A LOOK INTO ONLINE COURSE WITHDRAWAL

by

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Abstract

This study reviews the development of distance education, adult students and specifically looks at the reasons for online course withdrawal. The study specifically examines personal and course-related reasons distance students withdraw from courses. Online students who withdrew from a course were invited to complete a course withdrawal survey to provide additional information about why they withdrew. Students reported balance between coursework and work/family commitments most frequently as the primary reason for course withdrawal. Results indicated that students withdrawing because of work/family reasons have higher intentions of re-enrolling in the future. Faculty and staff response time was another reason reported for course withdrawal. A perceived delay in communication was related to course withdrawal. Results are discussed further and implications are addressed.

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Acknowledgements

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Distance education, online learning, continuing education–it has been dubbed with many names, but no matter the name –online learning is here to stay. Distance education has been defined as "a structured learning experience that can be engaged in away from an academic institution, at home or at a workplace, and can lead to degrees or credentials," (Gunawardena & McIsaac; Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, as cited in Tracy and Richey, 2005, p. 17). Sixty-five percent of institutions of higher education indicated online course offerings were a key component of the institution's strategic plan and in fall 2010 more than 6.1 million students took at least one online course (Allen and Seamen 2011).

Adult students may choose online education as a means toward advancement without having to give up work and family commitments. Distance education offers learners a higher level of flexibility since students and faculty do not might at specific times in specific locations. This flexibility is conducive to the adult learner who may need to spend typical class hours with family or at work. It is imperative that colleges and universities are prepared to support the needs and expectations of adult and distance education students.

Providing consistent and reliable support encourages student success and impacts retention, which is key to any institution of higher education. Colleges and universities have a great deal of time, energy and resources working to improve student retention. Experts including Tinto (1987), Bean and Metzner (1985) and Rovai (2003) have spent time developing models to help administrators better understand the reasons related to student persistence and retention.

Developing a strong understanding about the reasons students withdraw from online courses can lead to the identification of support strategies needed to help students succeed. Faculty, staff and administrators need to understand if the reasons for withdrawal are personal or

course related. Personal reasons are those issues beyond the control of the institution, but the information and support provided by university staff can encourage students to return to classes once the issue has passed. Course related reasons may inform institutions about best practices in and out of the virtual classroom related to communication and expectations of both the instructor and the student.

There are several research questions to consider when examining the reasons students withdraw from online courses. Why do students withdraw from online courses? What are the primary reasons for withdrawal? Is there a relationship between course related and personal reasons for withdrawal? Do students from a particular academic discipline withdraw more or less due to personal reasons? What about course related reasons? Do students withdrawing due to course related reasons have intentions to re-enroll in the future? What about personal reasons?

Existing research provides a foundation of knowledge about student persistence. Tinto (1987) provided the foundational model that has been used by many researchers. Each variation of this model added a new focus and a new perspective. Most recently, Park (2009) adapted the model for online course completion and online course withdrawal.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

Student retention has long been an important aspect of higher education. With the growth of distance education, retention has remained a key measurement of institutional success. Many individuals have researched online education, retention and attrition. Students of all ages are enrolling in online courses. The current study is focused on the adult distance learner. This chapter examined the relevant research in regards to distance education, student retention and adult students.

Delivery Models of Online Education

In some ways, distance education has been around for hundreds of years (Tracey and Richey, 2005). From pencil and paper correspondence courses to computer based discussion boards, the landscape of distance education has changed drastically. There are a variety of models of online learning that higher education has adopted over the years. The online learning model important to the present study is fully online courses that are asynchronous.

Early Distance Education

The first distance education courses were based on printed materials (Der Vyer and Lane, 2004). Printed material courses used the postal services to exchange readings and homework assignments. Correspondence courses first began in the 1800s and used the print-based model for many years to come (Tracey and Richey, 2005). Correspondence programs allowed people to expand their knowledge, however, such education was viewed to be inferiror to face to face education (Tracey and Richey, 2005). Distance education still faces this struggle today. As advances were made in technology; the radio and television became common household items.

Distance education programs adapted alongside those technological advances and educational programs were placed on the radio and then later the television (Tracey and Richey, 2005). Satellite technology was developed, institutions used it to deliver educational instruction. Later, in the 1980s specific educational programs were delivered to remote villages in Alaska via satellite technology (Tracey and Richey, 2005). The creation of CDs and DVDs provided a cost effective way to deliver materials to students, while allowing them to learn on their own time and at their own pace (Tracey and Richey, 2005).

Hybrid or Blended Courses

The development of the World Wide Web and the accessibility of personal computers, tablets and other digital, hand-held technologies have allowed students to access course information away from campus. Colleges and universities have taken the opportunity to develop hybrid or blended courses so that students interact with each other, their instructors and course material both inside and outside the brick and mortar (Vaughn, 2007). The use of hybrid courses, combining face-to-face learning with the use of online technologies and instruction reduced the amount of time students spent sitting in a physical classroom. Hybrid courses have grown in popularity throughout the last decade (Vaughn, 2007). Hybrid classes have decreased the amount of time students spent in a lecture setting and, and instead, engaged them in active learning opportunities according to Vaughn (2007). These courses were viewed as positive by students, faculty, and administrators for a variety of reasons. Students liked the flexibility of completing coursework outside of the classroom, while instructors felt a strong connection to and conversation with students during the face-to-face sessions (Vaughn, 2007).

Fully Online

A course or program offered fully online means that interaction between teachers and learners must are enabled via an online environment, (Nandi, 2012). Often, time and distance separated students from their instructors and institutions. Fully online courses allowed students the flexibility needed to complete degrees or credentials without physically moving near a post-secondary institution. Colleges and universities used a variety of platforms, technologies and methods to teach online courses.

Two common terms in distance education are synchronous and asynchronous communication (Asherian, 2007). Each has its own benefits and challenges. Instructors must select communication tools that best fit the needs of the class and may benefit from utilizing more than one method.

Synchronous

Courses using synchronous technological tools provide real time communication between students and instructors as well as students and other students (Asherian, 2007). The use of synchronous communication in an online course benefits students in receiving information and feedback from instructors and peers instantaneously. Synchronous video or audio chats are helpful for short term discussions, group projects or check-in opportunities (Asherian, 2007). This method requires that students log in to their virtual classroom at a specific time in order to actively participate.

Asynchronous

Asynchronous communication in an online course "facilitates a contemplative discussion and detailed exchange of ideas among students," (Asherian, 2007, p. 17). Message boards are one of the primary tools used in asynchronous communication and provide students the

opportunity to research, reflect and respond in their own time, which may create a deep level conversation among the class (Asherian, 2007). One of the challenges associated with asynchronous communication is the lack of timely feedback and flow of the conversation (Asherian, 2007).

Inter-institutional Distance Programs

The primary purpose of an inter-institutional alliance is to collaboratively develop educational opportunities and to deliver high-quality, fully online, academic programs, Moxley, Maes, & Anderson (2009). The context of an alliance allows institutions to work together to develop and offer premier academic programs that each could not produce alone. A secondary purpose of an inter-institutional alliance is to allow institutions to become innovative and competitive in the higher education marketplace Moxley, Maes & Anderson (2009).

The Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (IDEA) is one such inter-institutional alliance where more than twenty public, accredited institutions have come together to develop and offer fully online, academic programs (Moxley, Maes & Anderson, 2009). The Great Plains IDEA is based on three founding principles: (1) act as equal partners, (2) be respectful of differences among institutions, and (3) streamline and simplify the student process (Moxley, Maes, & Anderson, 2009). Participating institutions approve courses and curriculum at their own institution and accept graduate faculty from partner institutions. Course numbers and titles are unique to each partner institution. Administrative and financial agreements are accepted and followed by each member institution. Courses are offered at the same common price by all partner institutions. Students enroll, pay tuition, and are awarded their degree from one institution which is called the home institution.

Adult Students

The following characteristics have been used to describe adult learners: persons more than 24 years old who have family and work responsibilities –often nontraditional students are enrolled in classes part-time while working full-time according to Rovai (2003). Online learning provides students with a high level of flexibility, allowing them to complete courses away from a physical classroom. This type of learning is particularly appealing for adult students who have family and work commitments. Distance education is ideal for the adult learner who may be returning to school to finish a first degree or for someone who wishes to pursue the next level of education in their field.

Adult students, working in a career field who choose to complete master's level education should be a recognized and researched group according to Kearns (2006). This group of individuals represents a niche market of potential students interested in pursuing a graduate level degree while maintaining work and personal commitments, without needing to relocate to be geographically near an institution. These mid-career adult learners are different from undergraduate adult learners in that they have completed a bachelor's degree and are somewhat familiar with the expectations of higher education (Kearns, 2006). Adult graduate students bring professional experience to the classroom and have a set of expectations upon entering the online learning environment that is different from that of the traditional graduate student in that they have real life experience to draw upon and they view their time as limited.

Deggs, Grover and Kacirek (2010) completed a study on adult graduate student expectations in an online degree program and found three major theme areas of expectations: (1) learning outcomes, (2) faculty role, and (3) support systems offered by the university. When it comes to learning outcomes students in the Deggs et al. (2010) study indicated the expectation to apply skills and knowledge learned in the classroom and to grow personally and professionally

from the class (p. 695). Students indicated an expectation that faculty teaching online courses should be excellent communicators, provide appropriate feedback, and be responsive to student needs, (Deggs et al., 2010, p. 696). Finally, Deggs et al. (2010) found that adult graduate students expressed expectations that the support services provided by the university be clear and easy to follow; students expect timely responses from academic advisers, staff and access to necessary course information (e.g. technical assistance, textbook information, library resources, etc).

Adult graduate students face obstacles, and these factors influence a student's decision to withdraw from an online course or program. Among those factors are: (1) family structure changes (e.g. marriage, divorce, birth of child, death of family member), (2) employment changes, (3) financial circumstances and the ability to pay for classes, (4) student motivation, (5) academic confidence, and (6) institutional responsiveness (Kearns, 2006; Deggs et al., 2010). Three conceptual models have significance for the present study when addressing adult student retention and attrition in distance classes.

Conceptual Models

Researchers have long been interested in student persistence and student attrition. Three conceptual models were used in this study to examine the reasons for student withdrawal from distance courses. The first model, developed by Vincent Tinto, examined student integration for residential college settings (Tinto, 1987). Each model thereafter builds on the foundations of Tinto's model. Later, Bean and Metzner's Student Attrition Model was presented and Rovai's Composite Persistence Model was highlighted.

Student Integration Model

Tinto (1987) developed a model to explain student persistence in higher education, proposing that student-institution fit is critical to student retention. Tinto identified key terms

including institutional departure, when students depart from a specific institution. System departure then is when an individual departs from the higher education system (1987, p.8). He also used the term stopout, to indicate a brief period of withdrawal from an institution (Tinto, 1987). Stopout became an important aspect to consider when looking at student persistence and attrition. Student withdrawal from an institution is very individualistic and can only be fully understood by examining each case separately (Tinto, 1987). Two major causes for student departure were identified: (1) student intention and commitment prior to enrollment and (2) the individual experiences each student had with the institution after arrival including adjustment, congruency and isolation.

Individual Student Factors

The student's attitude about attending college and their academic and career goals is referred to as student intention (Tinto, 1987). The higher level of student intention indicates an increased likelihood of student persistence (Tinto, 1987). Commitment then is the drive and internal motivation to invest the time and energy required to be successful in higher education (Tinto, 1987).

Institutional Factors

Tinto (1987) identified four types of events that affect student departure or persistence: adjustment, difficulty, incongruence, and isolation. Adjustment refers to the social and academic transitions that students must make when entering college. Students who struggle to adapt to the new social environment and the academic demands may be more likely to depart (Tinto, 1987). Additionally, students must meet the academic standards of the institution. Some students experience academic difficulty in meeting the challenges of higher education course expectations

and demands. Tinto refers to difficulty in meeting academic demands as one of the causes for student departure, (Tinto, 1987).

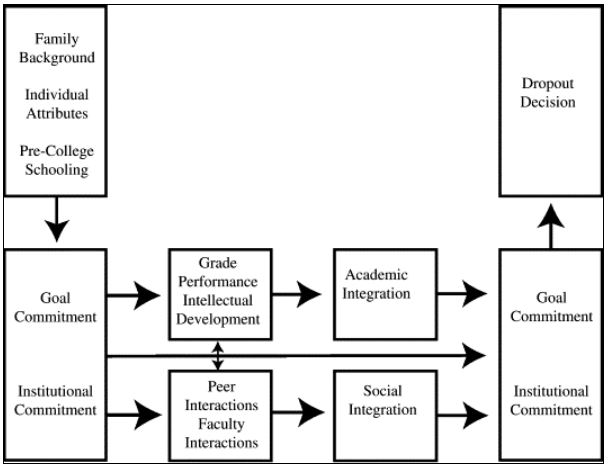
Integration is a key component to student persistence (Tinto, 1987). Students who do not integrate academically and socially with an institution may experience incongruence and/or isolation. Incongruence refers to the differences of needs, values and interests between the student and the institution (Tinto, 1987). Students should develop a sense of belonging with the institution both in and out of the classroom. Isolation refers to the lack of substantial connection to the members of the university community (Tinto, 1987). Students must develop a sense of belonging in order to increase persistence.

The Model

A student's degree of integration with the academic institution indicates the likelihood of persistence by that student. If a student adapts to the college both academically and socially the student is more likely to persist according to Tinto (1987). Tinto's model confirmed the need for colleges and universities to connect with students in a positive way and to help them adjust to college life both academically and socially.

The student integration model developed by Tinto (1975, 1987, 1993) provided a foundation for student persistence and attrition in higher education. The model is well suited for undergraduate students enrolled in on-campus, traditional academic programs. Tinto's model does not account for nontraditional students with different life experiences or for online learning.

Figure 2.1 Tinto's Student Integration Model



Rovai (2003)

Student Attrition Model

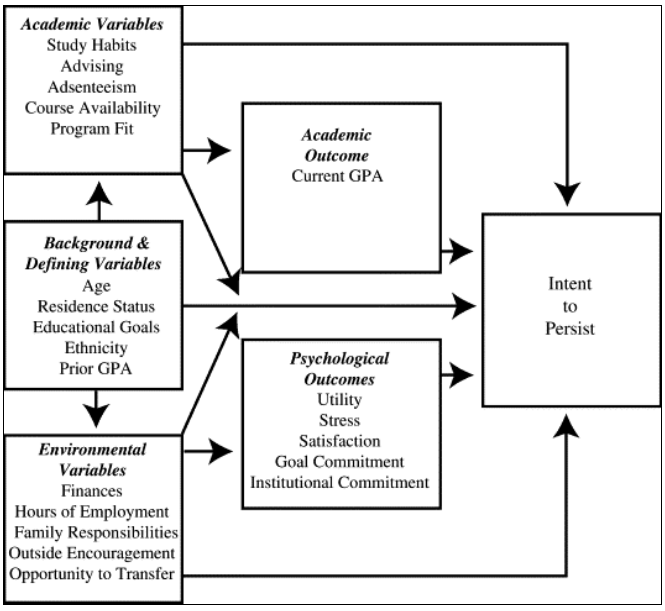
The student attrition model built on the work of Tinto, but focused on nontraditional students rather than campus based students. Bean and Metzner state, "nontraditional students are more affected by the external environment than by the social integration variables affecting traditional student attrition (1985, p. 485). Nontraditional undergraduate students were identified as an important group to address because of increases in the number of adult students attending college (Bean and Metzner 1985). Although the number of nontraditional students increased, the rate of degree completion was much lower than that of traditional undergraduate students (Bean and Metzner, 1985, p. 487). The student attrition model developed by Bean and Metzner (1985) builds on the concepts of Tinto's model, but focuses on nontraditional, undergraduate students who do not have the same access and connection to the university.

Bean and Metzner (1985) noted that traditional and nontraditional students have similar in-class experiences, but identified several major differences outside the classroom (p. 490). According to Bean and Metzner (1985) nontraditional students experience less interaction with faculty, staff and students, they participate in fewer extracurricular activities, are less likely to

utilize on campus student services and have a much higher level of interaction with the environment external to the university community.

The student attrition model looks at four sets of variables for reasons that students drop out of college: (1) academic performance, (2) intent to leave, (3) background variables (e.g. demographics), and (4) environmental variables (Bean and Metzner, 1985, p. 490). According to Bean and Metzner (1985), a student's environmental variables are more influential on drop out than academic variables (Bean and Metzner, 1985). The student attrition model predicts that if a student's external environment is supportive a student is more likely to persist even if academic factors are poor. The environmental variables include: finances, hours of employment, family/work support and family responsibilities (Bean and Metzner, 1985). If a student experiences a real or perceived lack of money, time, support or stress they may be more likely to dropout. While Bean and Metzner (1985) account for nontraditional undergraduate student needs and challenges the model does not include aspects of distance learning or graduate students.

Figure 2.2 Bean and Metzner's Student Attrition Model



Rovai (2003)

Composite Persistence Model

Rovai (2003) combined aspects of Tinto's (1987) student integration model and Bean and Metzner's (1985) student attrition model to develop the composite persistence model, which has a focus on online students. Persistence is defined by Rovai (2003) as "the behavior of continuing action despite the presence of obstacles" (p. 1). The model focuses on student characteristics and skills prior to admission as well as external and internal factors affecting students after admission (Rovai, 2003).

Internal Factors Considered Prior to Admission

Student characteristics and skills developed prior to admission into college affects persistence (Rovai, 2003). Student characteristics include: age, ethnicity, gender, intellectual development and academic performance prior to college as identified by Bean and Metzner (1985). Rowntree (1995) identified student skills prior to admission include: computing, literacy discussion, time management and interpersonal interaction as cited by Rovai (2003). These characteristics developed and acquired prior to admission can impact student persistence. Rovai looked at external and internal factors that affect students' decision to persist in an online course or program.

External Factors Considered After Admission

The external environment and circumstances are noted as having great impact on a student's persistence in online education. Rovai's (2003) composite persistence model drew heavily from Bean and Metzner's (1985) environmental variables such as finances, hours of employment, family responsibilities, and outside encouragement. The demands of family, work and personal responsibilities affect student persistence in online education. Support from work, family and friends seemed to have a definite impact on student persistence.

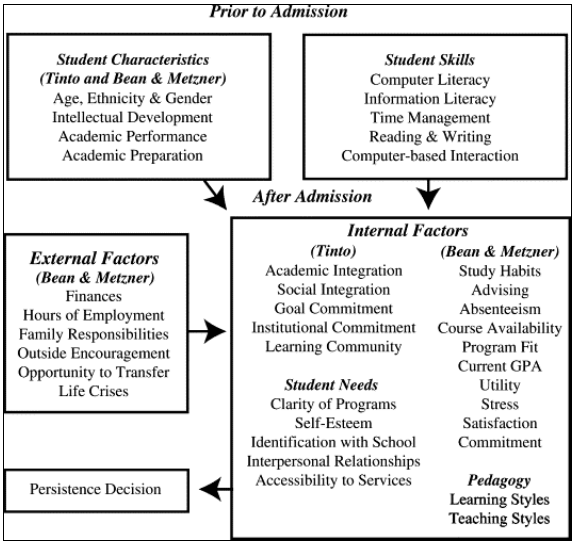
Internal Factors Considered After Admission

Rovai (2003) used aspects of both Tinto's (1987) student integration model and Bean and Metzner's (1985) student attrition model. Internal factors included academic and social integration, commitment to the institution and to educational goals from Tinto's (1987) model. From Bean and Metzner (1985) Rovai pulled study habits, advising, program fit, satisfaction, commitment and among other factors as internal influences on student persistence.

Needs of Distance Learners

Meeting distance learners' needs influences their persistence (Rovai, 2003). Distance learner needs include: (1) clear communication, (2) institutional, faculty and staff responsiveness and (3) developing a sense of community for distance learners. Distance programs must provide clear information about program and institution. Institutional responsiveness from faculty and staff encourages students to develop a sense of belonging (Rovai, 2003). Mandatory orientation programs may provide students develop a connection to the university and the confidence to pursue the program (Rovai, 2003).

Figure 2.3 Rovai's Composite Persistence Model



Rovai (2003)

Adult Dropout in Online Learning

Park (2009) built on Rovai's model (2003) by narrowing the focus to online course completion. Park (2009) modified Rovai's (2003) composite persistence model, and maintained the focus on nontraditional distance students. One significant change to Park's model was the focus on online courses rather than programs. Park's model examined course completion rather than general online persistence and attrition.

Park (2009) suggested three main modifications to the composite persistence model. First, learner skills do not play a critical role in a student's decision to persistent in online education. Park suggested that further investigation would be needed to know the significance of learner skills (2009) Second, Park added a continuum to the Rovai (2003) model and moved external factors to the middle of the continuum, suggesting that external factors may affect a student's persistence decision before and after a course begins. The third modification suggested by Park was the interaction between internal and external factors on student persistence.

The reasons for persisting and the reasons for withdrawing from online courses and programs are as numerous as the number of students enrolling in online courses. There is no single strategy to ensure persistence. It is important to recognize that students come with their own set of needs, expectations and challenges.

Influences on Dropout Decisions

Research conducted using Park's model identified specific areas of concern for distance students. Learning more about the reasons students withdrew provides institutions a foundation for working with distance students in the future.

Willinging and Johnson (2009) conducted a study of online master's degree program withdrawal reasons using and electronic survey. Students left their online programs for four

reasons: (1) personal, (2) job related, (3) program related, and (4) technology related reasons. Personal and job related reasons fit into the external factors, as identified by Rovai's (2003) composite persistence model and included: (1) finances, (2) schedule conflicts, (3) family responsibilities, (4) hours of employment, and (5) support from work. Program related reasons and technology related reasons included: (1) satisfaction, (2) assignment level, (3) instructor responsiveness, (4) teaching and learning styles, and (5) technological skill and assistance (Willging & Johnson, 2009).

Willging and Johnson (2009) found that withdrawal from a distance program is most likely to occur within the first few courses. Students who persisted the beyond first few courses are least likely to withdrawal. The top reasons students reported for program withdrawal was: (1) difficulties balancing full-time work and graduate student work, (2) a change in job responsibilities, and (3) technology problems (Willging & Johnson, 2009). Other reasons students reported for withdrawal included: high demands of the program, lack of interaction with faculty and peers, and family problems (Willging & Johnson, 2009).

Perry, Boman, Care, Edwards and Park (2008), conducted a study focused on voluntary student withdrawal from a graduate program. Student withdrawal is defined by Perry et al. as "students who leave for reasons not obviously related to academic requirements" (2008). Reasons for student withdrawal were grouped into two main categories: (1) personal reasons, including life and work issues and (2) program reasons, including learning style and program/career fit (Perry et al., 2008).

Personal reasons, specifically an unexpected life event, were cited most often as the reason for program withdrawal (Perry et al., 2008). Unexpected life events often included variables identified by Bean and Metzner as external factors including: finances, death of family

member, and time constraints by family and friends. Work commitments included hours of employment and added job responsibilities.

Program reasons for withdrawal included a learning preference for face to face interaction or a lack of skills to utilize the technology needed for online learning (Perry et al., 2008). Another program related reason for withdraw was changing educational and career goals by the student (Perry et al., 2008).

Conclusion

Online learning is ideal for learners, particularly for those adults who have personal and work commitments that do not allow them to attend class during the day or to attend a residential campus. Online learning is ideal for graduate students who may be looking for an opportunity to advance their careers while maintaining work and family commitments. Programs that are fully online, asynchronous and promote collaborative learning are optimal for adult students.

Understanding the challenges that adult distance learners face is imperative to the success of the students and the programs in which they enroll. Using the theoretical framework provided by Tinto and building on models by Bean and Metzner, Rovai and Park and Choi one can develop a better understanding of the internal and external factors leading to persistence and attrition in adult distance learning.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

This chapter presents information regarding the methods and procedures used in this study including a description and discussion of the participants, the survey instrument and data gathering. Research questions and hypotheses are also presented.

Great Plains IDEA Institutions

The Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (Great Plains IDEA) is a twenty member consortium of institutions. According to the Great Plains IDEA website, "member institutions are accredited by a regional accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education" and "membership is a selective process" (About Great Plains IDEA, n.d.).

The institutions span three of the four regions of the United States as outlined by the U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.). The Midwest region is home to nine institutions, the South region is home to eight Great Plains IDEA institutions and the West region is home to three institutions.

Participants

Participants in this study were identified and recruited by Great Plains IDEA. Students who withdrew from a Great Plains IDEA course were invited to participate in the survey. Students who did not withdraw from a course during one of the identified terms were excluded from the sample. A total of 249 students were identified as potential participants by Great Plains IDEA. These students dropped at least one course on or after the first day of class during summer 2012, fall 2012 and/or spring 2013. One hundred ten students, (44%) of potential participants completed the survey. Respondents to the Great Plains IDEA course withdrawal survey were

affiliated with nine member institutions: Colorado State University, Iowa State University, Kansas State University, the University of Missouri, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, North Dakota State University, Oklahoma State University, South Dakota State University and Texas Tech University.

Instrumentation

Great Plains IDEA Course Withdrawal Survey

The course withdrawal survey used in this study was developed by Great Plains IDEA. A literature review was conducted prior to survey development to determine the types of questions to be included. The survey was developed using modern survey methodology and was based on Rovai's Composite Persistence Model (2003) and the work of Perry, Boman, Dean Care, Edwards and Park (2008). The reasons for dropping a course were grouped into personal and course related reasons.

The survey contained fifteen statements directed to personal and course related reasons for withdrawing. Personal and course related reasons for withdrawing from a Great Plains IDEA course were measured by five-point (1, disagree to 5, agree) Likert scales. Sample items for personal reasons for withdrawing from a course include: "Balancing personal or family responsibilities with coursework" and "Lack of knowledge, skills or ability to successfully complete the course". Sample items for course related reasons for withdrawing from a course include: "I did not receive information from my instructor in a timely manner" and "I wanted more interaction with my classmates and instructor(s)." It should be noted that all items for course related reasons (items 7.1-7.8) were written in the negative. The instrument is presented in appendix C.

Reliability

The Great Plains IDEA course withdrawal survey was piloted at the close of the fall 2011 and the results were analyzed and the survey was revised based on the types of responses received from students in the open ended questions. Items frequently submitted in the open ended other categories were considered for inclusion in the survey. Questions were recoded and regrouped to improve the survey. The revised survey has been distributed four times and responses are consistent. A strict analysis of reliability was not conducted.

Validity

Validity indicates the level of accuracy of an instrument (Popham, 2002). Great Plains IDEA conducted content validation tests on the course withdrawal survey by asking staff members who work directly with students to review survey responses to see if the reasons reported in the survey match with what staff members hear directly from students. Staff members have indicated that the survey seems to include the primary reasons for withdrawal as reported by students in email and phone communication.

During the fall 2012 term, a graduate practicum student conducted follow up interviews with students who completed the course withdrawal survey to determine if survey and interview responses were aligned. The responses on the survey and the responses received by the graduate student were consistent, which indicates a level of validation. Participants were identified based on the date the student withdrew from the online course to eliminate risk of researcher bias.

Survey Limitations

Student participation in the survey was voluntary. One limitation may be that the data reported is biased toward the individual participant's perspectives and expectations rather than an objective researcher's evaluation. A second limitation is the voluntary nature of participation in

the study. Results represented only those individuals who chose to respond, which may not be reflective of the entire potential sample.

Procedures

Researcher Procedures

The researcher obtained approval to conduct this research from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Kansas State University prior to receiving the data from Great Plains IDEA. The IRB approved that no consent form was required for this study since Great Plains IDEA collected the original data. The IRB approval letter is included in Appendix D. Raw data and information about the course withdrawal survey were shared with the researcher by Great Plains IDEA in July 2013. The researcher completed variable coding, checked for outliers and missing data and conducted statistical analyses on the data provided.

Great Plains IDEA Procedures

The Great Plains Interactive Distance Education Alliance (IDEA) distributed the course withdrawal survey near the end of each academic term. Student survey data used for the present study were identified based on course withdrawal data housed in the Great Plains IDEA secure, student information system, ExpanSIS (Great Plains IDEA website n.d.). Students who withdrew from a Great Plains IDEA course on or after the first day of class were selected for analysis. The survey was distributed by the Great Plains IDEA Lead Institution, Kansas State University, using Axio, an electronic survey system. Potential participants receive an email inviting them to complete the survey. Those who chose to participate accessed the online survey using a link included in the email invitation (see appendix A). The survey was open for twenty-one days and participants received reminders every seven days until a maximum of three reminders were sent (see appendix B).

Participation was voluntary, responses were anonymous and confidential. This study spans three academic terms: summer 2012, fall 2012 and spring 2013. The purpose of this study was to explore the personal and course related reasons students withdraw from Great Plains IDEA online courses.

Every student who withdrew from a Great Plains IDEA course during one of the identified terms had the opportunity to provide feedback. The opportunity to share one's experience may bring participants a certain level of satisfaction. Due to the specific criteria that only students who withdrew from a course received the survey, the sample population could not be biased by the researcher or the Great Plains IDEA Lead Institution.

Research Design

This study looked at four research questions to learn more about the course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal. Results for each of the research questions are reported in chapter 4.The specific questions addressed in the study include:

1. What are the reasons students report for online course withdrawal?
2. Is there a relationship between course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal?
3. Are there differences between course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal and a student's academic program?
4. Are there differences between course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal and a student's intention to enroll in a Great Plains IDEA course again?

Hypotheses

1. There is no hypothesis for this descriptive research question.

2. There is no statistically significant relationship between course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal.
3. There are not statistically significant differences between course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal by student academic program.
4. There are not statistically significant differences between course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal by student intention to enroll in a Great Plains IDEA course in the future.

The researcher obtained permission to access the survey and data from the Great Plains IDEA research committee. The participant description and procedures sub-sections were written based on information provided by Great Plains IDEA. Research questions and hypotheses were identified by the researcher and statistical analyses were conducted by the researcher with data provided by Great Plains IDEA.

Chapter 4 - Results

This chapter contains the results of each statistical test conducted for each research question identified. Raw data were provided to the researcher by Great Plains IDEA in a CSV Excel document. The IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 was used for all statistical analyses. The following tests were used in analysis: descriptive frequencies (research question 1), bi-variate correlations (research question 2), one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA, research questions 3 and 4).

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive frequencies were conducted to develop a foundation of knowledge about the sample group and to identify reasons for online course withdrawal as reported by students, i.e. research question 1 (i.e., no null hypothesis). A simple bi-variate correlation was conducted to test research hypothesis two: there is no statistically significant relationship between course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal. A one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to test research hypothesis three: there are not statistically significant differences between course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal by student academic program. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to test research hypothesis four: there are not statistically significant differences between course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal by student intention to enroll in a Great Plains IDEA course in the future.

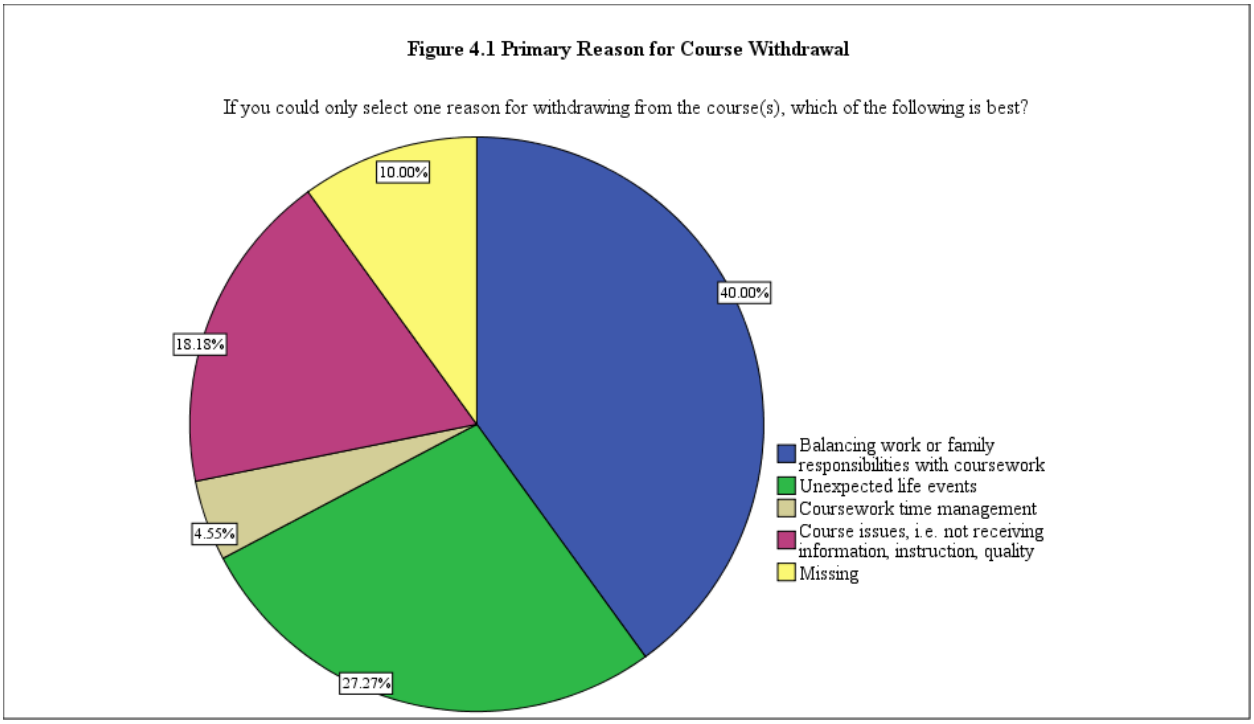
Results

Research Question 1: What are the reasons students report for online course withdrawal?

There was no hypothesis for this descriptive question. Students from nine institutions completed the Great Plains IDEA course withdrawal survey and identified themselves as

participants in 15 academic programs; one student did not identify with a Great Plains IDEA academic program. The majority, 93% (n=102) of respondents self-reported as graduate level students. When asked to select a single, primary reason for course withdrawal; 44.4% (n=44) of respondents indicated "balancing work or family responsibilities with coursework" as the primary reason for online course withdrawal. Other responses included: "unexpected life events" at 30.3% (n=30); "course issues, i.e. not receiving information, instruction, instruction quality" at 20.2% (n=20); and "coursework time management" at 5.1% (n=5) as the self-reported primary reason for online course withdrawal. Figure 4.1 illustrates the breakdown of responses for the primary reason of online course withdrawal.

Figure 4.1 Primary reason for course withdrawal



Research Question 2: Is there a relationship between course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal?

Null hypothesis 2: There is no statistically significant relationship between course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal. Spearman's rho bi-variate rank order

correlation was used to test null hypothesis two because of non-normal distributions and small sample size. The bi-variate correlation allowed for the examination of the relationship between course related and personal reasons students reported for online course withdrawal. The bi-variate correlation matrix indicated numerous statistically significant relationships with those of especially high magnitudes discussed below. (see Table 4.1)

Table 4.1 Correlations between course related and personal reasons for course withdrawal

	Q 5.1	Q 5.2	Q 5.3	Q 5.4	Q 5.5	Q 5.6	Q 5.7	Q 7.1	Q 7.2	Q 7.3	Q 7.4	Q 7.5	Q 7.6	Q 7.7	Q 7.8
	Participants (n = 98)														
Q 5.1	1	.445*	.382*	.055	.009	.183	.115	-.203*	.006	.122	.077	-.001	.123	.100	.111
Q 5.2		1	.270*	.069	.130	.153	.355*	-.014	.109	.193	.128	.083	.247*	.318*	.212*
Q 5.3			1	.586*	.129	.486*	.144	-.261*	.195	.059	.201*	-.051	.136	.144	.126
Q 5.4				1	.092	.502*	.120	-.251*	.125	.037	.054	-.134	.081	.109	-.082
Q 5.5					1	.375*	.455*	.045	.266*	.124	.321**	.158	.036	.157	.221*
Q 5.6						1	.288*	-.149	.368*	.229*	.310**	.114	.139	.266*	.155
Q 5.7							1	.052	.291*	.265*	.402*	.210*	.063	.275*	.427*
Q 7.1								1	.250*	.402*	.241*	.495*	.088	.210*	.259*
Q 7.2									1	.709*	.634*	.492*	.139	.453*	.262*
Q 7.3										1	.515*	.706*	.234*	.661*	.407*
Q 7.4											1	.412*	.261*	.347*	.449*
Q 7.5												1	.233*	.532*	.417*
Q 7.6													1	.312*	.391*
Q 7.7														1	.430*
Q 7.8															1

* $p < .05$

Table 4.1 Legend

Q 5.1: Unexpected family or personal events
Q 5.2: Unexpected financial challenges
Q 5.3: Balancing personal or family responsibilities with coursework
Q 5.4: Balancing job responsibilities with coursework
Q 5.5: Lack of knowledge, skills or ability to successfully complete the course
Q 5.6: Difficulty with coursework time management, i.e. studying, writing, library research
Q 5.7: Learning style not a good match with online learning
Q 7.1: I did not receive information from my instructor in a timely manner.
Q 7.2: The course took too much time in relation to the value of the material.
Q 7.3: I was disappointed in the quality of instruction.
Q 7.4: I was disappointed in the course content.
Q 7.5: The faculty or staff were not responsive to my individual needs.
Q 7.6: My work responsibilities changed and I no longer needed the course content.
Q 7.7: It was too difficult working on group assignments, i.e. to schedule, to complete
Q 7.8: I wanted more interaction with my classmates and instructor(s).

The bi-variate correlation matrix indicated several statistically significant relationships between course related and personal reasons for course withdrawal. In the personal reasons category two relationships stood out as statistically significant and practically applicable. These two relationships expressed a greater magnitude than the others. There was a statistically significant relationship between "Balancing personal or family responsibilities with coursework" and "Balancing job responsibilities with coursework" (r_{rho} = .586; p =.000). There was also a statistically significant relationship between "Balancing job responsibilities with coursework" and "Difficulty with coursework time management, i.e. studying, writing, library research" (r_{rho} = .502; p = .000).

There were many course related relationships with statistical significance; six relationships expressed a greater magnitude, indicating statistical and practical significance. There was a statistically significant relationship between "The course took too much time in relation to the value of the material" and "I was disappointed in the quality of instruction (r_{rho} = .709; p = .000). There was a statistically significant relationship between "The course took too much time in relation to the value of the material" and "I was disappointed in the course content" (r_{rho} = .634; p = .000).

There were statistically significant relationships between the item "I was disappointed in the quality of instruction" and three other course related items: "I was disappointed with the course content" (r_{rho} = .515; p = .000), "The faculty or staff were not responsive to my individual needs" (r_{rho} = .706; p = .000), and "It was too difficult working on group assignments" (r_{rho} = .661; p = .000).

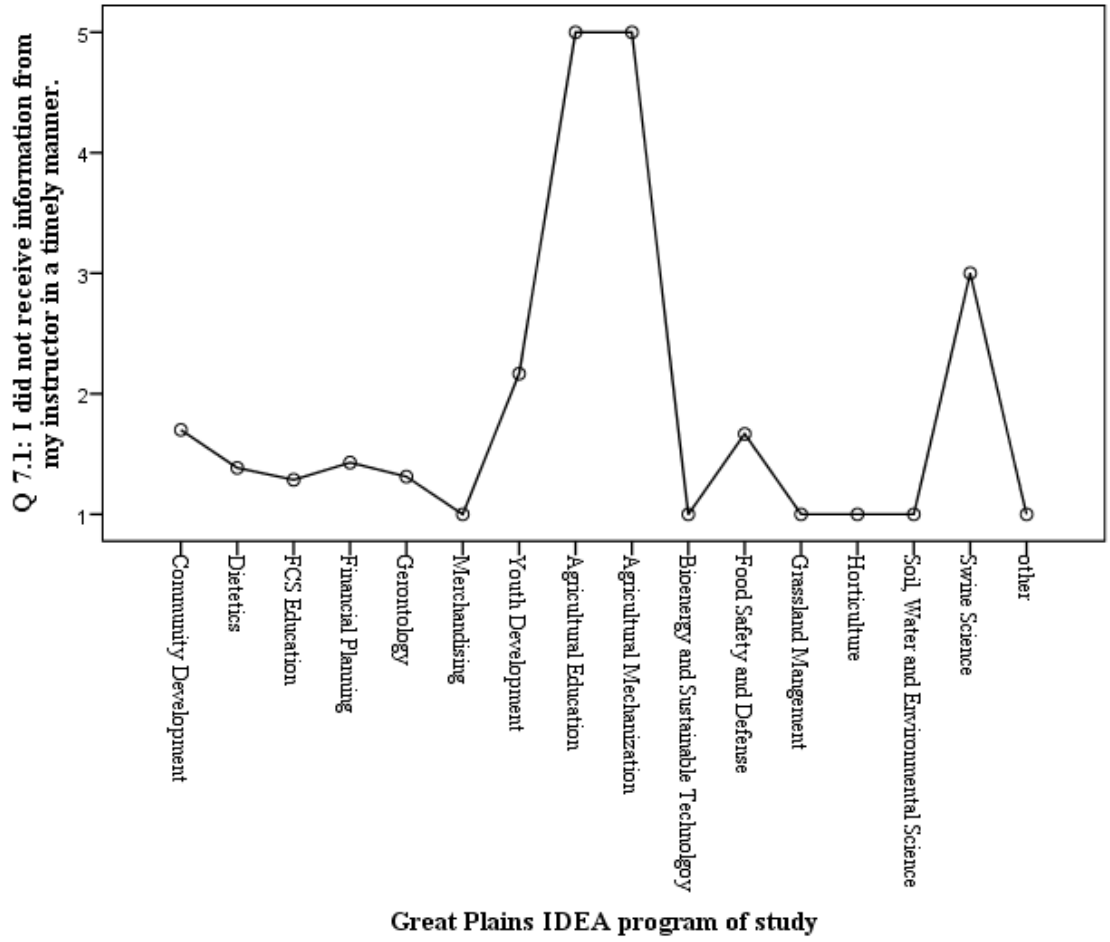
There was a statistically significant relationship between "The faculty or staff were not responsive to my individual needs" and "It was too difficult working on group assignments" (r_{rho} = .532; p = .000).

Research Question 3: Are there differences between course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal and a student's academic program?

Null hypothesis 3: There are not statistically significant differences between course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal by student academic program. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to test hypothesis three. The post-hoc test used was Games-Howell because unequal variances were assumed. The sample population was small (n = 98) and there were 21 programs, making the use of this post-hoc test results necessary. Appendix E contains the descriptive statistics for each of the course-related and personal items on the course withdrawal survey. Fifteen, 1 x 21 (course related and personal reasons by academic program) ANOVAs indicated statistically significant differences by academic program for three academic programs. However, in all cases cell sizes were too small to interpret analyses. Significant results emerged when the program cell size was one, thus, creating a type one error if the null were to be rejected. Tests of homogeneity of variances could not be conducted due to single cases reporting for some programs.

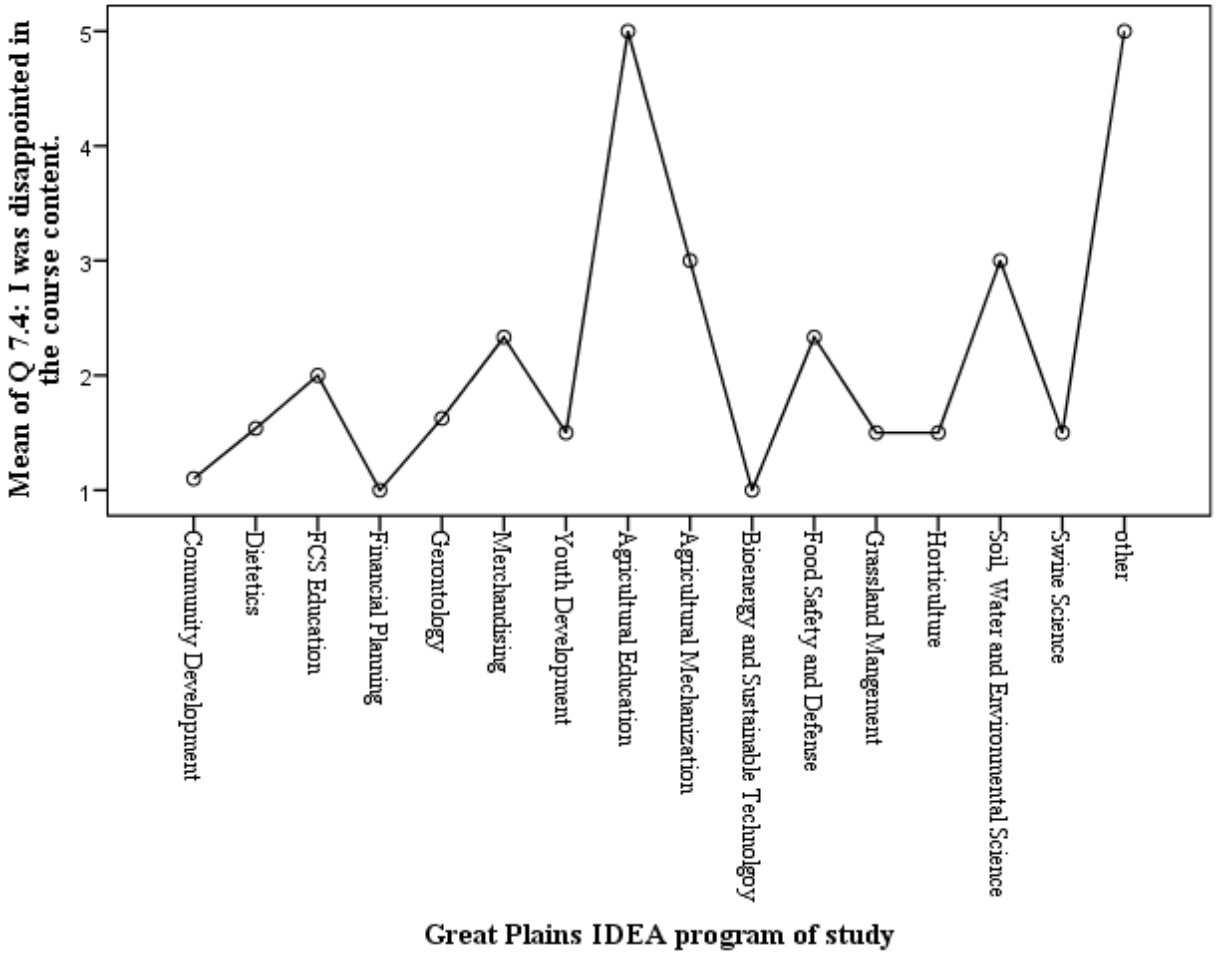
Nonetheless, the Agricultural Mechanization students were more likely to report "I did not receive information from my instructor in a timely manner," $F(98) = 2.018$; $p<.05$. ($M = 5$), as the primary reason for course withdrawal. See Figure 4.2.

Figure 4.2 Receiving information in a timely manner from the instructor



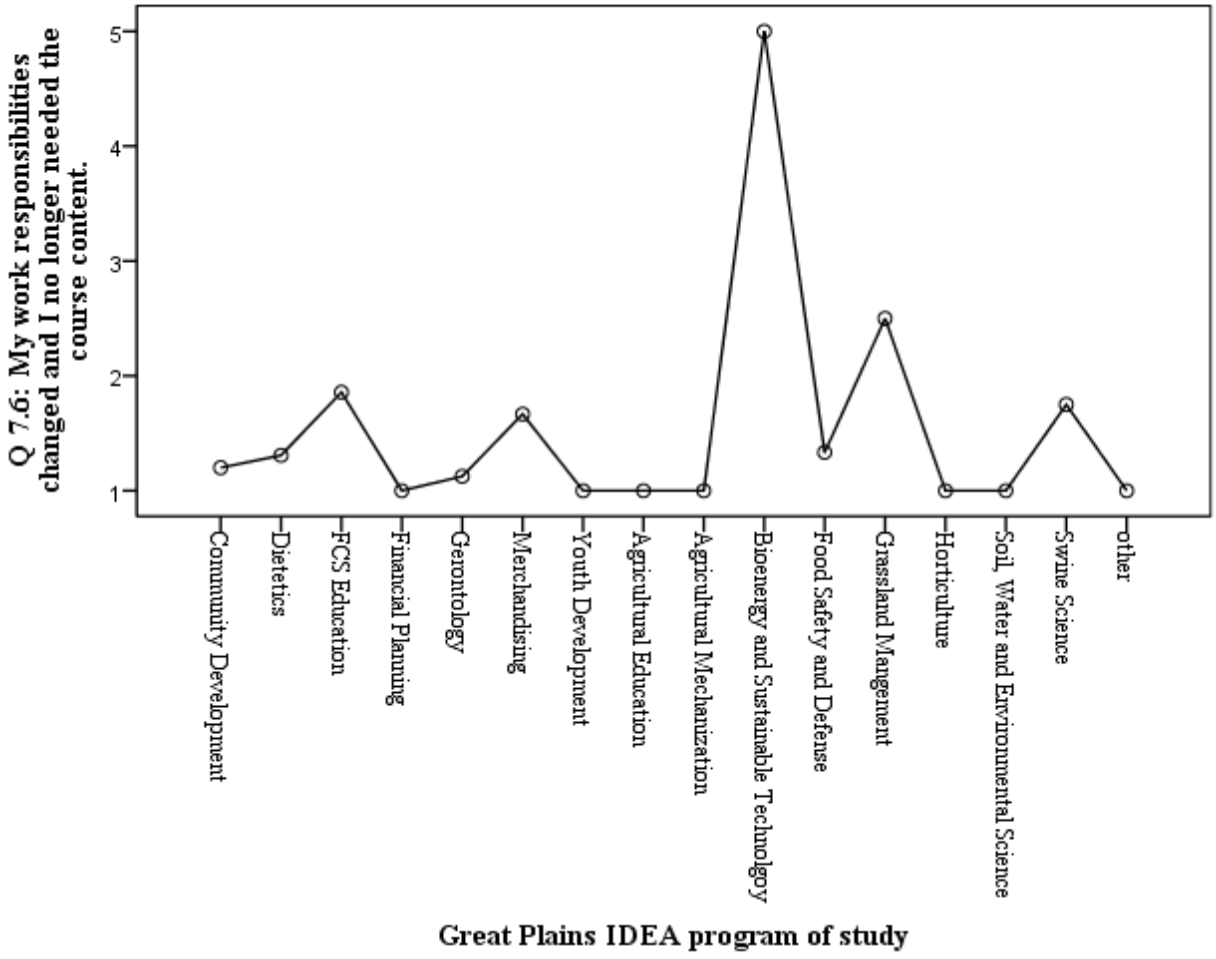
Agricultural Education students were more likely to report "I was disappointed with the course content," $F(98) = 2.604$; $p<.05$ ($M = 5$), as the reason for course withdrawal more than students from other academic programs. See Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3 Disappointed in course content



Bioenergy and Sustainable Technology students were more likely to report "My work responsibilities changed and I no longer needed the course content," $F(97) = 2.545$; $p<.05$ ($M = 5$), as the primary reason for course withdrawal, more so than other programs. See Figure 4.4.

Figure 4.4 Work responsibilities changed

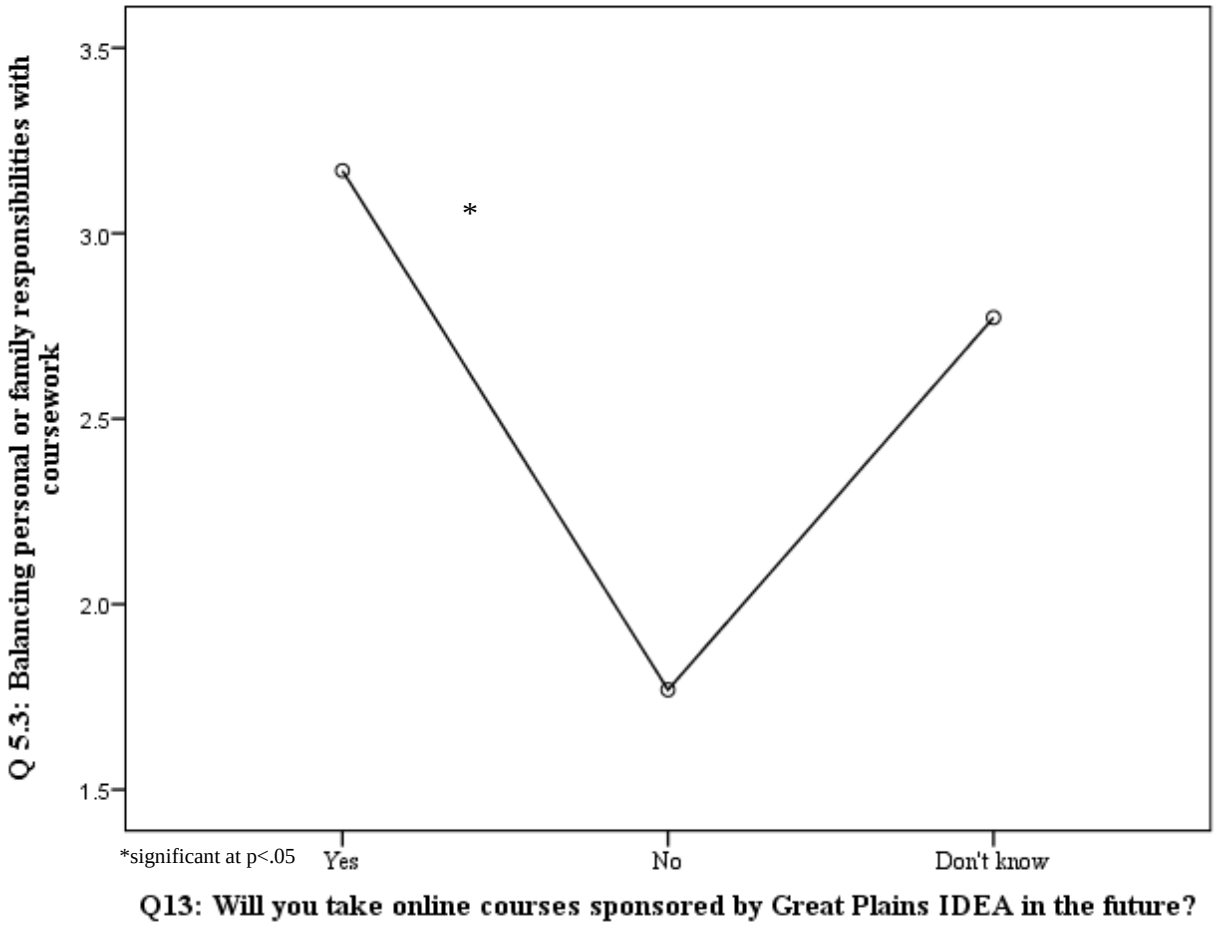


Research Question 4: Are there differences between course related and personal reasons for online course withdraw and students' intention to enroll in a Great Plains IDEA course in the future?

Null hypothesis 4: There are not statistically significant differences between course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal by student intention to enroll in a Great Plains IDEA course in the future.

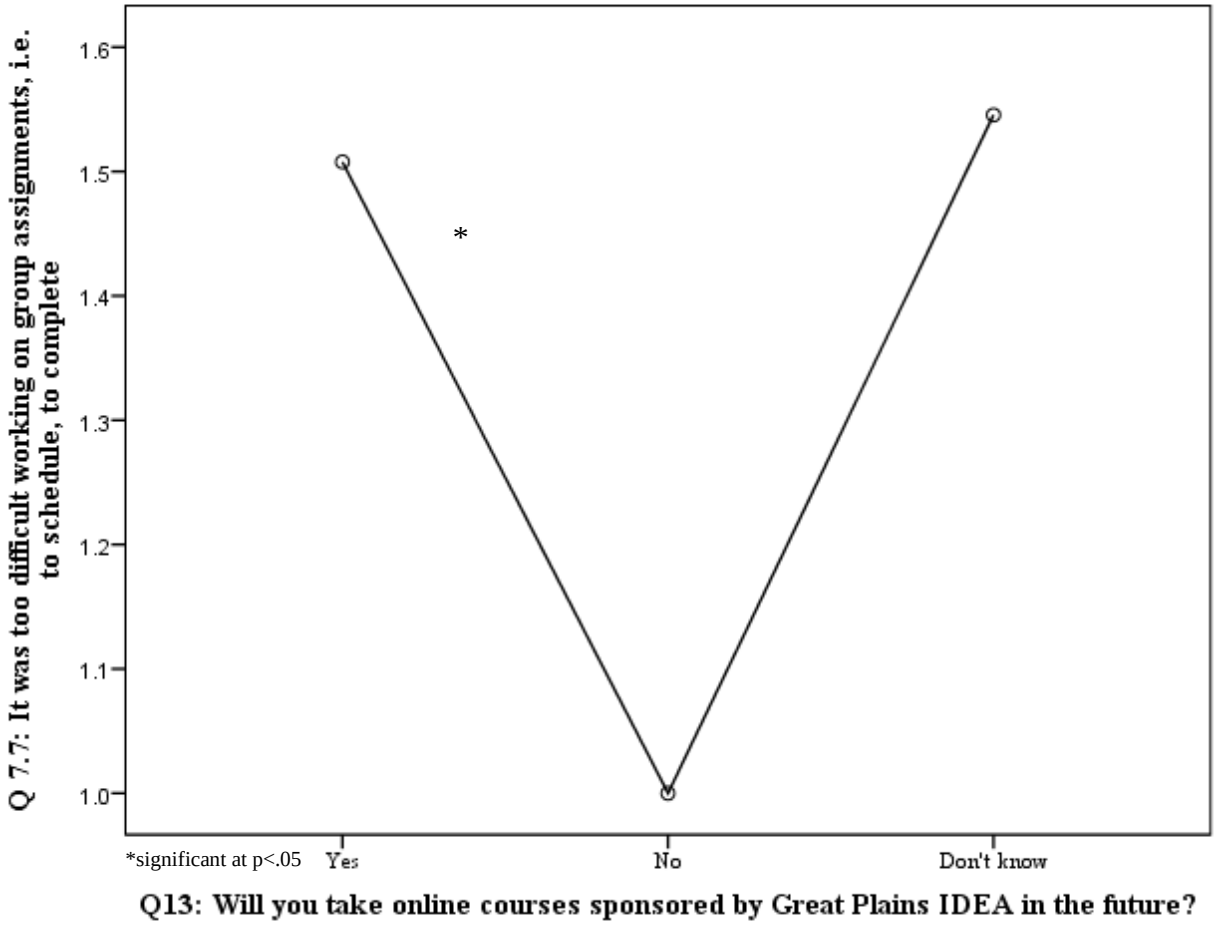
Fifteen, 1 x 3(course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal by intention to enroll again) ANOVAs indicated statistically significant differences. Respondents who withdrew because of "Balancing personal or family responsibilities with coursework" responded significantly higher that they would re-enroll (M = 3.17; SE = .230) than those who indicated they would not re-enroll in a Great Plains IDEA course (M = 1.77; SE = .426), or they did not know if they would re-enroll (M = 2.77; SE = .366). See Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5 Intention to re-enroll and balancing family responsibilities



Respondents who withdrew because of "too difficult working on group assignments" responded significantly higher that they would re-enroll (M = 1.59; SE = .159) than whose who indicated they would not re-enroll in a Great Plains IDEA course (M = 1.83; SE = .441), or they did not know if they would re-enroll (M = 1.55; SE = .244). See Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6 Intention to re-enroll and difficulties with group assignments



Conclusion

Research question one provided an overview of the survey participants. The majority of participants self-reported as graduate level students, affiliated with 15 of the 21 Great Plains

IDEA academic programs. Research question two helped to identify significant and strong relationships between course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal. Several relationships were found; there were more practical relationships in the course related category.

Research question three did not produce many statistically significant results due to small sample sizes. Research question four indicated that students who withdrew because of balancing work and family commitments with coursework or because of difficulties with group assignments are likely to re-enroll in Great Plains IDEA courses in the future.

The statistical tests conducted using IBM SPSS version 20.0 yielded significant results for some of the research questions. Further discussion about each of the statistical tests and directions for future research are found in chapter five.

Chapter 5 - Discussion and Implications

The results of this research study supported the three hypotheses put forward by the researcher. These results provided guidance about distance student services for faculty and staff. Results from the course withdrawal survey may be used to inform future interactions with Great Plains IDEA students, provided the study's limitations. Students indicated that timely communication played a role in their decision to withdraw from a course. This finding is consistent with Asherian's work on communication in asynchronous distance learning (Asherian, 2007). Great Plains IDEA leaders might be able to use this information to work with faculty and staff to improve communication plans. Instructors might choose to outline their communication expectations and preferences early in the semester.

Discussion

Participants indicated most often that finding the balance between family and work commitments was the primary challenge to remaining in courses. Students who completed the survey listed this as the number one reason for having to withdraw from an online course. This finding is consistent with the top reasons for withdrawal, as reported by Willning and Johnson (2009). Additionally, this study showed that there were significant relationships between course related reasons and personal reasons for online course withdrawal. These findings may need to be examined carefully before using such data to inform future interactions with students.

For example, students who experienced an unexpected family or personal event in their lives and did not feel they were not receiving information from the course instructor in a timely manner were more likely to withdraw from the class. Hypothetically, a student who experienced the birth of a child and slow instructor response time was more likely to withdraw from an online

course. Another example would be a student who experienced financial challenges and work responsibility shifts.

There were many relationships to be examined between course related and personal reasons for course withdrawal. One area that seems to stand out is the response time of faculty and staff. Rovai (2003) suggested that clear and timely communication with distance students was important to persistence. The survey indicated that distance students need and perhaps expect timely communication from their instructors and support staff. Other responses indicated that perhaps the course content and course expectations did not line up with what was perceived as reasonable to students. Students indicated a willingness to withdraw if the course expectations were perceived to be too high in relation to the value of the course content from the student's perspective. Future research could include variables related to the distribution date of course syllabus and the timing of the first contact between instructor and student.

The statistical analysis of course related and personal reasons for online course withdrawal by academic program appears to be a false-positive. The statistical results appear to be significant, but based on the small sample population it is unwise to make generalizations about the results. After more data has been collected, this hypothesis should be tested again.

The final statistical test looked at students' intentions to enroll in a Great Plains IDEA course in the future. The results indicated that students who withdrew because of life balance issues have higher intentions to enroll in a Great Plains IDEA course again. There are many factors that may play a role in this decision, which also should be researched in the future.

Strengths

The present study sought to gain a better understanding of the personal and course related reasons students reported for online course withdrawal. The Great Plains IDEA has the

opportunity to collect information regularly from students and to see trends in course withdrawal over time. The organization is moving in the right direction by working to devlop a clear understanding of the challenges faced by distance students both in the online classroom and in their personal lives.

The researcher conducted Chronbachs alpha measure of internal consistency reliability on the course-related and personal variables used in the study. For personal reasons, items 5.1 to 5.7, the coefficient was .65 which indicates good alpha reliability. For course-related reasons, items 7.1 to 7.8, the coefficient was .78 which also indicates good alpha reliability.

Limitations

This study had several limitations. It is important to consider the limitations when reviewing and interpreting results. The survey had already been developed and distributed prior to the beginning of this study. There was not an opportunity to edit the survey to add or change specific questions. It may have been informative to have more demographic information about the participants, including: gender, age, marital status and ethnicity. This information would show specific groups that might share common reasons for withdrawal. Understanding those specific developmental or learning needs would inform student services about which resources are best to support student persistence in online courses.

The survey has not been formally tested for validity, although through content validation the survey appears to provide accurate and consistent results regarding course withdrawal. Great Plains IDEA had distributed the survey only five times. Establishing the reliability of the assessment has not yet occurred. It is possible that both the validity and the reliability of the survey will increase over time.

The overall participant population was relatively small (n = 110) which made statistical analyses in some cases, difficult. Moreover, it is possible that responses were impacted by the response bias of individual participants, which may not be an objective perspective. Further, the lack of feedback from the non-respondents inhibited the findings due to response set bias.

Directions for Future Research

Great Plains IDEA should continue to distribute the course withdrawal survey and collect information about the course related and personal reasons students withdraw from online courses. This particular research area is relatively new, but it is a critical one in moving forward with distance education. Great Plains IDEA has the opportunity to become the leader in distance education student services. With assistance from this course withdrawal survey, they will learn where improvements can be made and how distance students can best be served. Future studies that use the same survey, it would be possible to identify programs that may have common reasons for course withdrawal. These results could be used later to adjust program curriculum, course sequencing and design.

Future research should collect more demographic information such as gender, age, race, and ethnicity from participants who complete the survey. Changing the timing of the survey could be beneficial. The survey could be revised to include additional questions about students' self-confidence in their ability to succeed in an online course work. The current survey asks about interaction with instructors and students in one item. If revised, it may be helpful to separate these into two items.

Great Plains IDEA may consider distributing the survey to students who withdrawal prior to the first day of class in the future. This may provide insight to the enrollment patterns of students and bring forth reasons for withdrawal prior to the first day of class. Park's Adult

Dropout Model (2009) indicates that external factors may influence drop out decisions before and during the semester. Including all students who withdraw from a course at any time in the survey would provide further insight to the external factors influencing students.

If possible, the survey should be sent to students within one week of course withdrawal. The student information system could be set to send a notification report on a weekly basis of all drops and the survey could be distributed weekly. This may help to increase response rate as well as to provide more details about the reason for withdrawal immediately following withdrawal.

Conclusion

It is important for administrators, faculty, and staff to develop a better understanding of the reasons students withdraw from online courses. Distance education is clearly part of the mainstream higher education system at this point so learning how to better support distance students will help increase the student experience as well as retention. Institutions of higher education will benefit greatly from the distribution of an online course withdrawal survey. Distance student services should be able to be improved and student persistence will likely increase when recurring themes for withdrawal emerge and systems provide mechanisms for responding to these themes.

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Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 Reprinted from Internet and Higher Education, 6, Rovai, In search of higher persistence rates in distance education online programs, p. 1-16, (2003), with permission from Elsevier.

Appendix A - Course Withdrawal Survey: Email Invite

Please respond to a short online survey about your withdrawal from an online course(s) this term. The faculty, academic administrators and student services providers associated with online courses sponsored by Great Plains IDEA www.gpidea.org want to understand students' needs and the circumstances that cause students to drop online courses. This information will be used to help us better meet students' needs.

Your response is confidential and voluntary. If you have questions, please contact Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas 66506, 785.532.3224.

Thank you for your assistance in conducting this educational research project.

Great Plains IDEA

Kansas State University

245 Justin Hall

Manhattan KS 66506

p:(785) 532-3965

Appendix B - Course Withdrawal Survey: Email Reminder

Please click on the link below to respond to a very short online survey regarding the reasons you withdrew from an online course(s) last term.

The information you provide will be used to improve our programs and better meet student needs. Your response is confidential and voluntary. If you have questions or concerns, please contact Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, Manhattan, Kansas 66506, 785.532.3224

Thank you for your assistance in conducting this educational research project.

Great Plains IDEA

Kansas State University

245 Justin Hall

Manhattan KS 66506

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Appendix C - Course Withdrawal Survey

AXIO SURVEY

Great Plains IDEA Course Withdrawal Survey2

Survey Description

The purpose of this survey is to help faculty members, academic administrators and student services staff members understand why students have withdrawn from online courses sponsored by Great Plains IDEA.

According to our records you withdrew from a course during this term. We value every student we serve and would appreciate feedback from you on why you withdrew from the course(s). This information is invaluable to us as we strive to improve students' academic experiences.

This survey is confidential and voluntary. If you have any questions please contact Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, 203 Fairchild Hall, Kansas State University, Manhattan, KS 66506, (785) 532-3224.

Opening Instructions

Please take a few minutes to complete this short survey in one sitting - it may time out if you leave it for an extended period of time. Thank you for your participation. Please contact gpidea@ksu.edu if you have questions or experience problems with the survey system.

Page 1

Question 1

Please select your home institution:

Further comments about your response:

Question 2

Please select your Great Plains IDEA program of study:

Further comments about your response:

Question 3

Please indicate your type of Great Plains IDEA program.

- Non-credential
- Undergraduate certificate/minor/concentration, etc.
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate certificate
- Master's degree

Further comments about your response:

Question 4

Please provide your date of birth: (MMDDYYYY)

Characters Remaining: 8

Page 2

Question 5

Please indicate you level of agreement with the following **personal** reasons why you withdrew from the course.

1 - Disagree | 2 - Somewhat disagree | 3 - Neutral
4 - Somewhat agree | 5 - Agree

	1	2	3	4	5
5.1 Unexpected family or personal events					
5.2 Unexpected financial challenges					
5.3 Balancing personal or family responsibilities with coursework					
5.4 Balancing job responsibilities with coursework					
5.5 Lack of knowledge, skills or ability to successfully complete the course					
5.6 Difficulty with coursework time management, i.e. studying, writing, library research					
5.7 Learning style not a good match with online learning					

Question 6

If you had other **personal reasons** for withdrawing from the course, please describe them here.

Characters Remaining: 200

Question 7

Indicate your level of agreement with the following **course-related** reasons why you withdrew from the course.

1 - Disagree | 2 - Somewhat disagree | 3 - Neutral
4 - Somewhat agree | 5 - Agree

	1	2	3	4	5
7.1 I did not receive information from my instructor in a timely manner.					
7.2 The course took too much time in relation to the value of the material.					
7.3 I was disappointed in the quality of instruction.					
7.4 I was disappointed in the course content.					

7.5 The faculty or staff were not responsive to my individual needs.	○	○	○	○	○
7.6 My work responsibilities changed and I no longer needed the course content.	○	○	○	○	○
7.7 It was too difficult working on group assignments, i.e. to schedule, to complete	○	○	○	○	○
7.8 I wanted more interaction with my classmates and instructor(s).	○	○	○	○	○

Question 8

If you had other **course-related reasons** for withdrawing from the course, please describe them here.

Characters Remaining: 200

Question 9

Was this the first time you had taken an online course?

- No
- Yes

Question 10

Did you withdraw from all the courses you were enrolled in this term?

- No
- Yes - I was only enrolled in one course
- Yes - I was enrolled in more than one course

Question 11

Did you receive a refund?

- No
- Yes

Question 12

What could we have done to help you stay in the course?

Characters Remaining: 200

Question 13

Will you take online courses sponsored by Great Plains IDEA in the future?

- Yes - indicate which courses in the comment box below
- No - please provide your reasons in the comment box below
- Don't know - please provide your deciding factors in the comment box below

Further comments about your response:

Question 14

If you could only select one reason for withdrawing from the course(s), which of the following is best?

- Balancing work or family responsibilities with coursework

- Unexpected life events
- Coursework time management
- Course issues, i.e. not receiving information, instruction, quality

Page 3

Great Plains IDEA is working to increase enrollments of military family members in its programs that educate individuals to provide critically needed services to military families.

Question 15

Your military affiliation may be direct (you have served or are currently serving in the military) or indirect (your spouse or parent serves in the military). Please review the list of military status options and select the option that best represents your status.

Please indicate your military status.

- I am not affiliated with the military.
- Active Duty
- National Guard or Reserve
- Veteran
- Military Spouse
- Military Dependent (Non-Spouse)

Further comments about your response:

Question 16

If your military affiliation was a factor in your course withdrawal, please indicate the reason.

- I am not affiliated with the military.
- I had a PCS (permanent change of station) move.
- I was deployed overseas.
- My spouse was deployed overseas.
- Military training exercise(s)
- Other:

Further comments about your response:

Page 4

Question 17

If you have any further comments for Great Plains IDEA, please provide them in the space below.

Characters Remaining: 200

Question 18

If you are willing to be contacted by Great Plains IDEA staff as a follow-up to your response, please provide information on your preferred method of contact (i.e., email address, phone number) in the space below.

Characters Remaining: 200

Closing Message

Thank you for taking the time to provide us this information. If you have any questions about the survey, your program of study, or Great Plains IDEA in general, please contact us at gpidea@ksu.edu.

- End of Survey -

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Appendix D - IRB Approval Letter

KANSAS STATE UNIVERSITY | University Research Compliance Office

TO: Doris Wright Carroll
SEC & SA
322 Bluemont

Proposal Number: 6429

FROM: Rick Scheidt, Chair
Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects

DATE: 11/02/2012

RE: Proposal Entitled, "Effects of PerformanceAn Investigation of Graduate Student Withdrawl Variables in Distance Programs"

The Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects / Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Kansas State University has reviewed the proposal identified above and has determined that it is EXEMPT from further IRB review. This exemption applies only to the proposal - as written – and currently on file with the IRB. Any change potentially affecting human subjects must be approved by the IRB prior to implementation and may disqualify the proposal from exemption.

Based upon information provided to the IRB, this activity is exempt under the criteria set forth in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, **45 CFR §46.101, paragraph b, category: 4, subsection: .**

Certain research is exempt from the requirements of HHS/OHRP regulations. A determination that research is exempt does not imply that investigators have no ethical responsibilities to subjects in such research; it means only that the regulatory requirements related to IRB review, informed consent, and assurance of compliance do not apply to the research.

Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, the University Research Compliance Office, and if the subjects are KSU students, to the Director of the Student Health Center.

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Appendix E - Research Question Three: Descriptive Table

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Q5.1: Unexpected family or personal events	Community Development	10	3.00	2.108	.667	1.49	4.51	1	5
	Dietetics	13	2.54	1.808	.501	1.45	3.63	1	5
	FCS Education	7	2.29	1.496	.565	.90	3.67	1	5
	Financial Planning	14	2.86	1.834	.490	1.80	3.92	1	5
	Gerontology	15	2.67	1.839	.475	1.65	3.68	1	5
	Merchandising	3	3.00	1.000	.577	.52	5.48	2	4
	Youth Development	19	2.79	1.903	.436	1.87	3.71	1	5
	Agricultural Education	1	1.00					1	1
	Agricultural Mechanization	1	4.00					4	4
	Bioenergy and Sustainable Technolgoy	1	5.00					5	5
	Food Safety and Defense	3	1.67	1.155	.667	-1.20	4.54	1	3
	Grassland Mangement	2	3.00	2.828	2.000	-22.41	28.41	1	5
	Horticulture	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Soil, Water and Environmental Science	1	1.00					1	1
	Swine Science	4	2.00	2.000	1.000	-1.18	5.18	1	5
	other	1	1.00					1	1
	Total	99	2.59	1.773	.178	2.23	2.94	1	5

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Q5.2: Unexpected financial challenges	Community Development	10	1.70	1.252	.396	.80	2.60	1	4
	Dietetics	13	1.69	1.377	.382	.86	2.52	1	5
	FCS Education	7	1.43	.787	.297	.70	2.16	1	3
	Financial Planning	14	1.64	1.447	.387	.81	2.48	1	5
	Gerontology	16	2.56	1.861	.465	1.57	3.55	1	5
	Merchandising	3	3.33	2.082	1.202	-1.84	8.50	1	5
	Youth Development	19	2.53	1.806	.414	1.66	3.40	1	5
	Agricultural Education	1	1.00					1	1
	Agricultural Mechanization	1	1.00					1	1
	Bioenergy and Sustainable Technolgoy	1	3.00					3	3
	Food Safety and Defense	3	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Grassland Mangement	2	2.00	1.414	1.000	-10.71	14.71	1	3
	Horticulture	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Soil, Water and Environmental Science	1	1.00					1	1
	Swine Science	4	2.00	2.000	1.000	-1.18	5.18	1	5
	other	1	1.00					1	1
	Total	100	1.97	1.540	.154	1.66	2.28	1	5

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Q5.3: Balancing personal or family responsibilities with coursework	Community Development	10	2.80	1.932	.611	1.42	4.18	1	5
	Dietetics	13	3.15	2.075	.576	1.90	4.41	1	5
	FCS Education	7	3.86	1.952	.738	2.05	5.66	1	5
	Financial Planning	14	3.07	1.639	.438	2.13	4.02	1	5
	Gerontology	15	3.20	1.740	.449	2.24	4.16	1	5
	Merchandising	3	4.67	.577	.333	3.23	6.10	4	5
	Youth Development	19	2.74	1.821	.418	1.86	3.61	1	5
	Agricultural Education	1	1.00					1	1
	Agricultural Mechanization	1	1.00					1	1
	Bioenergy and Sustainable Technolgoy	1	2.00					2	2
	Food Safety and Defense	3	4.00	1.732	1.000	-.30	8.30	2	5
	Grassland Mangement	2	3.00	2.828	2.000	-22.41	28.41	1	5
	Horticulture	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Soil, Water and Environmental Science	1	5.00					5	5
	Swine Science	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	other	1	1.00					1	1
	Total	99	2.92	1.828	.184	2.55	3.28	1	5

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Q5.4: Balancing job responsibilities with coursework	Community Development	10	3.30	2.003	.633	1.87	4.73	1	5
	Dietetics	13	2.92	1.935	.537	1.75	4.09	1	5
	FCS Education	7	3.29	2.138	.808	1.31	5.26	1	5
	Financial Planning	14	3.36	1.781	.476	2.33	4.39	1	5
	Gerontology	14	3.21	1.847	.494	2.15	4.28	1	5
	Merchandising	3	4.33	.577	.333	2.90	5.77	4	5
	Youth Development	19	2.74	1.759	.404	1.89	3.58	1	5
	Agricultural Education	1	1.00					1	1
	Agricultural Mechanization	1	1.00					1	1
	Bioenergy and Sustainable Technolgoy	1	2.00					2	2
	Food Safety and Defense	3	4.67	.577	.333	3.23	6.10	4	5
	Grassland Mangement	2	2.50	2.121	1.500	-16.56	21.56	1	4
	Horticulture	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Soil, Water and Environmental Science	1	5.00					5	5
	Swine Science	4	2.50	1.732	.866	-.26	5.26	1	4
	other	1	1.00					1	1
	Total	98	3.00	1.811	.183	2.64	3.36	1	5

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Q5.5: Lack of knowledge, skills or ability to successfully complete the course	Community Development	10	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Dietetics	13	1.85	1.519	.421	.93	2.76	1	5
	FCS Education	7	1.86	1.574	.595	.40	3.31	1	5
	Financial Planning	14	1.21	.579	.155	.88	1.55	1	3
	Gerontology	15	1.47	1.125	.291	.84	2.09	1	5
	Merchandising	3	2.00	1.000	.577	-.48	4.48	1	3
	Youth Development	19	1.58	1.216	.279	.99	2.17	1	5
	Agricultural Education	1	1.00					1	1
	Agricultural Mechanization	1	1.00					1	1
	Bioenergy and Sustainable Technolgoy	1	1.00					1	1
	Food Safety and Defense	3	2.33	1.155	.667	-.54	5.20	1	3
	Grassland Mangement	2	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Horticulture	4	1.25	.500	.250	.45	2.05	1	2
	Soil, Water and Environmental Science	1	5.00					5	5
	Swine Science	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	other	1	1.00					1	1
	Total	99	1.51	1.110	.112	1.28	1.73	1	5

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Q5.6: Difficulty with coursework time management, i.e. studying, writing, library research	Community Development	10	1.80	1.687	.533	.59	3.01	1	5
	Dietetics	13	1.85	1.345	.373	1.03	2.66	1	5
	FCS Education	7	3.29	1.704	.644	1.71	4.86	1	5
	Financial Planning	14	1.36	.842	.225	.87	1.84	1	4
	Gerontology	15	1.87	1.407	.363	1.09	2.65	1	5
	Merchandising	3	2.33	.577	.333	.90	3.77	2	3
	Youth Development	19	2.00	1.202	.276	1.42	2.58	1	5
	Agricultural Education	1	1.00					1	1
	Agricultural Mechanization	1	1.00					1	1
	Bioenergy and Sustainable Technolgoy	1	1.00					1	1
	Food Safety and Defense	3	2.67	1.528	.882	-1.13	6.46	1	4
	Grassland Mangement	2	2.50	2.121	1.500	-16.56	21.56	1	4
	Horticulture	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Soil, Water and Environmental Science	1	4.00					4	4
	Swine Science	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	other	1	1.00					1	1
	Total	99	1.88	1.327	.133	1.61	2.14	1	5

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Q5.7: Learning style not a good match with online learning	Community Development	10	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Dietetics	13	1.38	.768	.213	.92	1.85	1	3
	FCS Education	7	1.14	.378	.143	.79	1.49	1	2
	Financial Planning	14	1.79	1.369	.366	1.00	2.58	1	5
	Gerontology	15	1.53	1.187	.307	.88	2.19	1	5
	Merchandising	3	2.00	1.000	.577	-.48	4.48	1	3
	Youth Development	19	1.63	1.300	.298	1.00	2.26	1	5
	Agricultural Education	1	1.00					1	1
	Agricultural Mechanization	0							
	Bioenergy and Sustainable Technolgoy	1	1.00					1	1
	Food Safety and Defense	3	1.67	1.155	.667	-1.20	4.54	1	3
	Grassland Mangement	2	2.50	2.121	1.500	-16.56	21.56	1	4
	Horticulture	3	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Soil, Water and Environmental Science	1	1.00					1	1
	Swine Science	4	2.00	2.000	1.000	-1.18	5.18	1	5
	other	1	1.00					1	1
	Total	97	1.51	1.091	.111	1.29	1.73	1	5

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Q7.1: I did not receive information from my instructor in a timely manner.	Community Development	10	1.70	1.494	.473	.63	2.77	1	5
	Dietetics	13	1.38	1.121	.311	.71	2.06	1	5
	FCS Education	7	1.29	.756	.286	.59	1.98	1	3
	Financial Planning	14	1.43	1.158	.309	.76	2.10	1	5
	Gerontology	16	1.31	.873	.218	.85	1.78	1	4
	Merchandising	3	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Youth Development	18	2.17	1.425	.336	1.46	2.88	1	5
	Agricultural Education	1	5.00					5	5
	Agricultural Mechanization	1	5.00					5	5
	Bioenergy and Sustainable Technolgoy	1	1.00					1	1
	Food Safety and Defense	3	1.67	1.155	.667	-1.20	4.54	1	3
	Grassland Mangement	2	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Horticulture	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Soil, Water and Environmental Science	1	1.00					1	1
	Swine Science	4	3.00	2.309	1.155	-.67	6.67	1	5
	other	1	1.00					1	1
	Total	99	1.65	1.296	.130	1.39	1.90	1	5

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Q7.2: The course took too much time in relation to the value of the material.	Community Development	10	1.40	.843	.267	.80	2.00	1	3
	Dietetics	13	1.92	1.382	.383	1.09	2.76	1	5
	FCS Education	7	1.86	1.574	.595	.40	3.31	1	5
	Financial Planning	14	1.64	1.151	.308	.98	2.31	1	4
	Gerontology	16	1.56	1.263	.316	.89	2.24	1	5
	Merchandising	3	2.33	1.155	.667	-.54	5.20	1	3
	Youth Development	18	2.22	1.665	.392	1.39	3.05	1	5
	Agricultural Education	1	1.00					1	1
	Agricultural Mechanization	1	3.00					3	3
	Bioenergy and Sustainable Technolgoy	1	1.00					1	1
	Food Safety and Defense	3	2.67	2.082	1.202	-2.50	7.84	1	5
	Grassland Mangement	2	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Horticulture	4	2.00	2.000	1.000	-1.18	5.18	1	5
	Soil, Water and Environmental Science	1	4.00					4	4
	Swine Science	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	other	1	1.00					1	1
	Total	99	1.81	1.345	.135	1.54	2.08	1	5

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Q7.3: I was disappointed in the quality of instruction.	Community Development	10	1.10	.316	.100	.87	1.33	1	2
	Dietetics	13	1.54	1.050	.291	.90	2.17	1	4
	FCS Education	7	1.57	.976	.369	.67	2.47	1	3
	Financial Planning	14	1.29	.825	.221	.81	1.76	1	4
	Gerontology	16	1.63	1.408	.352	.87	2.38	1	5
	Merchandising	3	2.00	1.000	.577	-.48	4.48	1	3
	Youth Development	18	2.44	1.886	.444	1.51	3.38	1	5
	Agricultural Education	1	1.00					1	1
	Agricultural Mechanization	1	5.00					5	5
	Bioenergy and Sustainable Technolgoy	1	1.00					1	1
	Food Safety and Defense	3	1.33	.577	.333	-.10	2.77	1	2
	Grassland Mangement	2	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Horticulture	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Soil, Water and Environmental Science	1	1.00					1	1
	Swine Science	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	other	1	1.00					1	1
	Total	99	1.61	1.260	.127	1.35	1.86	1	5

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Q7.4: I was disappointed in the course content.	Community Development	10	1.10	.316	.100	.87	1.33	1	2
	Dietetics	13	1.54	1.050	.291	.90	2.17	1	4
	FCS Education	7	2.00	1.291	.488	.81	3.19	1	4
	Financial Planning	14	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Gerontology	16	1.63	1.408	.352	.87	2.38	1	5
	Merchandising	3	2.33	1.155	.667	-.54	5.20	1	3
	Youth Development	18	1.50	1.043	.246	.98	2.02	1	5
	Agricultural Education	1	5.00					5	5
	Agricultural Mechanization	1	3.00					3	3
	Bioenergy and Sustainable Technolgoy	1	1.00					1	1
	Food Safety and Defense	3	2.33	1.155	.667	-.54	5.20	1	3
	Grassland Mangement	2	1.50	.707	.500	-4.85	7.85	1	2
	Horticulture	4	1.50	1.000	.500	-.09	3.09	1	3
	Soil, Water and Environmental Science	1	3.00					3	3
	Swine Science	4	1.50	1.000	.500	-.09	3.09	1	3
	other	1	5.00					5	5
	Total	99	1.60	1.124	.113	1.37	1.82	1	5

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Q7.5: The faculty or staff were not responsive to my individual needs.	Community Development	10	1.40	1.265	.400	.50	2.30	1	5
	Dietetics	13	1.15	.555	.154	.82	1.49	1	3
	FCS Education	7	1.57	.976	.369	.67	2.47	1	3
	Financial Planning	14	1.29	1.069	.286	.67	1.90	1	5
	Gerontology	16	1.56	1.263	.316	.89	2.24	1	5
	Merchandising	3	2.00	1.000	.577	-.48	4.48	1	3
	Youth Development	18	2.33	1.940	.457	1.37	3.30	1	5
	Agricultural Education	1	1.00					1	1
	Agricultural Mechanization	1	5.00					5	5
	Bioenergy and Sustainable Technolgoy	1	1.00					1	1
	Food Safety and Defense	2	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Grassland Mangement	2	2.00	1.414	1.000	-10.71	14.71	1	3
	Horticulture	4	2.00	2.000	1.000	-1.18	5.18	1	5
	Soil, Water and Environmental Science	1	1.00					1	1
	Swine Science	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	other	1	1.00					1	1
	Total	98	1.61	1.337	.135	1.34	1.88	1	5

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Q7.6: My work responsibilities changed and I no longer needed the course content.	Community Development	10	1.20	.632	.200	.75	1.65	1	3
	Dietetics	13	1.31	1.109	.308	.64	1.98	1	5
	FCS Education	7	1.86	1.574	.595	.40	3.31	1	5
	Financial Planning	13	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Gerontology	16	1.13	.500	.125	.86	1.39	1	3
	Merchandising	3	1.67	1.155	.667	-1.20	4.54	1	3
	Youth Development	18	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Agricultural Education	1	1.00					1	1
	Agricultural Mechanization	1	1.00					1	1
	Bioenergy and Sustainable Technolgoy	1	5.00					5	5
	Food Safety and Defense	3	1.33	.577	.333	-.10	2.77	1	2
	Grassland Mangement	2	2.50	2.121	1.500	-16.56	21.56	1	4
	Horticulture	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Soil, Water and Environmental Science	1	1.00					1	1
	Swine Science	4	1.75	1.500	.750	-.64	4.14	1	4
	other	1	1.00					1	1
	Total	98	1.28	.883	.089	1.10	1.45	1	5

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Q7.7: It was too difficult working on group assignments, i.e. to schedule, to complete	Community Development	10	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Dietetics	13	1.15	.555	.154	.82	1.49	1	3
	FCS Education	7	1.57	.976	.369	.67	2.47	1	3
	Financial Planning	13	1.54	1.330	.369	.73	2.34	1	5
	Gerontology	16	1.56	1.263	.316	.89	2.24	1	5
	Merchandising	3	2.33	1.155	.667	-.54	5.20	1	3
	Youth Development	18	1.89	1.410	.332	1.19	2.59	1	5
	Agricultural Education	1	1.00					1	1
	Agricultural Mechanization	1	1.00					1	1
	Bioenergy and Sustainable Technolgoy	1	1.00					1	1
	Food Safety and Defense	3	1.33	.577	.333	-.10	2.77	1	2
	Grassland Mangement	2	2.00	1.414	1.000	-10.71	14.71	1	3
	Horticulture	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Soil, Water and Environmental Science	1	1.00					1	1
	Swine Science	4	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	other	1	1.00					1	1
	Total	98	1.46	1.047	.106	1.25	1.67	1	5

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Q7.8: I wanted more interaction with my classmates and instructor(s).	Community Development	10	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Dietetics	12	1.25	.622	.179	.86	1.64	1	3
	FCS Education	7	1.43	.787	.297	.70	2.16	1	3
	Financial Planning	14	1.14	.535	.143	.83	1.45	1	3
	Gerontology	16	1.38	1.088	.272	.80	1.95	1	5
	Merchandising	3	1.67	1.155	.667	-1.20	4.54	1	3
	Youth Development	18	1.67	1.372	.323	.98	2.35	1	5
	Agricultural Education	1	1.00					1	1
	Agricultural Mechanization	1	1.00					1	1
	Bioenergy and Sustainable Technolgoy	1	1.00					1	1
	Food Safety and Defense	3	1.33	.577	.333	-.10	2.77	1	2
	Grassland Mangement	2	2.50	2.121	1.500	-16.56	21.56	1	4
	Horticulture	3	1.00	0.000	0.000	1.00	1.00	1	1
	Soil, Water and Environmental Science	1	1.00					1	1
	Swine Science	4	2.00	2.000	1.000	-1.18	5.18	1	5
	other	1	1.00					1	1
	Total	97	1.37	.972	.099	1.18	1.57	1	5