Learners’ Attitudes and Perceptions of Online Instruction

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Overview

Background of the MSIDT Program

Purpose of the Study

Review of the Literature

Methods and Findings

Conclusions and Recommendations
Background of the MSIDT Program

• Master of Science in Instructional Design and Technology (MSIDT)
  – Brief history
  – Program focus and description
Background of the MSIDT Program: Brief History

- First online MS degree program at the university
- Created by interdisciplinary team of faculty
- Went through extensive review process
- WASC approval
- New strategies and protocols
Background of the MSIDT Program: Focus and Description

- Program focus
  - direct applications of technology for teaching, learning and curriculum development
- Ten courses: two per segment
- Learning goal strands throughout curriculum:
  - Assessment/evaluation, collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving, media literacy, research, written communication
- Cohort model
- Boot-up camp and midpoint
Purpose of the Study

• Background
  – majority of online students are adult professionals seeking advanced training or a degree
  – Rapid growth in online instruction – large source of ongoing higher education
  – Quality of instruction cannot be overlooked
  – Multiple variables can influence students’ online learning experiences:
    • prior experience with computers, peer interaction, teacher/student interaction, and institutional support.
Purpose of the Study

- Objective: To address each of these variables as they relate to the MSIDT program.
- Purpose: To provide guidelines and recommendations for helping instructors create effective and positive online learning environments.
Review of the Literature: Prior Experience with Computers

- More experience = more positive learning experience
- Positive attitude toward computers = positive perceptions of online learning
- Previous online experiences influence students’ attitude toward online instruction.
Review of the Literature: Peer Interaction

- Positive online experiences result from active interaction with other learners
  - Small group activities can enhance learner motivation
- Positive experiences = better course completion rate and motivation
- Peer interactions are “…more evident in an affective domain such as attitude, satisfaction, or motivation toward distance learning rather than in a cognitive domain of learning”
Review of the Literature: Teacher/Student Interaction

- Key factors:
  - the teacher’s presence and instructor’s social interactions with students
  - Instructor expectations
  - Instructor assistance and interpersonal encouragement
Review of the Literature: Institutional Support

- Includes student services, technical support and interface, etc.
- Can affect the students’ academic success and course completion
- More significant than peer or teacher interaction
Methods

• two reports filed by an external evaluator

• responses to a discussion board prompt, “Being an Online Student”

• midpoint reflections written by each of the students

• end of the program survey
Findings

- **Prior Experience with Computers**
  - Students come into the program well-prepared
  - Some more advanced than others
  - Students are less likely to feel intimidated if they are comfortable with their own technology skills and ability to learn
  - Findings support previous research
Findings

• **Peer Interaction**
  – Positive perceptions/attitudes were the result of social posting threads, group projects, group discussions, and face-to-face meetings (orientation and midpoint).
  – 74% used social networking to decrease their sense of isolation
  – 93% felt a sense of belonging to the MSIDT online learning community.
  – Only 26% stated that the most meaningful learning came about through their interactions with others
Findings

• **Peer Interaction (Continued)**
  – Negative interactions = exclusion and decreased motivation and interaction
Findings

- **Teacher/Student Interaction**
  - Negative effects:
    - lack of consistency, communication, help, interactivity, and instruction
    - Rude and uncaring demeanor
  - Positive effects:
    - instructors’ awareness of students’ personal situations and commitment to the students’ success
    - Instructional approach
    - Instructor presence and level of interaction
    - Responsiveness
    - Positive feedback
Findings

• **Institutional Support**
  – Technical difficulties = decreased sense of community
  – Lack of hardware and software support = heightened levels of frustration and stress
Conclusions and Recommendations

• Prior experience with computers
  – Adds to self confidence and ability to learn

• Peer interaction
  – Sense of online community; increased motivation

• Teacher/student interaction
  – Disposition, presence, instruction

• Institutional support
  – Access to online learning environment
Conclusions and Recommendations

- Prior experience with computers
  - Assess the minimum computer skills (saving files, logging into and navigating the Internet, etc.) needed to be successful in the online program.
  - Determine which software products in which students will need to have basic, intermediate, or advanced skills.
  - Establish minimum computer requirements (e.g., Internet speed, memory, etc.) and whether or not a specific platform and operating system are required.
  - Ensure students have the necessary computer skills and meet the requirements before accepting them into the online program.
Conclusions and Recommendations

- **Peer Interaction**
  - Create opportunities to support social interactions among students (e.g., an online social forum where students can talk about topics outside of the program.)
  - Establish a safe learning environment; review and enforce rules of netiquette and cooperation.
  - Assign group projects.
  - Establish group discussions.
  - Hold face-to-face meetings (e.g., orientation and midpoint, as well as optional end of the program event).
Conclusions and Recommendations

- **Teacher/Student Interaction**
  - Establish consistency in all courses across the program.
  - Balance workloads among concurrent courses.
  - Communicate clear goals and expectations.
  - Be aware and supportive of students’ personal situations and needs.
  - Be committed to the students’ success.
  - Maintain a constant presence on discussion boards.
Conclusions and Recommendations

• **Teacher/Student Interaction** (cont.)
  – Provide weekly summaries of discussions – citing students by names for their contributions.
  – Provide timely responses to emails.
  – Give supportive and positive feedback.
  – Ensure instructors have the necessary disposition and time to teach online.
  – Teach – do not put the responsibility of instruction on the textbook.
Conclusions and Recommendations

• Institutional Support
  – Ensure students have the necessary support and instruction to use required tools (software, hardware, etc.)
  – If possible, provide 24/7 technical support.
  – Provide a handbook of how to access and use support services and who to contact if students encounter difficulties.