Chapter 1.5
Why Choose an Online Course?

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ABSTRACT

OCICU is the Online Consortium of Independent Colleges and Universities and consists of five provider institutions which are located throughout the United States and Ireland. This consortium is the first of its kind to exist in distance education. The researchers wanted to understand why students choose to take courses through the consortium as well as why students opt for online learning instead of traditional face to face instruction. The research was limited courses that were completed in the Fall 2006, Spring 2007, and Fall 2007. The review of the literature revealed several factors of teaching online that affect why member schools recommend an OCICU course to their students and why these students succeed or fail in an online environment. The response rate of 25% diminishes the ability of this investigation to generalize to this population of 64 institutions.

INTRODUCTION

OCICU is the Online Consortium of Independent Colleges and Universities and consists of five provider institutions which are located throughout the United States and Ireland. Currently there are 64 member institutions that refer approximately 550 students per academic year to the consortium.

OCICU allows students from member institutions to register for approved courses being offered by provider schools and course credit is granted by the home / sending institution. The target market for OCICU are small institutions which currently have limited to no access to online courses but have identified a need by their students for online courses.

Provider institutions help member institutions increase enrollment, retention, and revenue by allowing them to offer their students a wider breadth of courses without having to develop an internal online program.

The researchers want to understand why students choose to take courses through the consortium and as well as why they, students, prefer online learning to traditional face to face instruction.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study explored online learning, particularly within the Online Consortium of Colleges and Universities (OCICU) program. This consortium is the first of its kind to exist in distance education. Because of the infancy of this program and the lack of available research within this realm, the provider institutions requested that a research project be undertaken to benefit the future course planning of the OCICU. Within this study, the researchers investigated the course selection for students, the reasons why member institutions recommend these courses to students, and why students choose to enroll in the courses within this consortium. Along with the course investigation, this study compared and contrasted the provider schools, attempting to identify the reasons why some institutions entice more students than other institutions. The overall goal of this research project was to further examine this program with the target of allowing the OCICU to better align itself with the demands and requirements of potential students and member institutions.

LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

The research limitations encountered include: limiting courses and orientations to those completed in the Fall 2006, Spring 2007, and Fall 2007; excluding the Summer 2007 courses in this study; level of difficulty of the online course, (e.g. an advanced accounting course); considering the success of the orientation of students who completed their online course; considering the success of the orientation for those students who dropped the online course.

The delimitations to the study included: knowledge and previous experience of the online course instructors; level of instruction readiness of the student; follow-up of member institutions with students to ensure completion of the orientation; the motivation of the student to complete the orientation; the interest of the student in completing the orientation; the time of day the student accessed the online course and that factors impact on their success; the technological capacity of the student to access and complete an online orientation; the varying lengths of the courses offered by the providers of the consortium; whether the member institutions provided face to face orientation in addition to the online orientation; the number of individual who attended any face to face orientation group; and the length of online orientation sessions.

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