Research of Best Practices and Curriculum for an

Online Course Orientation

by

Amy Gullixson

A Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the
Master of Science Degree
in

Education

Approved: 2 Semester Credits

Dr. James Lehmann

Digitally signed by Dr. James Lehmann
DN: cn=Dr. James Lehmann, o, ou, email=lehmannmath@yahoo.com, c=US
Date: 2010.05.11 16:28:44 -07'00'

Dr. James Lehmann

The Graduate School

University of Wisconsin-Stout

May, 2010

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI

Author: Gullixson, Amy C.

Title: *Research of Best Practices and Curriculum for an Online Course*
Orientation

Graduate Degree/ Major: MS Education

Research Adviser: James Lehmann, Ph.D.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to research the best practices and curriculum for an online course orientation for online students. Online learning, in the form of single courses, certificates, certifications, or degree programs, is growing exponentially. An increase in offerings logically equates to an increase in students, many of them first-time online learners. An orientation for these learners can help them become familiar with the institution's learning management system, as well as the individual institution's policies and procedures.

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to research the needs and characteristics of adult online learners, the importance and benefits of an online orientation, the curriculum of a typical online orientation, and how an orientation relates to retention. Further, a survey was given to collect data about the needs for a UW-Stout specific online orientation.

Upon conclusion of the review of literature and data, recommendations were made for current practice, as well as for future studies.

The Graduate School
University of Wisconsin Stout
Menomonie, WI

Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my thanks and appreciation to a few people. First, my husband, who has been the force (ambition) behind the pursuit of my education; without him, I would still be happily plugging along with a bachelor's degree and adequate sleep; my three children, without whom, I'd have free nights and weekends and absolutely nothing worthwhile with which to fill them (despite the abundance of reality television and made-for-TV movies); my parents, who raised me with a strong work ethic and a guilty conscience; and my in-laws, who I want to include simply because they are wonderful people who I may never get a chance to thank otherwise.

I would also like to thank my research adviser, who is one of the most laid-back, unobtrusive, and yet extremely helpful and caring persons I have ever met. Without Jim, I would have had to worry about deadlines. He also understood my absurd personality and bizarre attitude. Thanks, Jim; it was entirely my privilege to be able to work with you.

I would like to thank my supervisors (all of you, official and unofficial) who provided expertise…and partial tuition reimbursement. Additionally, my brilliant mentors, for their insight and patience; my instructors and program director, who have helped shape me into the student I am today; and Amy Gillett, an authority on everything APA.

Last, but not least, the baristas at Starbucks and Caribou, who supplied me with all of the caffeine I could handle (or afford), helping me stay up much later, and allowing for me to survive on much less sleep, than what is normally considered sensible.

Thank you. I am, unequivocally appreciative; I could not have done it without you.

Table of Contents

List of Figures

Chapter I: Introduction

According to a recent report from the Sloan Consortium, "more than 3.9 million students took at least one online course during the fall-2007 term" (Parry, 2009, p. 1). Further, the majority of learners who participate in online learning are nontraditional adults, ages 26 years or older (Coussons-Read, Mattes, & Nanney II, 2003). Many of these adults want to take advantage of online learning opportunities, primarily due to their busy schedules and the online format's convenience and flexibility. They take courses online because of their desire to earn an education; however, they are still able to manage their work and familial responsibilities (Cercone, 2008).

That said, however convenient online learning may be, it is not without its criticisms. A frequent complaint of adult online learners is the lack of support and communication given to them in terms of familiarization with the campus policies and procedures, communicating with the campus and instructor, course and student expectations, and the course management system. The learner's physical isolation from campus, as well as frustration with the unfamiliarity of the technology used, may both contribute to a lower retention rate in the adult online student population.

Increasing the retention rate of adult online students is a continuous goal in online courses and programs. As higher education institutions are increasing the number of online programs and courses offered, communication becomes a critical part of attempting to retain this student population. Institutions must find ways to better communicate policies and procedures of the campus and course or program and student expectations. Including information about the technical aspects of taking an online course, such as the course management system, where to log in, and how to navigate the system is critical. Any additional information that may be

pertinent to the student successfully participating in an online course is essential as well, and may increase the probability of student success.

The course management system used at UW-Stout is Desire to Learn, or Learn@UW-Stout (D2L). D2L is the platform that stores the course content. The student logs into D2L to locate the course(s) in which he or she is enrolled, retrieve course materials, participate in course discussions, view course grades, submit assignments, and other course-related tasks. Being familiar with this tool is vital to the student's success in the course. Unfortunately, students who are new to UW-Stout do not often have the necessary familiarity with D2L, how it operates, or how they can best use it to locate needed information.

Ironically, it is important to note the responsibilities (family and job) that necessitate online education can also interfere with the adult student's learning process (Cercone, 2008). As adult learners, their personal circumstances, such as lack of transportation, lack of childcare, death of a parent, etc., can hinder their learning process as well (Cercone, 2008). These situations are many times specific to the adult learner, as opposed to the traditional student, which gives rise to the importance of the university and its employees to understanding the characteristics and needs of today's adult online learner.

Orientations are one way to increase retention by clearly communicating holistic expectations as to what is required of the student to successfully take an online course. According to an Eduventures (2007b) report, there are four key elements of effective online orientations. These elements include (a) informing the student of the most effective ways to communicate with the instructor, (b) allowing the student to review and attempt the technical skills and abilities necessary to successfully use the student learning platform, (c) setting clear expectations of what is expected of the student (such as policies and procedures), and (d) helping

the student become self-aware of what is needed, intrinsically, to take an online course, such as time management, independently studying, self-direction, and other necessary aptitudes. Eduventures (2007b) further stated the orientation should "simulate the real course experience as closely as possible" (p. 19).

If developed correctly, orientations may serve as a bridge between the physical campus and the online learner. Effective orientations would allow for the online student to become familiar with the campus' policies and procedures. Learners would be provided clear expectations and information on the course management system navigation and student-instructor communication. Skills and abilities needed to complete online coursework successfully would be self-identified as well, and the student would be better able to make an educated, informed decision about their capabilities for online learning.

Statement of the Problem

A problem exists in that there is not currently a college-wide orientation in use for UW-Stout's adult online learner. As a result of the increase of UW-Stout's online courses and programs, and thus, an increase in the number of adult online learners, it is necessary to create a holistic online orientation to educate adult online students about online learning, advise these students to campus policies and procedures, inform the students about best practices, as well as familiarize them with the course management system, D2L.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this investigation is to research and determine the best practices and curriculum for an online orientation course. The data will be gathered via literature review, review of related websites, and via an electronic survey tool. The finished product is intended

for use by new adult online learners in UW-Stout School of Education's online programs and courses.

Assumptions of the Study

Each investigation has its own unique assumptions; therefore, this particular investigation will operate with several assumptions. In terms of the curriculum written, the assumption is that a majority of the adult online learners attending UW-Stout are not familiar with the university's policies and procedures. A second assumption is a majority of new adult online learners attending UW-Stout are not familiar with the student learning platform, D2L. In terms of the literature review, the researcher assumed that the literature reported was valid and reliable, despite the lack of quantitative data.

Research Questions

Questions formed for this investigation will be used to maintain focus on the primary purposes for this research. Consequently, in this investigation, the following questions will be considered when researching literature and/or collecting data via the survey instrument:

1. What are the needs and characteristics of adult online learners?
2. Does an orientation affect the retention of a student in a course or program?
3. What information should be included in an online orientation?

Definition of Terms

The following terms will be used throughout this investigation. Please note: the definitions listed are for the purpose of clarity of the terms, as well as to ensure a more complete understanding of the intent of this investigation.

Adult online learners. Adult online learners will be defined as students, aged 26 years old or older, taking online courses (full-time or part-time) and working (full-time or part-time).

Desire to Learn | Learn@UW-Stout (D2L). Desire to Learn | Learn@UW-Stout is the student learning platform used to manage online courses and hold online course content at UW-Stout.

Online programs and courses. Online programs and courses refer to courses and programs from UW-Stout that are offered completely online.

Limitations of the Study

Being that each investigation has its own unique limitations, this particular investigation operated with several limitations. In terms of the curriculum written, this study included only policies and procedures that are specific to UW-Stout. Additionally, the curriculum written included only information from D2L as it was used for online courses at UW-Stout, the curriculum did not include all policies and procedures used at UW-Stout, and last, the curriculum did not include all aspects of D2L.

In terms of the literature review, literature included only online course orientations used for online, post-secondary courses and programs, and was not exhaustive of all types (face-to-face or hybrid; online high school or non-credit) of orientations. In addition, information reported was based on literature review only, and not from review of the online orientations themselves, for content.

Methodology

A literature review will be completed to explore and research the main foci of this investigation. The needs and characteristics of adult online learners will be studied in order to better understand the intended audience. Knowing the strengths, weaknesses, and nature of this population can only improve online course and program retention.

The literature review will also assist in identifying the benefits of an online orientation and how the orientation may be directly associated to retention of students in online courses and programs. Knowing these benefits will help ensure the online orientation is created with the most effective and helpful topics included. The curriculum developed will focus specifically on the subjects that are the most beneficial to the retention of the adult online student.

Additionally, the literature review will critically examine the various types of online orientations used at a variety of universities around the nation. Information in relation to online orientation content, strengths, and areas for improvement will be collected and reviewed. Recommendations for practice and future research will also be presented.

Finally, a survey instrument will be deployed to UW-Stout's Online Professional Development instructors, as well as those additional faculty who teach online courses in the MS in Education program. The survey will collect information as to what content should be included in an online orientation based on the faculty perspective, as it is the faculty who have first-hand communication and involvement with his or her students in online courses.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter will review literature in regard to the characteristics and needs of adult online learners. In addition, the importance of online orientations will be discussed, as well as orientation curriculum. Last, the design of effective online orientations and resulting retention will be covered in brief. A summary will conclude this chapter.

Adult Online Learners

Adult online learner needs and characteristics are many times specific to their population, as opposed to the traditional (18-24 year old) student population. Understanding the characteristics of the learner is imperative, as he or she is the most essential piece of the online learning environment (Conceicao, 2007). If the learner is understood, his or her needs can be identified. Identifying these needs, as well as knowing the importance of meeting these needs, allows for the institution to then address this population appropriately.

Characteristics of Adult Online Learners. Characteristics of the adult online learner vary within the literature. According to Coussons-Read, Mattes, and Nanney II (2003), the majority of learners who participate in online learning are nontraditional adults, ages 26 years or older. According to Bataineh (2001), the typical online learner can be generalized as (a) a nontraditional student, (b) a full-time worker, (c) a parent, (d) someone living in a rural area, (e) a female with children, or (f) a person with a disability. Wilson (2005), deemed the typical distance learner as either (a) an adult with a family, (b) a full or a part time employee, (c) lives in a rural area, (d) is unable to afford full-time study, or (e) is part of the military. Eduventures, a higher education research firm that has been observing the adult learner population for almost 10 years, reported the typical adult learner as 38.8 years of age and employed full time. In addition,

a majority of these learners are married and have dependent children living at home (Eduventures, 2008).

Regardless of the varying attributes, Conceicao (2007) emphasized a universal characteristic of online learners is their commitment to earning an education. Literature reviewed showed that motivation for taking online courses or enrolling in online programs varies with the learner. However, the main themes that emerged included career change, license renewal, or career advancement (Eduventures, 2007a), or an increase in performance or pay (Eduventures, 2008) in their current positions.

Needs of Adult Online Learners. "Online instruction has made the impossible possible [...]" (Fink, 2007, p. 20). Online education has allowed those who could not take classes because of geographic limitations, work, or personal responsibilities the ability to now enroll in courses or programs online. According to a recent report from the Sloan Consortium "more than 3.9 million students took at least one online course during the fall-2007 term" (Parry, 2009, p. 1). If institutions want to take advantage of this population, it is vital for them to understand the issues unique to online learners and fulfill those learner needs (Fink, 2007).

Furthermore, Eduventures (2008) stated the most decisive factor for adult learners, when selecting a college, is scheduling, and online learning provides the flexibility they seek. Due to their busy personal lives, work responsibilities, and education, these learners depend on the online format's convenience and flexibility (Eduventures, 2008). The responsibilities of adult learners render online learning as a principle need for these students (Fink, 2007). They seek courses online because of their strong desire to earn an education, but yet, they are still able to manage their other responsibilities (Cercone, 2008). In short, literature supported the statement that "online education provides a practical, convenient, and economical opportunity for adult

learners" who are not otherwise able to take advantage of educational offerings (Yoon, 2003, p. 29).

Additionally, online learners seek courses and programs that are offered completely online, without any required on campus attendance (Eduventures, 2007a). In addition to scheduling, they are more likely to base their decision to enroll on their perception of whether the institution provides adequate student support services. Therefore, in order to attract this population, institutions must be prepared to meet or exceed online learners' expectations, and be more responsive to their needs (Eduventures, 2007a).

Online Orientations

An online orientation is important as it is a legitimate response to the adult learner needs of taking courses online and providing adequate support services. Offering courses online requires providing the additional support needed for the student to be successful. Palloff and Pratt (2001) emphasized, "We cannot assume that learners will automatically understand the new approach to teaching and learning that the online classroom exemplifies" (p. 123). Learners used to the traditional approach to learning (instructor-lead, structured learning) may not be aware of how online learning approaches are different. Approaches such as student-centered or instructor-facilitated learning may be foreign concepts. Palloff and Pratt (2001) therefore recommended some form of orientation to students who are experiencing online learning for the first time to ensure these new approaches are understood by the learner.

Online student orientations may be designed to include curriculum to address these specific adult learner needs, benefitting the institution, instructor, and student. Furthermore, it can give the learner a clearer understanding of what to expect with online learning (Palloff & Pratt, 2001). These expectations include topics such as what constitutes effective

communication, technical skills needed to take an online course, and self-awareness activities, such as time management assessments and learning style inventories, for those new to online learning.

Importance and benefits. Orientations are one way to increase retention by clearly communicating holistic expectations as to what is required of the student to successfully take an online course. Knowing the characteristics and needs of adult online learners, an online orientation can then be created to serve the intended audience, including the information and activities that will benefit the student the most, and presenting the information in such a way to help the student gain confidence as an online learner. Orientations allow students to familiarize themselves with the learning platform directly and evaluate their ability to progress through it, while identifying any barriers or obstacles before their course starts (Whittemore, 2008).

Although currently, online orientations are not always available to students taking online courses or programs, literature reviewed supported the practice of institutions offering these orientations. Huber and Lowry (2003) emphasized that institutions which offer online courses or programs should also offer training to their students, both before and during their time in the courses or program. Orientations can continue to be useful resources to the same students while they are completing the online course or program, as the students may be introduced to new software programs throughout their program. In Huber and Lowry's experience, the online student orientation that was offered familiarized the learners with the software programs that were to be used in their program.

As a best practice, Wilson (2005) supported the Institute for Higher Education Policy recommendation of the need for an orientation prior to the start of a program. They encouraged

the advisement of students about topics such as self-motivation and technology requirements as part of the orientation process to ensure a quality experience for the learner.

Literature reviewed with reference to Gaide (2005), also recommended that institutions that offer online programs or courses must also consider providing an online student orientation. Gaide (2004) also emphasized the use of orientation courses as important to assist with familiarizing students who are taking online courses of what they can expect, such as the reading and writing demands of an online course, as well as familiarizing them with the skills they may need to be successful, such as time management skills, learning independently, and the like.

In short, online orientations can deter many potential student problems by proactively addressing them before they arise. Being proactive is essential to maintaining quality and success within the course, program, or institution. Further, offering an orientation prepares the student for learning online. Students who are prepared are more likely to persevere and complete the program. Ko and Rossen (2008) confirmed, "the most successful online programs offer student orientations" (p. 183).

Moreover, adult students must also learn how to learn online (Fink, 2007). They must become familiar with the learning platform in order to navigate it successfully, as well as other technologies that may be required. Research has shown that many students are overly confident in terms of using the Internet and other related technologies (Eduventures, 2007b). An online orientation would accustom the online students to the technologies used in the institution's online courses or programs, such as the student learning platform and the email software program.

Online orientations not only benefit the student, but also the instructor. In an online course, when students are not familiar with certain technical aspects, such as the learning

platform, it is the instructor who then has to troubleshoot the problem (Lehmann, 2004).

Additionally, if too much effort is devoted to trying to navigate the online environment or

student learning platform, conversely, less time and effort is spent comprehending and actually

learning the material (Fink, 2007). Last, the institution benefits as a whole, in terms of retaining

their students in courses and in completion of programs. The more satisfied students are, the

more likely they are to return for another course (Ko & Rossen, 2008), as well as recommend the

courses or programs to other students.

Curriculum. Content of an online orientation varies according to the literature

reviewed; however, there are some similarities in overall content included. Eduventures (2007b)

released a study completed in regard to the availability and content of online orientations offered

at 15 separate member institutions. Overall, Eduventures reported there were four key elements

in the most effective online orientations. In general terms, these elements included (a) effective

communication, (b) technical skills, (c) clear expectations for the learners, and (d) self-awareness

topics (Eduventures, 2007b).

At the Center for Distance Learning (2008) at the City Colleges of Chicago, an

orientation was redesigned to help increase retention in the college's online courses. Their

orientation was designed with the following modules: getting started (online vs face-to-face

learning), setting goals and action plans for success (study strategies), understanding the

characteristics of effective online learning (expectations for online learners), researching on the

internet (using the online library), overcoming barriers (setting goals), and using Blackboard

(Center for Distance Learning, 2009).

Palloff and Pratt (2001) recommended including topics on technology (using the Internet,

accessing the course site, email), self-awareness, communication (student-instructor, feedback,

how to get help), and netiquette (social principles in regard to communication when using the Internet). In other literature, Gaide (2005) mentioned seven modules as a guideline for other institutions, but included topics only related to technical skills (email, word processing, hardware/software skills) and self-awareness (time-management, learning style).

In addition, as online students, learners need to be aware of how to communicate effectively. Students become frustrated when they are unsure of whom to ask their questions. Literature reviewed showed existing orientations were including items such as Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) or question and answer discussion boards, and reinforcing the importance of using email communication, as well as making general announcements within the orientation. These topics assisted students in knowing which methods were the best or most appropriate to use to communicate within the course, as well as with their instructor or the institution. Student-instructor communication is vital to retention. According to Scagnoli (2001), "students worried about communicating with an instructor [...] will experience frustration and ultimately drop [...]" (p. 22).

In all literature reviewed, it was clear the orientation should, at the very least, introduce the learning platform the student will be using and allow them to review the major features that are utilized (Ko & Rossen, 2008). In addition, Eduventures (2007b) stated the orientation should "simulate the real course experience as closely as possible" (p. 19). Whittemore (2008) further encouraged the orientation be housed within the learning platform itself. This would allow the learners to view and experience actual course tools that will be used in their online course or program.

Literature reviewed has shown that most orientations included the technical aspects students may find in their courses, as well as the importance of student communication; however,

very few addressed the topics of expectations and self-awareness subjects such as time management, self-directed learning, and learning styles in as much detail. These two topics are imperative to student success as well.

Failure of the institution to set clear expectations, according to Eduventures (2007b), was one of the primary factors in low retention or high attrition within a course or program. Expectations should be clearly communicated from the beginning of the course or program; doing so can help to prepare the student for what is expected. Therefore, the online orientation should include topics that pertain to what is expected of the student, as well as what the student can expect. Eduventures (2007b) further reported that "existing research suggests that outlining clear expectations during the orientation is highly beneficial" (p. 5). Expectations can include, but are not limited to, topics such as time management skills, amount of communication expected from the student, or time needed to devote to a course.

Studies showed that within institutions that use best practices in online orientations, tools such as self-assessment checklists, personality inventories, learning style indicators, and psychological tests were used. Self-evaluation tools are used so that online learners are able to consider themselves in another perspective from a neutral source. Furthermore, allowing the students to build self-awareness about their individual strengths and weaknesses helps them recognize what changes they may need to make in order to be successful in online learning (Eduventures, 2007b).

Although the conclusion of an orientation is just as important as the other content covered, very little literature was found that addressed best practices in concluding an orientation. The conclusion is the final opportunity to reassure the learner that he or she is ready to move forward to the actual course. Ko and Rossen (2008) suggested finishing on a positive

note, with an activity or feedback that reinforces the students' sense of preparedness to begin their online course. Ending in this manner should give the learners confidence about their preparedness for what is to come in the online course or program.

Effective online orientations and retention

Online orientations can range in design and type. They may be simple web pages, self-paced modules, interactive activities, highly organized courses, or a mixture of any of the above. Further, they may be mandatory or optional, for credit, or noncredit. However offered, Eduventures (2007b) has determined by their research that the organizations that use compulsory online orientations for their courses or programs placed importance, rather than indifference, in familiarizing their students with the online environment. By providing an effective online orientation, it can be implied further that the organization also places value on the retention of their online students.

Delivering the online orientation effectively is important. An effective orientation program may help get students off on the right foot (Center for Distance Learning, 2009). The orientation may be the first significant experience the student has with the institution and its online courses. Further, it could be the basis for which the student decides whether online learning is feasible for them. If the orientation is not delivered effectively, the student may not gain the intended self-confidence, or worse, if the orientation is not well-organized and delivered appropriately, it may add to the student's confusion (Scagnoli, 2001). Unorganized orientations increase the anxiety of the learner, as he or she expects to be reassured by completing an orientation, but instead, the learner is met with disorder and uncertainty. This kind of negative experience may lead the learner to speculate about the overall quality of the course or program, and he or she may back out before starting the coursework.

Additionally, the orientation may be delivered via synchronous tools (occurring in real time, such as instant messaging or chat) or asynchronous tools (occurring outside of the constraint of time, such as email or course discussion boards), or a combination of both. Literature reviewed has primarily supported asynchronous learning for online orientations, as the orientation should be something the learner can do at his or her own pace, at his or her convenience. However, using synchronous tools to complement asynchronous activities can be helpful for the learner, as he or she would be able to ask a question and receive an immediate answer (via instant message, chat, video conferencing, etc).

According to Ko and Rossen (2008), effective orientations not only benefit the student, but also benefit the institution because of the significance it has on student retention in online programs. Likewise, "students who start off with a good orientation are most likely to have a positive experience and to return for further courses" (Ko & Rossen, 2008, p. 184). Eduventures also stated (2007b), "It would appear that the institution of an effective, well-rounded orientation containing the suggested elements positively affects online learning as well as retention" (p. 19).

Despite the literature supporting the relationship between effective online orientations and student or program retention, there seems to be very little concrete evidence of that relationship. Most of the literature reviewed was qualitative, and it was implied or assumed that meeting the needs of the learner would increase the learner's satisfaction, and in turn, increase retention. Much of the literature relied primarily on information such as student feedback and low attrition rates to confirm the success and effect of online orientations; however, no quantitative data was given. Eduventures (2007b) reported that DeVry University does have concrete evidence to support the connection between orientations and retention, but was unable to report the actual data.

Lack of quantitative data is important to document, as quantitative data is essential to effectively evaluate the orientation to discern whether the orientation is functioning as intended or is ineffective as a learning tool. Quantitative data can also assist in deciding which parts of an orientation could be improved or revised to be more effective. Future research should focus on collecting data to support the effectiveness of online orientations.

Summary

In order to serve the increasing numbers of adult online learners, institutions first need to understand the population and its unique needs. Once these are identified, institutions can then provide the communication and student services that meet these needs, and as a result, increase the retention rate (Parker, 1999).

Literature reviewed supported the thought that in order for any program to be successful, there must be support services in place for the population being served. One of the ways institutions can meet this need is through an online orientation. If developed correctly, orientations may serve as a bridge between the physical campus and the online learners. Effective orientations would allow for the online students to familiarize themselves with what is needed, intrinsically and externally, to take an online course, or enroll in an online program, with the utmost success.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

As stated earlier, a problem exists in that there is not currently a college-wide orientation in use for UW-Stout's adult online learner. As a result of the increase of UW-Stout's online courses and programs, and thus, an increase in the number of adult online learners, it is necessary to create a holistic online orientation to educate adult online students about online learning, advise these students to campus policies and procedures, inform the students about best practices, as well as familiarize them with the course management system, D2L.

Sections to be addressed in this chapter include subject selection and description, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis, and limitations.

Subject Selection and Description

The sample used in the collection of data was those instructors who teach for UW-Stout's School of Education. More specifically, those instructors who taught online courses in the Online Professional Development program, as well as instructors who taught online courses in the Master of Science in Education online degree program, were selected to participate in the survey. Further, a few additional staff members were selected who work in key offices on campus. These additional staff members also work directly with online adult students on the UW-Stout campus. In total, there were a total of 37 persons invited to participate; of these 37, 19 participated in tier one, 14 participated in tier two and 12 participated in tier three.

Instrumentation

The three surveys (appendix A, B, and C) used in this study were designed by the researcher. Some of the questions in the survey were based on the literature reviewed. Other content in the survey was specific to the features of UW-Stout's learning management system,

Desire to Learn/Learn@UWStout (D2L), as well as UW-Stout specific student policies and procedures.

The surveys were given in three parts, or 'tiers.' Each survey drilled down further than the previous survey, from broad to specific. The purpose of giving the survey in tiers was twofold. First, it was intended to decrease the amount of data collection for unnecessary topics, by first starting with broad topics, and narrowing down the available topics each survey, when necessitated, based on the response. The second purpose was to break up the number of questions asked into three surveys, rather than one long survey, which was intended to increase the response rate. Including all possible questions in a single survey would have necessitated a very long survey instrument.

Within the first tier (see Appendix A), the respondents were asked about the broad characteristics of D2L, as well as other broad topic areas such as campus policies, campus offices, and the like. The purpose of this first tier was to get a general idea of what kind of topics should be included. If a topic did not get a majority response as a "need" in the first tier, it would not be included in the second tier of the survey. The respondent was also invited to write-in any subtopic they believe to have been overlooked by the researcher.

Within the second tier, (see Appendix B), responses from the first survey were reviewed, and any no/low need topics identified and removed. Respondents were then asked to respond to questions more specific to each broad area from tier one. Each question listed a topic, and then a number of related subtopics, and the respondent was then asked to rank each subtopic based on need (No/Lowest Need, Some Need, Most/Highest Need). The respondent was also invited, at that time, to include any subtopic they believe to have been missed.

Within the third and last tier (see Appendix C), responses from the second tier were reviewed, and any no/low need topics were identified and removed. Respondents were then asked to respond to additional questions, functions, or subtopics based on the results of the previous tier. The respondent addressed two types of questions in the third tier. He or she was again asked to identify the need for some of the topics in this tier. Additionally, the respondent was asked to rank order specific subtopics or functions from the previous tier, defining which topics were of the most importance, from the respondent's perspective. Last, the respondent was also invited to include any subtopic or function they believe to have been overlooked by the researcher.

Data Collection Procedures

Three surveys, given in tiers, were sent to UW-Stout School of Education Online Professional Development instructors, faculty who teach in the MS in Education online program, and select staff who work directly with online adult learners. The survey was given electronically, in three separate instances, spanning two to three weeks apart. This gave the respondent approximately a week to respond, and the researcher then had time to review the data and design the next tier.

The first invitation to participate was sent via email on March 8, 2010. Within the invitation, the researcher was introduced, the study and its purposes were stated, and the risks and benefits addressed. Next, the survey instrument and procedure was described, and examples of the question topics and subtopics were given. Last, the potential respondents were informed that their responses were confidential, but not anonymous, and that participation in the study was voluntary. Study approval via the Instructional Review Board at UW-Stout was also mentioned. The survey link was then given, so that those who wished to participate could do so

electronically. The survey was stated to remain open until March 12, but that date was extended through the weekend, and the survey actually closed on March 12, 2010.

The second tier of the survey invitation was sent on March 17, 2010 to those who responded within the timeframe of the first survey. In this email invitation, respondents were informed of the approximate time (10-15 minutes) it would take to participate in the survey. Also explained was the nature and purpose of the survey (drilling down the broad topic areas from tier one), and how the responses from this survey would affect the following survey (those topics that were to be further delimitated in tier three must be deemed "needed" topics by respondents). Last, the invitation informed the respondents of the close date of the survey (March 22, 2010) and gave the link, so the survey could be accessed electronically.

The third, and last, tier of the survey was given April 16, 2010 to those who responded within the timeframe of the previous survey. In this email invitation, respondents were again informed of the approximate time (10-15 minutes) it would take to participate in the survey. The nature and purpose of the survey were again explained (in this case, the researcher wanted to find out which topics or subtopics were deemed as most important, as these would be included in the first draft of the revised orientation). Last, no specific close date was mentioned, as the researcher was ardently aware of the number of respondents and could follow up as needed. The link to the survey was given electronically, as well. The third tier closed on April 26, 2010.

The surveys were not anonymous, as stated above, as the researcher wanted to be able to contact the respondent directly, in case of any confusion with a response given. Further, there were no blatant or inherent risks to the survey. Individual responses were kept confidential and could be accessed only by the researcher through an individual login (username and password

required to access the data) to the survey tool (Qualtrics). User comments were not to be reported in ways in which the reader could directly identify the comment with the respondent.

Data Analysis

Qualtrics, UW-Stout's survey and data collection tool, was used to collect and analyze the data for the purpose of this study. Primarily, the researcher focused on the individual responses, mean, and number of responses. The researcher focused on the topics which received the most responses and the highest level of need. Those topics and subtopics which were felt to have a "need" or "most need" 50 percent (50%) majority, based upon the responses of the respondents, were included in subsequent tiers of the survey. Further, those in the third tier with a 50% majority response to have a "need" or "most need" will be included in the curriculum of the first draft of the online student orientation.

Limitations

There are a number of limitations to this study. Each of them will be discussed in detail in the following paragraphs.

First, this study is specific to a small number of online instructors, based solely in the School of Education, as well as a very limited number of staff who work directly with online adult learners. The sample size will be very small, and therefore, they survey, and resulting data collected, are not meant to be used to generalize to the population outside of the School of Education.

Second, the survey is specific to UW-Stout's policies and procedures, as well as its learning management system, D2L. Neither the survey data, nor the study itself, is meant to be generalized to the population, other universities within our outside of the University of Wisconsin System, or learning management systems used other than UW-Stout-supported D2L.

Third, pertaining to validity and reliability, no measures of either have been documented. This survey was designed specifically for use in this study, only. It is unknown if the survey instrument is either reliable or valid, or whether it can be used for future studies of the same subject matter or topic area.

Fourth, this instrument is given in three tiers, which may increase the likelihood of fewer respondents with each tier. However, giving the survey in one tier would have resulted in a very long survey, which might have taken anywhere from 30-45 minutes to complete. Giving the survey in three tiers, with shorter time-spans, seemed to be more respondent-friendly.

Chapter IV: Results

As a result of the increase of UW-Stout's online courses and programs, and thus, an increase in the number of adult online learners, it is necessary to create a holistic online orientation to educate adult online students about online learning, advise these students to campus policies and procedures, inform the students about best practices, as well as familiarize them with the course management system, D2L.

A survey was given to all School of Education Online Professional Development instructors, as well as faculty who teach in the MS in Education online program, and select staff who work directly with online adult learners. The total number of persons invited to take the survey was 37. There were 19 responses to tier one, 14 responded to tier two, and 12 responded to tier three. The primary purpose of the survey was to answer research question three: What information should be included in an online orientation?

The survey was given in three tiers, on three separate instances. The instrument contained questions about topics in direct relation to UW-Stout student policies and procedures, as well as the learning management system, D2L. The researcher's intent was to collect information about which topics and functions were most troublesome for the student and time-consuming for the instructor/staff, based upon the instructor or staff person's perception when working directly with online adult learners at UW-Stout. These topics would then be included in the first revision of the currently used online student orientation.

For all questions posed, when asked to rank-order, 'one' equates to the "most important" and the level of importance decreases from there, and is dependent upon the number of subtopics given. For example, if a question had five subtopics or functions from which to rank, the resulting mean rank of each subtopic or function would range between one, most/more

important, and five, less/least important. In addition, for all questions posed, a "majority" means 50% or greater of those who responded.

Item Analysis

The first question of the survey asked respondents to enter their full name. The reason behind this was so that the researcher could contact the respondent in case of the need for clarity or further information.

For the second question, respondents were asked to rank, in order of importance (one being the highest, five being the lowest) five email functions. Email activation was ranked the highest, averaging 1.1, and junk mail was ranked the lowest, at 3.8 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Ranking the importance of email functions
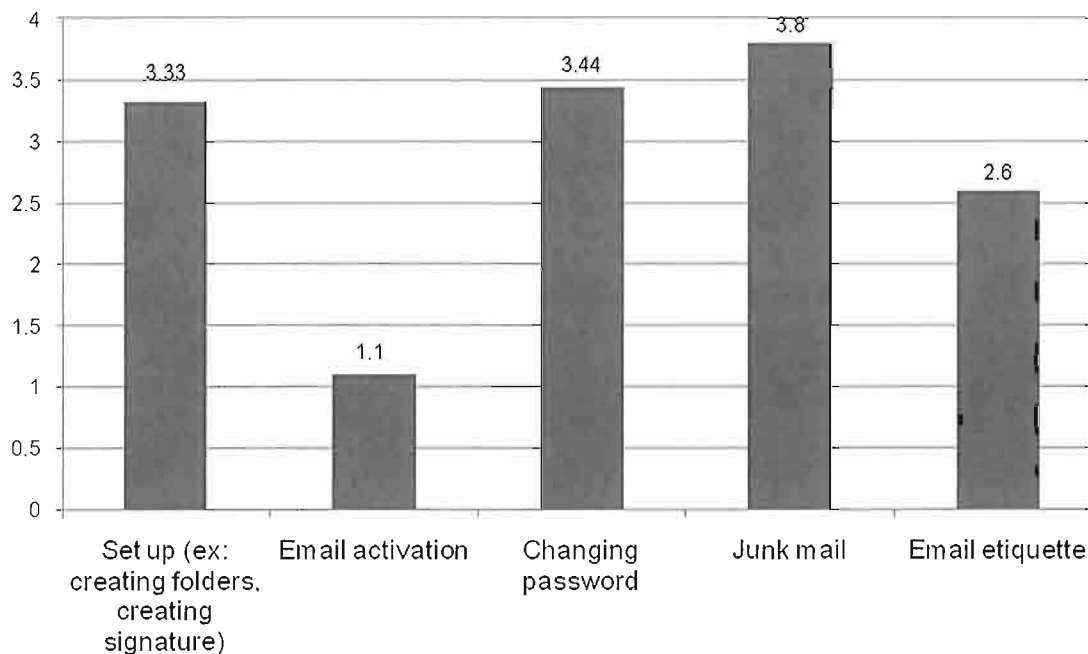
The next question asked respondents to rank-order seven D2L functions in order of importance. Locating D2L ranked the highest, at 1.88, and Classlist/Completing your Profile, ranked lowest, at 5.43 (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Ranking the importance of D2L functions
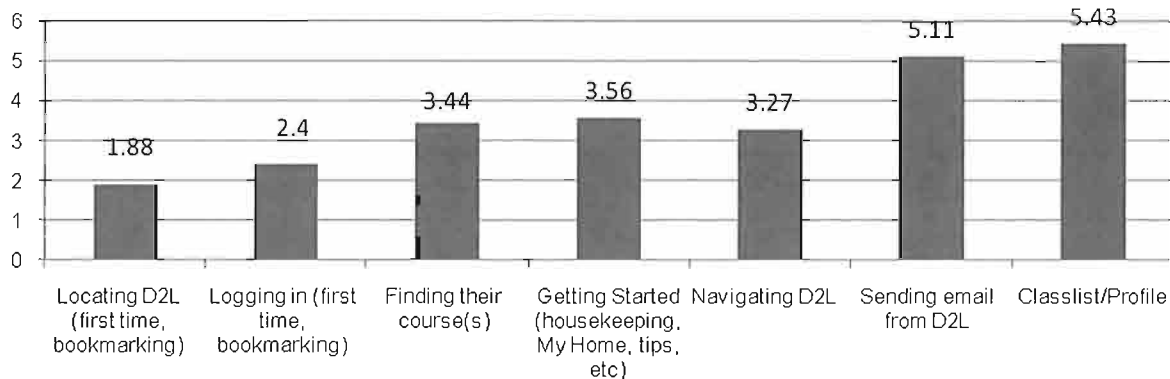
Question four asked the respondents to first separate five topics in relation to Discussion

in D2L as either "need" or "no need." Respondents were then asked to rank, in order of

importance, those topics which they felt were "needs." All topics were considered a "need" by a

majority of the respondents. In addition, "using specific subject headings" was considered a

need by one respondent. When ranking the five topics, finding discussions was ranked as most

important, and adding attachments was ranked as least important (see Figure 3).

Figure 3. Ranking the importance of discussion functions
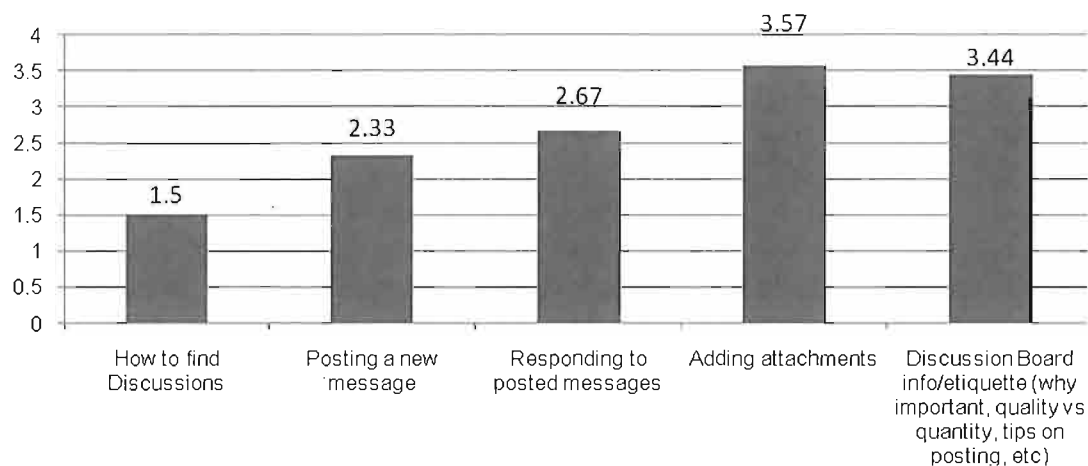
The next question asked the respondents to first separate two topics in relation to Grading

in D2L as either "need" or "no need." Respondents were then asked to rank, in order of

importance, those topics which they felt were "needs." Both topics were considered a "need" by a vast majority of the respondents. Further, one respondent felt "importance of frequently looking at the gradebook" was an additional need. When ranking, both topics ranked high in importance: how to find the gradebook (1.13) and how to view comments (1.71).

The sixth question posed asked the respondents to first separate three topics in relation to the dropbox function in D2L as either "need" or "no need." Respondents were then asked to rank, in order of importance, those topics which they felt were "needs." All three topics were considered a "need" by a vast majority of the respondents. Further, one respondent felt "importance of viewing feedback" was an additional need. When ranking, all three topics ranked high in importance: how to find the dropbox (1.63), how to submit a file (1.70), and how to view feedback (2.44).

The seventh question posed asked the respondents to first separate three topics in relation to Content in D2L as either "need" or "no need." Respondents were then asked to rank, in order of importance, those topics which they felt were "needs." All three topics were considered a "need" by a vast majority of the respondents. Further, one respondent felt "browser settings, toolbars, and support" was an additional need. When ranking, all three topics ranked high in importance: how to find content (1.11), how to view content (1.88), and how to print content (2.50).

Question eight asked respondents to rank, in order of importance seven Access Stout functions. Logging in to Access Stout was ranked the highest, averaging 2.0, and how to order an unofficial transcript was ranked the lowest, at 5.86 (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Ranking the importance of Access Stout functions
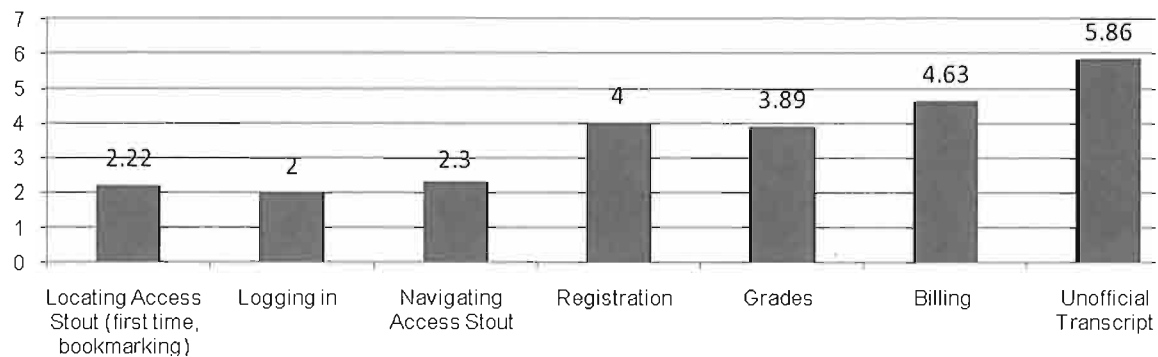
Question nine asked respondents about which student services areas students should be referred directly to the appropriate website versus including information in the actual online orientation. A visual representation of responses can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5 Student Services information access: refer to website or include in the orientation?
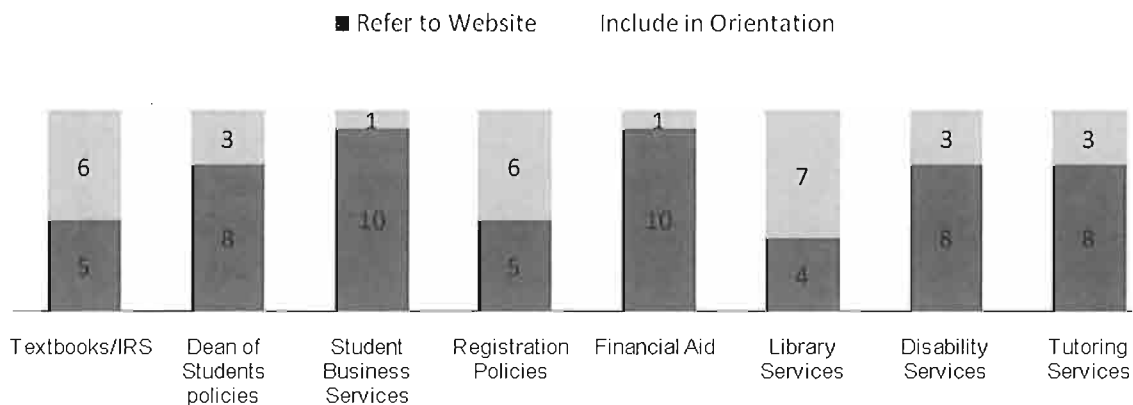

Question ten asked respondents about textbook policies and procedures. Respondents were to rank-order seven topics in relation to textbooks. How to request a textbook (2.17) and Where to find textbook information (1.29) ranked the highest in level of importance (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Ranking the importance of textbook policies and procedures
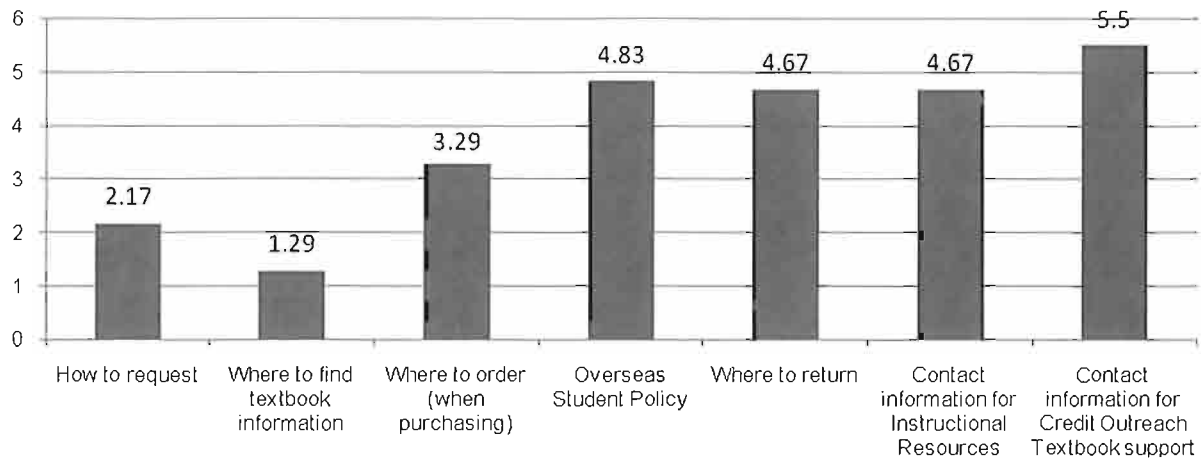
The eleventh question asked respondents to rank-order subtopics in relation to which

student policies and student services offices to include. Library Services (2.13), Financial Aid

Office (2.40) and Academic Misconduct/Dishonesty policy (3.0) ranked the highest in this

category (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. Ranking the importance of including student policies and student services offices
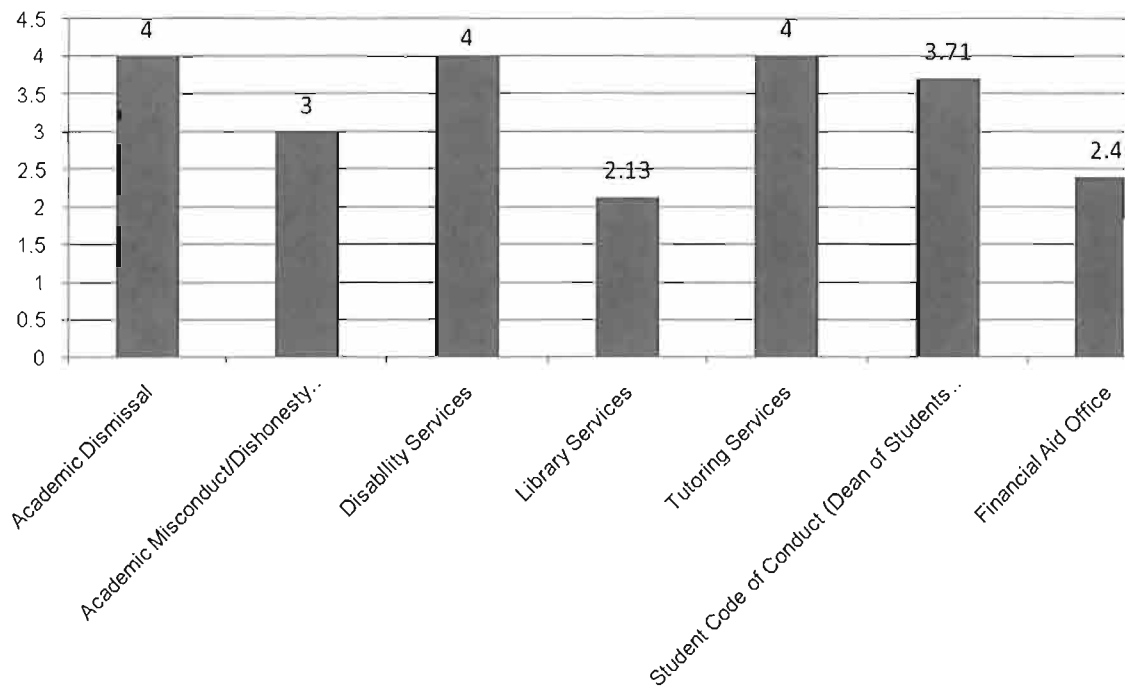
The twelfth question asked respondents to rank-order subtopics in relation to Student

Business Services. Billing information and contact information ranked as most important in this

category, at 1.8, each. Of other importance was student fee information (2.4) and refund

information (3.1).

Question thirteen addressed registration policies and asked respondents to rank five

subtopics in order of importance. Information about dropping/adding/repeating courses was

ranked as most important (1.56), and withdrawal procedures came in at least important (3.88)

(see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Ranking the importance of registration policies
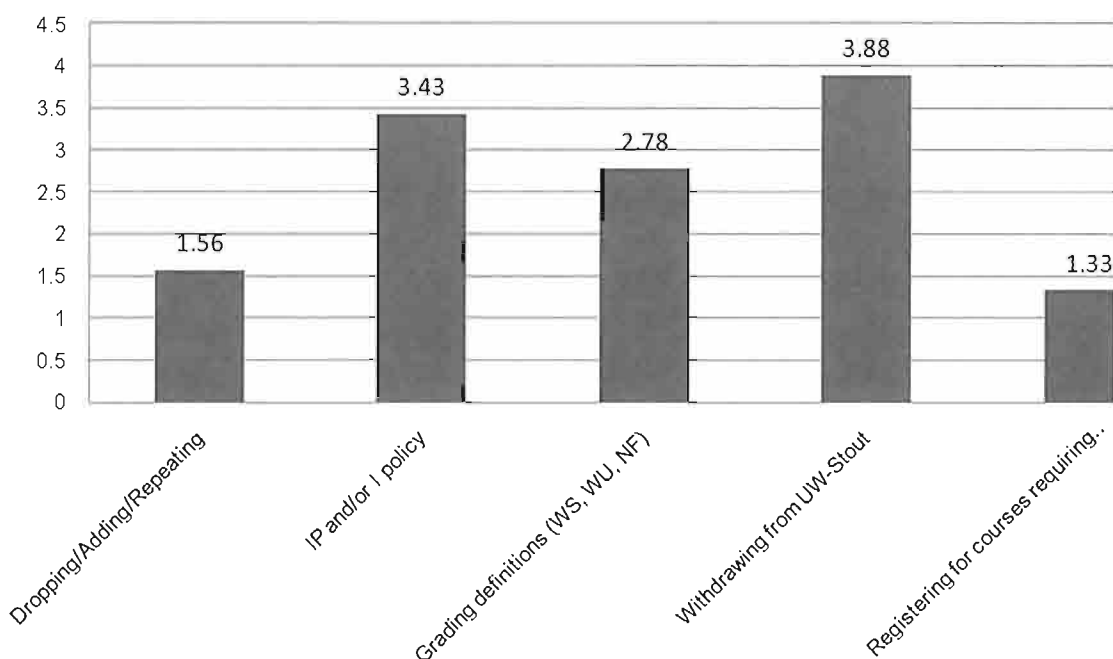
Question fourteen addressed "how to" topics. Respondents were asked to rank three

topics in order of importance. Working with attachments was most important (1.30) and

instructions on how to order required software was ranked second (2.14). The third topic, how to

access the key server, was listed as important by only four respondents.

For question fifteen, respondents were asked to rank eleven subtopics in order of importance in relation to pre-course or preparatory information. The top three subtopics included an online student expectations agreement, successful online learning tips, and effective communication tips. One topic received fewer than five votes: role of adviser/program director (see Figure 9).

Figure 9. Ranking the importance of preparatory/pre-course information topics
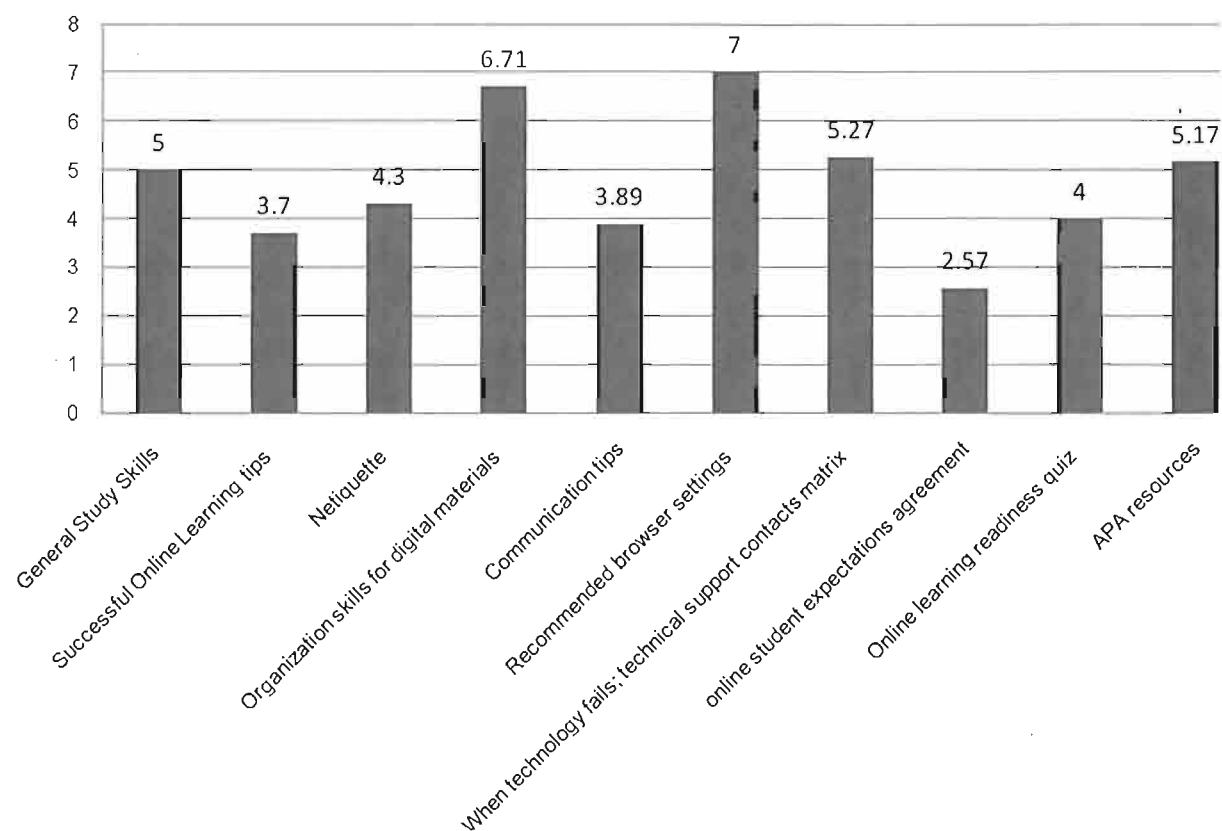
The final question addressed the ways in which students should be informed or instructed. Respondents were asked to rank, in order of importance, nine ways in which to communicate with students. Five of the nine topics received five or fewer votes: broadcasting outlet (ie, Twitter), wiki, PowerPoint, synchronous web meetings, and DVDs. The remaining

four topics ranked as important included web pages, tip sheets, referring students to the

orientation, and video instructions (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Ranking the importance of ways in which to inform/instruct students
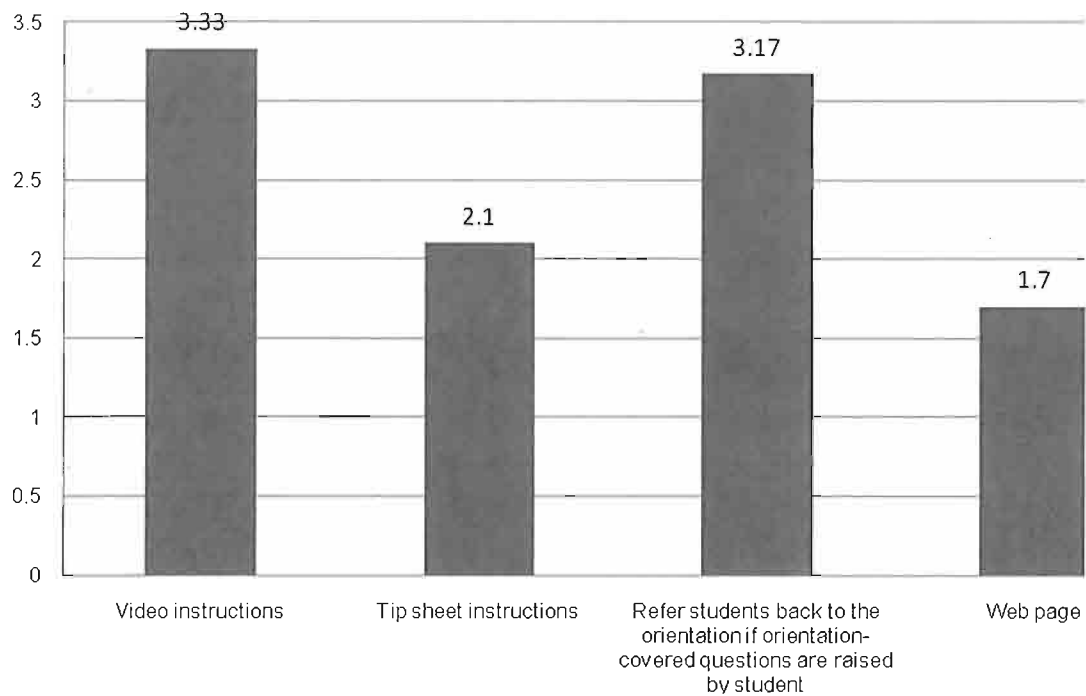
Chapter V: Discussion

Introduction

This chapter will contain the limitations of the literature review, a discussion of the literature review, and recommendations for practice. This chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research.

Limitations of the literature review

The primary limitation of the literature review was that the literature included only online course orientations used for online, post-secondary courses and programs, and was not exhaustive of all types (face-to-face or hybrid; online high school or non-credit) of orientations. The researcher did not study information reported on orientations that were not held online. In addition, information reported was based on literature review only, and not from a review of the online orientations themselves for content.

Discussion

Within the literature reviewed about adult online learners, it is considered that those classified as an 'adult learner' is generally over 26 years old (Coussons-Read, Mattes, & Nanney II, 2003; Eduventures, 2008). Although the characteristics diverge from there, for the most part, research shows several similarities (Bataineh, 2001; Eduventures, 2008; Wilson, 2005): adult learners have other responsibilities outside of school, such as work and family (such as dependent children); adult learners are sometimes in an area where a traditional, face-to-face college education is not a viable option, or they have other obstacles, such as the military or a disability, that makes it more convenient for them to complete their coursework online. However, it was apparent that these learners have a commitment to earning their education.

Understanding the needs of adult learners is important in order to serve them well. These learners seek coursework or programs that are online, because they need the flexibility and convenience that "online" brings. In addition, many seek courses and programs that are entirely online, with no travel required. Last, it is important to recognize these needs and provide student services to meet them in order to be responsive to this student population.

Several studies supported the fact that online orientations are an important part of meeting student needs and increasing retention in online courses and programs (Eduventures, 2007b; Gaide, 2004, 2005; Huber & Lowry, 2003; Ko & Rossen, 2008; Palloff & Pratt, 2001; Wilson, 2005). Though the importance of simply offering an online orientation was emphasized, some research actually stated it should be a mandatory component when enrolling in online courses or programs (Eduventures, 2007b). Students may need a different skill set and must be made aware of the differences of learning online versus traditional, face-to-face learning in order to increase their chances of success. An online orientation could easily provide such information.

The curriculum to be included in an online orientation varied according to the literature reviewed. However, many orientations included four basic topic areas: (a) communication, (b) technical skill requirements, (c) learner expectations, and (d) self-awareness activities. Each of these areas included a variety of information and activities students may need to be aware of when enrolling in online courses and programs. Although all four of the topic areas are important, not all orientations included all four topics. However, at the very least, the orientation should give the student a small experience, or snapshot, of what it will be like to take a course in the student learning platform and allow them to practice using actual course tools that will be

used. Many institutions are currently reviewing and revamping their current online orientations to meet these topic areas to try and increase retention.

Overall, in order for online course orientations to serve their purpose, they must be effective in their design. Students should feel reassured and prepared after completing an online course orientation. The online orientation could consist of asynchronous learning, primarily, with synchronous learning tools as a complement when needed or desired. When developed correctly, orientations help bridge the gap between the online student and the physical campus.

Literature reviewed reported little to no quantitative data as to the relationship or correlation between effective online course orientations and student retention. However, qualitatively, the literature supports the theory that the online course orientation increased retention in courses and programs (Eduventures, 2007b; Gaide, 2004, 2005; Huber & Lowry, 2003; Ko & Rossen, 2008; Palloff & Pratt, 2001; Wilson, 2005). Many universities are currently using them as retention tools to increase and maintain enrollment. However, it is not just important to have the orientation, but more so, it is important the orientation used is effective and serves its intended purpose: helping the students to familiarize themselves with what is needed to enroll in an online course or program—and be successful.

The survey results analyzed also supported the literature reviewed; specifically, the features and functions of UW-Stout's learning management system, D2L. These topics were found to have a high level of importance to the respondents. Further, those topics that related directly to the student accessing his or her course materials were highly ranked. Included in this area were: locating D2L for the first time, accessing UW-Stout email, and how to post messages to the discussion board. These functions support effective communication from the student, as well, as D2L is the area in which the student communicates with his or her classmates, and UW-

Stout email is the only way in which the University communicates with its students. Additionally, these responses also supported the idea that it's important for the student to experience and practice within the same course environment as where their course content will be housed, in order to increase the level of comfort the student has when using the learning management system.

Some of the topics in relation to communicating UW-Stout policies and procedures were deemed as necessary to be included in the orientation, such as textbook information, registration policies and procedures, and library services. However, other topics were thought to be mentioned only, and it was thought the student should be directed to the appropriate website for more information.

Last, topics in relation to areas such as communication, technical skills, learner expectations, and self-awareness were also deemed to be a need based on the response survey respondents, which also supported the literature reviewed. Examples of these included communication tips, working with attachments (technical skills), online student expectations agreement (delineates learner expectations; student reviews, signs, and then adheres to policy), successful online learning tips (self-awareness).

Recommendations for practice

Currently, online orientations are used in several institutions that offer online courses or programs. However, the curriculum has not been standardized, and therefore, the effectiveness of orientations cannot be determined based on curriculum alone. For those who wish to create and use an online course orientation, it is important to be informed about the online courses and programs offered, about the student learning platform used, and about institutional policies and procedures in order to design the online orientation effectively. Although important to become

informed of best practices, it is not enough to only review other online orientations and recommendations. Institutions must also be aware of the characteristics and needs of its online courses and programs, as well as its online student population.

Recommendations for future research

It is clear that more quantitative research needs to be done in order to confirm and substantiate the effectiveness of online orientations. In the future, research should be done which measures any change in retention or student satisfaction as a result of completing an online course orientation prior to enrollment in online courses or programs.

In addition, once an online orientation is put into practice, it should be reviewed regularly. Online learning and adult students are both dynamic in nature, and it is important to recognize any changes in either the courses and programs or students. Through both a student survey and a faculty/staff survey, institutions can ensure current needs are being met, as well as use that data to improve the content within the orientation, if needed.

References

Bataineh, E. (2001, March). A summary look at internet based distance education. In F. Fuller & R. McBride (Eds.), *Distance education. Proceedings of the Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference* (pp. 17-22). (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED 457 822)

Cercone, K. (2008). Characteristics of adult learners with implications for online learning design. *AACE Journal, 16*(2), 137-159.

Conceicao, S. (2007). Understanding the environment for online teaching. *Teaching Strategies in the Online Environment, 113,* 5-11.

Coussons-Read, M., Mattes, C., & Nanney II, R. (2003). The online university: Who are its students and how are they unique? *Journal of Educational Computing Research, 28*(2), 89.

Center for Distance Learning. (2009). Comprehensive orientation helps online students succeed. *Dean & Provost, 10*(5), 8.

Eduventures, Inc. (2007a, April). *Assessing consumer preferences for adult, continuing, and professional education, part VI. A profile of online learners.* Boston, MA: Author.

Eduventures, Inc. (2007b, August). *Orientations for online students: Current and best practices.* Boston, MA: Author

Eduventures, Inc. (2008). *The adult learner: An Eduventures perspective.* Boston, MA: Author.

Fink, S. (2007, Spring). The online learner. *Journal of Instruction Delivery Systems, 21*(2), 17-21.

Gaide, S. (2004). Community college identifies student expectations as key element in online retention. *Distance Education Report, 8*(15), 5-6.

Gaide, S. (2005). Seven steps to meeting the technical needs of online students. *Distance Education Report, 9*(16), 4-5.

Huber, H., & Lowry, J. (2003). Meeting the needs of consumers: Lessons from postsecondary environments. *Facilitating Learning in Online Environments, 100,* 79-88.

Ko, S., & Rossen, S. (2008). *Teaching online: A practical guide.* New York, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Lehmann, K. (2004). *How to be a great online teacher,* Lanham, MD: ScarecrowEducation.

Palloff, R., & Pratt, K. (2001). *Lessons from the cyberspace classroom, the realities of online teaching.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Parker, A. (1999). A study of variables that predict dropout from distance education. *International Journal of Educational Technology, 1*(2). Retrieved from: www.ed.uiuc.edu/ijet/v1n2/parker/index.html

Parry, M. (2009, April 6). Sloan Foundation ends major grant program for online education. *The Chronicle of Higher Education.* Retrieved from: www.uis.edu/newsbureau/inthenews/20090406-ChronofHigherEd-SloanFoundation.pdf

Scagnoli, N. (2001, Fall). Student orientations for online programs. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education, 34*(1), 19-27.

Whittemore, B. (2008, Fall). Crucial communication with the online student begins before enrollment in a course. *Journal of Instruction Delivery Systems, 22*(4), 28-32.

Wilson, S. (2005). Adult learning principles and learner differences. In Dooley, K., Lindner, J.,

    & Dooley, L. (Eds,), *Advanced methods in distance education: Applications and*

    practices for educators, administrators, and learners (pp. 56-75). Hershey, PA:

    Information Science Publishing.

Yoon, S. (2003). In search of meaningful online experiences. *Facilitating Learning in Online*

    Environments, 100, 29.

Appendix A: Survey Tier One

Online Student Orientation Needs Survey

Thank you for your participation in this survey. This survey should take between 5 and 15 minutes. If you participate in this survey, please plan on participating in the next two follow up surveys. As stated in the invitation email, your responses are NOT anonymous, however, they will be kept confidential.

This survey will be open until Friday, March 12, 2010.

This research has been approved by the UW-Stout IRB as required by the Code of Federal regulations Title 45 Part 46.

* Required

Please enter your first and last name *

_____

Do you believe there is a need for an online orientation for online education students? Or, in other terms, do you believe having new online students participate in an online orientation would be beneficial to them as students and/or to you as an instructor?

○ Yes

○ No

Please rank the level of need in the broad areas you perceive to have need:

	No Need	Lowest/Least Need	Some Need	High/Most Need
Email functions (set up, changing password, etc)	◯	◯	◯	◯
D2L functions (logging in, accessing course, navigation)	◯	◯	◯	◯
Access Stout functions (logging in, printing a transcript)	◯	◯	◯	◯
Textbook Policies	◯	◯	◯	◯
Student Policies (academic dismissal, plagiarism, disabilities)	◯	◯	◯	◯
Student Business Policies (refunds, bills, etc)	◯	◯	◯	◯
Registration Policies (adds/drops/withdrawals)	◯	◯	◯	◯

Other: (please list BROAD area of need if you feel there is one that is not covered above)

[ ]

Do you find value in topics for students such as: time management tips, online learning tips, and netiquette?

◯ Yes

◯ No

If yes, please list a maximum of five of these areas you would like to see covered:

[ ]

Appendix B: Survey Tier Two

University of Wisconsin-Stout WISCONSIN'S POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

Please enter your first and last name

_____

In regard to the broad area of "email," which topics do you feel should be included:

	No/Lowest Need	Some Need	Most/Highest Need
Set up (ex: creating folders, creating signature)	○	○	○
Email activation	○	○	○
Changing password	○	○	○
Junk mail	○	○	○
Other_____	○	○	○

In regard to the broad area of "D2L." which topics do you feel should be included:

	No/Lowest Need	Some Need	Most/Highest Need
Locating D2L (first time, bookmarking)	○	○	○
Logging in (first time, bookmarking)	○	○	○
Finding their course(s)	○	○	○
Housekeeping (pop-ups, resolution, etc)	○	○	○
Navigating D2L	○	○	○
Sending email from D2L	○	○	○
Discussions	○	○	○
Grading	○	○	○
Surveys	○	○	○
Quizzes	○	○	○
Classlist	○	○	○
Checklist	○	○	○
Content	○	○	○
Chat	○	○	○
Other_____	○	○	○

In regard to the broad area of "Access Stout," which topics do you feel should be included:

	No/Lowest Need	Some Need	Most/Highest Need
Locating Access Stout (first time, bookmarking)	○	○	○
Logging in	○	○	○
Navigating Access Stout	○	○	○
Registration	○	○	○
Grades	○	○	○
Billing	○	○	○
Other_____	○	○	○

In regard to the broad area of "Textbooks," which topics do you feel should be included:

	No/Lowest Need	Some Need	Most/Highest Need
How to request	○	○	○
Where to find textbook information	○	○	○
Where to order (when purchasing)	○	○	○
Overseas Student Policy	○	○	○
Where to return	○	○	○
Contact information for Instructional Resources	○	○	○
Contact information for Credit Outreach Textbook support	○	○	○
Other_____	○	○	○

In regard to the broad area of "Student Policies and Services," which topics do you feel should be included:

	No/Lowest Need	Some Need	Most/Highest Need
Academic Dismissal	○	○	○
Academic Misconduct/Dishonesty	○	○	○
Disability Services	○	○	○
Library Services	○	○	○
Tutoring Services	○	○	○
Other_____	○	○	○

In regard to the broad area of "Student Business Services," which topics do you feel should be included:

	No/Lowest Need	Some Need	Most/Highest Need
Refund Information	○	○	○
Billing Information	○	○	○
Contact Information	○	○	○
Other_____	○	○	○

In regard to the broad area of "Registration Policies," which topics do you feel should be included:

	No/Lowest Need	Some Need	Most/Highest Need
Dropping/Adding/Repeating	○	○	○
IP and/or I policy	○	○	○
Grading definitions (WS, WU, NF)	○	○	○
Withdrawing from UW-Stout	○	○	○
Appeals	○	○	○
Other_____	○	○	○

Which "how to" topics do you feel should be included:

	No/Lowest Need	Some Need	Most/Highest Need
Working with attachments (PC, Mac; Word, Adobe)	○	○	○
Ordering required software (WISC)	○	○	○
Other_____	○	○	○

What preparatory or precourse information do you feel should be included:

	No/Lowest Need	Some Need	Most/Highest Need
General Study Skills (online reading, time management, stress reduction)	○	○	○
Successful Online Learning tips	○	○	○
Netiquette	○	○	○
Organization skills for digital materials	○	○	○
Communication (w/instructor or other students)	○	○	○
Discussion Board information (why important, quality vs quantity, tips on posting, etc)	○	○	○
Email etiquette	○	○	○
Recommended browser settings	○	○	○
When technology fails; technical support contacts matrix	○	○	○
online student expectations agreement (student would read and "sign")	○	○	○
Online learning readiness quiz	○	○	○
Role of adviser/program director	○	○	○
APA resources	○	○	○
Other_____	○	○	○

In what ways should we inform/instruct students (select all that apply):

- ☐ Video instructions
- ☐ Tip sheet instructions
- ☐ Standard operating procedure of referring students back to the orientation if related questions are raised by student
- ☐ Broadcasting outlet with general student information (eg Twitter)
- ☐ Other _____

Orientation should be...:

- ○ Mandatory for all users (first time and returning)
- ○ Mandatory for first time users only; optional for all returning students
- ○ Mandatory for new students and those who have been out one semester
- ○ Mandatory for new students and those who have been out two or more semesters (optional for those who have missed only one semester)
- ○ Other _____

In what cases should we NOT include information, but rather, refer the students directly to the appropriate website (select all that apply):

- ☐ email functions
- ☐ D2L
- ☐ Access Stout
- ☐ Textbooks/IRS
- ☐ Dean of Students policies
- ☐ Student Business Services
- ☐ Registration Policies
- ☐ Library
- ☐ Other _____

- ☐ Click to write Choice 10

Other topics (semi-broad) you feel should be included?

Appendix C: Survey Tier Three

University of Wisconsin-Stout WISCONSIN'S POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

Please enter your first and last name

In regard to the email topics below, which scored highest in the tier two survey, please rank the subtopics in order of importance (if you feel any sub-topic has no need, please do NOT rank it--leave it blank):

Set up (ex: creating folders, creating signature)

Email activation

Changing password

Junk mail

Email etiquette

In regard to the sub-topics of "D2L" below, which scored highest in the tier two survey, please rank the subtopics in order of importance (if you feel any sub-topic has no need, please do NOT rank it--leave it blank):

Locating D2L (first time, bookmarking)

Logging in (first time, bookmarking)

Finding their course(s)

Getting Started (housekeeping, My Home, tips, etc)

Navigating D2L

Sending email from D2L

Classlist/Profile

In regard to Discussions, which topics do you feel should be included (drag and drop the items from the left into one of the boxes, then rank (drag and drop within the Need box) in order of importance--no need to rank the items that are No Need):

Items	No Need	Need
How to find Discussions		
Posting a new message		
Responding to posted messages		
Adding attachments		
Discussion Board Info/etiquette (why important, quality vs quantity, tips on posting, etc)		
Other_____		

In regard to Grading below, which topics do you feel should be included (drag and drop the items from the left into one of the boxes, then rank (drag and drop within the Need box) in order of importance--no need to rank the items that are No Need):

Items	No Need	Need
How to find the Gradebook		
How to view comments		
Other_____		

In regard to the Dropbox, which topics do you feel should be included (drag and drop the items from the left into one of the boxes, then rank (drag and drop within the Need box) in order of importance--no need to rank the items that are No Need):

Items	No Need	Need
How to find the Dropbox		
How to submit a file		
How to view feedback		
Other_____		

In regard to Content, which topics do you feel should be included (drag and drop the items from the left into one of the boxes, then rank (drag and drop within the Need box) in order of importance--no need to rank the items that are No Need):

Items	No Need	Need
How to find Content		
How to view Content		
How to print Content (procedure, tips, etc)		
Other_____		

In regard to the sub-topics in "Access Stout" below, which scored highest in the tier two survey, please rank the subtopics in order of importance (if you feel any sub-topic has no need, please do NOT rank it--leave it blank):

Locating Access Stout (first time, bookmarking)

Logging In

Navigating Access Stout

Registration

Grades

Billing

Unofficial Transcript

In what cases should we include limited information in the orientation, and then refer the students directly to the appropriate website (if you include any items as ones to "refer to website," please do not rank and/or answer the corresponding question (Q10, Q11, Q12, or Q13) thereafter)(drag and drop the items from the left into one of the boxes, then rank (drag and drop within the "Include..." box) in order of importance--no need to rank the items that are "Refer..."):

Items	Refer to Website	Include in Orientation
Textbooks/IRS		
Dean of Students policies		
Student Business Services		
Registration Policies		
Financial Aid		
Library Services		
Disability Services		
Tutoring Services		

In regard to the sub-topics in "Textbooks," which scored highest in the tier two survey, please rank the subtopics in order of importance (if you feel any sub-topic has no need, please do NOT rank it--leave it blank): NOTE: If the course(s) you teach does NOT use a textbook, please skip this question!

How to request

Where to find textbook information

Where to order (when purchasing)

Overseas Student Policy

Where to return

Contact information for Instructional Resources

Contact information for Credit Outreach Textbook support

In regard to the sub-topics in "Student Policies and Student Services offices" below, which scored highest in the tier two survey, please rank the subtopics in order of importance (if you feel any sub-topic has no need, please do NOT rank it--leave it blank):

Academic Dismissal

Academic Misconduct/Dishonesty (plagairism)(Dean of Students Policy)

Disability Services

Library Services

Tutoring Services

Student Code of Conduct (Dean of Students Policy)

Financial Aid Office

In regard to the sub-topics of "Student Business Services" below, which scored highest in the tier two survey, please rank the subtopics in order of importance (if you feel any sub-topic has no need, please do NOT rank it--leave it blank):

Refund Information

Billing Information

Contact Information

Student Fees (graduation, Research Paper, etc)

In regard to the sub-topics in "Registration Policies" below, which scored highest in the tier two survey, please rank the subtopics in order of importance (if you feel any sub-topic has no need, please do NOT rank it--leave it blank):

Dropping/Adding/Repeating

IP and/or I policy

Grading definitions (WS, WU, NF)

Withdrawing from UW-Stout

Registering for courses requiring instructor approval

In regard to the "how to" topics, which scored highest in the tier two survey, please rank the subtopics in order of importance (if you feel any sub-topic has no need, please do NOT rank it--leave it blank):

Working with attachments (PC, Mac; Word, Adobe)

Ordering required software (WISC)

How to Access Key Server

In regard to preparatory or precourse information, please rank the 11 subtopics in order of importance (if you feel any sub-topic has no need, please do NOT rank it—leave it blank):

_____ General Study Skills (online reading, time management, stress reduction)

_____ Successful Online Learning tips

_____ Netiquette

_____ Organization skills for digital materials

_____ Communication (w/instructor or other students)

_____ Recommended browser settings

_____ When technology fails; technical support contacts matrix

_____ online student expectations agreement (student would read and "sign")

_____ Online learning readiness quiz

_____ Role of adviser/program director

_____ APA resources

Please rank, in order of most importance, the ways in which we should we inform/instruct students (if you feel any sub-topic has no need, please do NOT rank it—leave it blank):

_____ Video instructions

_____ Tip sheet instructions

_____ Refer students back to the orientation if orientation-covered questions are raised by student

_____ Broadcasting outlet with general student information (eg Twitter)

_____ Web page

_____ Wiki

_____ PowerPoints or Fantasia

_____ Synchronous web meetings (optional)

_____ DVDs set up in the "classroom" for student to click and listen