the class as it is, so I don't want to be dealing with that kind of a battle front in two different majors at once. I didn't take any break. I went straight from high school to the summer college program, I taught during the college summers, I taught introduction to the Criminal Justice system, cause a lot of the faculty were not available during the summers, they actually wanted to go on vacation. Crazy people. So basically, I didn't get any summers off, I was working year round, year round, year round, bachelors, masters, law degree, so I, I probably wouldn't have done well, because it probably would have been too much. But, I like doing things, I like computers a lot. And so, that first computer in 6th grade, and exposure in high school, the crash course in college, more

exposure with the data crunching in criminology, all of that led me there and my focus is white collar crime, which is crime committed by business people. In fact that's what I practiced, environmental damage, white collar crime, securities fraud, that's what I do for a living, so I wish that I had known more of what I learned here earlier.” She described some of the places she had worked while working on her undergraduate, graduate and law school education, companies involved with pharmaceuticals, the film industry and computer manufacturing, and concluded, “so I, you know, wanted to learn it, because I knew something about business, and I like the mode of delivery, cause I didn't have to go drive somewhere. This was my schedule, it would never have happened.”

When asked if she wanted to add anything to the first part of the interview session, L. commented, “You know, there is one thing. I guess I was really meant to go to an online master’s program, because, in 2001, S.A. offered to send me to graduate school, assuming I would have gotten in. I didn't apply, cause I was too worried about the math focus.” She continued that she had been working on a case that involved “a lot of white collar crime stuff caused by a certain VP of Finance, and they said, "You know, you've done such a great job trouble shooting all the problems of what this person had done. If you could, if you were interested in doing an online master’s program, we would pay for it, and then, when you're done we'll make you Vice President of Finance, you can have the job you litigated.”... “And I was like, wow! That was a lot of pressure, and at the time I was trying to deal with passing the bar exam. I couldn't really do two, but I did take the GMAT, and much to my surprise I did much better on the GMAT than the LSAT, so maybe I was wrong all along.”

Online Orientation

With L.'s extensive background in teaching online and helping students go through orientations her feedback on her own online orientation and course experiences were very thorough and specific. About the orientation L. commented, "Let's see. It was probably June, June of twenty twelve. So it was a bit far back but in a lot of ways it seems similar to my own campuses structure which, as I remember it was similar in that we had to practice to see if we could initiate the email to the instructor, and I think we had to do a little practice post or two to see if we could do that. And then we had to make some selections on a full exam type setting to see if we learned what we had, you know, looked at in a presentation. And, you know, all of that was, all of that was helpful, cause you do perform all those functions in a real class. It's nice to have a neutral environment where you can test stuff without having your grade on the line. That was helpful."

Online Program and Technology

She continued with a combination of suggestions and comments on both the orientation and the online courses, "I think the announcements, the message center, a lot of those things remind me of regular email. So it's not a huge jump to figure out how to do something. I think the most complicated thing of all to gain from a hybrid is stuff that could even change from an instructor to instructor. Like what is a late penalty, do they even allow late work? You know what I mean, when do they want the first post of the week. I know they seem to have it pretty standardized, but I think those are a few of the nuances that is helpful to really give a lot of weight to so people know not just technically how do I press on the button, and will they work, and let us know when we're down for maintenance. Also, there needs to be more about the grading rubric and the late

penalties and things that earlier on might have been more helpful. Maybe make that some questions on the hybrid itself. Then people can focus on the concepts divorced from the specific instructions to learn the policies. So that was the only thing that was really challenging. I remember later in the course, every once in a while a video attachment or an article attachment would no longer be there. Can't remember the one about those guys that got lost on their trip to the Arctic, where I was searching Netflix and Google (laughs...). I was desperately trying to access it for the class. But that's not the instructors fault and there's always also going to be lag time between curriculum development and when people actually get to the link, so it's understandable. But overall the experience was pretty good.”

When pressed for more details about her own orientation or online course experiences L. commented, “I remember there would be like a person that would be guiding you through the screens, and you would click when you were ready to go to the next screen and so forth. But the odd thing is, right now I can't remember if there's any sound, cause I think that there really hasn't been any sounds through all the classes. I don't think there's ever been. I think there was one class that occasionally had little video snippets in one of my courses. That's kind of a nice feature. I think people are engaged a little more with sound, ...you know what they say about that the way that people learn, how much we retain, depending on how we learn it. We retain a certain percent from reading, a certain percent from hearing, a certain percent from speaking that kind of stuff, kinesthetic hands on. One area where they could probably do some tinkering?”

She elaborated some more, “I think one thing that should be amplified with an explanation of things that can arise. The most important of that would be the zero

phenomenon, cause that was just terrifying, especially if I were a brand new student, with no familiarity with the LMS or something similar. That quarter that I had O.D. with Dr. R., she went away for the holiday weekend, and it showed a zero for an assignment for three or four days. And all the students were emailing each other in the message center. People they had had in a group project and things, trying to figure out "You see zero too? This person is a crazy grader. What's going on?" You know explaining to people who have an expectation that when you see a zero, before the grades are due to be finalized, this is what it usually means, only be scared if it goes past X number of days. Again, it's kind of those expectations understanding management issues that are often as important, sometimes they're more important than the actual class content, or even the technical interface. I remember at the beginning there were places where the connectivity wasn't working. But that is nowhere near as terrifying as seeing a bunch of zeroes for a while, because someone logged in to grade and forgot to log out. You know, that sort of thing." "That's something that would involve education of the faculty "Don't do that, you know, people will get scared (laughs...). The students will overwhelm the support staff with questions."

L. recounted another incident of concern, "And I have to say, was it three quarters back, the quarter when the F. lab was malfunctioning. And the tech people could not fix it either, on the phone, and it was just... If I had not had some assistance in tuition reimbursement, I might have dropped out at that junction, cause that was just exhausting, trying to figure it out. It would re-grade itself and there was no way to save it. You couldn't print it out. I was trying to preserve the screen shot. I mean D. S. was an extremely patient instructor, and I guess he found a way to deal with the grading aspect,

cause I was in terror that whole quarter, cause I just could not get a handle on that thing. The scary thing was I knew that there was more math to come. And I was so thankful that other courses did not a lab.”

After commenting on some of the experiences she had with her own students and getting them through their orientations in a face-to-face environment she continued, “And so, you know, the things that I notice are kind of odd things, but I noticed that students just don't do well with the hybrid. If they get the hang of it, if the hybrid is a magical experience, the battle is halfway won. Fifty-fifty chance they're going to do OK in the class.” When asked to elaborate on the use of the word “hybrid” L. explained, “It's like a pep rally, right.”... “At our campus they use the word hybrid, they call it "hybrid prep" and that's the orientation. So they're logged into their online orientation, but they are doing it with a pep-rally leader in the back, trying to get them through the different phases, because what we found is with our students, if they do part of it one day, and they come back to do the rest the next day, it doesn't acknowledge the first half, and they have to go back all the way to the beginning. So I tell them, "You're in it to win it. Your butt is mine for the next two hours. You are camped out. Do not even think - you cannot do it today, come back next week!"

When comparing her own orientation experience and the “hybrid” experience her students take, she exclaimed, “Well, graduate students are at a higher level. What we had was sufficient. That was fine - the online program version. Would have been nice to have sound, but not the end of the world, right? But, you know, if they were to roll this down backwards and automate portions of the bachelors and associates level, you would need something a little harder core, more hand holding. ” For example her students, “for the

most part could not tell the difference between posting into the practice class versus posting into the real class. They don't understand what they need to do to trigger attendance so they get kicked out of class." She would tell them, "You're gonna fail if you do nothing - nothing comes of nothing." She would add, "Anytime you're just rotating eyeballs, reading grades, reading "presos", checking emails, reading other peoples' posts, reading feedback you are not attending." L. exclaimed, "Cause every quarter we'd lose about two thirds of the students, because they would get deactivated. They didn't connect the dots." Based on these observations she made an analogy, "So it was really an interesting learning curve, where they were falling off the bus. They were still at the bus stop, and the bus had driven away without them. So, it's kind of an interesting, you know."

In referring back to her own online experience as a student she commented, "But for us, the one problem, the only real problem I ever had, was a couple of bad links here and there, in different classes, and then the F. lab, it was just, oh my God makes me wanna cry bad. The only other thing was occasionally things would crash for unannounced maintenance." There was one class she recalled, "During that class there was a couple of weeks where there was a lot of pockets of downings, when instead of the blue screen of death, you see the white screen of death with the orange button. That is never a good sign. You never want to see that screen. You know. So, but other than that, you know, the interface worked pretty smoothly, and I didn't try any other labs." L. went on to explain that after teaching some courses with labs, she felt more comfortable with the concept. "So now I am so over the complexities of the little, you know, CD ROM lab thing that they install, and then we go from there. Now I've got that down too."

She went on to compare the labs and the LMS, “There's a learning curve the first time they do that. The first time they have that LMS format, but once you get it you got it, the only thing is you have to make sure that initial experience is very warm and fuzzy. If they struggle with the hybrid orientation preparation, it puts a little spillover effect on everything that follows. So you want to have your A team up front, in terms of instructors and graders, and communicativeness”. She recalled one particular online experience she had where one instructor, “did one group conference call to go over questions on a project and we all got to hear each other's voice. That was really cool. If they did something like that in some of the classes that would probably be well received.”

About the math tutoring she received as an online student her comments were, “I liked the GoTo Meeting functionality of the tutoring, there's a residual log that I discovered after the classes were done of the conversations that I guess GoTo Meeting generates and that was really helpful. The capacity to access that extra assistance - that was really good. I liked that. That was a winning thing you know.”

When L. reflected on the instructors she noted, “Other things were the instructors are quite variable. I liked all the instructors. You may remember one of the lady instructors was a little slow on the grading, but overall she was a nice person to deal with. Some instructors never say anything in the thread ever. Like Mr. T. is that way. The lady instructor was that way, a couple of people, and then you have others that are major league activists in the forum. Dr. R. a bunch of time. Dr. S. is very involved in the discussions, I don't think S. ever participated in the thread, but that's OK. I was so grateful cause he was such a patient math teacher I don't care what he did (laughs...). He

was so patient on those things, with that crazy lab. But others, one of my O. instructors, he's real active in the forum. So that's kind of nice.”

She reflected for a moment on her own online student complaints, “Cause one complaint I get a lot from my own online students is that they don't like when people don't respond.” In hind sight she realized, “I was fortunate, cause I have really responsive people for the most part. We had to get the topic approved, so what it was is that we had to work in groups of four, and we had to let the instructor know which four people we were doing. And then she would respond if that was OK, and then we had to respond to the other groups on projects drafts and the final. And that worked well because she was communicative, but I could see how that could be dangerous if you had someone that delayed in approving the project. Then you wouldn't know if it was acceptable or not. So, it's one of those things, but my experiences were pretty good. I got very detailed feedback.” She recalled specific instructors and their methods of feedback, “S. was insane with his APA format and his redline. I mean, I would say that his feedback was triple what I gave him. And then there are others, like T. who doesn't put any feedback, just a grade.” L. continued by stating that in some cases she would have liked to have received more feedback on her grades, “I didn't have anything negative to say about the grading, but it'd just be a score, and it would just say "No Feedback". So you're like, "OK, there's a 94 and nobody knows why, must have done something wrong." But then when the feedback showed, it would say, "Excellent, L." She added, "So excellent that it's not a higher score. Well, I guess I'll wonder. And then I'd reach the stoic phase of - I'm graduating in seven days, does it really matter if it's a 90 anything, it's close enough for government business (laughs...)” “Tunnel vision - eyes on the prize.

Maybe there's just so many of us it's just not possible to put in a little blurb for every person.”

L. summarized her online experience stating, “I think that pretty much sums it up. I learned a lot. Generally the faculty were pretty good about things, and pretty responsive and knew their fields. And also generally the books were good. The one book that probably needs a friend to go with it is the H. book. It had a lot of general information and good specific war stories, but you couldn't really answer papers and discussion forums relying just on the book.”

As the second interview session was wrapping up L. mentioned having looked up some of her instructors online to see how other students had rated them. “So, if you look at Mr. T., you notice that the students are really positive and warm and fluffy, and they rate him as a fairly easy instructor, and I'm thinking, - I wouldn't say that, because I'll get - excellent 94 - and I was thinking, I wouldn't say he's easy, but he apparently knows his material etc., but then, when you look up someone like Dr. R., he comes up between four and five on difficulty and grading and they just bashed the “bjesus” out of him, and then you have him as an instructor and he's a generous grader. He gives lots of feedback and he spends more time in the forums than the students do, responding and promoting conversation and tying the books to the concepts, and taking something someone said and adding a new idea, and I was thinking, "Wow, what do students know?" (Laughs... and claps hands...).

In moving into the third interview session the conversation briefly digressed as L. questioned graduation requirements etc., and commented on future academic plans after completion of her program, including going into international law, “cause I love law and

international law.” After explaining her professional goals, including exams and certifications she planned on taking she stated, “So I know that these three things are the big academic goals for now, but then I need to "chillax" a little bit, spend some time with myself, a little bit of time, cause it's just been crazy.” L. also brought up additional family and educational challenges that she encountered along the way. “I had to take the bar exam more than once. My parents filed for divorce right before the week of the bar exam. Mom is quite the saboteur. So dad was kicked out and ended up moving in with me right at the wrong time. Actually we were having so many problems, I think I mentioned with regard to law school arrangements and stuff, that she actually kicked him out my senior year of law school and so he stayed on my sofa, the guy that paid for an almost million dollar home in R. V. being stuck on my sofa, while still working. It was terrible. It was really, you know. So, I just look around at that sort of stuff. If you're lucky enough, as I am, I have an amazing spouse. That you know. He's just real supportive about any of my wacky ideas, just never says no, and is very curious and inquisitive as well. Everything goes more smoothly.” Then she returned back to the original subject, “and it is a very hard bar exam, and I might have had the same challenges even without the family problems. I was really burnt out when I took the bar exam, cause I had been in school three degrees in a row with not even a summer break. When you go at night you have to take summer school at L. So that's two classes during the summer in a very compressed fashion. The thing is if you don't take the bar exam employers will assume you took it and didn't pass and you're lying to them. So if you do take it and you're not ready, I guess the good thing is it becomes a dry run and you learn, I mean, you can use it as a resilience training exercise in some fashion.”

Success

In discussing her success as a student, L. commented that, “I think the online master’s program definitely enhanced the material I already knew, and it filled in some blind spots that I had in places on things that I hadn't really encountered thus far in my learning, so I think one of the, two of the subjects, three of the subjects, benefits and compensation, I learned a few things in there that I had not tripped over in the course of benefits class action, so there was some fun things that I learned there that I really enjoy. And then some of the staffing nuances were great. I got labor litigation for three major corporations and everything you can imagine. And so it was really great to get more on some of the areas I've been dealing with all along, but I wish I'd had, and I'm glad I have moving forward. Finance is one of those things and then operations managements was kind of accidental because of offering availability. But wow, did I learn a lot in that. You know all the "just in time" and remanufacturing and things of that nature. I love learning how things are made. I love working for manufacturers, cause it's really fun. Sometimes you notice these few random things that turn out to make a difference, a large scale difference. It's great, I think that the master’s degree was kind of like a nice little crowning point. The online experience was overall a pretty positive one. I'm hoping I'll be able to keep in touch with some of the people that I worked with in some of the group projects. I'm hoping I'll get to meet some of them at graduation too. I've met one of them live.”

L. digressed as she recalled a chance meeting she had with another online student, whom she met “...at the campus where we overlapped briefly, she rotated in as a management trainee, Y.V. ” L. described their meeting, "Y., that' an unusual name, is

your last name V.?" and she goes, "That's just eerie." And I said, "I might be in an online class with you, I'm L.." And she goes, "L.?" And everyone's like, "What is going on in there? This place is total love fest." We're like chatting up a storm like old buds, and (laughs...) it was just so funny. I was like, "They really are alive!" I'm not talking to my imaginary friends on the weekends and I don't need a mental checkup after all, right?"

Then, returning back to the subject of student success, L. stated, "The online experience is pretty positive, you know. A lot of the students have a lot of good content, the faculty were very high quality. The books were good. I would never have met all of you guys, right? The student support staff, you, V. and C. etc. And the very best thing is that I do feel a great deal of success, because I never left the law field." She detailed some of the academic opportunities that opened up to her as she completed the online graduate courses, "...but, in terms of now and future feelings of success and, and the current feeling. I mean it is a very successful feeling because as my employer shifted academic programming focus and I was fortunate enough to have at least 18 credits in the right places in the master's degree program, in such a way, that combined with my JV, which is what I've been using for the last year teaching I could teach Business and Project Management."

One of the benefits of being a student and teaching at the same time allowed L. the ability to apply what she had learned immediately. L. continued, "So I was immediately able to use what I was using and there've been many a time I've actually used a video clip from something from my class, just to get my students to see how things fit together, or I use examples of things I remember from case studies from my master's degree classes in the classroom. Other work opportunities at other colleges had also been

offered to her, as she explained, “I’ve gotten offers to be a business chair or a business faculty person locally, just cannot do it from my current campus, so it’s kind of interesting.”

The coursework expanded her ability to manage an academic department as well as well as enhance her legal work, “So from a teaching perspective, you could see how it would immediately expand your opportunities, but then again I also manage a department. I mean you can use some of those HR motivational and organizational ... things right away in the field. So all of that is just stuff I use it in my litigation practice already, on an ongoing basis, and I’m actually going to do some other things that relate to labor down the line.” After describing some more advantages that the online graduate program will provide she concluded, “There’s so many, so many interesting avenues that it automatically opens up. So, I feel pretty good about it.”

When asked if the orientation had anything to do with her feelings of success as an online student she stated, “I don’t think students could have the classes without the orientation. I think it’s a critical stepping stone, it would be disastrous without it, cause it’s not obvious, and people would probably drive the technical team nuts, (laughs...) trying to figure out what and how they have done what and how to whom. Cause I assume people would be trying to upload posts into the Message Center (laughs...) When you see students that don’t understand something try and do something and show you what they’ve done it is at those points that I see the whole universe of possible approaches (laughs...) to the same kind of problems.” She commented that, “We have faculty, we have chairs at our campus, who’ve never touched the LMS, Electronic chair, IT chair, Drafting chair, like no idea what it is. So when students come in, they’re like,

"What? What are you talking about, this is Greek to me?" So, (clears throat...), it's one of those things where one of the blessings is doing it yourself while you're helping other people do it. Makes it more obvious and the two reinforce each other, but you also know what's working and what isn't. And the good thing is you know how bad it would be without the orientation, if there wasn't something there. So, for the students who don't log in on time, they're like "Oh, there was a hybrid (laughs...)" You know, when you see that you appreciate what are the benefits of going through it." Moving on to describe the online courses she recalled, "I do remember that I had some challenges in matching to my very first textbook, and what is interesting is I noticed there is a certain amount of messing around between Mozilla Internet Explorer and Google Chrome. Because some of the functionality works better with one platform than another, and it's not always what you would expect." Overall her attitude about the orientation and the online experience was very positive as she continued, "So the trials and errors made me a much more patient person than I probably was before, ah, that's good, but I think maybe adding of the sound, and it might be fun, if there was a way to, I don't know if they've ever considered taping little bits and pieces of the lecture with the actual instructor that's grading, so people could put the name with the face more. I know we get a picture in the instructor message section, but that might soften it a little bit, in terms of interaction and things."

Based on her own teaching experience L. offered some suggestions as well, "I find that the first quarter that I taught I had just one student. The student had a lot of family disasters going on. I wish I could have done what I had done sooner (clears throat...). The second time that I had students, what I did was I emailed them all my contact information and I asked them to email me a time when I could speak with them

individually. And so I called each person to talk to them "Now, what are my expectations for the course. What is the project about? How to reach me if you have a question? What am I doing?" And I found that call helped. I found after that they were more committed. They knew they could just leave a message if they were upset. You may consider that, but that becomes much more burdensome on the instructor, and the instructors may not welcome that degree of interactivity depending on their other time constraints and so forth, but I just found that worked for me". She added that uploading pictures helped as well, "...but I think the softening things make it more human, I think students really respond to that. And I noticed that my students told me that they like it when the faculty of their own online classes sent them the little weekly announcements - this is what's coming up. The time that they don't click in the right places or they forget to look in the study guide, and they think, "There's always a discussion every week.", when there isn't and then they miss the mid-term, because they didn't realize that that was the week of the mid-term, so I noticed that the students seem more on task if the instructor does a mass announcement mailing things like Welcome to Week 1." As for her own online experience she commented, "I noticed that Prof. R. and D.R. are certainly people who do that pretty religiously, so there are things that people can do to make it more personable within the confines of the system."

L. concluded the final interview session by stating, "I can't say not too much more, I mean I feel like I really grew as a person. You know, there were some subjects I didn't think I could necessarily manage, and the timeline seemed so accelerated. But then, once you get through it all, you feel like, I guess it's a little bit more than a

decathlon, but I think you know what I mean. It feels like you (laughs...) made it to the end of the marathon as it were” (Personal Correspondence, L., October, 2013).

Value of Education Theme

In L.’s case, this theme should be not only value of education but love of learning. These themes permeated L.’s interview as she described the initial selection process and acceptance in to an accelerated program in third grade, “teaching dyslexic kindergarteners” in sixth grade, graduating “second in my class from high school” and testing “out of the first year of college with advanced placement testing.”

Her enthusiasm for education did not dampen even when she momentarily reflected on some of the family issues she had to overcome along the way, “I got to give you an idea of how bad my growing up years were, I fell asleep in a coma for 72 hours at J.’s house cause I was dealing with bronchitis and my mother would come yelling and screaming into the room every couple of hours threatening to kill someone. We went through this cycle every night, so I was always sleep deprived. In high school I started falling asleep in class at the back of the room. I was probably the person least likely to graduate. I ended taking naps the last two hours of the day in the chemistry lab next to the beakers.”

L. continued, “I did a lot of academic decathlons” “won departmental awards and “was sent for a scholarship for thirteen days in high school”, “won a speaking contest” and received a “fellowship as soon as I turned 18 right before college started for three months where they paid for room, board and side trips.” This was all put in perspective when L. described herself, “I learned early on that I am sort of an academic freak.” As she described some of her experiences in more detail she punctuated them with, “Great

stuff!", and "It was a lot of fun", and "Loved it!" As she detailed her undergraduate experience, "I graduated... I was Phi Beta Kappa...which was crazy cause I didn't have any time to really study, cause I was working two jobs, over forty hours a week and between the two I was working at a law firm. I intended to go to law school". Her enthusiasm for education did not curb even when presented with more obstacles beyond her control. "I graduated and then I intended to go to law school and at the time, if you were under 25, and hadn't lived out of the house for two years, you could not sign off on a law school loan in your own name. I was really kinda devastated." Along with that she explained that she, "was trying desperately to get away from my very violent abusive mother, and that didn't work, so I was not too happy." With the help of her mentor L. was able to go to graduate school and get a master's degree while she waited to go to law school.

L. continued, "I finished dealing with my masters, and I started law school finally, and I went at night. Eventually I dealt with passing the bar exam and practicing law." Her quest for more educational opportunities were unquenchable, "Practicing law and an opportunity to teach arose as an adjunct", then some time after that she applied for another position that, as she said, "gave me the full time position that allowed me to participate in the online graduate program." As she went on, "I'd always wanted to do the online graduate program... So I thought, "Oh, great idea, we'll try it." L.'s ability to promote the value of education not only for herself but for others was evident when she realized that by doing her own online work, she would be able to, "log in and do stuff as me on mine, so my students can see how it works without freaking out". She

summarized it aptly by stating, “it was more of a hobby of something I always wanted to do, but functioned also as a teaching aid.”

L.’s strong belief in the value of education was extended beyond herself when she described how she handled the hybrid orientation training at her campus. She said, “I noticed that students just don't do well with the hybrid orientation. If they get the hang of it, if the hybrid orientation is a magical experience, the battle is halfway won. Fifty-fifty chance they're going to do OK in the class.” She proceeded to explain, “At our campus they use the word hybrid as "hybrid prep" and that's the orientation. So they're logged into their online orientation, but they are doing it with a pep-rally leader in the back, trying to get them through the different phases. The way that I educate them is I say - Kids, it's real simple. You've been to the drive through, right? If you don't upload your question, your order to the square box and you don't upload the money you drive away with no food. Your online class is the same thing, right? If you don't send a little email, upload a post, upload an assignment, take a little test nothing happens. You're gonna fail if you do nothing, nothing comes of nothing. Anytime you're just rotating eyeballs, reading grades, reading presentations, checking emails, reading other peoples' posts, reading feedback you are not attending". Because of her varied teaching and learning experiences she commented, “I see education from every different conceivable angle.” She added, “There's a learning curve the first time students do that, the first time they have that format of the LMS, but once you get it you got it! The only thing is you have to make sure that initial experience is very warm and fuzzy. If they struggle with the hybrid orientation preparation it puts a little spill-over effect on everything that follows.”

L.'s suggestions on how to improve the online program also stemmed from her deep interest and concern for the love of learning and the value of education. She recommended the addition of sound to the presentations stating that, "I think people are engaged a little more with sound. You know what they say about that the way that people learn, how much we retain depending on how we learn it. We retain a certain percent from reading, a certain percent from hearing, a certain percent from speaking, kinesthetic hands on...one area where they could probably do some tinkering?"

L.'s value of education also manifested itself when she described her disappointment on not receiving more feedback from her instructor when all she got was a 94 on an assignment and a comment stating only "Excellent". She retorted, "So excellent that it's not a higher score."

Her persistence in the program continued despite some of the challenges she faced. In describing one of the math courses she explained, "the quarter when the math lab was malfunctioning and the tech people could not fix it either on the phone, if I had not had some assistance in tuition reimbursement, I might have dropped out at that junction, cause that was just exhausting trying to figure it out."

Her love for learning and education was further supported when she used words like "fun", "enjoy" and "great" as she continued to describe why she desired to do the online graduate program, "I wanted to learn it because I knew something about business and I like the mode of delivery, cause I didn't have to go drive somewhere. With my schedule it would never have happened." She continued, "The online graduate program definitely enhanced the material I already knew and it filled in some blind spots that I hadn't really encountered thus far in my learning. There was some fun things that I

learned there that I really enjoy. It was really great to get more on some of the areas I've been dealing with all along.”

In explaining the teaching opportunities that her online graduate education afforded her L. continued that, “I was immediately able to use what I was learning in my own class just to get my students to see how things fit together, or I used examples of things I remembered from case studies from my classes, so it's allowed me to teach immediately”.

As for some of the challenges she faced along the way, L. remarked, “I do remember that I had some challenges in matching to my very first textbook. I noticed there is a certain amount of messing around between Mozilla, Internet Explorer and Google Chrome, because some of the functionality works better with one platform than another, and it's not always what you would expect. She continued, “The trials and errors made me a much more patient person than I probably was before. That's good!” In conclusion the value of education was well stated in her final comments, “I feel like I really grew as a person. There were some subjects I didn't think I could necessarily manage and the timeline seemed so accelerated, but then once I got through it all, it's a little bit more than a decathlon, it feels like you (laughs) made it to the end of the marathon as it were.

Meaning of Success Theme

L.'s motto, “I just keep moving forward” characterized her approach to success throughout the interview. Despite many educational and family obstacles along the way L. persistently continued on her journey of self-fulfillment to reach her goals. On the surface her academic successes such as graduating second in her high school, Phi Beta

Kappa in her undergraduate, getting her Master's and JD degrees as well as her success in the online graduate program appear effortless, until the details of the struggles were revealed in the interview. As she explained, "I got to give you an idea of how bad my growing up years were, I fell asleep in a coma for 72 hours at J.'s house cause I was dealing with bronchitis and my mother would come yelling and screaming into the room every couple of hours threatening to kill someone. We went through this cycle every night, so I was always sleep deprived. In high school I started falling asleep in class at the back of the room. I was probably the person least likely to graduate. I ended taking naps the last two hours of the day in the chemistry lab next to the beakers." She continued, "I had to take the bar exam more than once. My parents filed for divorce right before the week of the bar exam. Mom is quite the saboteur. So dad was kicked out and ended up moving in with me right at the wrong time." Her open minded attitude and willingness to learn even from failure showed her positive attitude and internal locus of control. This was evident when she expressed her attitude about having to take the bar exam twice, "I guess the good thing is it becomes a dry run and you learn, I mean you can use it as a resilience training exercise in some fashion".

The outward signs of success of her online graduate program were evident as well as she explained that getting the degree would be "a nice little crowning point", with plans of more responsibility in her full time position and making more money in her receivership work. In her words, "I do feel a great deal of success, because I never left the legal field". She also mentioned other job possibilities, "I've gotten offers to be a chair or a faculty person locally". The main emphasis on success though was in how the degree had enhanced her own learning, as she explained it, "filled in some blind spots

that I hadn't really encountered thus far in my learning”, and in her teaching she, “was immediately able to use what I was learning in the class... from a teaching perspective, I could see how it would immediately expand my opportunities”. Her excitement of being able to apply what she learned was also evident as a department manager, “I also manage a department and I can use some of those motivational and organizational deviance things right away.” She went on, “in the field, I use it in my litigation practice already on an ongoing basis.”

Her positive and affirmative attitude toward her online learning experience was evident as L. commented that, “The trials and errors made me a much more patient person than I probably was before. That's good!” and she concluded that, “I feel like I really grew as a person. There were some subjects I didn't think I could necessarily manage and the timeline seemed so accelerated, but then once I got through it all, it's a little bit more than a decathlon, it feels like I (laughs) made it to the end of the marathon as it were.”

Locus of Control Theme

L.'s internal locus of control, being in control of her own destiny, was evident when reviewing the stages of her life as expressed in the interview, especially upon examining how she handled adversity. Her academic ability, along with inner motivation and persistence propelled her forward to overcome all obstacles, learn from her mistakes, and take advantage of opportunities and help along the way.

Analysis of R.'s Profile (NSS/QS)

Overview

R. was the third person interviewed. Her selection for the Quiz Success category was based on her orientation quiz grade of 75%, which was above the successful threshold of 60%. She was not successful as a student because she was withdrawn from the program before she could complete her first course because of her employment status. She agreed to be interviewed face to face since she worked on campus. This second face to face interview was also conducted in the library. R., like C., was no longer enrolled in the graduate online program. She was the oldest person interviewed. According to her interview and the secondary institutional data she was a Caucasian woman of 62 at the time of the interview. She was the seventh person contacted out of 154 students from the No Student Success/ Quiz Success group (NSS/QS) and readily agreed to be interviewed when contacted by phone and email. Her interview also took place in one day and lasted about an hour, which included two five minute breaks in between the three interview sessions. Her selection for the No Student Success category was based on the fact that she attended the online class after completing her orientation less than one week before she was told she did not qualify for the employee pilot project or discount and was administratively dropped from the program.

Student Life History and Education

Out of all of the interviewees R. did not talk much about her family background and preferred to speak about her education through her work experience and training she had received when employed in the high tech industry. When questioned about her early educational experience she started by saying, "I went to kindergarten, which was a weird

experience for me, but then I went into first. From first to eighth grade I was in a parochial catholic elementary school.” When asked why kindergarten was weird she elaborated, “I don't know why, because I didn't have any friends, the building was very old. I was afraid to go downstairs into the basement to go to the bathroom (laughs...). I don't remember very many good things from kindergarten, but then I went to first grade and it was parochial. I was taught by the nuns. I always did well in school, mostly A's and B's.” She recounted the two high schools she went to and her plans on continuing to college, “I went for two years at S.L.A., which was an all girls' school. It was OK, I just don't know if I was boy crazy or I just felt like I wanted to be in school with boys and girls, so I asked my mother to let me go to L.H., which I did, and in both times, in both places, I was going towards taking courses for college. Again I did well in high school. Made a lot of friends.”

Her first attempt at college was to go for a teaching degree, “And then I went to L.S.C., was studying to be a teacher, and at that time there's a lot of students that were graduating from L.S. as teachers and not getting jobs. So I said, "Woah! Why am I going through all of this to get a degree and I'm not gonna get a job?" So I quit college.”

Her first job as a clerk introduced to her computers. This experience influenced her decision to go back to college to take programming courses and pursue a career in high tech. As she explained, “I was just a clerk, but I was working with blue prints and counting different diodes, and it had to with electronics. And all of the information that I was doing was going onto keypunch cards and going into the programming department. So then I became friends with the woman that worked in the programming, she was about the same age as me and I said, "What did you do to get this degree, this is very interesting

to me?" Shortly after she enrolled in to another university and, "went for a BS degree in Management Information Systems... was going at night and working in the day, so it was part time, and I was working at companies where my tuition was getting paid back, so, it was a pretty good deal." She moved from one high tech company to another and, "became a software engineer for a while, did some assembly language programming, which I really didn't like (clears throat). Then I went on and did more of program management type of stuff, and that was the end of my education. Actually I took courses at work, whatever training I needed to take and it was available at work I would go and take it. And that's it. That was my education." The training she received, "was specific for business, there were technical courses. Then there was a lot of excellence type courses, some supervisory type or project planning, project management type courses that I took (clears throat)." When pressed for specific stories on her educational experience the only thing that she remembered was, "when I was in parochial school I remember taking penmanship." Then she added, "What else can I remember? I always did well with math, I did good with science courses, I actually did well with all kinds of courses. When I was in college, though, I didn't do well the first year." She went into more details, "I think there's an adjustment there. I know I remember I had an eight o'clock class in the mornings, which I didn't like at all (clears throat...), so I didn't do well in that class cause I skipped a lot of those classes. I found out that if I took my classes later I did better (laughs...). College was fun." Her only regret was that because of finances she lived at home and, "I think I missed out on that living at school experience." Her attitude toward education changed, as C.'s did, as she got older, "School always came easy to me especially when I was in high school, but moving on to college I realized I needed to do a

lot more studying. I do remember when I started going to school nights, I started taking it a lot more seriously and studying a lot harder. So when I finally did get a degree from L.U., I graduated magna cum laude, I got mostly A's and B's, so I guess I'm proud of that (laughs...). That's about it, I don't know, I don't have really any other stories, it was a long time ago (laughs...).”

When asked what prompted her to take the graduate online program, R. stated that there were two reasons why. “The first preliminary courses for the online were free, and it wasn't that I didn't want to pay for it, because I didn't know if I would have the time necessary to put to it, to get the grades that I would expect of myself. So I figured well, this is a good way to see if I can manage my time to put into these courses and see if I want to continue with it.” Unfortunately because she was not a full time employee she stated, “I got kicked out of the program, so (laughs...) I never found out if I could, you know, if I had the time to do it. I'm glad they kicked me out really early and I didn't spend a lot of time studying because that would have been really disappointing if I'd have spent that time studying, and then, you know got nothing for it, so.” After some reflection R. added, “Well, you know I'm at a point in my career that I don't really feel like I have a career right now, so I guess a lot has to do with my work experience and not with my educational experience. So, do you want to hear about that?”

She proceeded to elaborate on some of her work experiences she had in different high tech industries, “I was a software engineer for a while, then I became more of a project planner or customer service systems engineer.” She explained how she was, “responsible for (clears throat) software applications that were being built. We had to make sure that before they were released, that everybody who was responsible for

supporting them were ready to support them, making sure that everybody was trained properly, that all the support centers throughout the world were ready.” She mentioned that she, “didn't like being in my office, heads down, coding. I wanted to be working more with people. Being technical, but also having more exposure and relationships with people. I like that a lot.”

Big changes took place for her in 1994 when she became pregnant and was laid off. “Then I was upset, but then on the other hand I'm thinking - Well, I have all this time to spend with my daughter. So, I was out of work for eighteen months, and then I went back to work.” She worked at several places until she again got laid off, “That was 2001, after September 11th, I think a month after September 11th, everybody was (clears throat) let go (clears throat). And after that I really had a hard time getting back into high tech. So then I went and became a realtor, (laughs...) and then I got divorced.” The real estate work did not work out so eventually, “I was taking anything I could, and then I ended up getting a job here, part time as admin, and just doing some other things that I could to make money. So I figured if I had this opportunity to get an online graduate degree, that would add more to my resume. I really enjoy project management so I was looking to maybe do more in the project management field, but that didn't work out.” She concluded, “Well, one of the reasons why I was taking the online graduate degree is because I had been in corporate world and business world for a long, long time before I got laid off in 2001, and I was thinking this was my way to maybe get back in.”

Online Orientation

When asked for details about the online orientation, R. commented that, “well that was a year and a half ago, so I don't remember too many details. All I remember is I was

excited to start. I forget what the courses were, but I was very interested in the course I was taking.” After a few moments she added, “I remember vaguely during the orientation, the online orientation, and I didn't have any problems with it. I think maybe there was one or two questions and I can't even remember what they are now. I think there was one or two things that I mentioned or sent as comments and they welcomed the comments. And I don't remember what they were.” When asked if she was able to view all the parts of the orientation including the presentations, she continued, “I went through all of the orientation, but I didn't take part in any, listening to any lectures or be part of a lecture we had.” When pressed for more details on the orientation and if she recalled anything else from it, she commented, “No, to tell you the truth I don't.”

Online Program and Technology

When asked for more specific details about her short online program experience she started out by stating how, “I was disappointed. I was actually angry when I got kicked off the program (laughs...), but that's the way things go, you know. I was hired here as temporary, and I'm still temporary (laughs...), which is a little bit of a sore subject, but there is really nothing I can do about it, you know.” Then she proceeded to recall the actual course experience, “I started reading an online book, and I think I read one or two chapters and I was enjoying the book, I was enjoying the reading. I remember having to do some kind of an assignment that was explaining who we were, where we were coming from. I was planning to spend a lot of time doing it on Saturday, but Friday they told me that I could not continue, because I was only temporary and not part time, and not regular, and I couldn't continue to take the class.” Her actual time in the course was, “Not even a week.” When asked if she had any technical difficulties she mentioned

that she had issues when trying to use a tablet to read the online book, but because, “the operating system for it wasn't very user friendly, I just gave up on it and used my PC.”

About the overall experience she mentioned, “except for me getting kicked out it was a good experience, and I was actually excited about going towards my graduate degree.” She continued to express her disappointment by stating that even, “when they roll out for the regular courses I can't even get the discount. I have no benefits what so ever being a temporary employee. So, it's disappointing, especially after I've been here so long (laughs...)”.

Success

When asked about her feelings of success based upon her educational life history and online orientation and program experiences, R. expressed her disappointment in her lack of success in her current life. She started out by stating that, “I know a lot of people my age who are displaced and I just think there's a lot of age discrimination going on out there.” She continued, “I felt like I was successful up until the point when I got laid off and couldn't get back into high tech. I think a lot of my education that I've taken in the past I'm not using. I mean I know my way around the computer, if I'm learning a new application I can learn it pretty quickly because of my background, but I really do think that one of the reasons why I can't get a full time job, which I'm actively looking for a full time job, is my age. So, do I feel successful? No, not really (laughs...). It's very, very frustrating... I'm sixty-two. I'm going to be working part time or whatever until I don't know when (sniffing, tearful).” She elaborated on some of the other part time jobs she had done and was currently doing, the financial hardship she was undergoing and concluded, “It's very difficult. It's not only me. I know a lot of people my age who are

smart, have been successful and now we've got no place to go. So that's my story (laughs...).

When asked if she would continue her education she stated, "No, I can't afford it. (inhales deeply), it's expensive, it's either that or my mortgage. I need a place to live more than I need the courses." When pressed for more details on how she is able to use her educational background, she continued, "You know, I'd like to think of myself as an intelligent person and I think that intelligence makes me have a certain presence, or a certain posture, which helps in any kind of business, anything that you're doing. So yeah, absolutely. I mean, I don't feel like any of my education has been wasted, everything that I took, formal education or on the job training, or just relationships with people I think helps you grow. And I don't think that process ever stops. I find myself being more mature. I mean as you get older you get more mature, you have more patience, and are not as quick to fly off the handle, or get angry about things. I mean the whole process of growing and growing older and learning has helped, absolutely."

She mentioned the value of college education when she spoke about her daughter, "I'm concerned about my daughter (voice gets shaky). I mean I can see her going through college and I don't want her not to go through college. I think it's a very vital experience, but hopefully when she gets to be my age she doesn't go through what I'm going through. Cause now I almost feel like all that education that I took in high tech, all those high tech courses were almost a waste of time, not the other courses, but the technical courses." She concluded, "So, I don't know if it's my fault for not staying more current and keep going to school to learn all the new technologies, but, I don't know. It is what it is" (Personal Correspondence, R., October, 2013).

Value of Education Theme

For R. "School always came easy to me" and even in high school she was, "taking courses for college". As the interview progressed it appeared that R.'s value of education was motivated by what job opportunities it would open up for her. She quit her initial college experience because of lack of jobs. As she explained, "I went to college, was studying to be a teacher. At that time there's a lot of students that were graduating as teachers and not getting jobs. So I said, "Woah! Why am I going through all of this to get a degree and I'm not gonna get a job." So I quit college. Then I went to work".

At her job as a clerk she was introduced to computer science and decided to go back to school in order to be able to work in that field. She continued, "So I enrolled in college at night, started taking courses for programming and went for a degree in Management Information Systems. I got a BS." It was upon her return back to school part-time when she started taking her education more seriously, "When I was in college, though I didn't do well the first year. When I started going to school nights, I started taking it a lot more seriously and studying a lot harder so when I did finally get a degree I graduated magna cum laude. I got mostly A's and B's. So I guess I'm proud of that (laughs)." Her value of education shifted to training at work as she explained, "I went on and did more of program management type of stuff and that was the end of my education actually. I took courses at work, any kind of training, whatever training I needed to take and it was available at work I would go and take it. And that was my education."

R. had a hard time getting back into high tech after being laid off in 2001. "That was 2001, a month after September 11th, everybody was (clears throat) let go (clears throat). After that I really had a hard time getting back into high tech."

Her decision to start in the online graduate program was initially due to the courses being free for the initial quarter for employees, and her worry as to whether, “I would have the time necessary to put into it to get the grades that I would expect of myself”. Another reason was because “this opportunity to get an online graduate degree that would add more to my resume” to which she added, “I really enjoy project management so I was looking to maybe do more in the project management field, but that didn't work out.” As to her future education, she mentioned, “I can't afford it (inhales deeply). It's expensive. It's either that or my mortgage. I need a place to live more than I need the courses.” She expressed her concern for her daughter, who was going to college, stating, “I don't want her not to go through college, I think it's a very vital experience, but hopefully when she gets to be my age she doesn't through what I'm going through, cause now I almost feel like all that education that I in high tech, all those high tech courses, were almost a waste of time - the technical courses - not the other courses” In conclusion she added, “Everything that I took formally, formal education or on the job training, or just relationships with people I think helps you grow. And I don't think that process ever stops.”

Meaning of Success Theme

Grades and doing well in school were meaningful to R.. “School always came easy to me so when I did finally get a degree I graduated magna cum laude. I got mostly A's and B's. So I guess I'm proud of that (laughs). Based on her emphasis on her work experience, her career in high tech was a source of success for her, “I felt like I was successful up until the point when I got laid off and couldn't get back into high tech”. She continued, “But I really do think that one of the reasons why I can't get a full time

job, which I'm actively looking for a full time job, is my age. So, do I feel successful? No, not really (laughs). It's very, very frustrating. I'm at a point in my career that I don't really feel like I have a career right now”.

One of her reasons for enrolling in the online graduate program was for career advancement as she stated, “Because I had been in the corporate world and business world for a long, long time before I got laid off in 2001, and I was thinking this was my way to maybe get back in”. Even though she blamed her age for lack of success in getting a full time job, she mentioned that, “as I get older I get more mature, have more patience, and not as quick to fly off the handle, or get angry about things”. At the end of the interview R. reflected on actions she might have taken along the way, “I don't know if it's my fault for not staying more current and keep going to school to learn all the new technologies. I don't know. It is what it is.”

Locus of Control Theme

Early on in the interview R. described being in control of her own destiny, especially when she went back to college the second time and then started working in the high tech industry. The internal locus of control shifted gradually as external incidents seemed to take control over R.'s life, such as being laid off after September 11, 2001. There was a sense of hopelessness that permeated the interview, where inner motivation and persistence seemed to have been stripped away, and obstacles of getting back into a full time job due to her age seemed insurmountable.

Analysis of S.'s Profile (NSS/NQS)

Overview

S. was the last person interviewed. His selection for the Quiz Success category was based on his orientation quiz grade of 40%, which was below the successful threshold of 60%. He was also not successful as a student because he withdrew from his first course before completing it due to being laid off from his job and losing his employee benefit. Like L., he was also interviewed via Skype because of his location. He had a lot of “only’s” as an interviewee, which made his input that much more relevant to the overall collected data. He was the only male, the only non-Caucasian, the only undergraduate student and the youngest out of a total of the four interviewees. He readily agreed to the interview when contacted by phone and email, but because of his busy schedule the date was postponed several times. The first and second sessions were conducted on the same day with a short interval in between, but because of S.’s busy work schedule, the third interview had to be postponed for another day. Based on the institutional data and the interview S. was 37 years old and had listed his ethnicity as Asian-American. He was no longer enrolled in the program. His interview was the shortest one of the four, it lasted a total of about 48 minutes, and required redialing via Skype several times because of static, poor connection or poor reception, depending on where S. was, or if he was using his phone or his computer for the Skype connection. Out of all of the interviews S.’s was the most unfocused one with regards to the flow of the interview, changing subjects and opinions as he went along. He also repeated many words, which sounded like stuttering during the interview and the constant interruptions from the environment added to the sense of scatterdness. What was interesting to note

was that during the break in between the first and second interview S. had a dialog with his co-worker, and there was not a trace of stuttering or repetition of words during that conversation.

Student Life History and Education

S., like R., had not been actively pursuing continuation of his education until the opportunity for free courses arose as part of his employment benefits. As he stated, “I wasn't really intending to... to... go to school. I just had an opportunity and I wanted to finish school.” The online undergraduate program was the third program he had been enrolled in, the first one being a community college, and the second one a university that he thought it was going to be more of a trade school experience. As he explained, “I went to community college and then I focused on helping my parents with their company and I put my education on hold.” This happened again with his university experience as well, “When I got the chance to go back to school I went to a university for three years, and I never finished because I again, I had to go and, and help my family.”

During his high school years he admitted that he was not very focused on academics and enjoyed sports and his social life more. “I found high school was pretty easy, I just played a lot of sports. I had more of a social life in high school, and academically wasn't really that focused on it”. He continued, “I didn't feel like my teachers focused and pushed on me too hard, and I needed a little bit more attention. I was actually afraid of my teachers and I felt that I didn't have the good connection that I needed with some of my teachers.” He mentioned that he did connect with a couple of his teachers, but overall, “I think if I had a better connection with them it would have helped me grow as an academic student.” S. mentioned that at sixteen, seventeen, “it's

hard to connect with someone who's sixty plus and you just find, as far as a teacher role, it feels more like you're being punished all the time.”

The connections he made with his instructors in the community college were more memorable to him than the instructors at the university. He continued, “I remember my professors from junior college a lot more than I did from the university.” He went on to elaborate on his favorite algebra teacher, and how with his help and attention S., who started out with a D in the class finished with a 98%. “I came in a student that really wasn't too focused on education, and he kinda turned it around for me.” His experience at the university left a bitter taste as he explained, “I was going to junior colleges, but I wanted something faster and quicker so I went to the university and they of course they promised me the world, and they said I would finish in such an amount of time. I put myself in, in, in debt going to the university because I didn't understand. I was still pretty young and I felt like they took advantage of me when I went there and just collected money from me. I have a huge student loan right now and paid off quite a bit”.

S. explained about himself, “I'm a very sensitive person, so when I see a teacher giving lot of love, or lot of attention to a student I, I, I react better. I don't like it when they don't really care, that sets me off. I feel like they just don't pay attention and are not focusing on the student.” He continued that even though he didn't finish at the university he, ”wanted to finish somehow and the opportunity came when I was working and could apply for the online program, but I left after they let me go (clears throat). Financially it was too much for me to afford, so I couldn't do it.” In terms of continuing his education he mentioned, “I actually want to continue my education, but right now I'm running a

construction company and I have two, two boys. I'm kind of waiting for things to settle down so that I can continue my education.”

Online Orientation

When asked about the online orientation S. initially mentioned that, “It was confusing a bit, but I'm pretty tech savvy so I figured out most of everything that I just did on my own”. Further into the interview S. commented that, “I don't really remember it, cause I don't think there really was one”. Upon further reflection he mentioned, “I do remember a quiz and some other stuff, but I don't, I don't recall a written portion, a written portion of the orientation. I do remember emailing the instructor, but I don't remember anything else after that.

Online Program and Technology

Overall S. described his short online experience stating, “I actually really enjoyed all the online classes. Then I was let go, so I really only got one quarter in and that was about it.” He stated he “did like the classes, I like the structure of the classes, it actually was well thought out.” However, he continued, “what I didn't like was, like I said, since there was no orientation there, a lot about why the message boards were so important.” He complained that at the very beginning of his business math course, “there was only four or five of us actually participating in the classes on the message board” but that, “Once it got rolling a lot of people started participating, but then they weren't really asking the right questions, or they weren't really with the conversation, so that it was a bit frustrating on my, my part (clears throat)”. He mentioned that he “had a great contact with the instructor” and, “made some good contacts with my peers” and that he did not find it hard to follow, but “would definitely do it again.”

In terms of improvements, S. mentioned that he would have liked, “a little bit more interaction with my peers” and, “to have seen a little more technology as far as maybe a class with cameras or something, and everyone could have seen each other.” His one big complaint was that he, like R., had difficulty accessing the books online. He had wanted to use his phone or a tablet, but, “couldn't use my tablet because that wasn't supported, but then I just used my laptop and I was fine.” He mentioned that as an “older student” he would have liked a hard cover book, “so what I ended up doing was I just printed out all of the pages and I would read them.” He explained that, “I'm 37. When I was going to high school we didn't have tablets, we had computers, we were just at the advent of the internet and laptops. We didn't have laptops either”.

When comparing his prior junior college online experience to the latest online program he said, “It was almost a ten year gap so, you know, it was a lot different taking it online at the junior college so I can't really compare the two. It's like comparing apples and oranges, they were a lot different”. After his short online experience he mentioned that, “I would actually rather do it online because of the time, time is so crucial in my life right now that I'd much rather do it online than in person (laughs).” Upon further reflection about continuing his education he stated, “I am planning to continue I just don't know when. I would do a combination of both online and on campus”.

Success. Success for S. was more focused on his role as a business man in his family business than on his education. As he stated, “My successes right now as far as a business man, I would contribute my education probably about 30%, because the rest of the 70% was on the fly. I learned a lot when I was doing business.” He continued, “I think I use 35 - 40 % of what I, I learned in business math.” The word that summarized

S.'s sense of success was when he stated, "I feel confident in what I do right now." He elaborated, "I'm using a lot of math skills and a lot of customer service, which are all things I've learned in, in school", and continued that in order to grow his company he would like to go, "back and really focus on more of the business aspects" of education. His success has not come without some challenges as he stated, "Business is interesting. No one ever is going to have a home run right off the bat, and I've had a couple of failures." He elaborated, "I learned from those mistakes. Here I am now, we're growing and we're getting business." In conclusion he stated, "what I did learn is communication using online is, is essential when you're doing projects" and continued commenting on his work and his partners, "I use a collaborative online program for my project and not everyone checks in and it's pretty frustrating. They're going to have to learn, if they're not gonna to do it they're gonna fall by the way side. It's something that they have to do" (Personal Correspondence, S., October, 2013).

Value of Education Theme

As the interview unfolded S. explained how the family business always came first, before his own education, and contributed to him quitting the community college and the university. S. seemed to value the education he had received as it pertained to his family business and how he could apply what he had learned stating, "I think I use 35 - 40 % of what I, I learned in business math" and "I would contribute my education probably about 30%, because... the rest of the 70% was on the fly." What seemed to make education valuable to him was when he was able to make a connection with his instructor and receive the care and attention he desired. This was evidenced when he spoke of his instructors, "I didn't feel like my teachers focused and pushed on me too

hard, and I, I needed a little bit more attention” and again, “I think if I had a better connection with them it would have helped me grow as an academic student.” His experience with his junior college algebra instructors was a really good example of this when he pointed out that the instructor, “would stay late with me to, to work on things. He sat and talked to me and he really made that connection with me and he helped me understand. He really focused on me, and I ended up finishing that class with, I think it was 98 percent.” As S. put it, “I came in a student that really wasn't too, too focused on education, and he kinda turned it around for me.”

Meaning of Success Theme

Confidence as a business man in his family’s business summarized S.’s meaning of success. This was evident when he stated, “I feel confident in what I do right now.” He attributed his success partly to his education, but mostly to his own work experience. “My successes right now as far as a business man I would contribute my education probably about 30%, because the rest of the 70% was on the fly, I learned a lot when I was doing business.” As he summarized his company’s prospects he stated, “We're growing and we're getting business”

Locus of Control Theme

The confidence that S. was in control of his own destiny was exhibited when he spoke to his co-worker during the break between interviews without stuttering, repeating words or any hesitations. This attitude also came through when he often remarked on how “tech savvy” he was. When commenting on his online course experience he continued, “I figured out most of everything that I did on my own”. When commenting on how he adopted online communication as part of his business practice, he stated,

“what I did learn is communication using online is, is essential when you're doing projects, but sometimes not everyone's going to follow those cues.” He continued, “I use a collaborative online program for my project and not everyone checks in and it's pretty frustrating, but that's how it is.” In a matter of fact business tone he continued, “It's just, they're going to have to learn, if they're not gonna to do it they're gonna fall by the way side. It's something that they have to do.”

His success in business did not come without some challenges. As he reflected, “Business is interesting. No one ever is going to have a home run right off the bat, and I've had a couple of failures. I learned from those mistakes”. Despite many setbacks in his educational career and the sense of external locus of control when it came to his family obligations, his internal locus of control was evident when it came to his profession as a business man. His ability to learn from the education he received and incorporate that into his business strategy and in his daily business interactions, overcome obstacles and keep the company growing exhibited another side to success that was not evident when looking at just his educational history.

Integrated Data Analysis

This mixed method research combined the quantitative and qualitative methods of gathering data to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between student success and the online orientation. This triangulation sought to strengthen and reinforce the findings from both approaches while minimizing their limitations (Creswell, 2009). The quantitative phase of this study supported the research question: there was a statistically significant relationship between student success and online orientation quiz scores, though the relationship was considered weak due to the confidence interval. The

profiles created through the qualitative phase of the study supported the findings of the quantitative phase and the value of the orientation, but more importantly provided a more in-depth understanding of what student success meant and the characteristics that seemed to help online student be successful in an online environment. The interviews also provided further insight into the underlying quantitative analysis numbers, whereby the numbers came alive through the stories of the participants. This in turn generated categories out of which the following themes emerged: value of education, meaning of success and locus of control, where locus of control appeared as the most significant theme and seemed to have a strong effect on the participants' value of education and meaning of success.

First, success in the program or in the quiz as categorized in the quantitative phase of the study did not necessarily match the students' own interpretation of success. Second, the value of the orientation quiz experience was minimal, if even remembered by the majority of the students. Third, the theme of value of education, which emerged from the interviews, was interpreted in a wide spectrum by the students; however, the students with internal locus of control noted how they applied what they had learned throughout their education more so than the student with external locus of control. Finally, another theme generated by the interviews, namely locus of control, seemed to be an underlying motivator that colored a students' ultimate perception of success; those with internal locus of control thought of themselves as successful, whereas the external locus of control student did not.

Further analysis of the quantitative findings revealed that C. (SS/NQS) did meet the criteria for student success (i.e. retention and program CGPA success), and her

interview data corroborated the quantitative analysis label of a student of success, (i.e. active in two quarters with a minimum of three courses) though at the time of the interview she was no longer active in the program. C. was the only one interviewed who did not start in the original June cohort, which was offered free to employees for the first quarter. C.'s interview revealed how her external motivation for education changed when she returned back to school, and became more internal when "the papers became more meaningful...in applying...what I've learned". She attributed her success as a student to her age, changes in her value of education, and a combination of life and work experiences. Her success in the orientation and specifically the orientation quiz score was only a minor factor of her experience as an online student, which became clear in the interview. Her overall impression of the orientation was favorable, but when pressed for more details she stated, "I don't recall it specifically".

C.'s gradual change from external to internal locus of control and sense of being in control of her own destiny was evident during the interview. This transition supported Rotter's observations that individual traits should not be regarded as fixed (1966). These observations corroborated the quantitative label of a successful student as well, when she stated, "I've made a conscious effort to return, which I believe is a lot harder for a lot of different reasons. I have a little bit more invested, other than money (laughs) in succeeding". This was also confirmed when she described her persistence and ability to be flexible when confronted with technology issues during her online program, as well as when she described her experience of how she persisted in getting help from a career center while she was laid off. Her internal locus of control was well summarized when

she shared her future educational and professional goals in project management, “the only way to keep the doors opening is to really advance myself”.

Analysis of the quantitative findings revealed that L. (SS/QS) met the criteria for student success (i.e. retention and program CGPA success), and her interview data, like C.’s, also corroborated the quantitative analysis label of a student of success as well as quiz success. At the time of the interview L. had doubled up on her last two graduate courses and was only a few weeks away from completing the program. L. attributed her success as a student to persistence, perseverance and “resilience”, an open and curious mind, always wanting and willing to learn, even from failure. Her sense of success was also evident when she explained that the online program “enhanced the material I already knew and it filled in some blind spots”, and when she continued excitedly about how she was able to successfully apply what she learned in her teaching and legal professions. The professional success and the additional income she would gain by completing the degree were on the horizon as well, but in the end it was her positive attitude about how she “grew as a person” and through the trials and errors became a “much more patient person than I probably was before” that seemed to bring her the greatest sense of success. Unlike C., L. remembered many details from the online orientation and the quiz, and connected that experience with her own, since she was also an instructor of orientations among other things. L.’s internal locus of control was evident from the start of her interview, and her motto of “I just keep moving forward” propelled her throughout her education, life and work experiences despite the many family and other obstacles that she encountered.

Analysis of the quantitative findings revealed that R. (NSS/QS) did not meet the criteria for student success (i.e. retention and program CGPA success), and her interview corroborated her no success as a student. Her success in completing the orientation and the quiz was only a minor factor in the online program experience; she like C. could barely recall any specific details about the orientation. R. attributed her nonsuccess as a student to the circumstances around her employment, and her inability to continue in the program due to her part time work status. When asked if she would continue her education in the future she stated that she could not afford it. Upon further review of the interview it seemed that her educational experiences were more motivated by external rewards of job opportunities and professional advancement rather than internal satisfaction of gaining educational experience and personal growth. R., like C. and L., faced many obstacles along the way, including being laid off several times and having a hard time getting back into high tech, as well as failure as a real estate agent and going through a divorce. Unlike C. and L. she did not seem to have the same degree of internal motivation, persistence and resilience to overcome these obstacles. R.'s external locus of control became evident during the interview when she blamed circumstances and others for her failures. Unlike C., who attributed her success as a student partly to her age, R. expressed disappointment and frustration in her lack of success in her current life and blamed the fact that she could not get a full time job at sixty-two on age discrimination. When asked about her feeling of success based upon her educational experience and life and history she stated that, "I felt I was successful up until the point when I got laid off and couldn't get back into high tech." In conclusion R. reflected on the decisions she made in life by stating, "So, I don't know if it's my fault for not staying more current and

keeping going to school to learn all new technologies, but I don't know." Her final statement seemed to reflect her sense of despair, powerlessness over her destiny and confirmed her external locus of control as she concluded with, "It is what it is."

Analysis of the quantitative findings revealed that S. (NSS/NQS) did not meet the criteria for student success (i.e. retention and program CGPA success), nor was he successful with his quiz scores, but his interview did not corroborate his label as a student with no success. Like C. and R., S. did not recall many details of the orientation, and initially even questioned whether there had been one. Like R. and L., he was part of the initial June cohort, and like R. and L. also decided to pursue continuing his education because of his employment status. Like R., S. was not able to stay in the online program as an employee because he was laid off, and "financially it was too much for me to afford" to continue his education. When asked if he would continue his education he stated, "I actually want to, but right now I'm running a construction company and I have two boys. I'm kind of waiting for things to settle down."

S.'s attitude about the online program and his short lived experience seemed very different than that of R.'s; according to S. he was able to apply "35-40% of what I learned in business math" and contributed "about 30%" of his education to "my successes right now as far as a business man." S.'s definition of success, like R.'s, was more focused on his professional role as a business man than on his education. As was the case with the other interviewees, S. also had his share of obstacles, and challenges, in education as well as in business, but like C. and L. he persisted and "learned from those mistakes". By taking charge of his destiny to become "confident in what I do right now" he exhibited an internal locus of control.

In summary the interviews reinforced the importance of a mixed method study to triangulate data and offer a deeper insight into the relationship between student success and online orientation quiz scores. The online orientation quiz scores, the dependent variable, although statistically significant ($p < .05$) was determined to be relatively weak, when taking into account that the 95% confidence interval (CI) of -5.69 and 0.36 contained a 0. This weak link analysis was corroborated during the interviews when the effects of the online orientation were deemed practically insignificant according to the majority of the interviewees; three of the four interviewees hardly even remembered doing the online orientation and were not able to describe that experience with very many details.

The interviews also offered a deeper understanding of the concept of student success, beyond the numerical quantification of retention and program CGPA, making the numbers come alive and adding “meat to the bones”. It was interesting to note that students with no program and retention success (R. and S.) seemed to be more focused on defining their success in terms of their work and profession, whereas the students with success in both the program and the retention (C. and L.) defined their success in terms of personal and educational growth.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This two phase mixed method study sought to investigate the relationship of student success and online orientation quiz score as well as the characteristics of successful students in an online learning environment.

Phase One: Quantitative

During the initial quantitative phase the online student orientation completers were categorized as student success if they met the retention (student took at least 3 online courses and was active during two quarters) and program success (CGPA for undergraduates at 2.0 and above, CGPA for graduate students at 3.0 or above) criteria. Once the independent variable of student success or no success was established the online orientation quiz success score (60 or above) was used to divide the completers into the dependent variable – quiz success or no success. Thus four groups were created – student success/quiz success (SS/QS), student success/no quiz success (SS/NQS), no student success/quiz success (NSS/QS), and no student success/no quiz success (NSS/NQS). The quantitative phase of this study supported the research question – there was a statistically significant relationship between student success and online orientation quiz scores, though the relationship was considered weak due to the confidence interval.

Phase Two: Qualitative

Once the groups were established one student from each of the four groups was randomly interviewed. The interview questions asked during the interview focused on:

1. Educational History Background

2. Online orientation and online course experience
3. Reflection on experiences and their meaning

Student Life History, Education, Online Orientation, Online Program and Technology, and Success were the focus of the interviews. After examining the interviews for themes and patterns for individual students and between groups the following themes of Value of Education, Meaning of Success and Locus of Control were generated.

Analysis Across Groups

Through reviewing the themes and patterns certain characteristics of successful students in the online environment seemed to emerge, such as self-motivation, persistence and resilience. Research has shown that students with academic success tended to attribute their effort and ability as reasons for their success, whereas students with poor academic records tended to attribute their lack of success to how difficult the tests were, or bad luck (Bernstein et al., 1979, Kovenklioglu & Greenhouse, 1978).

The categories and themes derived from the interviews suggested that students who seemed to have a more internal locus of control (C., L. and S.) showed characteristics of internal motivation, persistence, and resilience, despite challenges and setbacks. They also spoke about how they internalized what they learned and applied it to new situations and circumstances, both educationally and professionally. In C.'s case, the internal locus of control seemed to evolve with age, maturity and experience from what was originally a more external locus of control. This transition supported Rotter's observations that individual traits should not be regarded as fixed (1966). The overall significant relationship of the characteristic of locus of control with a students' definition

of success, and the fact that it could change, as detailed in C.'s interview analysis, suggested changing the online orientation to help students be more successful.

Presenting additional lecture material on locus of control, as well as adding a threaded discussion activity that would guide students to review reasons for their prior academic success and failure, and explore what they can do to control their “academic destiny” through effort and ability could promote a more internally oriented locus of control, which could in turn increase student academic success and retention (Dollinger, 2000, Kirkpatrick et al., 2008, p. 494, Noel et al., 1987). In addition, the online orientation could promote resilience, by advocating a change in mindset in how adversary situations and their causes were interpreted, and exposing students to the notion that personal characteristics, like intelligence and ability, could be changed “with effort, new strategies, learning, help from others, and patience” (Yeager & Dweck, 2012, p. 312).

Education and Reflections

John Dewey (1859 – 1952), was a great American philosopher and educator, whose progressive ideas helped form the U.S. education. He was a prolific writer, who believed that the best way to promote human interests was through “a democratic society of informed and engaged inquirers” (Gouinlock, J., (n.d.). Though he wrote *Democracy and Education* almost a century ago, his writings, thoughts and teachings are still thought provoking and meaningful even in today’s technological society. The following writings were based on the researcher’s interpretations of Dewey’s teachings from *Democracy and Education* (1916).

As we go through life and experiences in our society we are in a constant process of self-renewal through our interactions with each other and our environment.

Civilization, the gap between a newborn's capacities and the aims, beliefs, knowledge and traditions of the elders in a society, is comprised of the constant "reweaving of the social fabric" (p. 3), the knowledge of which is transmitted through education. Society exists in the act of communication and since all communication performs a role of educating others, it is transformative. In order to communicate an experience, the experience has to be put imaginatively into a context another can understand, thus give it meaning. As Dewey so aptly put it, "All communication is like art" (p. 4). For social life to continue it requires teaching and learning as well as the experience of living in a society. In order to "transmit all the resources and achievements of a complex society" (p. 5) a more formal method of instruction is required. The danger lies in losing the indirect, personal and vital way of learning of a child in the transition (Dewey, 1916). Dewey's words of warning, though uttered almost a century ago, still echo true today,

As formal teaching and training grow in extent, there is the danger of creating an undesirable split between the experience gained in more direct associations and what is acquired in school. This danger was never greater than at the present time, on account of the rapid growth in the last few centuries of knowledge and technical modes of skill. (Dewey, 1916, p. 6).

The transformative experience of education, where education is a combination of nurturing and fostering, as well as indirect and formal instruction, needs to occur in an environment that is interactive. The environment, or medium, is an extension of an individual's behavior, which "can be remote in space and time from ...a human creature, may form his environment even more truly than some things close to him" (p. 7).

Though online learning did not exist at the time Dewey wrote *Democracy and Education*,

he may have agreed that in an online learning environment “conditions that promote or hinder, stimulate or inhibit the characteristic activities of a living being” (p. 7) are possible. Education is a process of growth towards more education through a “constant reorganizing or reconstruction of experience” which offers direction to future experience. (p. 38). Dewey would support the definition of research as solving current problems by searching the past, “which supplies meaning to what we find when we search” (p. 38).

In a social environment, whether it is in business or education, an individual “cannot perform his own activities without taking the activities of others into account... When he moves he stirs them and reciprocally” (p. 7). Dewey proposed that a “common mind...controls the action of each” (p. 16) when everyone views their actions as having consequences that affect others. Although Dewey did not address leadership in the modern terms that we use today, it is safe to assume that he would strongly support the idea of quantum leadership, where “an entity’s identity is inseparable from its relationship with other entities; it is through these relationships that entities “co-create” their realities (Zohar, 1997, p. 50 as cited in Larazidou, 2008). Dewey’s analogy of a less desirable leadership style – transactional - would be where individuals “use one another to get the desired results” (p. 3) but do not address everyone’s emotional, intellectual or character dispositions. This kind of environment, where all work like machine parts to create a common product does not constitute a community. What he would state as lacking is communication in a larger sense, sharing of purposes, goals and interests on an individual as well as on higher levels, and the consensus, engagement and purposeful activity of all constituents towards a common end.

Although Dewey may not have known about the specific concept of locus of control, he identified certain characteristics that “lie below the level of reflection” formed through constant interaction and experience with our environment, that “determine our conscious thinking and decide our conclusions” (p. 10). The environment could be designed to educate others indirectly and create conditions that sustain or frustrate activities; it is a form of control, where direction can be re-directed with focus of action and cooperation in order to get the desired result. Dewey also emphasized the importance of reflective thinking in order to change attitudes. In his book *How We Think* (1933), he stated that reflective thinking “includes a conscious and voluntary effort to establish belief upon a firm basis of evidence and rationality” (p. 9). Julian Rotter, who developed the concept of locus of control in his social learning theory, also underlined the importance of the environment and thought process. He promoted the idea that human personality and behavior was changeable; and depended upon people’s response to changes in their environment or in the way they think (Mearns, 2009). An online orientation could fulfill these requirements, where new meanings and reflections could come through interactions within the online learning environment.

As a recommendation to improve an online orientation and promote student success adding an I-E scale (Rotter 1966) to the online orientation would allow all individuals to assess their internal/external characteristics and bring it to consciousness. The students could bring meaning to this observation through reflection and interaction in the online discussion forum with their instructor and peers. The interaction might help those students with external characteristics to decide they may want to re-direct their

energies into acting “like an internal” and take charge of their academic fate, instead of finding excuses when obstacles arise.

Recommendations

In order to try to affect student success and increase retention students should take the I-E scale test or a modified version of it as part of the online orientation. Students with external locus of control could be identified early as potentially at-risk, and have extra support available to them from the beginning of their academic career. The online orientation should also include assignments that guide students to reflect on their scores and determine if they are more internal or external. Reading articles on locus of control and possibly another one on resilience and/or mindset could be required, followed by classroom or online discussion, along with a possible reflection paper in order to help students recognize the importance of taking control of their own academic success (e.g., Dollinger (2000), Noel et al. (1987); Yeager & Dweck, 2012). This approach to online education would follow Dewey’s idea of providing an interactive transformative and reflective experience, where education could be a combination of nurturing and fostering, as well as indirect and formal instruction.

Based on the belief that there was a relationship between the online orientation quiz scores and how well students would do in the online courses more recent students who have taken the online orientation have been offered an opportunity to retake the quiz after reviewing the presentations again if their original score was below an 80. Many students have taken advantage of this opportunity, which seemed to show a more internal locus of control, such as taking responsibility for failure, being motivated and putting in effort to retake the quiz. In most cases students were successful when retaking the quiz

and seemed to be better prepared when taking their online courses. Students who were contacted about retaking the quiz, but who did not respond, seemed more likely to not do well in their courses, or even dropped out of the program. Further research in online orientation and the relationship to student success would be beneficial.

Research in how businesses may want to incorporate a locus of control survey when selecting managers for certain positions may be beneficial since transformational leadership and locus of control seem to have a positive relationship, especially in risk-taking dynamic environments (Howell and Avolio, 1993; Miller et al., 1982). Locus of control surveys could also be incorporated in business orientations to help identify employee characteristics best suited for certain business environments, and empower external employees to think “like an internal” and take control of their professional success. These measures could increase employee retention, performance and satisfaction, as well as overall company profits.

Summary

Christopher Thompson, the author of a local Sunday Business Newspaper article summarized what he considered to be most concerning in today’s business – lack of personal accountability. He described the reason that people don’t take personal responsibility and blame others for their lack of success is because of their sense of entitlement; however, internal and external locus of control may be another likely explanation. The author recommended that in order to change this entitlement mentality, people need to step back, reflect and mentally adjust their mindset in order to recognize that “hard work, self-discipline and personal accountability” are necessary for success in their personal and professional success life (Thompson, 2014, p. B1). These

recommendations were very similar to the ones proposed above in order to foster a better understanding of locus of control and thereby potentially improve student success and retention.

The article expanded the applicability of locus of control to success beyond the field of education, to the professional and personal lives of people. Recognizing and reflecting on one's personal generalized expectations of events and how one deals with adversity may, as Dewey (1916) stated, bring the unconscious to a more conscious level. Suggestions for people with external locus of control to behave like internals and become active agents in their own education and professions, may lead to more overall success in their lives (Dollinger, 2000). In leadership, internal locus of control was one of the main psychological variables that distinguished leaders from non-leaders. As was evident in the interview with C., locus of control was not a fixed characteristic, and could change. With a proper mindset students may, with time and effort, learn new strategies and be better prepared for challenges in their academic and social life (Yeager & Dweck, 2012).

Students who had a more internal locus of control seemed to have higher course satisfaction rates and retention (Drennan, 2005; Parker, 1999; Xiao, 2012). Three out of the four interviewees seemed to have a more internal locus of control and even though only two of them met the fairly stringent student success criteria used in the current research, in general all three considered themselves to be successful, took responsibility for their actions and applied what they learned to their academic, professional and personal lives. Dewey's notion of education as a transformative experience, with a combination of formal as well as indirect instruction, could support the locus of control concept in the online educational environment as a way of making the interactive

experience more nurturing. The dissertation added to the body of knowledge because there was limited research on locus of control in online education. In higher education leadership as well as business leadership the importance of addressing the whole needs of the individuals, affective as well as intellectual, may bring about better academic and professional performance, higher retention rates academically, and more “success” to all constituents.

Final Thoughts

By making students more conscious of their unconscious locus of control, they would then be encouraged to think “like an internal”, be more reflective, self-directed, independent thinkers, who take responsibility for their education. When they are faced with obstacles, they will try to think of ways to take control of the situation rather than blame others or fate for their lack of success. This mentality would be beneficial for all students, but especially online students, who need to be, just by the nature of their learning environment, more independent thinkers. Raising awareness of locus of control for all ages in education, business, and in other industries may have a significant effect on individuals’ perceptions of control of their lives and sense of success. Understanding and applying a mindset open to growth may change not only individual lives but a whole society by helping everyone recognize that through persistence and effort, especially during adversity, one can change things for the better.

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APPENDIX A

FRANKLIN PIERCE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL

REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



College of Graduate and Professional Studies & College at Rindge
Proposal Cover Page

Principal Investigator(s) [PI]:

Name: Tatiana Lassonde

Title: Student Support Coordinator

Phone No.: 603-848-0490

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Co-investigator(s)

Name _____

Title _____

Phone No.: _____

Email: _____

Faculty Sponsor (as applicable for students):

Name: Carol Nepton

Email: neptonc@franklinpierce.edu

Academic Department: DAL5

Home Campus: Concord

PROPOSAL TITLE: A Mixed Method Look at Online Orientation as a Predictor of Online Student Success in Higher Education.

RESEARCH QUESTION/S: Can a mandatory online orientation help predict student success in online education.

Is there outstanding funding for the proposed research? No. If so please indicate the source:

NOTE: This proposal approval will expire one year from date listed below. Students must apply to the Chair for an extension two months prior to the expiration date.

For Office Use Only: Exempt (one reviewer) : Expedited (two reviewers) Full (all)

Name of Reviewers: Thomas Stowell and Jodi Young

Gale E. Cossette, Ph.D. X Approved Approved with Revisions Not Approved

Chair-Signature

Date 11-5-12

Comments: _____