

THE EFFECT OF SUCCESSFUL ONLINE ORIENTATION  
COMPLETION ON ACADEMIC SUCCESS

A Dissertation

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## Dissertation Approval

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of the online orientation course created and launched by Virtual School A. The aim of the research is to determine if student success is linked to the successful completion of the orientation course. The theoretical framework of this study is derived from the constructivist theory, which asserts the main role of teaching should be supporting students in developing life-long experiences rather than simply transferring information to students (Saljo, 1999).

Research indicates that students frequently lack the skills needed to realize academic success in the online learning environment. Many online schools and programs require a mandatory orientation to develop online readiness prior to academic course enrollment. This mixed-method research study was completed in two phases. During phase one of the research study, a quantitative research design was used. Students' grades were analyzed using an unpaired two-tailed t-test. This statistical analysis was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference between the academic achievements of first-year students who completed the orientation compared to students who did not. The difference between the two variables was not statistically significant (Table 1) according to the P value of .33. During phase two of the research study, a qualitative research design was used. Students were surveyed to measure perceptions of the online orientation course. Although the research did not prove a significant academic improvement as a result of implementing the online orientation course, students did perceive the course to aid in their overall academic success. More research should be conducted on intrinsic motivation levels in online learners. Motivation is the key to experiencing success in the digital, asynchronous world.

*Keywords: online orientation, distance education, motivation, support, academic achievement*

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## Dedication

This work is dedicated to my family; because of them, I strive to be the best person I can become. To my late great grandmother, Annie ‘T-Nanny’ Cox, without your unconditional love and enduring support, I could not have made it this far in life. You never had much; however, you made sure I never went without anything. You created my work ethic and passion for education. I am forever grateful to have experienced an actual earth angel. To my sister, Chazni Darden, you are my inspiration. To my husband, Christopher Garner, thank you for loving and allowing me to pursue all of my dreams. And to my mother, Tracy Wiggins, father, Tracy House, grandparents, the late Hazel Horton, and Catherine Jeanette and Walter Yander, aunts Wilma and Renee, uncles, Freddie and Ronnie, siblings, as well as a host of cousins, thank you for your continued love and support. Without each of you, this would not be possible. I love each and every one of you!

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **Introduction and Background**

Various strategies have been utilized in an attempt to improve students' success rates in the online learning environment. This dissertation will explore how an online orientation class impacts students' academic success during their first year of online education. This correlational research study contains quantitative measures in an effort to contribute to the field of electronic learning.

In this proposal, Chapter One provides an overview of the study. This includes an introduction to the field, context of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, definitions of key terminology, goals of the research questions, an overview of the methodology and rationale, and significance of the study.

### **Context of Study**

The Internet has drastically changed the process of information delivery as well as practically every aspect of modern day society including the education system (Harrell, 2008). Online learning is becoming increasingly prevalent across the nation, which has changed the landscape of K-12 education.

### **Types of Online Learning**

Online learning environments operate as either synchronous or asynchronous learning environments. A synchronous online school is one in which learners log in at a specific time period and receive live instruction via webcam or other digital communication technology. An asynchronous virtual school operates quite differently because participants do not receive live instruction. Rather, these students and teachers log in and access course content independently at a time that is both convenient and productive for them.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Research indicates that students frequently lack the skills needed to realize academic success in the online learning environment. Many online schools and programs require a mandatory orientation to develop online readiness prior to academic course enrollment. Orientation courses ease the transition from a traditional classroom course experience to the online environment.

Students attending Virtual School A (code name) often experience several hurdles getting started and navigating their coursework. After conducting a student-needs assessment, the school determined its students needed additional support prior to accessing course content. To address this need, Virtual School A created an online orientation course for students to complete prior to official course enrollment.

Electronic schools must consider many factors “when developing an online orientation, including content” (Harrell, 2008, p. 38). Virtual School A’s orientation design included several procedural videos, quizzes, and family contracts. The primary purpose of the orientation was to explain navigation to students using the same platform with which they would be working. Initially, Virtual School employees traveled to individual schools and conducted onsite orientations; this process, however, became virtually impossible due to an increasing growth in enrollments.

To date, Virtual School A has not evaluated its online orientation course to determine whether the content does, in fact, contribute to future academic success for its students.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of the online orientation course created and launched by Virtual School A. The aim of the research is to determine if

student success is linked to the successful completion of the orientation course. Previous research studies have indicated that orientations provide first time participants with realistic expectations of the coursework (Jones, 2013). Few studies, however, evaluate completion with ultimate academic success. Thus far, Virtual School A has not offered an online orientation course to all students. Therefore, determining the effectiveness and impact of Virtual School A's online orientation program is critical. Ongoing and focused research regarding academic gains in online programs is crucial to identify what impacts students' success. (Cavanaugh & Blomeyer, 2007).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is derived from the constructivist theory, which asserts the main role of teaching should be supporting students in developing life-long experiences rather than simply transferring information to students (Saljo, 1999). The distance and online learning environments create dynamic experiences for learners; these experiences and skills typically transcend the educational environment. The constructivist instruction subcategory embraces "online enhancements with which students direct their own pace, acquire their own data, and apply the data to the environment" (Cavanaugh & Blomeyer, 2007, p. 96).

Distance education and online learning are alternative learning platforms that provide sustainable opportunities for the future of K-12 and higher education. Since online learning is a form of distance education, it is important to understand the sustainability that comes along with these learning models. Regardless of a student's physical location or condition, he or she may actively participate in the online learning environment.

Students choose online learning for several reasons, two of which may include course availability or flexibility and time (Cavanaugh & Blomeyer, 2007). Self-direction is required in distance learning; students must possess the intrinsic motivation that is necessary to meet

learning objectives. According to Birch (2001), self-directedness is a prerequisite for online student learners' success. This self-directed learning focuses on students' "ability to take responsibility for the learning context to reach their learning objectives" (Kirmizi, 2015, p. 133). Not all students master the concept of self-direction; many young learners do require a bit more guidance.

Online learning is a sustainable strategy for improving the teacher-learner process quality through the use of computers, the Internet, and other digital resources (Golzari, Kianmanesh, Ghoochian, & Jafari, 2010). This platform of learning has the potential to surpass traditional teacher-focused designs through a more student-focused approach. Online learning is available in two formats, synchronous and asynchronous. Synchronous learning requires students to be available at a specific time of day to receive instruction. Asynchronous offers more flexibility, in which students are afforded independent student-led access to course content rather than direct instruction.

The demand for online learning is increasing; the retention rates, however, are lower than those of traditional courses (Jones, 2013). Online student orientation courses designed to help bridge the gap between the traditional classroom and online learning can hopefully provide a solution.

### **Research Questions**

1. Is there a significant difference between the academic achievements of first-year students who completed an online orientation course compared to first-year students who did not?
2. What were students' perceptions regarding the online orientation course's role in preparing them for successful online learning?

### Definition of Terms

The terms used in this study may be common in many educational settings, but the following terms may require definition for the sake of clarity:

*Asynchronous learning:* An independent student-led online learning environment in which teachers serve as facilitators of the course is termed asynchronous. Students access material and learn at their own pace and in their own time from anywhere (Topal, 2016).

*Blended learning.* Any combination of asynchronous, synchronous, and on-site traditional instruction is considered blended learning (Vai & Sosulski, 2016).

*Distance education.* Any continuum learning platform which may range from mixed face-to-face to distance teaching is considered distance education (Bates, 2000).

*Online orientation course:* An online course created to assess and promote student readiness for the online learning environment.

*Self-efficacy.* An individual's belief in his or her own ability to achieve and carry out certain goals is known as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

*Synchronous online learning.* Students learn utilizing real-time interaction with an online teacher and possibly other students. This instruction occurs at the same time, even though participants may be in different physical locations (NFES, 2006).



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Review of the Literature**

An in-depth analysis of online learning and its relationship to students' success will include the types and trends of distance education. Additionally, the effects that orientation components have on students' success and achievement in the online environment will be discussed. This review of literature will conclude with an explanation of best practices in online education as it relates to student readiness and success in the asynchronous online environment.

### **Distance Education**

Pupils are not only students within the confines of educational brick and mortar; they are capable of learning both inside as well as outside of the classroom (Rovai, Wighting, & Lucking, 2004). With the benefits of distance learning, students are given autonomy of their learning process in terms of amount, order, and pace (Hannafin, 1984).

The term *online education* is used interchangeably with “distance education, distributed learning, open learning, and network learning, web-based education, virtual education, cyber education, net education or other similar terms” (NFES, 2006, p. 3). Online learning is a transformation from teacher-centered learning to a more learning-centered approach with support and communication technologies (Aoki, 2010).

### **The Demand for Online Learning**

The need for online course access in K-12 schools is increasing. The National Forum on Educational Statistics (2006) indicates that online learning is more often preferable when

distance educational professionals choose to offer subject matter not offered conveniently elsewhere and utilize instructional expertise and materials not found in traditional classrooms. Furthermore, online learning often delivers instructional material and supplemental experiences not available in real time or space, i.e. online field trips. Additionally, online learning often maximizes educational prospects beyond customary school hours and eliminates time required to travel between instructional settings while allowing students to learn at their own pace. Online education offers a solution for hospitalized, homebound, and incarcerated students, and it also provides services to students who simply prefer homeschooling. Online learning provides educational opportunities to students who for other reasons, such as anxiety or bullying, may prefer an alternative educational setting. The availability of online learning ensures a fairness and equity of educational opportunity for students regardless of their residential area and school district, whether urban, suburban, or rural (p. 5).

### **Constructs of Online Education**

Bates (2000) categorized distance education as a continuum ranging from mixed face-to-face and distance teaching. Blended education is a form of distance learning that incorporates both online and face-to-face interactions; this type is also considered distributed education. Online learning, as a whole, has traditionally been “synonymous with distance education” (Cavanaugh & Blomeyer, 2007, p. 180).

There are two types of online learning options, synchronous or asynchronous (Topal, 2016). Synchronous online learning is real-time interaction in which the student and teacher must log in at a particular time to interact. Asynchronous online learning can occur regardless of the time or student’s location.

Blended learning is a combination of asynchronous, synchronous, as well as on-site

traditional instruction. In order for it to be considered blended learning (Vai & Sosulski, 2016), it must be a combination of at least two of these things.

Asynchronous learning is a convenient option for those students who want to learn without time restrictions, whether day or night, and without traveling. To access content in an asynchronous learning environment, students only need Internet access. Materials in an asynchronous course are usually portable, whether downloadable for viewing, printing, listening or viewing at a later time. Since most students have access to smartphones, tablets, or computers, educational materials are easy to use. Asynchronous learning also allows learners to work through the coursework at their own pace to a certain degree. Students may work more quickly through material that is familiar or easy for them; they may, on the other hand, work more diligently and carefully through subject material that is difficult for them. The possibilities offered by asynchronous learning include additional sources of support, such as individualized guidance by teachers. Asynchronous learning also poses less pressure for students to respond to questions immediately like there often is for onsite coursework. Students in the asynchronous learning environment have the opportunity to reflect before responding during online learning, and reflection and thinking should be encouraged (Vai & Sosulski, 2016, p. 16)

### **Candidates for Online Learning**

By 2004, 91% of traditional, public schools were equipped with Internet access, and at least 77% of teachers in those schools used the technology actively in the classroom (Setzer & Lewis, 2005). By 2005, at least 22 states had established online schools (NFES, 2006). Online learning continues to become a more common practice around the world. Online learning opportunities change students' experiences and provide an impressive way to learn (Garrison & Anderson, 2005).

The current demand for online programs that educational institutions offer is “continuously increasing at varying degrees, with the major participants being adult learners who have no opportunity to access traditional education” (Llgaz & Gulbahar, 2015, p. 171). There is also a population of traditional-age students where the online format is likely a better fit.

Online learning allows an organization to reach its “target audience which is often disadvantaged by limited time, distance, professional and personal constraints” and enables it to “cost effectively update students’ knowledge base with minimal disruption to their personal lives” (Hunte, 2012, p. 181).

### **Barriers to Online Learner Success**

A study conducted in Rochester, New York, assessed perceived barriers in the online environment; surveys distributed asked participants to share reasons they did not experience success in the online course. The most frequent reason for students’ failure of online coursework according to participant responses was because students fell behind in their assignments and felt they could not catch up (Fetzner, 2013). Students involved in this study provided recommendations to upcoming online learners. This advice included: (a) stay current with the course activities; (b) use good time management skills; (c) utilize good organizational skills; (d) set time aside regularly for online coursework; (e) be knowledgeable about getting technical help when needed; (f) maintain regular online communications as needed and ask for help when necessary; (g) prepare for online writing and reading assignments; (h) carefully read the course syllabus; (i) understand the requirements and content of online course discussions; (j) recognize how much each online activity impacts your grade; (k) participate in the student orientation provided online (Fetzner, 2013). It is painfully apparent why the recommendations in this study would aid in the success of future online learners.

## **Online Learner Readiness**

The concept of *online learner readiness* was proposed by Warner, Christie, and Choy in 1998. They identified three important aspects of learner readiness for the online environment. First, student preferences should help guide and inform instruction. If students prefer face-to-face instruction as opposed to online instruction, will they make comparable academic gains in an online environment? Next, the capability and confidence levels of students using technology impact the likelihood of successful distance learning. Finally, each student's ability to learn independently impacts his or her likelihood of success (Warner, Christie, and Choy, 1998).

Engaged students actively participate in the learning process and take responsibility for their own learning gains while frequently contributing to others' progress as well. The concept of online learning may seem novel to some students. Therefore, the teacher needs to advise his or her students regarding time management as well as the required levels of communication and cooperation in group and individual assignments (Vai & Sosulski, 2016).

A study conducted to measure self-perceptions in online learning found that student readiness is comprised of five sub-dimensions, including (a) computer/Internet self-efficacy, (b) self-directed learning, (c) learner control, (d) motivation for learning, and (e) online communicative self-efficacy (Kirmizi, 2015).

Seraji and Yar Mohammadi (2010) created an online learner readiness tool in their research study. Based on their findings, five critical skills are required to measure student readiness. These elements include metacognitive skills, cognitive skills, self-navigation abilities, communication skills, and collaborative skills. Other researchers, however, have different conclusions regarding online readiness. For example, in a study conducted the same year by Shraim and Khlaif (2010), online readiness was determined by program usability, individual

competency, and personal motivation, minus unforeseen obstacles.

### **Student Satisfaction**

Student satisfaction in an online course must be identified and analyzed in order to determine its impact on distance learning effectiveness. Student satisfaction is defined as the perceptions of students' actual value of the course and their experiences in the program (Kuo, Walker, Belland, & Schroder, 2013).

The satisfaction of online learners is one of the most critical "factors that shapes the design, delivery, and implementation of e-learning and almost certainly affects the quality" (Llgaz, 2015, p. 173). Students in the online environment must be satisfied in order to experience success. Satisfaction has been proven to be greater when students are ready for the online environment.

### **Essential Student Characteristics**

Technological experience, of course, has been shown to impact the students' success in regards to distance learning (Hong, 2002). Time management is another characteristic necessary for students' success in the distance-learning environment. According to Zimmerman (1986), self-regulated learners remain proactive in regards to time management and study space environment. Self-advocacy is yet another determining factor in distance learning success; self-regulated learners are more likely to ask for assistance when needed (Lynch, 2004). There is a strong correlation between an individual student's attitude and his or her success in an online course (Topal, 2016). In order for a student to be successful in a distance education program, a he or she would need all of the aforementioned characteristics.

Personal perceptions and thoughts towards self-efficacy are critical components that contribute to motivation in distance education. Self-efficacy is a measure of an individual's

belief in his or her own ability to achieve and carry out certain goals (Bandura, 1997). Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, and McKeachie (1991) defined goal orientation quite simply as the learner's basic goals for a course.

According to Kim, Park, Cozart, & Lee (2014), a qualitative research study was conducted to determine the difference between high achieving virtual math students and low achieving students in an asynchronous environment. This study concluded that participant's performance in the course was based on levels of engagement and motivation. Self-efficacy and effort regulation was the primary indicator of motivation and engagement. School districts in which teachers are responsible for creating online course content should ensure students are well-informed regarding time management (Cavanaugh & Blomeyer, 2007).

### **Lynch's Five Attributes to Student Success**

In a study conducted to review self-regulation in distance education, Lynch identified five primary attributes linked to student success. These attributes include (a) intrinsic goal orientation, (b) self-efficacy for learning and performance, (c) time and study environment management, (d) help-seeking, and (d) Internet self-efficacy (Lynch, 2004). Motivation is not only necessary for a distance-learning program, but any learning program regardless of the type.

### **Students' Readiness for Online Learning**

Readiness for online learning is another key attribute to a prospective learner's success. *Online readiness* can be identified in three aspects: social, cognitive, and educational. The *social* aspect applies to ensuring that learners are fully capable of communicating in various formats. *Cognitive* readiness simply means the learners are ready for the informational format, and the ability to think critically in an independent environment. Being ready *educationally* refers to the ability to problem solve and find information in a variety of resources (Aruk, 2008). If an online

learner is equipped with all three aforementioned aspects, the learner is more likely to experience academic progress and success.

### **Organizational and Instructional Strategies for Learner Success**

The quality of an online program is defined by the learning experience and evidence of learning outcomes (Carr & Carr, 2000). Well-designed, effectively implemented, and efficiently delivered online courses are essential to successful course development (Daugherty & Funke, 1998). Distance learning is often more effective, and “retention rates in many online courses are significantly lower than in similar, face-to-face courses” (Harrell, 2008, p. 36).

The goal of any online course should include teaching students to carefully read and critically analyze text and to understand methods that authors use language to share meaning and entertainment. Other essential goals for online learning include teaching students to analyze a text’s structure, theme, language, and tone. These students should read complex representative texts from significant periods and genres that reflect social and historical values. Most importantly, students should be taught to write critical analyses regarding significant pieces of literature and “to become aware through speaking, listening, reading, and chiefly writing, of resources of language: connotation, metaphor, irony, syntax, and tone” (Cavanaugh & Blomeyer, 2007, p. 25).

According to Cavanaugh & Blomeyer (2007), when designing an online course, it is important to follow four basic principles. First, increasing the frequency each student accesses significant online resources generally improves his or her engagement and academic retention. Secondly, interactions in an “online environment vary in complexity and sophistication” and usually fit into one of five categories: (a) simple recognition (true/false or yes/no); (b) recall (fill-in-the-blank or matching); (c) comprehension (short answer); (d) problem solving (analysis); or



(e) knowledge construction (project synthesis or research). Scaffolding each type of task is essential for academic growth.

Another tenet of designing an online course is the importance of offering learners meaningful feedback in a timely manner. Diagnostic feedback is especially valuable because it promotes improved academic performance rather than merely indicating a response is right or wrong.

The fourth tenet of designing online classes is balancing comprehension and significance. Information provided online is either difficult or easy to understand based on its complexity or length. Usually, students become confused when too much information, whether text or graphics, is displayed on a given screen. On the other hand, learners may interpret over-simplified information as either trivial or irrelevant.

### **The Demand-Driven Learning Model**

According to a study conducted at the University of Ottawa, all five dimensions of the Demand-Driven Learning Model must work in unison to implement a quality online course (MacDonald & Thompson, 2005). Those dimensions include structure, content, delivery, service, and outcomes.

The next section will dive into accessibility features available to students and the importance of online orientation development and delivery.

### **The Importance of Online Orientation**

Online students reported that an orientation to the course context is a critical component of support at the beginning of any online course (Britto, 2013). Online orientation courses should: provide feedback to learners to expand upon the students' knowledge; help learners understand how to make improvements; address misconceptions and correct mistakes; and

motivate students with a positive attitude regarding the activities and learner progress (Vai & Sosulski, 2016).

According to Glazer and Murphy, the first year of online degree seeking students' experience of an online orientation also experienced better academic success in the online program overall. This study explored various strategies to improve distance-learning experiences. Of all strategies explored, the pilot year of the online orientation experienced the most success (Glazer & Murphy, 2015).

After conducting student interviews in a qualitative study, Russo-Gleicher discovered several strategies to improve online student success, including improved online orientations, a more detailed pre-screening process, and additional faculty support (Russo-Gleicher, 2014). A study on a Turkish military base distributed an online readiness survey to a population of military students. The results of this study differed in that it indicated students' motivation for online learning was more closely correlated with program success than the degree of computer/Internet self-efficacy (Cigdem & Dunlap, 2016).

A researcher at Capella University identified which online orientation course components are necessary to promote learner autonomy by creating a modified Delphi study. This study's sample population included 50 instructional designers that established 17 components required to create an effective online class that promotes learner autonomy. Of these components, the most important characteristics identified were students' self-direction and classmate collaboration (Harmon, 2012).

A qualitative study conducted to determine whether a college orientation course would likely impact students' self-efficacy indicated that students' self-efficacy ratings improved significantly following the administration of an online orientation course (Brewer & Yucedag-

Ozcan, 2013). Another study on the effectiveness of online orientation found that students must first and foremost understand the time management skills necessary to be successful (Bozarth, Chapman, & LaMonica, 2004). Research also indicates students who complete an online library orientation are more likely to benefit from virtual library use as a supplemental resource for writing papers and completing projects (Goldman, Turnbow, Roth, Friedman, & Heskett, 2016).

### **Online Orientation for Student Support**

The Internet may function as a conduit to increase the frequency of distance education registrations, however, the weighty surge in online enrollment is ascribed to other dynamics, including timing or scheduling issues in traditional learning environments and the lack of specific courses, including enrichment or remediation. Additionally, students are often unable to physically attend conventional class due to illness or health constraints. Students may have a conflict with a sports or fine arts commitment or may merely prefer using computer-mediated instruction for academic growth. Many students are experiencing disenchantment with traditional learning environments and placements (Cavanaugh & Blomeyer, 2007, p. 181).

Not only does research indicate a need for online orientation course implementation, the National Standards for quality online programs recommends them as well. Quality online programs provide student support services that address students' needs at multiple stages within the organization. The support provided in a quality online program is not only appropriate, but also essential for students' success. It should provide students with support that addresses their educational, individual, and developmental needs while providing access to appropriate content, technologies, resources, and instruction. An effective online program also establishes meaningful teacher and student communication, including timely assessment feedback. Most importantly, an effective online program will provide prompt and effective support for technical issues should

they arise (Pape & Wicks, 2009).

In order to reduce the anxiety levels and increase the retention rates of graduate students, one university provided a first year cohort with an online orientation program. The anxiety levels in this group of participants decreased significantly after completing the experimental online orientation course (Hullinger & Hogan, 2014).

### **Designing an Online Orientation Course**

Creating online courses, regardless of the method, is a considerable undertaking that consumes a great deal of time for virtual instructors. In addition to creating tests, building syllabi, responding to email, and grading assignments, online teachers must also communicate effectively with parents, teachers, and administrators who are all off-site (Cavanaugh & Blomeyer, 2007). Therefore, online institutions and instructors usually use a learning management system (LMS).

Learning management systems are web programs that facilitate online courses. There are several well-known LMS programs available such as Canvas, Moodle, and Blackboard (Vai & Sosulski, 2016). When creating an online course with a learning management system, instructors should utilize a syllabus to organize lessons and activities. According to Vai & Sosulski (2016) one of the primary benefits of creating a syllabus includes allowing students to become familiar with the course requirements.

There is a wealth of research outlining several strategies to approach the development of an online orientation course. A study conducted at Excelsior College provided an outline of the topics included in their online orientation course, which proved to have an impact on overall student achievement. Topics introduced in the student syllabus included “how to get started in the course, module navigation, posting discussions, submitting assignments, locating your

grades, instructor feedback, and grading rubrics” (Taylor & Winn, 2015, p. 3). The online orientation used at Excelsior College also utilized an effective welcome video to help make students feel more comfortable with the course.

An effective online orientation course is one that is interactive and introduces students to the type of assignments they will likely encounter in the course. The orientation should encourage the development of technical skills needed to complete the course, and it should communicate organizational policies, procedures, and resources. Furthermore, to be effective, an orientation must help students develop time-management, study skills, and NetEtiquette (Harrell, 2008).

An all-inclusive online course should have particular characteristics, such as complete curricula, lesson plans, and online modules that simplify instruction and learning. Program developers acknowledge teacher adoption depends on many factors within the K-12 virtual classroom. Teachers must decide for themselves if they should use it for lesson planning, assignment grading, a basic online course of communication, or all of the above (Cavanaugh & Blomeyer, 2007).

In a study conducted at Richland Community College in 2013, Jones discovered the effectiveness of an online orientation course. Although the institution practiced high instructional strategies, administrators noticed students were not experiencing success, and these trends placed a negative impact on the school’s retention rate. The study found students felt better prepared for the online course after completing the orientation course online (Jones, 2013). To maintain effectiveness and ensure currency, this online orientation is updated twice yearly.

### **Effective Online Learning Systems**

According to McEwan’s (2009) text *Ten Traits of Highly Effective Schools*, there are five

primary characteristics that effective schools have in common. These traits are strong educational leadership, high expectations of student achievement, an emphasis on basic skills, a safe and orderly climate, and frequent evaluation of pupil progress in regards to academic achievement.

Effective schools and leaders look for ways to improve school climate among many other areas of refinement. McEwan shares specific strategies to promote a healthy organizational culture. In order for students to learn and experience academic growth, they need strong leaders who understand emotional intelligence.

Students need to be challenged with high expectations in order to grow academically; if educators challenge pupils with rigorous expectations, they will experience increased academic gains. Students also need instruction in basic life skills; this includes their hierarchy of needs. Students must have their basic needs met before they can adequately participate in the school experience. Students need a safe and orderly climate to engage in academics. If they do not feel safe, loved, and supported at school, students are less likely to make academic advances. This goal can be met through relationship building strategies and collaboration.

And finally, students need constant intervention and observation. The sooner a teacher notices a student's learning deficiency, the sooner intervention can occur. If leaders follow these steps, they are well on their way to promoting a climate of change and learning.

A longitudinal study examined the effects of *distributed leadership* on school improvement and growth in student math achievement. This study was conducted in 195 elementary schools in one state over a four-year period using a multilevel latent change analysis (Heck & Hallinger, 2009). Distributed leadership directly impacted the schools' academic capacity and indirectly impacted student growth in the area of mathematics. The results of this

distributed leadership study support building the academic capacity of schools as a means of improving student learning targets and outcomes. Distributed leadership works in education, which again ties to collaboration. Not only is this trend in positive school climate evident when collaboration tactics are used to facilitate student learning, but teachers also exhibit higher levels of self-efficacy and sustainability within a collaborative environment.

Making an effective online program is a recipe that requires more than just one ingredient, like strong leadership. In fact, when students choose an online school, there are countless factors to consider. Does meaningful interaction and communication occur between students and teachers? Do students have the ability to choose content and access the learning resources easily? Are there prerequisites prior to admission? Is a course syllabus with layered content and measurable objectives provided and utilized accordingly for each class? Is the program easy to navigate and are the course objectives clear? Do the instructors provide timely feedback and meaningful evaluation? In case of technical issues, does the online program provide prompt help, student services, and human contact? Does the online school teach time management techniques and utilize built-in monitoring systems to avoid failure? Are student authenticity and integrity valued and stressed? Are student self-evaluation and peer-evaluation used for enhancing academic performance? Does the online school offer an engaging, robust curriculum? Students must decide for themselves, which ingredient is most important (Cavanaugh & Blomeyer, 2007), but without an effective online orientation, students may find themselves virtually unprepared --- as though they forgot to preheat the oven. The recipe for an effective online program is like any other recipe in that: (a) some ingredients are essential, even non-negotiable, (b) the timing of certain steps is crucial, and (c) the blending of key ingredients at an appropriate temperature, or climate, is greater than the sum of its parts. That is, the timing

and quality of the online orientation course impacts the success of the entire endeavor. The online school must build a climate of distributed leadership that focuses on key elements that drive students' success.

### **Best Practices**

Empirical evidence points to online participation as a driving force to academic success in the online environment. The benefits of online learning include high rates of student satisfaction as well as increases to retention rates (Alavi & Dufner, 2005).

### **Support Resources**

Harrell (2008) provides research that claims there are three areas that attribute to positive impacts in online student success: student readiness, student orientation, and student support. Student readiness instruments were used to evaluate particular characteristics in students, such as learning styles, a locus of control, computer skills, and self-efficacy. The goal of this study was to determine if, in fact, a student's characteristics are congruent with the traits needed to experience success in the online learning environment (Harrell, 2008). The research study indicated the use of online readiness instruments improved online course retention (Gaide, 2004).

Harrell (2008) suggests, even if a student is not ready for the online learning environment, all students should be given access to an online orientation course to aid in academic success. Murray (2001) states implementing an online orientation is one of the most favored ways to increase online retention rates. Using the online orientation process can enable students to determine whether the online environment is a good fit for their unique learning style (Harrell, 2008). First-time online students' perceptions of support were measured in the Caribbean Small Island Development States. The results revealed student's perceptions of support services were very high. All students participated in an online student orientation.



Nash (2005) found that students who withdrew or failed online learning were reported to believe the online environment was going to be easier than face-to-face. Students, however, need proper support in order to experience success in the online course environment (Harrell, 2008). Providing adequate technical support is very important to overall student success in the online environment. Inadequate guidance or technical support could contribute to “late submission of coursework, frustration, and dissatisfaction with the online environment” (Harwell, 2008, p. 40). Learner support services are important and an effective mechanism to offset challenges related to online learning (Keegan, 2003).

### **Motivational Strategies**

There is a relationship between online students’ motivation and their academic success (Radovan, 2011). Radovan conducted a study in which 319 students completed a questionnaire on motivational strategies. The results emphasized the importance of motivational factors like intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. Students are more successful in the online environment when they are intrinsically motivated and have confidence in their own abilities and skills.

Motivation is a factor in online student achievement. Keller’s (1987) motivational model suggests four components for motivating student learners: (1) *attention* describes a student’s curiosity and intellectual arousal; (2) *relevance* refers to establishing a link between the lesson and the learner’s needs and motives; (3) *confidence* describes the impact of a learner’s positive learning experiences on his or her individual behavior; (4) *satisfaction* refers to the developing desire to pursue similar academic goals (Keller, 1987).

In an effort to provide support and motivate online learners, the Rio Honda Virtual College Retention Project retained online counselors to contact students who had not “logged onto the course website by the end of the first week,” students who had not “begun coursework

by the fifth week of class,” and students who were targeted through “faculty referral or by student requests” (Torres-Gil, Maffris, Garcia & Roig, 2000, p. 43).

Online students are must become self-directed learners to become successful academically. Online learning continues to strengthen the skills needed to manage time and function effectively as self-directed independent learners. Successful online learners are computer literate and possess interpersonal communication skills. Most importantly, they are self-directed learners, which is essential for accomplished success (Ludwig-Hardman & Dunlap, 2003; Nash, 2005, Rovai, 2003).

### **Conclusion**

Thus far, this literature review has explored several important components of distance learning. Online learning types and trends, student readiness, online orientation essentials, online orientation for student support, as well as designing an online orientation course. All students who are candidates for enrollment in “online courses should be properly oriented to the environment” (Harwell, 2008, p. 37).

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Research Methods**

This chapter explains the research methods used to carry out the study. This includes the identification of the research design, participants, instrumentation, procedures used and analysis of data, as well as the role of the researcher in limiting bias and procedures to protect human subjects. In order to answer the research questions posed, both quantitative and qualitative research designs were necessary. Thus, a mixed-method research approach was utilized.

Quantitative research requires testing of objective theories by exploring the relationship between variables. The variables are then measured on instruments so that numbers can be analyzed using statistical procedures and methods (Creswell, 2009). In this instance, student achievement and completion of the online orientation course will be examined.

Creswell (2009) posits that qualitative research is “an approach to exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The process of research involves emerging questions and procedures, data typically collected in the participant’s setting, data analysis inductively building from particulars in general themes, and the researcher making interpretations and meaning of the data” (p. 4). This study sought to explore survey responses to analyze qualitative impact.

The commonality among all types of correlational research is that they explore relationships between variables. Where descriptive research only describes what is going on, correlational research attempts to establish a link between different data. To best investigate the

research question, both descriptive and correlational data will be collected and analyzed. Mixed method research utilizes both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

It is important to understand that correlational research does not tell us that variable A caused variable B, but rather that they are somehow related (AP Psychology, n.d.). That said, to monitor trustworthiness of this qualitative research study, the four criteria of Guba's (1981) model will be used. *Truth-value* determines whether the "researcher has established confidence in the truth of the findings for the subjects and the context" in which the study was conducted. *Applicability* refers to the "degree to which the findings can be applied to other contexts" or groups; can we safely and truthfully generalize the findings to other situations or populations? *Consistency* indicates whether the findings would be "consistent if the inquiry were replicated with the same subjects or in a similar context." *Neutrality* describes the absence of "bias in the research procedures and results" (Guba, 1981, p. 80).

### **Mixed Method Research Design**

#### **Phase One: Quantitative Research**

The purpose of phase one is to answer the following research question:

1. Does a significant difference exist between the academic achievements of first-year students who completed an online orientation course compared to first-year students who did not?

First, using a quantitative approach, an unpaired two-tailed *t*-test was used to determine whether or not a significant difference exists between the two variables.

It is argued that a *t*-test is a "common statistical test used to compare two groups, typically two groups' means, especially the difference between two means divided by a measure

of variability,” and a *t*-test “takes into account the number of units in the sample” (Purdue Owl, n.d., p. 2).

### **Phase Two: Qualitative Research**

In order to answer the second research question a qualitative approach was used. The purpose of phase two is to answer the following question;

2. What were student perceptions on whether the online orientation course prepared students for successful online learning?

Using a qualitative approach, a survey was administered to a sample population of students.

#### **Population**

For Phase One the population was a sample of convenience taken from all first year fall semester 2015 students enrolled in Virtual School A, and all first year fall semester 2016 students enrolled at Virtual School A. For Phase Two, a population sample of 30 students participated in the survey.

#### **Setting**

Virtual School A is a public online school located in the southeastern United States. The school offers over 48 asynchronous online courses to over 900 5<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> students.

#### **Description of Instruments**

##### **Phase One:**

The first data elements reviewed were the fall 2015 first year student grade data. This information was reviewed via Microsoft Excel to determine an overall first-year student grade point average. The second data element reviewed were the fall 2016 first year student grade data. The fall 2016 group received the online orientation course. The *t*-test sought to find a

significant difference between the two data sets.

### **Phase Two:**

The next data element explored were the survey results. The survey was used to measure the overall qualitative effectiveness of the online orientation course. The survey questions were used in a pilot test to ensure validity and reliability prior to distribution. A sample population from the group of students during the fall 2016 semester was used to complete the survey.

The final data element explored was the open-ended question. This information was used to measure overall qualitative data effectiveness.

## **Data Collection Procedure**

### **Phase One:**

This study required the use of an unpaired two-tailed *t-test*. A *t-test* is used to compare results with a known or specified value. In most studies, a sample size of at least 40 can guarantee that the sample mean is approximately normally distributed, and the one-sample *t-test* can then be safely applied (Skaik, 2015). All information was retrieved from the Blackboard Learning Management System.

### **Phase Two:**

The survey was distributed electronically via Google Forms to the sample population. All responses will be analyzed in Microsoft Excel. And the open-ended responses were grouped and coded into three categories.

## Data Analysis

**Phase One:** Open coding was used during this study to review for accuracy and trends. Tools such as Blackboard, Google Forms, and Microsoft Excel were used as well. Sections of the data were highlighted and reviewed. All attempts at research must:

collects data of some sort. In order to make sense of the data, it must be analyzed.

Analysis begins with the labeling of data as to its source, how it was collected, and the information it contains. Working with original data, however, can be very cumbersome, whether it is hundreds of mailed questionnaires, figures on yearly accident rates for the fifty states, or observations of classroom behavior of school children (SPSS, 2004).

For this reason, data must be coded.

**Phase Two:** The survey responses must be analyzed as well as the open-ended item. As a secondary means of data collection, open-ended questions (Creswell, 2009) on the survey will allow students to suggest additional constructs and content not currently identified in the online orientation course. Furthermore, students will be able to suggest any necessary edits to properly frame best practice in the field. This will provide the researcher with a large amount of qualitative data to analyze. Responses to the open-ended questions will be coded and sorted on the basis of emerging themes (Creswell, 2009; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). To arrive at emergent themes, the researcher will utilize Creswell's (2009) linear, hierarchical approach to qualitative data analysis.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Findings**

#### **Introduction**

This section will explore the results of the data collected in this study. The primary goal of this chapter is to present the data in the form of data tables and charts, without providing conclusions on the items collected. The first item to explore is research question one for which data collection procedures and results are noted. The next item to explore is research question two. The data collection method and results are displayed for research question two, as well.

The purpose of this study is to determine the effectiveness of the online orientation course created and launched by Virtual School A. The aim of the research is to determine if student success is linked to the successful completion of the online orientation course. To measure the effectiveness of the online orientation course, the following research questions were posed:

1. Is there a significant difference between the academic achievements of first-year students who completed an online orientation course compared to first-year students who did not?
2. What were students' perceptions regarding the online orientation course's role in preparing them for successful online learning?

#### **Selection of Participants**

In phase one of the study, the population selected for the convenience sample was taken from all first year fall semester 2015 students enrolled in Virtual School A, and all first year fall



semester 2016 students enrolled at Virtual School A. The grade data was analyzed using an unpaired two-tailed *t*-test. During phase two of the data collection, a population sample of 30 students participated in the survey to determine their perceptions of the online orientation course efficacy. Participants were contacted via email with a link to the survey, as well as the expected window to complete the survey. All responses have been analyzed and coded.

### **Research Question One**

During phase one of the research study, a quantitative research design was used. Student grades were analyzed using an unpaired two-tailed *t*-test. This statistical analysis was conducted to determine if there was a significant difference between the academic achievements of first-year students who completed the orientation compared to students who did not. The difference between the two variables was not statistically significant (see Table 1) according to the *P* value of .33. According to the table results, the students' grade averages did increase from a mean of 69.8% during the fall semester of 2015 when no online orientation was presented, to a mean of 71% during the fall semester of 2016 when the online orientation course was implemented. The online orientation, however, did not create a significant difference in the academic achievement of online learners.

### **Research Question 2**

During phase two of the research study, a qualitative research design was used. Students were surveyed to measure perceptions of the online orientation course. The survey was created using an online survey tool via Google Forms. Six items were posed in the survey. Items one through four were Likert scale statements. Item five was a closed yes or no question. Finally, Item Six was an open-ended question. Item Six's responses were coded and grouped (see Figure

6). Survey questions were selected from a pilot study conducted to measure validity and reliability. Each item is listed below in the survey question summary.

Table 1

*Unpaired two-tailed t-test results*

	<i>Fall Semester 2015</i>	<i>Fall Semester 2016</i>
Mean	69.88774459	71.26897375
Variance	793.4296538	1008.482358
Observations	971	838
Hypothesized mean difference	0	
<i>df</i>	1688	
<i>t</i> Stat	-0.971693345	
<i>P</i> (T<=t) one-tail	0.165671171	
<i>t</i> critical one-tail	1.645756832	
<i>P</i> (T<=t) two-tail	0.331342343	
<i>t</i> critical two-tail	1.96137035	

### **Brief Summary of Survey Questions**

**Survey Question 1.** The first item was worded, “Please rate the level of difficulty experienced while navigating through the online orientation course.” This Likert question was asked to analyze student perception regarding the navigation of the course. According to (see Figure 1) 50% of the respondents, students found the online orientation course navigation to be easy. Those respondents who found the course challenging to navigate made up 33% of the responses. Finally, 17% found the course neither easy nor difficult to navigate.

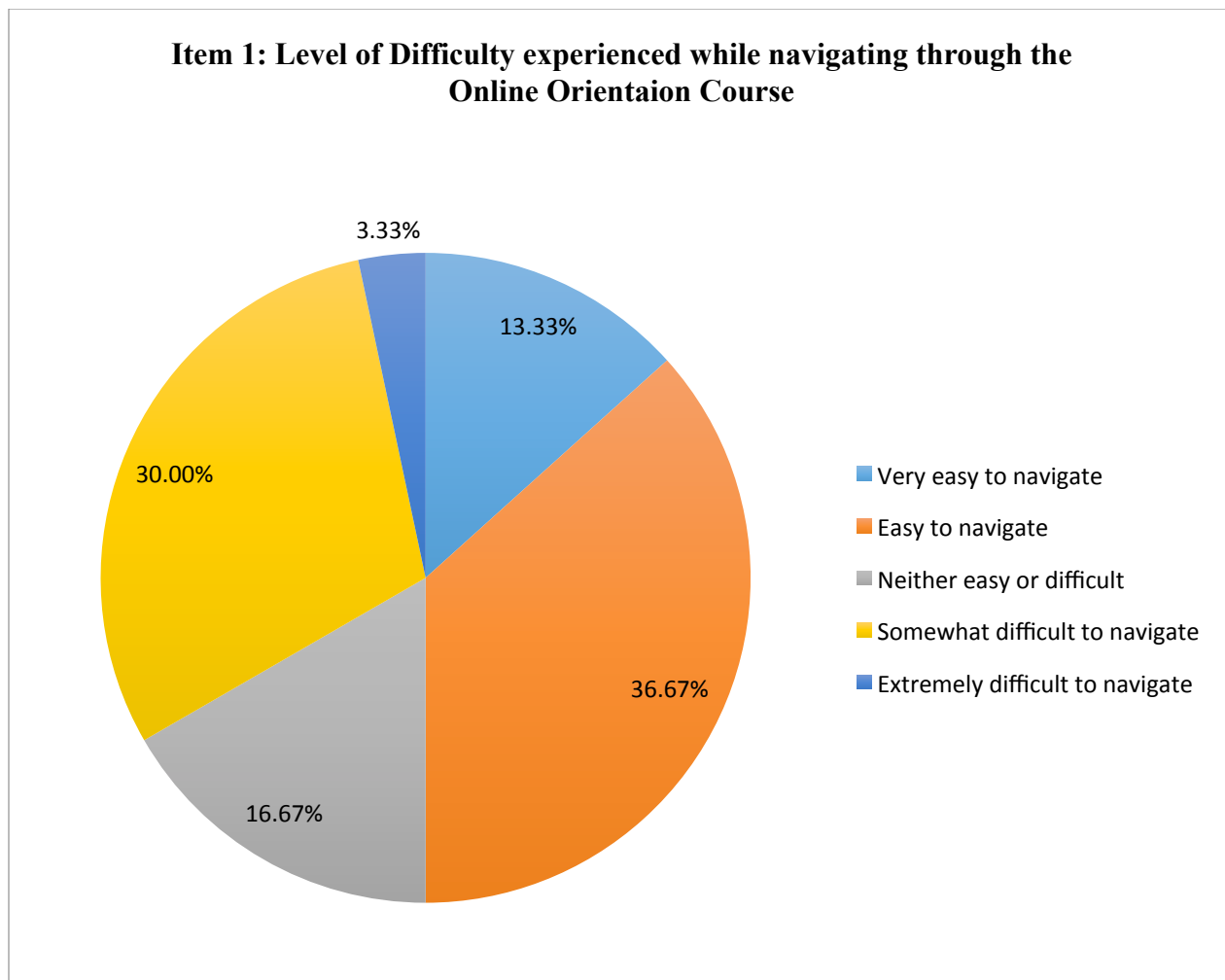


Figure 1  
*Item 1 Responses*

**Survey Question 2.** The second item stated, “The online orientation course provided large amounts of variety in content.” This Likert question was asked to analyze student perceptions of the content offered in the online orientation course. According to 37% of respondents, students agreed that the course content contained a variety of information (see Figure 2). Of the remaining respondents, 20% disagreed that the course provided variety in content. Finally, 43% of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed that the course offered variety in content.

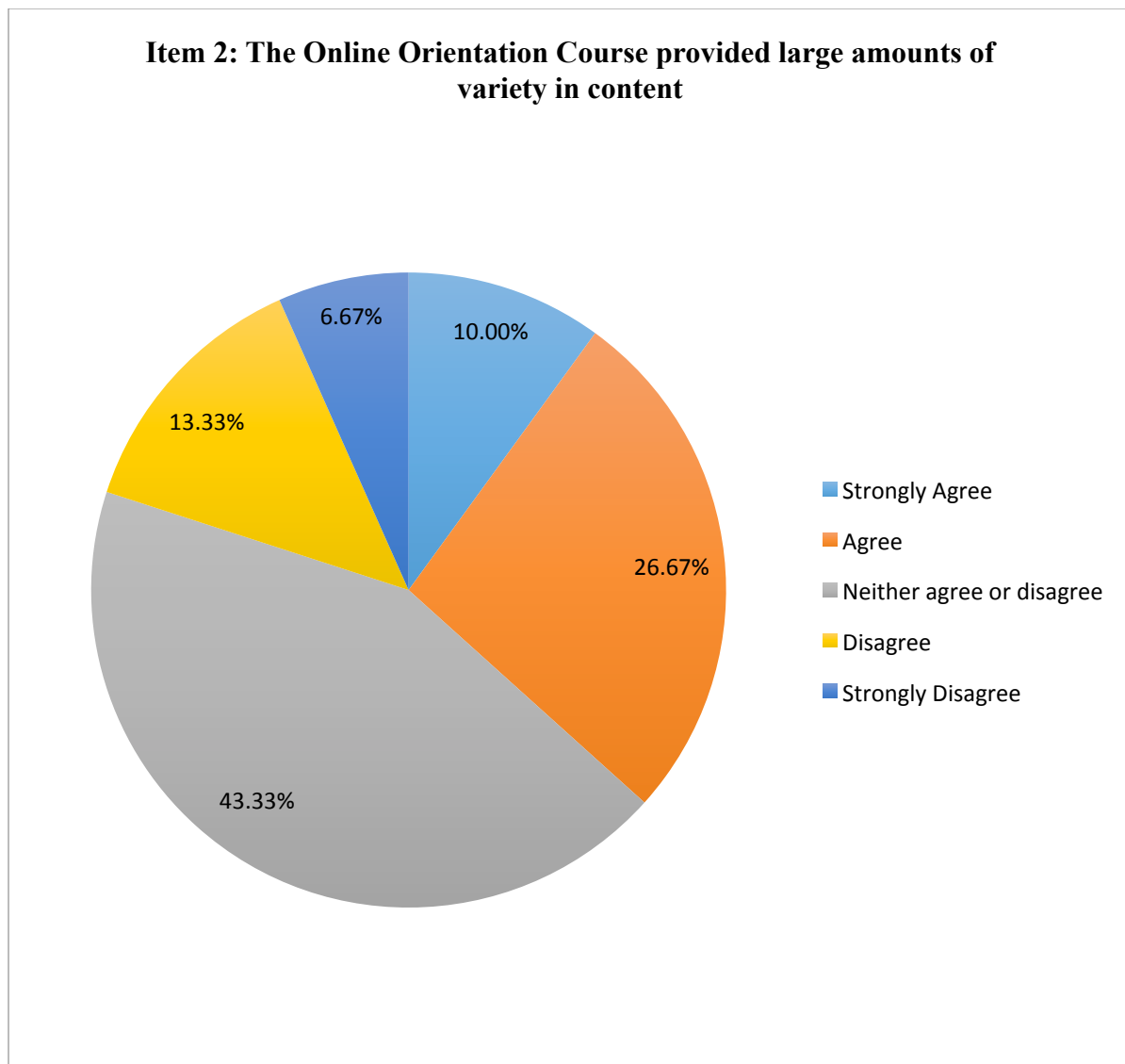


Figure 2  
*Item 2 Responses*

**Survey Question 3.** The third item was worded, “Please rate your level of engagement in the online orientation course.” This Likert question was asked to analyze students’ perceptions regarding their engagement in the course. According to (see Figure 3) 17% of respondents, some students felt engaged in the online orientation course. Of the respondents 26% felt they were not engaged in the online orientation course. Finally, 57% of respondents felt they were neither engaged nor disengaged in the online orientation course.

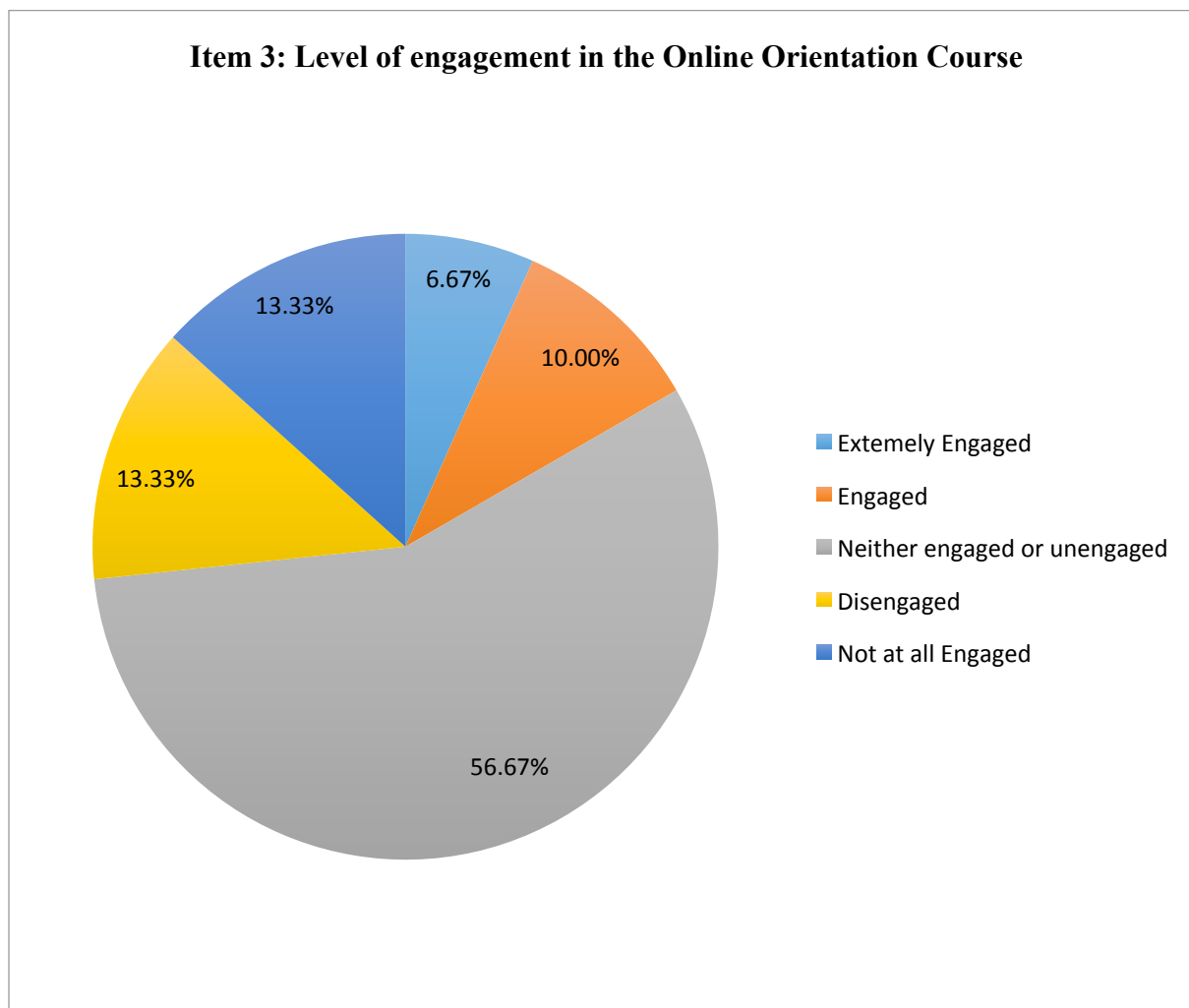


Figure 3  
*Item 3 Responses*

**Survey Question 4.** This item was worded, “How well do you think the online orientation course prepared you for success in the virtual school environment?” This Likert question was asked to analyze student perception regarding the benefit the online orientation course provided to their overall virtual learning experience. According to 76% of respondents (see Figure 4), most students felt the online orientation course prepared them for success. 20% of respondents felt the online orientation course did not prepare them for success. Finally, 3% of the respondents

felt the online orientation neither prepared nor left them unprepared for the virtual school environment.

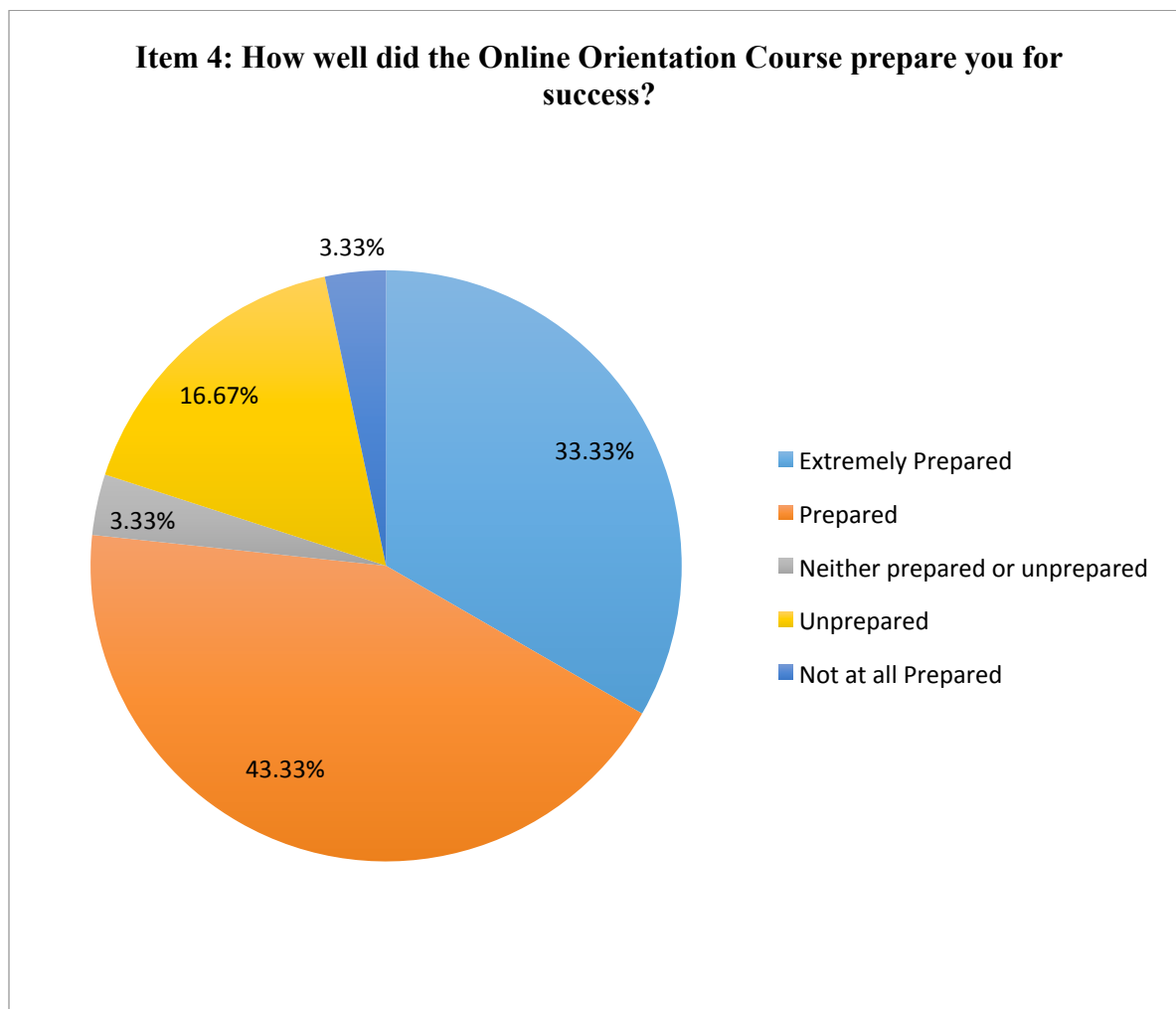
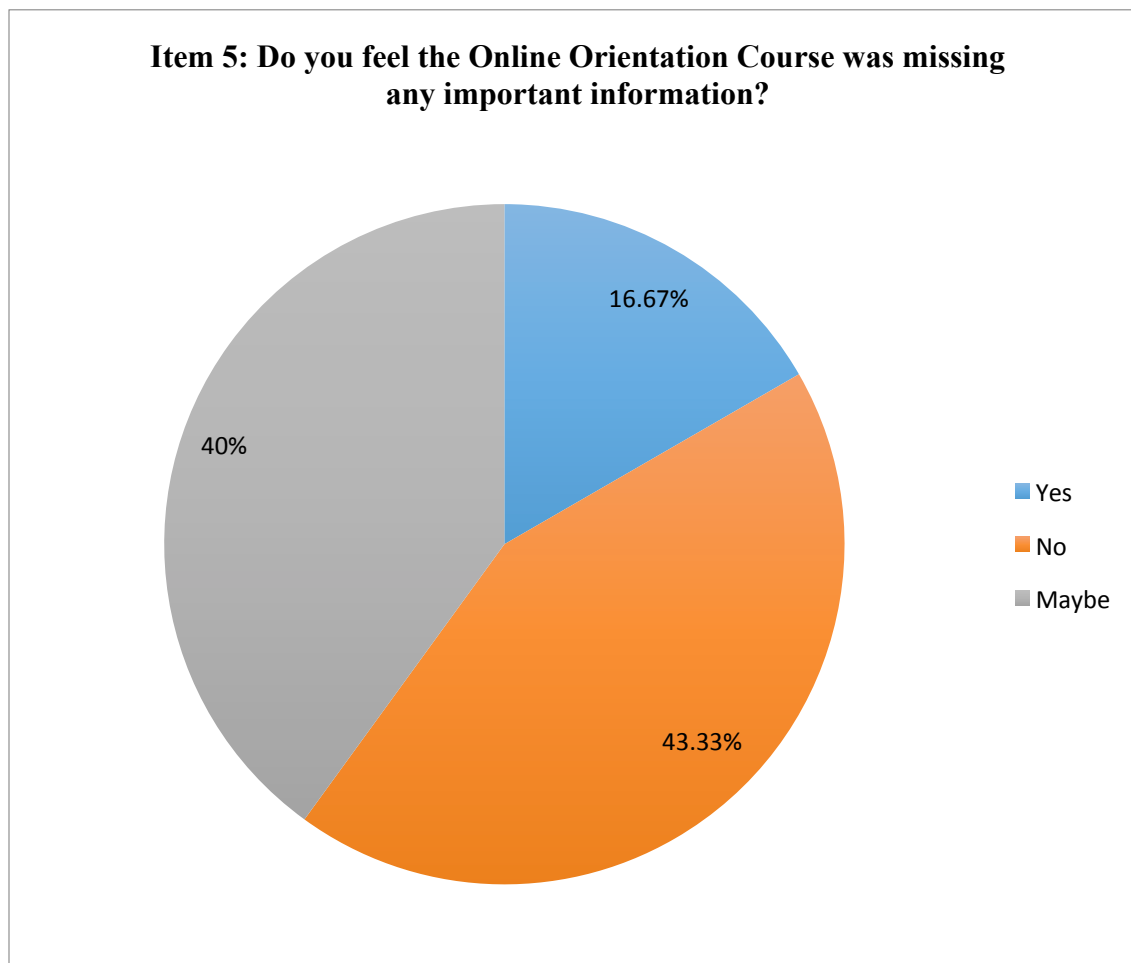


Figure 4  
*Item 4 Responses*

**Survey Question 5.** This item was worded, “Now that you have completed an online academic course, do you feel the online orientation course was missing any important information?” This yes or no question was asked to analyze student perceptions and reflections regarding the orientation. According to Figure 5, 17% of respondents felt the orientation course

was missing important information. Of the respondents, 43% felt the course was not missing any valuable information. Of the respondents, 40% felt the course might be missing some important information.



*Figure 5*  
*Item 5 Responses*

**Survey Question 6.** The sixth item asked, “What would you change about the online orientation course?” This open-ended question sought to analyze student feedback. The responses were coded and grouped into three categories. Figure 6 illustrates a detailed chart view. All 30 of the respondents answered the open-ended question. Of the responses, 40% felt there are changes needed to the course layout and the Learning Management System,

Blackboard. Respondents who felt the course content needed changes made up 37% of responses. While 23% of respondents felt nothing needed to be modified in the online orientation course.

The open-ended question required students to provide feedback regarding what they would change about the online orientation course. Student responses were grouped by the most frequently responded themes. The following groups were created for coding and clarity, learning management system/layout, content, and nothing. Students with responses aimed directly at the learning management system/layout were comprised of 40% of responders. These students mentioned issues such as limited video accessibility, module colors and visuals, the overall presentation of the learning platform, as well as the layout of the course. 37% of students mentioned potential changes to the content included information regarding the length of the videos, class specific modules, and trouble with uploading the parent agreement contract. Finally, 23% of students mentioned they would not change anything about the course.



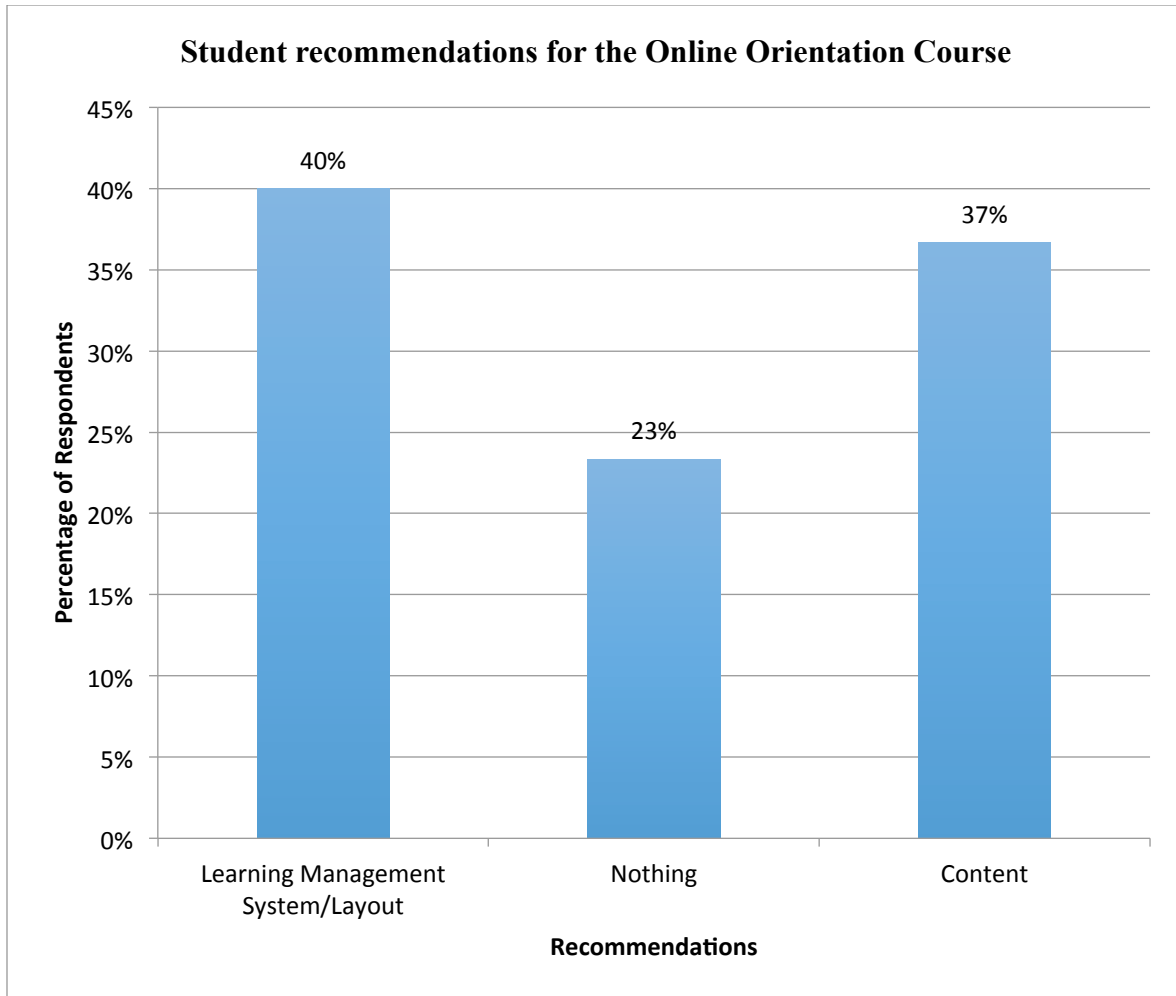


Figure 6  
*Open Ended Question Responses*

## Conclusion

In this chapter, the findings of the research study were presented. The primary goal within this chapter was to present the results in the form of data tables and charts, without providing conclusions on the items collected. The first item explored was research question one. The data collection findings for research questions one and two were presented.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations.

#### Introduction

The purpose of chapter five is to draw conclusions from the research findings, as well as to note implications and recommendations for further study. This chapter seeks to explore the research problem, answer the research questions, discuss the findings and implications, as well as provide recommendations for future research on this topic.

The Internet has drastically changed the process of information delivery, as well as practically every aspect of modern day society including the education system (Harrell, 2008). Online learning is becoming increasingly prevalent across the nation, which has changed the landscape of K-12 education. Online learning environments operate as either synchronous or asynchronous learning environments. A synchronous online school is one in which learners log in at a specific time period and receive live instruction via webcam or other digital communication technology. An asynchronous virtual school operates quite differently because participants do not receive live instruction. Rather, these students and teachers log in and access course content independently at a time that is both convenient and productive for them. Research indicates that students frequently lack the skills needed to realize academic success in the online learning environment. Many online schools and programs require a mandatory orientation to develop online readiness prior to academic course enrollment. Orientation courses ease the transition from a traditional classroom course experience to the online environment.

Students attending Virtual School A (code name) often experience several hurdles getting

started and navigating their coursework. After conducting a student-needs assessment, the school determined its students needed additional support prior to accessing course content. To address this need, Virtual School A created an online orientation course for students to complete prior to official course enrollment.

Electronic schools must consider many factors “when developing an online orientation, including content” (Harrell, 2008, p. 38). Virtual School A’s orientation design included several procedural videos, quizzes, and family contracts. The primary purpose of the orientation was to explain navigation to students using the same platform with which they would be working. Initially, Virtual School employees traveled to individual schools and conducted onsite orientations; this process, however, became virtually impossible due to an increasing growth in enrollments.

## **Conclusions**

### **Phase One: Quantitative Research Question 1 Summary**

The purpose of phase one is to answer the following research question:

1. Does a significant difference exist between the academic achievements of first-year students who completed an online orientation course compared to first-year students who did not?

First, using a quantitative approach, a t-test was used to determine whether a significant difference between the two variables exists.

The first data elements reviewed were the Fall 2015 first year student grade data. This information was reviewed via Microsoft Excel to determine an overall first-year student grade point average. The second data element reviewed was the Fall 2016 first year student grade data. The Fall 2016 group received the online orientation course. The t-test sought to find a significant

difference between the two data sets. According to the unpaired two-tailed t-test, there was not a significant difference between students who completed online orientation course compared to those who did not (see Table 1). More interventions are necessary for students to gain academic advances in the online learning environment.

### **Discussion of Research Question 1**

Although the data table reflects no significant difference between the variables, the mean of the total semester grades moved from a failing average (fall of 2015) to a passing average (fall of 2016). The fall semester 2016 students received the online orientation course. The fall semester 2015 students received some onsite orientation sessions.

The theoretical framework of this study is derived from the constructivist theory, which asserts the main role of teaching should be supporting students in developing life-long experiences rather than simply transferring information to students (Saljo, 1999). Using this framework, the first research question is answered using the two-tailed t-test. The results show, students did not achieve significant academic gains due to receiving the online orientation course. Students may need a combination of both types of orientations; onsite and online. Simply transferring information to students may not be enough; educators may have to physically show students the best way to reach academic success in the online environment.

### **Phase Two: Qualitative Research Question 2 Summary**

In order to answer the second research question a qualitative approach was used. During phase two the researcher sought to answer the following question;

2. What were student perceptions on whether the online orientation course prepared students for successful online learning?

Using a qualitative approach, a survey was administered to a sample population of students.

The next data element explored the survey responses. The survey was used to measure the overall qualitative effectiveness of the online orientation course. The survey questions were used in a pilot test to ensure students understood the meaning of the questions prior to distribution. A sample population from the group of fall 2016 students was used to complete the survey. The final data element to explore was the open-ended question. This information was used to measure overall qualitative data effectiveness. Figures 1-6 may be viewed to note a detailed account of student responses. The open-ended question was coded and grouped.

### **Discussion of Research Question 2**

Student perceptions were explored in order to answer research question two. The survey questions asked students about the navigation, content, engagement, success preparation, as well as potential changes they would make to the course. In summary, students felt the online orientation course was easy to navigate, and prepared them for success. Students felt the course content was not engaging and needed more variety in content. Students were asked in an open-ended question regarding what they would change about the course. The responses were coded and grouped into three categories, learning management system/layout, content, and nothing to change. The majority of students felt the learning management system/layout and content needed improvements.

The distance and online learning environments create dynamic experiences for learners; these experiences and skills typically transcend the educational environment. The constructivist instruction subcategory embraces “online enhancements with which students direct their own pace, acquire their own data, and apply the data to the environment” (Cavanaugh & Blomeyer, 2007, p. 96). The constructivist theory also assists in answering the second research question, this theory encourages student learning through data collection. Ultimately, it is up to the student

to take ownership of his or her learning. Online enhancements may assist students, however motivation and perseverance will be needed.

### **Inferences**

Although the research did not prove a significant academic improvement as a result of implementing the online orientation course, students did perceive the course to aid in their overall academic success. By implementing the recommended changes presented by students in the open response question, the school may notice an increase in the effectiveness of the online orientation course. One of the reasons students may not see academic improvements could be related to motivation as indicated in Chapter Two.

There is a relationship between online students' motivation and their academic success (Radovan, 2011). Radovan conducted a study in which 319 students completed a questionnaire on motivational strategies. The results emphasized the importance of motivational factors like intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy. Students are more successful in the online environment when they are intrinsically motivated and have confidence in their own abilities and skills.

Motivation is a factor in online student achievement. Keller's (1987) motivational model suggests four components for motivating student learners: (1) *attention* describes a student's curiosity and intellectual arousal; (2) *relevance* refers to establishing a link between the lesson and the learner's needs and motives; (3) *confidence* describes the impact of a learner's positive learning experiences on his or her individual behavior; (4) *satisfaction* refers to the developing desire to pursue similar academic goals (Keller, 1987).

Student demographics and digital literacy could be factors in the results of this study. The school district in which the study was conducted is diverse. Students come from various socio-economic backgrounds, and hundreds of ethnicities are represented. It is difficult to

identify which students are digitally literate when computer use is considered. One implication for phase two of the research could be student attitudes to the virtual academic content. It is difficult to determine which students were experiencing challenges in their online class when completing the survey.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Creating an effective online orientation course is extremely challenging. With student-centered learning at the pinnacle of this work, future researchers should seek to explore more techniques that will aid students in reaching greater academic success in the online environment. More research should be conducted on intrinsic motivation levels in online learners. Motivation is the key to experiencing success in the digital, asynchronous world.

### **Concluding Statements**

This study sought to determine what impact, if any, an online orientation course had on student achievement and to measure student perceptions of the orientation. The data was analyzed using a mixed method research approach of an unpaired t-test as well as qualitative student survey responses. Results indicate positive student perceptions regarding the course following the online orientation course; however, no statistically significant positive effects were associated with the grades of students receiving the online orientation course. This research topic can be expanded by broadening student intervention services in the online learning environment.

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## Appendix 1

Fall 2015 Raw Grades	Fall 2016 Raw Grades
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## Appendix 2

## Statistical Chart

<i>t</i> -test: Two-sample assuming unequal variances		
	<i>Fall Semester 2015</i>	<i>Fall Semester 2016</i>
Mean	69.88774459	71.26897375
Variance	793.4296538	1008.482358
Observations	971	838
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
<i>df</i>	1688	
<i>t</i> Stat	-0.971693345	
<i>P</i> (T<=t) one-tail	0.165671171	
<i>t</i> Critical one-tail	1.645756832	
<i>P</i> (T<=t) two-tail	0.331342343	
<i>t</i> Critical two-tail	1.96137035	



## Appendix 3

## Online Orientation Survey

**Online Orientation Course Survey**

Please complete this survey regarding the online orientation course you completed in August. Please answer these questions honestly as it will help us make appropriate improvements to the course.

\* Required

1. Please rate the level of difficulty experienced while navigating through the online orientation course \*

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Extremely Difficult to Navigate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very Easy to Navigate

2. The online orientation course provided large amounts of variety in content \*

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Strongly disagree	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Strongly agree

3. Please rate your level of engagement in the online orientation course \*

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all engaged	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely engaged

4. How well do you think the online orientation course prepared you for success in the virtual school environment? \*

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all prepared for success	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Extremely prepared for success

5. Now that you have completed an online academic course, do you feel the online orientation course was missing any important information? \*

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Maybe
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. What would you change about the online orientation course? \*

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## Appendix 4

## Survey Question Responses

<b>Question 1</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Very easy to navigate</b>	<b>Easy to navigate</b>	<b>Neither easy or difficult</b>	<b>Somewhat difficult to navigate</b>	<b>Extremely difficult to navigate</b>	<b>Total</b>
Please rate the level of difficulty experienced while navigating through the online orientation course	30	13.33%	36.67%	16.67%	30.00%	3.33%	100.00%
<b>Question 2</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	
The online orientation course provided large amounts of variety in content	30	10.00%	26.67%	43.33%	13.33%	6.67%	100.00%
<b>Question 3</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Extremely Engaged</b>	<b>Engaged</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Disengaged</b>	<b>Not at all Engaged</b>	
Please rate your level of engagement in the online orientation course	30	6.67%	10.00%	56.67%	13.33%	13.33%	100.00%
<b>Question 4</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Extremely Prepared</b>	<b>Prepared</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Unprepared</b>	<b>Not at all Prepared</b>	
How well do you think the online orientation course prepared you for success in the virtual school environment?	30	33.33%	43.33%	3.33%	16.67%	3.33%	100.00%

<b>Question 5</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Maybe</b>	<b>Total</b>		
Now that you have completed an online academic course, do you feel the online orientation course was missing any important information?	30	16.67%	43.33%	40%	100.00%		

## Appendix 5

## Open Ended Question Responses

Number	Responses	Assign	Themes	Code
1	Provide more information about Connexus. For instance, due dates are daily and not Friday at 11:59 p.m. For our first week, we had many "past due" assignments, thinking we had until Friday to submit them. While this is true for the Blackboard courses, it is not true for the Connexus courses.	L	Learning Management System/Layout	L
2	It should have more visuals and have example DBA's. Also it should explain that you can work at your own pace and that the due dates are "suggested" and not required. Also it should teach you how to get signed up for a class.	L	Nothing	N
3	The videos were long and boring. If we were able to interact more then it would be better. It is too much information at one time. I would have preferred some training at MNPS when we were new students. We started behind in the semester then got overwhelmed. If the 1st week would only teach how to navigate and use the website instead of requiring lessons to be turned in, then it would be better.	C	Content	C

4	Everything was great, the only thing I would change is by adding a video is the beginning before starting the orientation with step by step instructions on how the online orientation will be. It was tricky trying to understand from what step to the next I'd take and I think that would be a great addition but as far as everything else goes, it was very forward and easy to manage!	L		
5	put some activities in the course to keep the person entrusted in it.	C		
6	I would make it shorter.	C		
7	I would take away all the pictures at the beginning of each module and make everything that I can click be a different color.	L		
8	I wouldn't change anything.	N		
9	Where everything is located to make it easier to get to.	L		
10	I would make submitting a certificate a little less complicated.	C		
11	I would want it to stress the importance of time management	C		
12	Make sure that people know to click on the name of the lesson to enter it. This is confusing for 1st time Blackboard users.	L		
13	It needs more memes.	L		
14	Nothing	N		
15	More descriptive and have	C		

	the voice over be a lot slower			
16	I would instruct students on class specific modules like FLVS modules compared to MNPS modules compared to Connexus.	C		
17	Update the online classrooms software, making it look more presentable.	L		
18	I wouldn't change anything	N		
19	nothing	N		
20	Nothing	N		
21	Nothing	N		
22	Submitting the student/parent contract was too complicated. Online submission would be much easier.	C		
23	Blackboard	L		
24	Get rid of most of it. All students need is a list of the basics. Instructions provided in conjunction with the actual taught material would be better and wouldn't feel like such a waste of time.	C		
25	I would prefer having an actual class, instead of doing it online.	L		
26	I would change the different titles for each part of the lessons because they make the course and online course seem more intimidating than it actually is.	L		
27	Make access to the parent form easier to find	C		

28	I think that it shouldn't have been necessary before getting our actual course work and instead be more quick access as a guide to the online courses while one is taking them.	L		
29	Nothing	N		
30	Just be more specific.	C		



## Appendix 6

## Open Ended Question Statistics

Statistics	
Frequency	
Learning Management System	12
Nothing	7
Content	11
Total	30
Proportion	
Learning Management System/Layout	40%
Nothing	23%
Content	37%
Total	100%