

Chapter 7.14

Do Orientation Materials Help Students Successfully Complete Online Courses?

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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 the importance

of orientation materials to successfully completing an online course taken from another institution. The review of the literature revealed several factors of teaching online that supported the position that pro-active development of orientation materials is essential to the growth and development of online learning and results in additional revenue to participating institutions.

INTRODUCTION

The researchers of the Online Consortium of Independent Colleges and Universities (OCICU) are devoted to advancing the opportunities for its members by sharing academic online courses among and between its members. The OCICU is made up of two groups, member institutions and provider institutions. The providers are institutions that offer online courses in which any member institution can access. At last count there are between 50-60 member institutions that are part of the OCICU, and there are 6 institutions that are OCICU providers.

The researchers sought to determine whether orientation materials of a member institution helped students to successfully complete online courses. Currently, the OCICU provides schedules, classes, and course syllabi. The researchers examined the types of course materials, timing, and topics of these materials given to the students by the member institution and how these factors impacted online course completion. Through this study the researchers hope to make correlations between these factors and successful online course completion.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The member and provider institutions of the Online Consortium of Independent College and Universities (OCICU) sought to determine whether there is a connection between a member institution's orientation materials and successful student course completion. The research team attempted to connect topics, timing, and other variables that emerged from a survey of students who have completed online courses through the OCICU. The member and provider institutions determined common variables that can be replicated for successful student completion of any online course.

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.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is important for the OCICU to ensure students' satisfaction with courses taken as part of the consortium offerings in order to encourage and retain enrollments. If this study shows a positive relationship between orientation materials and retention, it would support the proactive development of orientation materials by member schools as essential to the growth and development of the OCICU and thus will result in additional revenue to member institutions.

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