

ONLINE ATTRITION AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE
IN RURAL APPALACHIA:
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Victoria Sue Ratliff

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The education attainment level of residents in rural Appalachia has consistently ranked below the remaining populous of the United States. Although distance education initiatives have attempted to bridge the disparities between rural Appalachia and the rest of the nation, online community college students in this region are likely to drop out or fail their classes. To understand the phenomenon of online attrition in rural Appalachia, a phenomenological study was conducted to determine what students experienced from the time they chose to enroll in online classes through the point of failure or withdrawal from their courses. This triangulated study utilized surveys, focus group sessions, and individual interviews to determine how the participants' perceptions and emotional responses developed, changed and lead to their dropping out or failing an online course, as well as how the students' social or cultural values influenced their online class experiences. An analysis of this study's data indicated that factors contributing to the participants' lack of success or attrition in online classes related to the social integration model crafted by Tinto and external factors indicated by Bean and Metzner. This study provided an opportunity to advance these models by considering the unique cultural aspects of an institution and its service region. As indicated by this study, the online experiences of students in rural Appalachia were directed impacted by their familial connections, their sense of self-reliance or personal independence, and a general distrust of "outsiders."

Keywords: Appalachia, Online classes, Distance Education, Success, Attrition,

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

American Association of Community Colleges (AACC)

Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC)

Center for Community College Student Engagement (CCCSE)

Institute of Education Sciences (IES)

Instructional Technology Council (ITC)

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES)

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The education attainment level of residents in rural Appalachia has consistently ranked below the remaining populace of the United States (Laird, Cataldi, KewalRamani, & Chapman, 2008). While students in this region have limited expectations and receive little encouragement to obtain a college education from their family members, the underlying reasons for low levels of education attainment in rural Appalachia include low high school graduation rates, regional isolation due to the area's topography and its mountainous roads, and poor socioeconomic conditions (Appalachian Regional Commission [ARC], 2011; Haaga, 2004; Laird et al., 2008). Efforts to reduce educational disparities in nonmetropolitan areas, such as Appalachia, have resulted in colleges offering distance education options to provide access to higher education for residents in rural isolated areas (Provasnik, Kewal-Ramani, Coleman, Gilbertson, Herring, & Xie, 2007).

Online enrollment in the United States has steadily grown over the past decade, particularly in rural areas (Alessi, 2009). Although individuals from central Appalachia are enrolling in distance learning programs because they are perceived to alleviate geographic and access barriers, online students are not finishing their classes and obtaining degrees (Haaga, 2004). Consequently, the region still falls below the national average with respect to the number of residents who obtain a postsecondary degree (Appalachian Regional Commission [ARC], 2011).

In order to address the problem of attrition, it is important to understand its causes. While researchers have studied online attrition and proposed theoretical models in response to this problem, a Boolean search of the literature within ERIC and VIVA

databases revealed a lack of research considering attrition from the perspective of the rural Appalachian population (Colorado & Eberle, 2010; Patterson & McFadden, 2009; Street, 2010; Willging & Johnson, 2009).

This transcendental phenomenological study examined the experiences of unsuccessful online community college students in rural Appalachia using the constructs of Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model, as well as the theories of Bean and Metzner. Although Tinto's model is limited in respect to online learning, the framework of this study relies on Tinto's assertion that students are more likely to drop out of college when they fail to become integrated into the academic and social aspects of their educational environment, as well as Bean and Metzner's position that socioeconomic and external factors influence the completion rates of nontraditional students. The intent of this study was to extend the theoretical foundations of these models by examining the factors contributing to online attrition, taking into consideration the unique cultural aspects of the rural Appalachian region.

This chapter begins by establishing the geographical setting and progress of education in rural Appalachia and leads to the statement of the problem. The philosophical assumptions and motivation for this study are explained, prompting the study's purpose and significance. A brief overview of the research plan, including a list of questions guiding this study and an explanation of the key terms, are also provided.

Background

The Appalachian region encompasses a 205,000 square-mile area from southern New York to northern Mississippi. More than 24 million people reside within this mountainous region's 13 states and 420 counties (ARC, 2011). Forty percent of the Appalachian region and 80% of the central Appalachian sub-region are designated as

rural. The geographical focus of this study lies within the central Appalachian region that includes a portion of Ohio, Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, and Virginia, as well as the entire state of West Virginia. The demographics of the region indicate a racially and ethnically homogeneous population, with 95% of central Appalachian residents categorized as Caucasian (ARC, 2011).

Demographics of the Region

The region's population has been described as hard working, independent, and self-reliant; however, it has been an area plagued with poverty, high unemployment, and poor health (Dunn, 2013; Schwartz, 2004). The independent nature of the Appalachian residents may have contributed to their social and economic plight. Many Appalachians have been unwilling to accept change and influence from mainstream America (Elam, 2002). The values, beliefs, and colloquial dialect of rural Appalachian residents have further divided the region from the rest of the nation, resulting in a unique cultural identity known as the "Appalachian poor" (Fellenz & Conti, 1989, p. 16).

A factor contributing to the Appalachian region's economic plight is its residents' educational levels (ARC, 2011). A common indicator of an area's economic potential is the number of residents who have a postsecondary degree (Wood & Bischak, 2000). Low educational attainment levels of adults within Appalachia have significantly reduced the region's potential workforce base. Only 13.2% of the population in central Appalachia who are 25 years of age and older have a college degree, compared to the national average of 24.4% (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2013). The number of high school graduates within the region who pursue a college education is well below the national average of 63.3%. The region's college matriculation rate in its most rural areas is 35% and 55% in its more metropolitan areas (ARC, 2011; Hu, 2003).

However, the number of individuals holding a degree in the Appalachian region has increased significantly over the past three decades, gaining 6.5% since 1980 (Hu, 2003). Much of this increase can be attributed to the arrival of community colleges in Appalachia. These two-year public institutions have provided Appalachian residents the opportunity to obtain a college degree where previously the options were limited (ARC, 2011). The advent of distance education further increased access to higher education opportunities for residents in this isolated region (Alessi, 2009).

Establishment of Community Colleges

Prior to President Harry Truman's Commission on Higher Education of 1946, few public two-year colleges existed within the United States, even though the need to provide educational opportunities outside the university setting was identified. The Truman Commission suggested the development of a collegiate system to serve the needs of the public, regardless of the students' race, religious beliefs, and economic circumstances. Truman's reference to the name *community college* helped to foster the network of two-year colleges established across the nation in the 1960s (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2011).

Since their inception, community colleges have operated in a manner designed to meet the educational and economic needs of their service regions (AACC, 2011). Because the culture, characteristics, and economic conditions of the Appalachian region distinguish this area from other parts of the nation, community colleges in central Appalachia have embraced these differences within their institutional goals (Edwards, Asbury, & Cox, 2006; Rural Community College Initiative [RCCI], 2001). One of the differences is the region's topography. Students in rural Appalachia are dispersed across a wide geographical area in relation to their college campuses. Therefore, the drive to

campus may be long and burdensome for those in the region's most isolated areas. Eller, Garza, Martinez, Pace, and Pavel (1998) indicated "geographic distance and insufficient transportation often make it difficult for rural individuals with family and work responsibilities to pursue higher education" (p. 36).

To negate the inherent constraints of geography, community colleges in rural Appalachia have implemented distance education programs to meet the educational needs of students who may not have easy access to a college campus (ARC, 2011). Although degree attainment rates have improved, some challenges still remain. Jaggars and Xu (2010) found that community college students in Virginia were less likely to complete online classes than students enrolled in a traditional baccalaureate program. They concluded "students who participated in more online courses had lower success rates" (p. 25). Students' lack of success and attrition in online community college courses and programs is a problem, particularly in rural Appalachia (ARC, 2011; Haaga, 2004).

A number of empirical studies reviewing online attrition at the community college level suggest that students are much less likely to complete online courses when compared to their peers enrolled in traditional classes (Carpenter, Brown, & Hickman, 2004; Jaggars & Xu, 2010; Xu & Jaggars, 2011). The literature is replete with quantitative studies that have examined the relationship between students' demographics or personal characteristics and online attrition rates (Street, 2010; Wasley, 2006; Willging & Johnson, 2009; Zawacki-Richter, Bäcker, & Vogt, 2009). However, Willging and Johnson (2009) concluded that online attrition is a "complex phenomenon that cannot be easily described with quantitative variables" (p. 126). The study of Patterson and McFadden (2009) validated this statement. They stressed the need for qualitative studies to determine the reasons why students drop out or fail to complete online classes. While

prior qualitative studies investigated online attrition, most have focused on students at the graduate or Bachelor's level (Carpenter et al., 2004; Jaggars & Xu, 2010; Nash, 2005; Xu & Jaggars, 2011). Students' demographics, including ethnicity, have been noted in each of the studies, yet none of the identified studies involved the sampling of a unique homogenous population (Jaggars & Xu, 2010; Nash, 2005; Xu & Jaggars, 2011).

Lack of Diversity

As reported by the Appalachian Regional Commission (2012), the central Appalachian region is significantly less diverse, both racially and ethnically, than the remaining regions of the United States. Within the service region of the target college, the population is 96% Caucasian (Lenowisco, 2009). This is significant because when a group or community of individuals is homogeneous in nature, yet different from the dominant culture, it may be deemed to have a cultural identity. Fellenz and Conti (1989) determined that one example of a cultural identity found within the United States is the "Appalachian poor" (p. 16). As noted by Fellenz and Conti (1989), culture drives the way students communicate and interact with one another.

Theoretical Framework

In an effort to understand students' lack of persistence, many researchers have relied on Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model as a theoretical framework to study attrition (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005; Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, 2008; Meyer, Bruwelheide, & Poulin, 2009; Pascarella, Terenzini, & Wolfe, 1986). Tinto (1975) surmised that students who were less committed to the goal of graduating or were less committed to their institution were more likely to drop out of college before completing their degree. Under this framework, students' commitment levels were directly impacted by their individual backgrounds and their academic and social integration into their learning

environment.

Tinto (1975) theorized that students fail to persist in a college environment because of their experiences prior to college and their individual characteristics, as well as their experiences at the institution. While he argued that students' experiences before they entered college could not be changed, Tinto suggested that students should break away from their past in order to become integrated into their college environment. Tinto also asserted that students' experiences subsequent to their admission were a reflection on the institution's policies, practices and environment. According to Tinto, an institution's resources, facilities, organizational structure, and the effectiveness of its faculty and staff were all institutional factors that could impact students' integration both academically and socially, and therefore have an effect on attrition.

Guiffrida (2006) argued there was a significant limitation to Tinto's (1975) theory of attrition. Specifically, Guiffrida questioned Tinto's assertion that students must first separate themselves from their past traditions in order to become socially and academically integrated into the college environment. Although Guiffrida's study was based on his critique of Tinto's theory in relation to minority students, he stressed the importance of students' cultural heritage, regardless of the race or ethnicity of the students. Kuh and Love (2000) also found Tinto's theory lacking because of his failure to recognize cultural variables as factors impacting student attrition.

Because of the limitations in Tinto's model, I also relied upon theorists Bean and Metzner's (1985) model was used to provide additional support for the foundation of this study. While their Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition focused on nontraditional graduate students, Bean and Metzner viewed attrition as a problem related to students' backgrounds, including their age, educational goals, ethnicity, and prior

academic grade performance, as well as academic, psychological and environmental variables. Describing nontraditional students as those who attend college part-time, commute to class, or are older than 24 years of age, they found that nontraditional students typically leave college because of socioeconomic and external factors. Because the majority of students enrolled in community colleges meet the nontraditional student definition and culture is central to understanding the population under study, Bean and Metzner's model was pertinent to this study of online attrition at the community college level (Bailey, Alfonso, Scott, & Leinbach, 2004).

Researchers have suggested that student attrition may be better predicted by using a combination of Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model and Bean and Metzner's (1985) Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition than either model by itself (Cabrera, Castaneda, Nora, & Hengstler, 1992; Rovai, 2003). While the level of students' interaction with their peers and faculty was an integral construct of both models, and Bean and Metzner (1985) noted that socioeconomic and external factors were likely to influence the completion rates of nontraditional students, no research was found that addressed attrition in rural Appalachia. As noted by Guiffrida (2006), recognizing the role of students' cultural heritage is important to an institution's ability to integrate students into the college's social and academic environment. This study extended the theoretical foundations of these models by examining the factors contributing to online attrition, taking into consideration the unique cultural aspects of the rural Appalachian region.

Problem Statement

Ninety-seven percent of the nation's community colleges offer some form of distance classes (Parsad & Lewis, 2008), and comprehensive studies have found that

success rates for online classes at community colleges are 8% to 12% lower than traditional face-to-face classes (Xu & Jaggars, 2011). Students living in rural Appalachia are less likely to successfully complete their online community college classes when compared with their peers in a traditional face-to-face setting (ARC, 2011; VCCS, 2012). On average, 37.2% of the students at the target institution earn a grade of D, F, U, or W in their online classes each year, and the college's overall average attrition rate exceeds 58%.

A significant gap in the literature exists in relation to the attrition of online community college students in rural Appalachia. Alessi (2009) and Haaga (2004), as well as the Appalachian Regional Commission (2011), noted significant growth in online enrollment in rural Appalachia, but acknowledged that increased enrollment has not resulted in improved graduation rates. The unknown element is why a significant number of students attempting online classes in this rural region drop out or are otherwise unsuccessful.

This study incorporated Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model and Bean and Metzner's (1985) Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition and considered their applicability to online students in a rural community college setting. A Boolean search of ERIC and VIVA databases indicated no studies or attrition models pertaining to online attrition in the unique cultural setting of rural Appalachia. Therefore, this study extends the relevancy of Tinto's model and Bean and Metzner's model by taking into consideration the effects of a homogeneous population, and cultural variables that impact how individuals in rural Appalachia interact with one another.

Situation to Self

Community colleges in rural Appalachia have played a significant role in the

progress of this region and its people (ARC, 2011). This is particularly true for me. As a lifelong resident of central Appalachia, I was reared in a traditional coal mining community where females were expected to become stay-at-home mothers, and education was of little importance. The encouragement of secondary teachers provided me the courage to attend a local community college, and I found it to be a life-changing experience. It was in this setting that I decided to continue my education with the goal of returning to the community college to teach. Having accomplished that goal and now serving in a leadership capacity, I want to ensure that other students have a positive educational experience under my direction.

Many aspects of the community college have changed since I was a student in the early 1980s, including the implementation of online classes. During my tenure, the number of individuals enrolling in online classes at this community college has more than doubled, with 64% of the 2010-11 enrollment classified as distance education. Unfortunately, a large percentage of online students had an unsuccessful experience and fail to complete their classes. This is particularly true of community college students in the rural Appalachian region of Virginia where the majority of students take at least one online class (VCCS, 2011).

As an individual who seeks the answers to “why” in almost every situation, the phenomenon of online attrition intrigues me. I believe it is important to understand the root cause of a problem before attempting to find a solution. The broad goal of this research was to determine what was *really* happening when students fail to succeed in an online class at a rural community college. The ontological assumption within this study is that the realities of online class experiences are whatever the students perceive them to be, not what faculty and administrators believe they are (Laverty, 2003). Creswell (2007)

suggested that researchers conducting qualitative studies “are embracing the idea of multiple realities” (p. 16). Through the lens of social constructivism, my intention was to rely on the students’ views of their experiences to understand those realities and to serve as a non-participant observer in order to see their experiences from the natural setting (Patton, 2002).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of community college students living in rural Appalachia who do not successfully complete their online classes. I investigated the phenomenon of online community college attrition in this setting from the students’ perspective, taking into consideration the unique cultural variables of rural Appalachia. Unsuccessful students were defined as those students who earned grades of D, F, U, or W in online classes. The words and lived experiences of students who have unsuccessfully attempted online classes at a community college in rural Appalachia provided insight into the phenomenon of online attrition (Moustakas, 1994).

Research Questions

The following questions were used to guide this research project to understand the experiences of unsuccessful online students at a community college situated in rural Appalachia:

1. What motivates adult community college students in a rural area to enroll in online classes?
2. How do rural community college students describe their online class experiences?
3. How do rural community college students’ perceptions of an online course

develop, change and give rise to consequences of attrition or failure?

4. How do rural community college students' emotional responses to taking an online course develop, change and lead to dropping out or failing the course?
5. How do rural community college students' social or cultural values influence their online class experiences?

The target school offers classes in three formats: (a) traditional or face-to-face, (b) hybrid, and (c) online. Research indicates a variety of reasons why students select online classes when given a choice of other formats (Hannay & Newvine, 2006; Harris & Martin, 2012). Hannay and Newvine (2006) reviewed student preferences for online criminal justice classes in a university setting and concluded that the study's participants chose online classes because it allowed them to pursue an education while still managing their daily work and family obligations. They further found that online classes were a good alternative for students who were unable to attend traditional face-to-face classes because of scheduling conflicts. Harris and Martin (2012) found that access, convenience, and flexibility were key factors related to students' choices for online classes at one university located in the Pacific Northwest. Ascertaining whether students' motivation for taking online classes in a rural setting corresponded to the findings of Hannay and Newvine, or Harris and Martin, was pertinent to this study. Determining the motivations of online students in rural Appalachia would also serve as a basis to determine what the students experienced from the beginning of their online enrollment, which may play a role in their decision to leave.

Comprehensive studies have found that success rates for online community colleges classes are 8% to 12% lower than traditional classes (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Bambara, Harbour, Davies, & Athey, 2009; Xu & Jaggars, 2011). In order to understand

why rural community college students are less successful in online classes than their peers enrolled in traditional classes, I considered it important to learn what the students experienced while they were enrolled. Willging and Johnson (2009) found only a few differences in students' reasons for dropping out of online classes than those who dropped out of traditional face-to-face classes. According to their study, online students reported problems with technology and communication more so than their traditional counterparts, but these issues were not considered primary reasons for the attrition of online graduate students. Patterson and McFadden (2009) suggested that a students' age had a significant impact on attrition, with older students more likely to dropout of online classes than younger students. However, Willging and Johnson (2009) and Patterson and McFadden noted the need to study the phenomenon of attrition from a qualitative approach. In order to understand the full realm of their online experiences, I needed to discern the students' perceptions related to their pre-enrollment backgrounds, as well as their social and academic interactions with their peers and the college (Cunningham, 2010; Merriam, 2001, Tinto, 1975). Research questions 3 and 4 guided the effort to understand the participants' feelings toward the concept of online learning and how their feelings evolved over the period of their enrollment.

Fellenz and Conti (1989) stated that an individual's social environment and cultural experiences influenced the learning process. Therefore, question 5 was used to determine if the unique characteristics, beliefs, and values of the rural Appalachian region's population influenced the students' online experiences (Schwartz, 2004).

Significance of Study

From a theoretical standpoint, this study was significant in that it extended the applicability of Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model and Bean and Metzner's (1985)

Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Student Attrition at the community college level. In a comprehensive review of the literature related to online attrition, Street (2010) determined there had been no single set of variables identified that would predict online attrition, noting that a need existed for a study of various course factors relating to the phenomenon. While this study addressed online attrition, it was designed to address the gap in the literature concerning online attrition in rural Appalachia as well as how cultural variables affect the interaction of students in an online setting.

There were also a number of practical implications for this study. Identifying and understanding the unsuccessful online learning experiences of students in rural Appalachia will provide a basis for institutional planning and organizational improvement for rural community colleges offering distance-learning opportunities. In an effort to increase enrollment, colleges and universities have directed their efforts toward attracting more online students into existing and new programs (Stanford-Bowers, 2008). This is particularly true of community colleges in a rural setting, where access to campus limits students from attending traditional face-to-face classes (ARC, 2011; Murphey, 2006). Although online enrollment has increased by 19%, compounded annually since 2002, it has not resulted in a substantial increase in college graduates (Allen & Seaman, 2010; Xu & Jaggars, 2011). With online attrition 10-20% greater than attrition in traditional classes, institutions are finding it difficult to meet accountability measures (Xu & Jaggars, 2011).

Colleges and universities have attempted to reduce attrition rates in online classes by offering increased professional development opportunities for their online faculty, developing course review procedures, and improving their technology, but these strategies have had an economic impact on the institutions (Crawford, Gould, King, &

Parker, 2010). Unsuccessful class attempts negatively impact students' progression within their programs of study, thus limiting their educational attainment levels (Urtel, 2008). One way to address online attrition is to understand the factors that contribute to the problem so colleges can develop strategies to prevent attrition.

The viability of academic programs is another aspect of concern to colleges that have low retention and graduation rates (Urtel, 2008). Existing studies indicate online attrition rates are significantly higher than traditional classes, yet colleges continue to increase the number of programs offered entirely online (Patterson & McFadden, 2009; Xu & Jaggars, 2011). With dropout rates ranging from 20% to 50%, institutions must be aware of the effects of attrition on overall performance measures (Wojciechowski & Palmer, 2005).

The impact of distance education has resulted in a number of studies performed between 2000 and 2008. Zawacki-Richter et al. (2009) reviewed research conducted during this timeframe to determine if there were any notable gaps in the literature. Their findings revealed that the majority of research focused on student characteristics, instructional design, technology and interaction between students, their peers and their instructors. Yet, none of the studies reviewed by Zawacki-Richter et al. (2009) took into consideration the cultural aspects of a particular region in relation to online attrition.

Of the 695 articles reviewed, Zawacki-Richter et al. (2009) found that 33.6% of the qualitative studies were related to interaction and communication in learning communities. The remaining 53.7% of quantitative studies reviewed the areas of program evaluation, dropout rates, and completion/non-completion in distance learning programs. Further analysis of the research designs revealed that 38.1% of the studies were descriptive, 29.1% were quantitative, 19.9% were qualitative, and 12.9% were

based on a mixed-method design. There appears to be an increase in the number of qualitative studies, yet their findings support the need for more qualitative studies to “capture a deeper and richer range of data” (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2009, p. 32).

Moustakas (1994) stressed the distinctive nature of a phenomenological study and its ability to focus on the subjective experiences of individuals in a personal and uninhibited manner. The appropriateness of this research design is rooted in the direct experiences of the participants and its implications for online students, and colleges that provide online classes. This study sought input from a wide range of students to gain a deeper and broader level of understanding relating to online attrition.

Identification of Key Terms

Key terms relating to online course delivery and student success were used throughout this study. The following definitions are provided for clarity of the use of these terms within the context of this research:

Academic achievement at the target institution has been defined as the completion of two-thirds of courses attempted with a 2.0 GPA or higher (Sydow & Sandel, 1998).

An *asynchronous online class* indicates that students do not have to be on the Internet at a predetermined time to receive instruction or participate in an online class (Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2003). An average of 98% of online instruction at the target institution is delivered asynchronously (MYCC, 2012a).

Attrition within higher education refers to the rate of students who dropout or withdraw from their classes. For purposes of this study, the term *attrition* is being used to identify the rate of students who do not complete their online classes. It is the opposite of *retention*, or the rate of students who persist from one semester or course to another (Martinez, 2003).

Course success rates for the target institution are determined by an analysis of the student grades within a particular course or courses. According to the College's Student Handbook (MYCC, 2012c), letter grades of A, B, C or S are designated as successful. Although a grade of D is considered a passing grade, it falls within the category of *unsuccessful* or *nonproductive* for purposes of student success. Likewise, grades of F, U and W are unsuccessful grades. A grade of W is awarded to students who withdraw or are withdrawn from a course after the first two weeks of a semester, but prior to the completion of 60% of the semester.

Culture is indicative of an integrated pattern of learned beliefs and behaviors that are shared among a group of people. The culture of a region's population includes their styles of communication, views on roles and relationships, values, practices and customs (Fellenz & Conti, 1989).

Distance education is defined by Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS, 2000) as "a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction occurs when student and instructor are not in the same place" (p. 1). This form of instruction utilizes technology to provide learning away from the traditional classroom and is often referred to as *distance learning*. For the purposes of this study, classes categorized as distance learning will include those that are offered via the Internet and referred to as "*online classes*."

An *electronic course management system* is a software system or platform used to manage an online course (Vovides, Sanchez-Alonso, Mitropoulou, & Nickmans, 2007). The electronic course management system utilized by the target institution is Blackboard™.

Hybrid delivery refers to classes wherein instruction is delivered in a combination

of both online and traditional or face-to-face sessions (Allen & Seaman, 2007).

Rural areas comprise open country and settlements with fewer than 2,500 residents, according to official U.S. Census Bureau definitions. The USDA Economic Research Service (2013) noted that rural areas consist of all territory located outside of urbanized areas and urban clusters. For purposes of this study, “rural” is used to describe the area of central Appalachia where the target institution is located.

Synchronous online delivery of instruction indicates that both the student and the teacher are simultaneously online within the course management system, also known as participating in a real-time online learning environment (Simonson et al., 2003).

Traditional or face-to-face classes include those that are taught during the day and/or evening within a classroom on the college campus or at an off-site location (MYCC, 2012b).

Summary

Although distance education initiatives have attempted to bridge the disparities between rural Appalachia and the rest of the nation, the region still falls below the national average in the number of residents with a postsecondary degree (ARC, 2011). The problem is that students living in rural Appalachia are less likely to successfully complete their online community college classes when compared with their peers in a traditional face-to-face setting (ARC, 2011; VCCS, 2012). To understand this phenomenon, it is important to determine what students experience from the time they choose to enroll in an online class through the point of their failure or withdrawal from their courses.

While a number of studies have reviewed online attrition, none have examined the rural Appalachian population and the influence of the cultural aspects of this region on

attrition. As noted by Fellenz and Conti (1989), culture drives the way students communicate and interact with one another. Investigating online attrition in rural Appalachia through the attrition theories of Tinto (1975) and Bean and Metzner (1985) provided an opportunity to determine if students' online experiences were influenced by their cultural identity.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter examines empirical and theoretical research related to distance education and factors that result in the attrition of online students in rural Appalachia. A brief review of the status of education in rural Appalachia and the history of online enrollment provides a foundation for a more in-depth review of relevant theoretical models contributing to the essence of this study.

Education in Rural Appalachia

Rural Appalachia has historically ranked low in overall educational attainment where approximately 24% of adults age 25 or older have attended college (ARC, 2010; Laird et al., 2008). Yet, of those living in the most rural counties of central Appalachia, only 13.2% of the population aged 25 to 64 have earned a college degree (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2013). This phenomenon is exacerbated by the number of students from Appalachia who left their home area to earn a college degree but did not return to the region, resulting in an out-migration of an educated populous (ARC, 2010).

Low educational attainment levels have resulted in persistent socioeconomic problems for this region, including residents with low income potential and high unemployment rates. The Economic Research Service (ERS) of the United States Department of Agriculture identified 622 low education counties within the United States based upon its review of educational attainment across the nation. The largest concentration of localities designated as low education counties was located within the central Appalachia region and extended into the deep southern portion of the United States (ERS, 2012).

Geographic isolation and transportation issues have contributed to the low level of

educational attainment in this region (Hu, 2003). Until the enactment of the Morrill Land Grant College Acts of 1862 and 1890, Appalachia students who aspired to continue their education beyond high school often attended small private institutions such as Berea College and Alice Lloyd College located in Kentucky. The Morrill Land Grant Acts provided funding for the development of larger public universities within the region such as Virginia Polytechnic Institute, West Virginia State, and the University of Tennessee (Teets, 2006). The arrival of community colleges in central Appalachia in the 1960s provided even greater access and opportunity for college enrollment to the residents in this isolated area (ARC, 2011).

To negate the inherent constraints of geography, community colleges in rural Appalachia invested in personnel, technology, and infrastructure to improve educational opportunities in their service areas through online education (ARC, 2011). Federal and state funding initiatives to build broadband and fiber optic infrastructures increased access to the Internet for residents in the most remote areas of the region (Lenowisco, 2009). These initiatives were perceived to be an equalizer for the residents of rural Appalachia because of their combined ability to provide college access to those who aspire to earn a degree, regardless of their location or socioeconomic circumstances (Block, 2010). While increased enrollment has occurred as a result of distance learning opportunities, the number of college graduates in this region has not improved (Pollard & Jacobsen, 2013).

Distance and Online Education

The origin of distance education can be traced back to the early 1800s when correspondence courses were available in Europe (Imel, 1998). The development of audio and video technology in the twentieth century led to classes by television and

satellite transmission. The advent of the personal computer and the Internet in the late 1900s provided the means to deliver instruction without the burden of mail correspondence and expensive technology (Hiemstra, 1994; McIsaac & Gunawardena, 1996). The ability of anytime, anywhere web-based instruction created a new category of students—those who take classes online (Liu, Gomez & Yen, 2009).

An online course is one in which at least 80% of the course content is delivered to the students via the Internet (Allen & Seaman, 2008). Online classes are typically offered in either a synchronous or asynchronous format. Asynchronous classes allow students to participate in their online classes when they are available to do so instead of a set time or day of the week, while synchronous classes require students to communicate with their instructor and/or their class peers at a specified time (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Many colleges also offer a mix of traditional and online instruction in a format known as hybrid or blended classes (Lokken, 2010). Although all three modes of study are available to online students in rural Appalachia, asynchronous online learning is the focus this study.

Online Education Enrollment Growth

The number of college students taking at least one online course more than tripled from fall 2002 to fall 2011 (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Undergraduate students attending large institutions account for the greatest percentage of online growth. As reported by Allen and Seaman, “the increase from 1.6 million students taking at least one online course in fall 2002 to the 6.7 million for fall 2011 represents a compound annual growth rate of 17.3 percent” (p. 18).

As of the 2011 fall semester, more than 70% of public and for-profit colleges reported offering full academic programs online, while complete academic programs were available at almost half of the private nonprofit colleges. The percentage of

community and technical colleges has consistently outweighed the percentage of four-year colleges and universities providing online classes and degree programs (Allen & Seaman, 2013).

Community colleges were among the first to embrace the concept of online classes as a way to provide access to students in remote locations (Baldwin, 1996). Representative of the growth in online enrollment within the community college sector, Virginia's Community Colleges (VCCS) saw an increase of over 63,000 online students in a five-year span. The VCCS reported that 49.54% of all students in 2011-2012 were enrolled in at least one online class (VCCS, 2013). Four of the VCCS's 23 community colleges are located within the most rural areas of central Appalachia (VCCS, 2013).

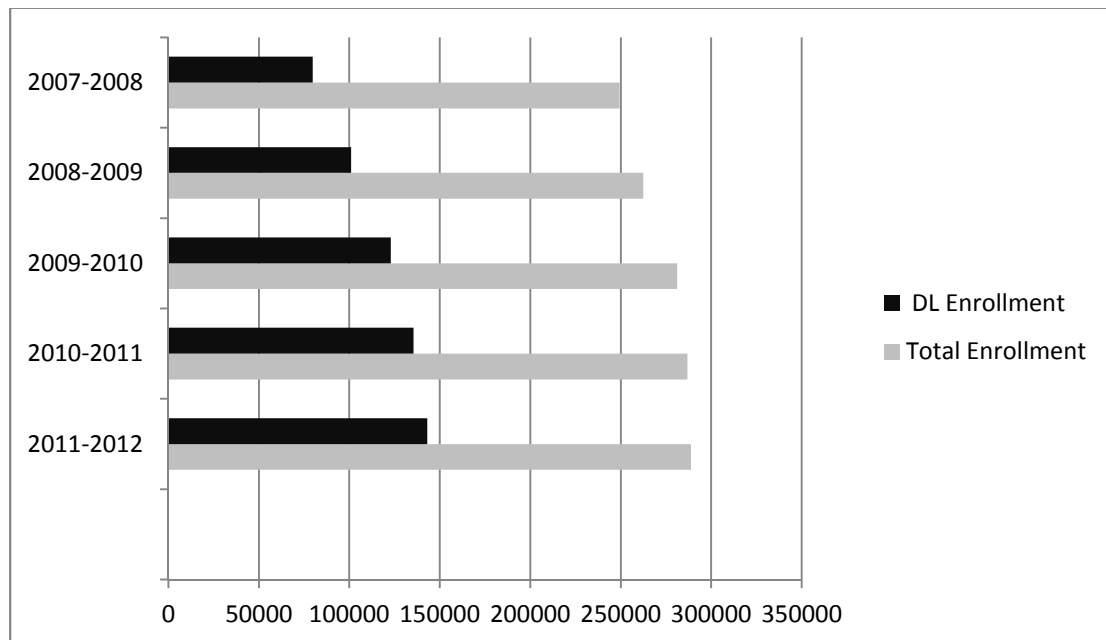


Figure 1. Growth in Online Enrollment: 2007-2012 (VCCS, 2013)

Community College Population

Community colleges are designed to serve “all segments of society through a flexible and open admission policy” (Liu et al., 2009, p. 165). They serve a dual purpose: (a) prepare students for a career and (b) prepare students to transfer to a four-year

institution (Karp, 2008). Community colleges serve a greater number of low-income, minority, and academically underprepared students than those who are served by four-year institutions (Jenkins, 2005). This is particularly true of community colleges in the rural areas of central Appalachia (ERS, 2012; Haaga, 2004). Many non-traditional students choose to attend a community college later in life because of changes in personal circumstances, such as loss or threatened loss of employment, divorce, or disability (Hannay & Newvine, 2006; Stanford-Bowers, 2008). Approximately 61% of this population chooses to take online classes (Pearson Foundation, 2011).

Online Community College Students

In addition to being first-generation students, rural online community college students generally have work and family responsibilities that limit their ability to take classes in a traditional face-to-face setting (Haaga, 2004; Hannay & Newvine, 2006; Park, 2007). Online classes are viewed as a good alternative for this population because they provide greater flexibility for students to manage their obligations and still pursue their educational goals (Moltz, 2008). Cooper (2010) reported that adult students benefit from online classes because of their work schedules, childcare and financial constraints. The average student participating in distance education has been described as a married woman who is older than typical college students and generally works full-time (Bryant, Kahle, & Schafer, 2005; Gibson & Graff, 1992; Lokken, 2010; Simonson et al., 2003).

Many of the characteristics used to describe typical community college students have been associated with lower success rates. Students who are older, work full-time, and have other family obligations typically choose online college classes; however, they are also more likely to have high dropout rates (Pearson Foundation, 2011). Bailey et al. (2004) found that community college students were more likely to start classes later in

life, enroll on a part-time basis, and have a lower socioeconomic status than traditional university students. Because of these circumstances, many nontraditional students have forgotten how to study, have no knowledge of new technologies, and are less likely to know what to expect in a college environment putting them at risk to drop out (Jenkins, 2012). Further, rural community college students are also typically underprepared for the academic rigor of college classes, creating yet another barrier to their success (Liu et al., 2009).

Online Attrition

Attrition rates in online classes have ranged from 10 to 50% higher than classes taught in a face-to-face setting (Carr, 2000; Park, 2007). The attrition rates for distance education classes in the community college setting have been reported as 6% to 20% higher than those of traditional classes (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Jaggars & Xu, 2010; Lokken, 2010, Xu & Jaggars, 2011). The problem of online attrition is widespread, affecting all levels of higher education. For example, approximately half of all students pursuing a doctoral degree in a traditional setting do not complete their programs of study, while the attrition of students in an online setting is even higher (Kraska, 2008). Patterson and McFadden (2009) reported that online Masters of Business Administration students were six times more likely to dropout than their on-campus peers, while attrition rates for online students in other graduate degree programs were up to seven times greater than their counterparts in traditional face-to-face classes. In community colleges, the likelihood of retaining online students from one academic year to the next is reduced at the associate degree level compared to students who take classes in a face-to-face setting (VCCS, 2011). This is particularly true at rural community colleges in the Appalachian region of Virginia where the overall fall-to-fall attrition rates averaged 58.4% from 2009

to 2011. Over 60% of the community college students in this region took at least one online class each year (VCCS, 2013).

Theoretical Framework

To better understand what contributes to the lack of success of community college students in online classes, an examination of existing theories and research related to attrition was needed. The theoretical models of attrition designed by Tinto (1975) and Bean and Metzner (1985) served as the framework for this research. Both models recognized social integration as a key factor affecting student attrition. These theorists also identified students' motivation, academic readiness and learning environments as additional variables attributed to students' lack of success.

Theorist Vincent Tinto (1975) conjectured that students were more likely to persist to degree completion if they felt connected to their institution. Based on Tinto's model, students' academic and personal backgrounds influenced their level of commitment to their college education. Furthermore, Tinto asserted when students felt a connection to their college or university, either academically or socially, they were more likely to remain enrolled. Pascarella et al. (1986) referred to the connection aspect of Tinto's model as the "person-environment fit" (p. 156).

Based on Tinto's (1975) model, students' intellectual development and grade performance determined academic integration, while social integration referred to the level of interaction students maintained with their peers and faculty (Tinto, 1975). The role of institutions in integrating students into their folds also became a factor as Tinto began to focus on what students were experiencing in the classroom. According to Tinto, students who perceived that their time and efforts were better utilized in college classes than in other endeavors were more likely to persist (Tinto, 1975). Tinto's later works

(1993 & 1998) continued to support the integration model; however, expanded upon his earlier theory by recognizing the importance of learning communities and collaborative learning activities to student persistence.

While Tinto's works on retention and attrition focused primarily on four-year colleges, the importance of social and academic integration of the students and the college appeared relevant regardless of the academic level of the institution (Meyer et al., 2009). Various studies have affirmed Tinto's (1975) theory, including Bailey and Alfonso (2005), Meyer et al. (2009), and Pascarella et al. (1986). While some have questioned whether Tinto's theory was relevant at the community college level, a study by Karp et al. (2008) determined that there was a correlation between academic and social integration and students' persistence at the associate degree level.

Alexander Astin's (1999) work also supported Tinto's integration model in that he suggested that students' social integration to their college environment was directly influenced by their interaction with their faculty. Astin (1999) suggested that there are often a large percentage of faculty within community college systems who are employed as adjuncts or on a part-time basis, limiting their own involvement on-campus. This becomes a factor influencing retention because Astin conjectured that students who frequently interact with their faculty are more likely to be satisfied with their college experience. A later study by Benjamin (2002) supported Astin's work, finding that students were less integrated into the college community when adjunct faculty provided more of their instruction. Benjamin surmised that adjuncts were less available to students outside of class and were therefore less likely to encourage students' participation in campus activities.

Yet, there appear to be limitations in Tinto's (1975) model in relation to online

learning. Although external factors were noted as important, these factors were not thoroughly explained within his model (Towles & Spencer, 1993). Tinto implicated that external factors such as work and personal obligations had less impact on student attrition than students' lack of social integration into their college environment. As noted by Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson (1983), Tinto's position likely manifested from his focus on full-time traditional residential students. Because online students are typically older, work full-time, and have other family obligations that are very different from traditional college students, Tinto's theory alone appeared insufficient to support this study on online attrition at a rural community college.

While Tinto argued that students should break away from their past in order to become integrated into their college environment, Guiffrida (2006) considered Tinto's (1975) model lacking because of his failure to recognize cultural variables as factors impacting student attrition. Guiffrida questioned Tinto's assertion that students must first separate themselves from their past traditions in order to become socially and academically integrated into the college environment. Although Guiffrida's study was based on his critique of Tinto's theory in relation to minority students, he stressed the importance of students' cultural heritage, regardless of the race or ethnicity of the students. Kuh and Love (2000) also suggested a culture-based theory of retention maintaining that when a student's cultural background was different from that of an institution, there was a greater likelihood that the student would not persist to graduate from that institution.

Because of the limitations in Tinto's model, the works of theorists Bean and Metzner (1985) were also used to help lay the foundation for this study. Although their model focused on nontraditional graduate students, Bean and Metzner viewed student

dropout as a problem related to students' backgrounds, thus adding to Tinto's model. However, they suggested that integration was not as important for nontraditional students. Their research identified four factors that predict persistence: (a) academic variables such as the availability of courses and the adequacy of students' study skills, (b) students' backgrounds in relation to their age, educational goals, ethnicity, and prior academic grade performance, (c) academic and psychological outcomes, and (d) environmental variables such as work and family responsibilities, financial constraints, and encouragement.

In 1985, Bean and Metzner developed a Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition. Defining nontraditional students as those who attend part-time, commute to class, or are older than 24 years of age, Bean and Metzner made the assumption that most nontraditional students were first-generation college students from blue-collar families. According to their theory, the decisions of nontraditional students to leave college were more often attributed to socioeconomic and external factors that were not as significant to traditional students (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Since previous models relied heavily upon socialization as a contributing factor to attrition, the relevance of this model is its recognition of the unique characteristics of nontraditional students.

The validity of Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model and Bean and Metzner's (1985) Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition has been supported by a number of studies (Bailey & Alfonso 2005; Karp et al., 2008; Meyer et al., 2009; and Pascarella et al., 1986). The framework of this study relied on Tinto's assertion that students are more likely to drop out of college when they fail to become integrated into the academic and social aspects of their educational environment, as well

as Bean and Metzner's position that socioeconomic and external factors influence the completion rates of nontraditional students. As suggested by Rovai (2003), student attrition may be better predicated by using a combination of Tinto's and Bean and Metzner's models than either model by itself. Therefore, the literature review and research findings from this study were organized within the three primary areas identified by Tinto and Bean and Metzner: (a) student related factors, (b) institutional related factors, and (c) external factors.

Student Related Factors

Evidence suggested that students often leave during their first-year of college for many reasons, academic and otherwise (Liebow, 2010; Tinto, 1975, 1993 & 1998). Previous research found that the unique demographic attributes of the students from institution to institution could impact student attrition (Yukselturk & Bulut, 2007). Motivation, academic preparation, and students' peer and campus interactions were identified as student-related issues associated with decreased student success (Davis, 1993).

Student Motivation

Researchers have determined that motivation can play a key role in whether a student persists in college until graduation (Huitt, 2001; Levitz, Noel, & Richter, 1999; Lorenzo, 2007; Stewart, Backman, & Johnson, 2010; Yukselturk & Bulut, 2007). Based on his review of the topic, Huitt (2001) defined motivation as "an internal state or condition that activates behavior and gives it direction, a desire or want that energizes and directs goal-oriented behavior, and the influence of needs and desires on the intensity and direction of behavior" (Definition section, para. 1).

There are two basic categories of motivation: intrinsic (internal) and extrinsic

(external). Those who are intrinsically motivated are described as mastery-oriented and are constantly seeking to improve their skills and accept new challenges (Guthrie, 2001). Huitt (2001) explained that intrinsic motivation comes from within a person and can be physical, mental, or spiritual. Students who are intrinsically motivated tend to perform better in an online setting than extrinsically motivated students because they are generally more task-oriented and prefer to work independently (Davis, 1993; Huitt, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Stewart et al., 2010).

For those students who are extrinsically motivated, the role of college professors and advisors becomes imperative (Davis, 1993). Extrinsic motivation is external and more common in a classroom environment, where students anticipate receiving good grades and praise (Alderman, 1999; Covington & Mueller, 2001). Those who benefit more from extrinsic motivation are often described as performance or ego-oriented. They also generally seek to maximize favorable evaluations of their abilities (Guthrie, 2001). Punishment can also be considered an extrinsic motivator. An example of this might be the potential loss of a scholarship if a student's grades drop below a certain level (DeLong & Winter, 2002).

Teachers who utilize extrinsic motivators often have to determine what drives their students, yet promises of rewards can distract students from their learning potential (Covington & Mueller, 2001). If a student wants to earn an average score on a particular test, he or she may study the material to earn the desired grade but not to recall or apply that knowledge later. Therefore, the long-term benefits of rewarding students will end when the rewards are terminated (DeLong & Winter, 2002).

When assessing the motivation level of students at the community college level, Howey (2008) noted there were clear differences between students who were and were

not academically prepared for college classes. Because community college students are typically less prepared than students attending four-year institutions, he concluded that early intervention strategies for those at-risk students are critical to improving student retention at this level. Recognizing that academically underprepared students are more extrinsically motivated, Howey suggested that more interaction with academic advisors and well-designed freshmen orientation classes targeting at-risk students was needed.

Summarily, motivating students is an instructor's key responsibility. Support, encouragement, enthusiasm, and commitment from the instructor can make a difference for those students who require extrinsic motivation (Covington & Mueller, 2001). Hynd, Holschuh, and Nist (2000) reported "motivation interacts with students' strategy use, knowledge level, context, and other elements of the learning environment" (p. 24).

Academic Preparation

Although *student readiness* is a common educational term, the phrase *college readiness* is typically defined as "an all encompassing term meant to reflect students' level of prerequisite knowledge and skills in certain areas" (Ratliff, 2009, p. 698). The ability to utilize key technological tools for academic purposes is a key component of this comprehensive definition (Ratliff, 2009).

Clearly, the fact that 28 to 40% of all students entering college today will be required to take at least one developmental or remedial English or math class during their college career is compelling (College Board, 2010; Russell, 2008). Up to 63% of students with a low socioeconomic status are not prepared for college-level classes. Russell reported that approximately 42% of students entering a community college test into a remedial level in reading, writing, or mathematics.

With this in mind, and with the goal of ensuring students are academically

prepared for college, federal and state mandates have increased accountability measures in K-12 education. Yet, the results of the American College Test (ACT) in 2009 indicated “only 23% of high school graduates in U.S. attained a college-ready score as measured by four ACT college-readiness benchmarks” (Barnes, Slate, & Rojas-LeBouef, 2010, p. 9). The ACT measures reading, writing, math, and science competencies. Benchmark scores are indicative of the minimum levels required for students to have a high probability of success in college level classes (ACT, 2010).

The rigor of classes taken at the high school level is the most compelling evidence of a student’s readiness for college. Specifically, students who have had more rigorous classes appear to be more academically prepared to enter college (Russell, 2008). Although there is no national definition of academic rigor, students who take advanced classes in mathematics, science, and a foreign language are more likely to complete a four-year degree than students who only take the classes required for a standard diploma (Adelman, 2006). An academically rigorous curriculum teaches not only the course content, but it also incorporates analytical thinking, comprehension, and writing skills (Conley, 2007).

Rachal, Daigle, and Rachal (2007) indicated that students’ limited learning strategies could be a rationale for their struggles in college. Students who transition directly from high school are accustomed to limited homework and test-focused instruction. In a college setting, students are introduced to new ideas and are left on their own to further investigate and apply those concepts. Having the experience of an academically rigorous curriculum in high school helps to prepare students to meet advanced course requirements in college (Conley, 2007).

Students face tougher academic challenges in college than they have faced in their

past (Moody, 2004). Adding to these pressures is a problem that has been recognized by many teachers—students’ lack of study skills and effective learning strategies (Kellner, 2005; Rachal et al., 2007). Considering the nature of distance education, it is somewhat difficult for faculty to recognize differences in the learning styles and study skills of their online students (Ratliff, 2009). Roughly half of the students who drop out do so during their first three courses, indicating an increased need for support services early in a student’s education plan (Holder, 2007).

Technology Readiness

Students in an online setting need to be college ready as well as technologically savvy. Online attrition levels have been associated with the technology readiness level of the students entering college (Elliott, Hall, & Meng, 2008). An assessment of business students who had reportedly used computers and technology prior to attending college found that 64% of those students’ test scores fell below 60% on technology pre-instruction assessments (Wallace & Clariana, 2005).

Kaminski, Seel, and Cullen (2003) surveyed freshmen at Colorado State University and reported that professors should not assume students have prior knowledge of “even the most basic information technology skills” (p. 35). Elliott et al. (2008) determined that cultural differences might also influence students’ desire to use technology as well as their attitudes toward specific technologies, the level of anxiety exhibited by students, and their capacity and willingness to use technology.

Hsiu-Mei and Liaw (2004) concluded that students not only need good technology skills, but they also need a strong desire to use the technology available to them. Artino (2007) suggested that students who lack self-discipline are less likely to perform well in an online environment, but providing them with pedagogical tools and

structure increases their chances to achieve success in distance learning courses. Students who were provided a more rigid framework, such as the web-based course management system Blackboard™, performed better than those who were given an outline and were left on their own to submit work via email or correspondence (Artino, 2007).

The basic purpose of an electronic course management system (CMS), also referred to as a learning management system (LMS), is to provide a method to organize and deliver course content in an online format (Green, 2008). A wide variety of online course management systems have infiltrated the education industry over the past decade. Most management systems include communication, administrative, and assessment tools, as well as features for the management of class materials and activities.

The most commonly used commercial vendors of course management systems in higher education include Blackboard™ and Desire2Learn, with ANGEL Learning having a stronghold in K-12 education. Budget restraints in education have resulted in a large number of institutions choosing to use open-source or free applications such as Moodle and Sakai (Agee & Yang, 2009).

Institutions must consider a variety of pros and cons when making the decision to utilize a proprietary system such as BlackBoard™ or an open-source application. While each of the systems offers similar course management tools, there are distinct differences among the systems. The proprietary systems are expensive and dependent upon vendor support, but are generally reliable. Open-source systems are typically easy to use, but are often poorly maintained. Since institutions do not control open-source systems, the security of student information and data can also be a concern (Cowan, 2011).

Institutional Factors

Tinto's model noted that students' are more likely to persist to graduation if they are connected both socially and academically to their college. When this connection does not occur, students feel that the institution cannot help them meet their goals and are less likely to persist (Karp et al., 2008). In reviewing Tinto's (1975) model, Pascarella, Duby, and Iverson (1983) defined social and academic integration as the sum of these variables:

- Cumulative grade point average at the end of the freshman year.
- Student's perceived level of intellectual development.
- Student's perception of faculty concern and quality of instruction,
- Frequency and quality of student to faculty interaction beyond the classroom.
- Level of extracurricular activities involvement.
- Quality and extent of a student's relationship with student peers.

Based upon these variables, there are a number of institutional factors that have an impact on student attrition in online classes. The underlying assumption is that if students are provided opportunities to engage with the institution, even in an online environment, they will have a connection to the college and choose to persist. The role of online faculty, the availability and quality of support services, and the frequency of opportunities for engagement were noted as institutional factors for this study.

Role of Online Faculty

Managing online classes requires teachers to use a distinct set of skills that are different than those used in the traditional face-to-face classroom. Instructors must have technical skills and an increased creativity level to engage students (Dennen, 2007; McClure, 2008). Wallace (2004) opined "the work of teaching and the nature of the Internet interact both to support and to inhibit innovative teaching and learning" (p. 448).

The conclusion of Wallace (2004) demonstrated that teaching online requires

teachers to rethink their methods of instruction and particularly their methods of interaction with students. Often the change of environment leads to a student-centered instructional approach as opposed to a teacher-centered effort. Not only must students adapt to being more responsible for their learning, but faculty must also learn to allow the students to work on their own (Diekelmann, Schuster, & Nosek, 1998; Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006).

Unfortunately, faculty members who have not taught in an online setting have developed negative opinions about this mode of instruction. They often perceive that online classes have less academic rigor and students do not learn as much as those in a traditional class (Osborne, Kriese, Tobey, & Johnson, 2009). Conversely, faculty who teach online often complain that online instruction requires more time than traditional classes (Maguire, 2005), and they report that it is a struggle to develop an online environment that emulates their traditional classes (Bryant, Kahle, & Schafer, 2005).

Because online and traditional learning require different pedagogical strategies, the interaction between students and faculty becomes more difficult in online classes (Dennen, 2007). One method of measuring an instructor's presence in an online course is to compare the online activity of the instructor with the activity of the students (McClure, 2008). Carr (2000) surmised that the engagement level of online students corresponds to the instructor's online presence. In other words, when the instructor is actively participating in discussions, posting announcements and providing feedback, students are more likely to participate in a similar fashion.

Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2001) identified three elements to effective distance learning: (a) social presence, (b) teaching presence, and (c) cognitive presence. Their research determined that an instructor's social presence was determined not only by

their presence as a teacher or mentor, but also by how well he or she was perceived by the students to be a real person. Social presence was also a reflection of the students' trust in the instructor and his or her learning environment.

As defined by Garrison et al. (2001), teaching presence is the “design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educational worthwhile learning outcomes” (p. 5). This included the way in which the materials for the class were developed and presented, including the course syllabus, class assignments, presentation materials, and the facilitation of discussions. The types of instructional methods utilized beyond lecture could measure an instructor's cognitive presence. For example, an online instructor would exhibit cognitive presence if he or she were to develop assignments that required the students to think reflectively about the course content, resulting in students questioning or probing for information on the topic (Garrison et al., 2001).

While an instructor's presence is important, Anderson (1979) indicated there is a need for more than general communication between the instructor and his or her students in an online class. As deduced by Anderson (1979), when instructors conveyed that they were approachable and available to students, students were more likely to have a positive instructional experience. Anderson referred to this as teacher immediacy. The construct of immediacy has been described as more than simple communication between teachers and their students. It indicates a positive relationship exists wherein the teacher exhibits a helpful attitude and engaging learning environment (Anderson, 1979). As noted by Averbek, Morthland, and Mufeyeva (2006), “when students view their teachers as immediate or ‘close,’ they enjoy the course more, feel more comfortable with material, and tend to pursue the subject further than do students with less immediate teachers”

(para. 4).

Carr (2000) and others recognized that traditional teaching strategies did not easily transfer to the online environment, leading to frustrated students and faculty, as well as increased attrition in online classes (Bryant et al., 2005; Dennen, 2007). Moore (1997) was among the first to propose a theory related to distance education. His work on this concept began as early as 1972, yet it was 1980 when he suggested the term *transactional distance*, signifying that distance does not refer to geography, but to the methodology of teaching (Bennett, 2007; Stirling, 1997). As stated by Moore (1997)

This separation leads to special patterns of learner and teacher behaviors.

It is the separation of learners and teachers that profoundly affects both teaching and learning. With separation there is a psychological and communications space to be crossed, a space of potential misunderstanding between the inputs of instructor and those of the learner. It is this psychological and communications space that is the transactional distance. (p. 22)

One of the variables within the transactional distance design is learner autonomy or the degree to which the student has control of his or her learning experience (Moore, 1997). This aspect of the theory references the ability of students to gather and process information independent of an instructor's involvement. Somewhat similar to the concepts of self-directed learning, learner autonomy places much of the responsibility or control of learning on the students (Knowles, 1975).

Morris, Xu, and Finnegan (2005) completed a qualitative study of 13 online instructors and found that the faculty perceived their primary responsibilities as course facilitation, customization, assessment, and grading. Nevertheless, a review of their

courses found that the 13 instructors' participation levels differed greatly. Experienced instructors were found to interact with their students more frequently, with an average posting rate that was 10 times greater than those of the novice instructors (McQuiggan, 2007). Because the faculty's presence and position within an online class influences the students' levels of involvement, the experience level of the faculty member could make a difference (Dennen, 2007; McClure, 2008).

The attrition of online students may also be the result of a teacher's reluctance to embrace the tools available to them in an online environment (Hacifazlioglu, Sacli & Yengin, n.d.). Using technology as a tool to enhance the learning process is important, but this can be a problem for teachers who lack the required skills (Bull et al., 2008; Gentry, Denton, & Kurz, 2008). Ongoing training and support increases the likelihood of faculty using the latest technology (Dennis, Bunkowski, & Eskey, 2007). The basis of this training for online instructors should include the following:

- Online pedagogy
- Adult learning theories
- Technology skills
- Course facilitation
- Institutional policies and procedures (Dennis et al., 2007, p. 43)

Dennis et al. (2007) concluded "a critical component of student motivation and the success of the online learning experience is the motivation of the instructor" (p. 41). This motivation may be a manifestation of flexible class scheduling and the desire to use technology, as well as other factors. Yet, the motivation level of online instructors is often reduced because of increased enrollment, heavy workloads, and a lack of technical support and training.

Support Services

A college's ability to "make a student feel at home" (Karp et al., 2008, p. 3) is often dependent upon the quality and quantity of support services available to the student. Yet, it is difficult to accomplish this task when students are enrolled in online classes (Fisher, 2010). As Tinto (1975) surmised, the more students are integrated into their learning environment, the more likely they are to be committed to completing their educational goals. The challenge for institutions offering distance classes is how to provide the same level of support to their online students (Karp et al., 2008).

Moore and Kearsely (1996) identified support services as one of the key components to improving student retention in online classes. They noted that online students often experienced feelings of isolation due to a lack of interaction with their peers and instructors, and felt that they had little support when registering for classes or conducting other administrative functions at the college. As noted by Jones and Meyer (2012), there are two distinct roles for support services for colleges to consider: (a) administrative services such as financial aid, admissions, and enrollment services, and (b) cognitive services including academic advising, student counseling, and tutoring services. However, Ludwig-Harman and Dunlap (2003) noted that cognitive services are often ignored for online students.

External Factors

While reviewing the differences between traditional and nontraditional students, Bean and Metzner (1985) concluded that nontraditional students were more likely to drop out of college because of external factors rather than a lack of social integration in their college environment. The external factors identified within this model were students' personal obligations such as work and family responsibilities, financial or socioeconomic

problems, and the degree of encouragement received from others.

Personal Obligations

Online community college students typically have a variety of challenges and responsibilities beyond college, including employment and family obligations (Hannay & Newvine, 2006; Lokken, 2010; Park, 2007; Stanford-Bowers, 2008). Because most problems with childcare, family conflicts, and changing work schedules arise are unanticipated, they become barriers for those who must choose between dealing with their personal or family problems and focusing on their college classes (Lokken, 2010). Lokken noted that adult women who were employed and had children were more likely to choose online classes than traditional classes. Additional studies have indicated that the personal demographics of online students contributed to the reasons why a significant percentage of them did not successfully complete their classes (Hannay & Newvine, 2006; Park, 2007; Stanford-Bowers, 2008).

Bean and Metzner (1985) argued that external variables directly impact students' decisions to leave college before completing their educational goals. According to their model, external factors impacted the persistence level of nontraditional students more so than academic and social variables. Online classes were viewed as a good alternative because they provide greater flexibility for students to manage their obligations and still pursue their educational goals (Moltz, 2008). As noted by Cooper (2010), adult students benefit from online classes because of their work schedules, childcare and financial constraints, yet these issues often remain obstacles to their success.

Socioeconomics

Socioeconomic status has been linked to an individual's academic motivation and performance (Braunstein, McGrath, & Pescatrice, 2000; Pintrich & Schunk, 2002). The

American Psychiatric Association (2011) explained that socioeconomic status is indicative of an individual's or family's social standing. It is commonly based on a combination of factors such as income, occupation, and educational attainment levels.

Bean and Metzner (1985) noted that students' financial constraints or socioeconomic status might also affect their success rates. As reported by the U.S. Department of Education (2000), high school dropout rates for students living in poverty are six times more likely than students with above-average family income levels. Braunstein et al. (2000) determined that college retention rates were also better among students from high-income families.

Similar to the findings of Braunstein et al. (2000), Black, Pollard, and Sanders (2007) indicated that education attainment levels are directly tied to the socioeconomic status of a region. Their study investigated the skill levels of residents in the Appalachian region. They found that a cause and effect relationship exists between educational attainment levels and economic development:

The basic results in this report show that working-age men and women in Appalachia still lag behind the rest of the United States in terms of income and employment...Our results suggest that educational attainment is the single most important factor driving improvements in income and year-round employment. (Black et al., p. 14)

The dire conditions of the Appalachian region became an area of focus for President Johnson in the 1960s as he sought to end poverty in the United States (ARC, 2011). In 1965, one-third of the residents in Appalachia were living in poverty. The Appalachian Redevelopment Act of 1965 was established to address the sub-standard economic conditions of Appalachia's isolated and rural poor. This Act established the

Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) to administer targeted programs for the development of infrastructure, transportation, industrial opportunities, and social programs to address the problems of housing and other inadequacies within the area. The ARC is a collaborative economic development effort between federal, state, and local governments of the 13 states designated as the Appalachian region. Each year, the Commission allocates funding for numerous projects including the development of businesses, community services, education, and workforce training (ARC).

Considered more rural than the rest of Appalachia, the central Appalachian region ranks among the most severely challenged in the nation in terms of socioeconomic status (ARC, 2011). Using 2000 Census data, Black et al. (2007) reported that males working in central Appalachia were earning 42% less than men outside of the Appalachian region.

Support and Encouragement

During the development of their Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition, Bean and Metzner (1985) recognized that students who lacked encouragement from their family, college personnel and peers were more likely to drop out of college before completing their degree. While traditional students were more likely to rely on their college faculty, peers and friends for support, Bean and Metzner concluded that nontraditional students were more likely to depend on the support and encouragement of their family and coworkers during their college experiences.

Hand and Payne (2008) examined the characteristics of students attending in-person community college classes in Appalachia and noted that most were first-generation college students. Because they were typically the first in their families to attempt higher education, the level of support available from family members was limited to childcare or general encouragement. Yet, if attending college was perceived to cause a

financial hardship or loss of commitment to the family unit, students in the Appalachian region were likely to dropout of their classes (Hand & Payne, 2008). As Zeidenberg (2008) noted, because they could not rely on the prior knowledge of family members, first-generation college students were less likely to know what to expect in a college atmosphere, including what to ask or who to ask for assistance.

A search for empirical evidence related to the role of family support to online students in rural Appalachia revealed a gap in the literature. Considering the importance of family support in Bean and Metzner's (1985) model, this study sought to close that gap by determining the types of support online students in this region received.

Interaction of Student, Institutional and External Factors

Based upon Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model and Bean and Metzner's (1985) Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition, it is incumbent upon colleges to address online student engagement from social and academic perspectives, as well as from an environmental standpoint. The need for community, interaction, and engagement in an online class is no less than in a face-to-face class. While addressing many of these needs can be accomplished by providing opportunities for online collaborative activities, discussion, and interaction, colleges must also address the support services needs of their online students (Lear, Ansorage, & Steckelberg, 2010).

Summarizing the findings of a fall 2009 survey conducted by the Center for Community College Student Engagement, Fisher (2010) indicated that online students were not only separated by distance, but they also reported having less support academically, socially, and financially. Likewise, students reported fewer collaborative activities in an online environment and less interaction with their instructors.

The methods used to engage students have changed as a result of the

technological advances occurring in today's world. Most traditional-age college students (18 to 24 years of age) have grown up immersed in technology for social purposes but have not embraced its use in the academic realm (Bryant et al., 2005; Caruso & Salaway, 2007). As a result, instructors must adapt their teaching styles in order to engage and pique students' interest (Kellner, 2005; Schaeffer & Konetes, 2010). Howerton (2004) suggested the use of visuals and interactive media, including wikis and social networking applications, increase students' interest in an online environment. Rovai (2002) stressed the importance of cultivating an effective learning environment and creating a sense of community, regardless of the delivery format.

While some students are naturally curious and enthusiastic about learning, others require inspiration and stimulation in order to sustain interest in their studies (Nilson, 2003). Colleges are cognizant of this and have identified motivational techniques to improve their methods of instruction. Students who are active participants in their classes are motivated to learn and are better able to recall material or information presented to them (Bambara et al., 2009).

While there are features that enhance engagement in an online environment, students still have to take advantage of them to be actively engaged in a course. Discussion boards, group and team activities, blogs, and email provide a means of interaction within an online course management system, but they are only as good as the level of interaction achieved (Lear et al., 2010).

Cultural Considerations

One of the weaknesses of using Tinto's (1975) theory for the framework of this study is its failure to recognize the cultural variables faced by institutions with high attrition rates (Guiffrida, 2006). The unique characteristics of community college

students in rural Appalachia pose a challenge to colleges who seek to implement integration strategies based on Tinto's model alone. Integrating the environmental factors identified by Bean and Metzner (1985) with Tinto's (1975) constructs of social and academic integration provided a stronger model to understand the phenomenon of online attrition in a rural setting.

Fellenz and Conti (1989) stated the learning process may be influenced by the social environment and cultural experiences of an individual. Culture drives the way students communicate and interact with one another and is based upon the students' "internal set of operating standards" (p. 15). They found that cultural influences develop from geographical locations, socioeconomics, or ethnicity. If a group or community of individuals is homogeneous in nature, yet different from the dominant culture, it may be deemed to have a cultural identity. One example of a cultural identity found within the United States is the "Appalachian poor" (p. 16).

In a study designed to determine how culture is related to adult learning, Merriam and Mohamad (2000) noted that the shared beliefs and values of a group of individuals in a geographic location could impact their view of learning activities. They argued that Eastern cultures deemed learning as a social activity while Western cultures tend to be more autonomous.

Considering the cultural aspect of learning, Heimstra (2009) conducted a study of online students in a rural setting. He concluded that online access has produced a new type of self-directed learner because students are turning more to the Internet for resources to meet their personal needs. Because study participants were self-selected, Hiemstra acknowledged the limitations of his findings as many questions pertaining to self-directed learning were left unanswered.

Although research pertaining to the cultural aspect of adult learning principles exists, there is a void in the literature relating to online attrition of community college students living in rural Appalachia (Fellenz & Conti, 1989; Guiffrida, 2006; Hiemstra, 2009). A Boolean search for articles relating to the attrition of rural Appalachian community college students within EBSCO databases returned no related results. Specifically the terms *attrition, culture, adult learning, student success, rural Appalachia, and community college* were used in an advanced Boolean search. Although a SmartText search revealed 30 articles, the issue of attrition for online students in rural Appalachia was not addressed.

Summary

The review of literature revealed that educational attainment levels in rural Appalachia remain low despite efforts to improve access to institutions of higher education (Haaga, 2004). Distance education has become a normal course of business for colleges and universities, particularly for community colleges located in rural areas where student access to college campuses can be difficult (Allen & Seaman, 2010; Murphey, 2006).

Although online enrollment has increased substantially over the past decade, the number of students completing programs of study and earning degrees has not improved (Carr, 2000). While researchers have reviewed several factors that related to online attrition, none have considered the unique cultural identity of rural Appalachia (Bryant et al., 2005; Carr, 2009; Street, 2010; Walsey, 2006; Willging & Johnson, 2009; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2009). As a result, there is a void in the literature relating to the attrition of online students in rural Appalachia. The unknown phenomenon is why a significant percentage of students in rural Appalachia do not successfully complete their online

classes.

Relying on the theoretical framework of Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model, and Bean and Metzner's (1985) Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition, the literature review and research findings from this study were organized within the three primary areas identified within these models: (a) student related factors, (b) institutional related factors, and (c) external factors. The results of this study will add to the body of knowledge relating to the phenomenon of online attrition from a rural perspective.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

As outlined within the introductory chapter and the review of literature, the purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of community college students living in rural Appalachia who do not successfully complete their online classes. The study was designed to extend the theoretical foundations of Tinto (1975) and Bean and Metzner (1985) by examining the factors contributing to online attrition, taking into consideration the unique cultural aspects of the rural Appalachian region. To discover what students are experiencing in online classes, I conducted a qualitative study with a transcendental phenomenological design. This type of research explored online learning at a rural community college through the voices and experiences of students. This chapter provides a more detailed view of the research design, data collection processes, and methods of analysis employed in this study.

Research Questions

In order to examine the interaction of internal, institutional and external factors that contribute to online students' lack of success in a rural community college located in central Appalachia, I used the following questions to guide this research project:

Research question 1. What motivates adult community college students in a rural area to enroll in online classes?

Research question 2. How do rural community college students describe their online class experiences?

Research question 3. How do rural community college students' perceptions of an online course develop, change and give rise to consequences of attrition or failure?

Research question 4. How do rural community college students' emotional

responses to taking an online course develop, change and lead to dropping out or failing the course?

Research question 5. How do rural community college students' social or cultural values influence their online class experiences?

Selection of Site

Located in the mountainous region of central Appalachia, the target institution, herein referred to as “the College,” is situated in a rural area of southwest Virginia historically characterized by an economy based on coal mining and small family farms. Although still heavily influenced by the mining industry, economic development efforts in the region have been successful in creating a more diverse economy. Recent improvements in local infrastructure have permitted the region to become competitive in technology-based industries (Lenowisco, 2009).

The region's rural population lags behind the state's average high school and college attainment levels and has a lower median family income than the state average (MYCC, 2012a). The unemployment rate has often been double the state's average, although a recent downturn in the economy has resulted in more comparable figures of 6.9% for the state and 7.9% for the local planning district, including three of the four counties served by the College (Lenowisco, 2012).

The most recent data available from the College's Office of Institutional Research indicated the total population of its service region is 109,632, with an average median household income of \$34,130. Approximately 21% of the service region is within the poverty range. Not only is the median household income level well below the state average of \$63,302, but the numbers of high school and college graduates are below the state average as well. Specifically, only 72% of the service region has completed high

school, while the state average is 87%. Moreover, the number of baccalaureate graduates within the region is only 12% compared to 34% statewide (MYCC, 2012a).

The population within the College's service region has been essentially static over the past decade, unlike the rapid growth in the population and economy seen in the other regions of the state. Based upon the mission of the community college system, the institution has an open admission policy (VCCS, 2011). The College is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and its programs are approved by the State Council of Higher Education in Virginia (SCHEV) (MYCC, 2012a).

The College began offering classes in 1972 and served 863 students during its first year. The number of students enrolled in credit classes since the 2004-2005 academic year has averaged 4,300, with a significant increase to 4,507 in 2009-2010. Enrollment declined to 4,442 in 2010-2011. The College offers a variety of career and technical two-year degrees and certificates as well as numerous traditional transfer programs to meet the needs of local business and industry. Of the residents within the service region who attend college, 65% have chosen to attend the College (MYCC, 2012a).

For the purpose of ongoing analysis of student population changes, the Office of Institutional Research maintains five years of data in the College's Fact Book. From 2006 through 2011, student enrollment increased 2.5% and the full-time equivalent students served (FTES) increased by 4.5%, to reach 4,442 and 2,252 respectively in 2010-11. The percentage of students enrolled in 12 or more credits averages 41%, with the remaining 59% classified as part-time students. The characteristics of credit students have remained unchanged in the past five years, except in the areas of dual enrollment and distance education. The amount of dual-enrolled students has increased from 17% to

23% of total enrollment, and distance education classes have increased from 47% to 64% of overall enrollment. The College's racial distribution, 97% Caucasian, is representative of the racial distribution within its service area. Females account for 62% of the College's enrollment, and the average student age is 27 years. An average of 67% of students at the college receive some form of financial aid, while another 20% receive tuition assistance from the college's foundation scholarship funds (MYCC, 2012a).

The region's geographic isolation and mountainous terrain inhibit access to the college's main campus (Eller et al., 1998). There are approximately 424 miles of primary roads within the service region of the target institution and 2,081 miles of secondary roads. Only 129 of those miles are divided 4-lane highways, but no interstate highway system intersects the region (Virginia Department of Transportation [VDOT], 2009). Distance education has become one of the college's responses to meet the educational needs of students who live in the most remote locations (Murphey, 2006).

As reported by the College, distance education enrollments have continued to increase during the past five years, with 64% of all students enrolled in at least one online class during the 2010-2011 academic year. The College has consistently ranked among the top five community colleges in its state for the percentage of students who take distance education courses. It was listed second among its counterparts in distance education enrollment during 2010-2011 (MYCC, 2012a). The high percentage of students enrolled in distance classes was a significant factor in selecting the site for this study.

Students pursuing an online two-year degree may choose from nine programs at the College, including (a) Associate in Arts and Sciences majors in Business Administration, General Studies, and Liberal Arts, and (b) Associate of Applied Science

degrees in Accounting, Administrative Support Technology, AST Medical Office Specialist, Correctional Services, Paralegal Studies, or Water/Wastewater Specialization. The College also offers 17 certificate and career studies certificate programs in an online format. Many of the remaining degree and certificate programs at the College include classes that are available online (MYCC, 2012c). To provide academic and student support programs and services, the College employs 49 full-time faculty and 70 full-time equivalent adjunct faculty, 72 classified staff members, 26 wage employees, and 23 administrators (including grant-funded positions). Thirty-five of the 49 full-time faculty members annually deliver instruction via online courses to over 2,800 students (MYCC, 2012c).

Reports from the Office of Institutional Research indicated that the college has offered synchronous and asynchronous distance education courses since 1996. Most of the distance student registrations from 1996-97 to 2001-02 were in video courses. In 2002-03, enrollment in video and online courses was almost equal. Since that time, the registrations in video courses decreased to less than 2% of all distance classes while enrollment in online courses has steadily increased (MYCC, 2012d).

Since 2001, the College has used the Blackboard™ online course management system for its distance education classes. The Distance Education Coordinator provides the initial Blackboard™ training to new faculty responsible for online instruction. Faculty who intend to offer classes online must first be trained and submit their initial online course for evaluation to the Distance Education and Instructional Technology Peer Review subcommittee after it is developed. New distance instructors must also enroll in an online class that focuses on applying andragogical theories in an online environment (MYCC, 2012d).

New courses to be offered online are required to meet certain criteria before development. The Dean of the academic division, for which the course will be delivered, must first evaluate the course to determine the following:

- Will this course be used toward completion of an online program?
- What is the enrollment potential of this course? How was this determined?
- Is the course required in any program?
- Is the course transferable?
- Is the course currently offered? If so, what effect will the online course have on the current course?
- Is the development/offering plan realistic?
- Has the person proposing the course received adequate preparation and training?
- Is the course offered elsewhere online? In the VCCS? (MYCC, 2012d, p. 1)

If approval to proceed is granted by the Dean of the division, the instructor is directed to the Distance Education Coordinator to complete the development process. Prior to delivery, the DEIT Peer Review subcommittee must review all new courses and the course must meet the requirements stated in the College's online course quality review process (MYCC, 2012d).

A course offered online by the College is expected to include the same content as a traditional or in-person section of that course (MYCC, 2012d). Likewise, the course should include the same rigor as its traditional counterpart regardless of the length of the term being offered (8 weeks or 16 weeks in duration). As stipulated by the college's *Distance Education Handbook*, online faculty are responsible for the development of their course content. At a minimum, all online courses must contain:

- A Getting Started Announcement that includes detailed instructions on course navigation, and structure as well as instructions on accessing course syllabus and other organizational materials.

- A course syllabus.
- A statement of course specific technical requirements.
- Faculty contact information including telephone, college email address, office hours, fax, etc.

- A calendar for the course.
- An external link to the college's homepage.
- A "General Topics" or "Student Lounge" discussion board to facilitate interaction among students.

- Assignments that correlate with course objectives and evaluations.
- At least one proctored activity/event.
- All components listed in the Online Course Quality Review Form (MYCC, 2012d).

The quality review process is just one strategy used by the College in an attempt to increase the success rates of its online students (MYCC, 2010). Course success rates at the College are determined by an analysis of student grades within a particular course. Letter grades of A, B, C and S are designated as successful while grades of D, F, U and W are not (MYCC, 2012c). According to the College's Quality Enhancement Plan (2010), the distribution of unsuccessful grades within online classes is widespread among all subjects.

During the 2009-10 academic year, 30% of online classes at the College averaged a failure rate of 50% or higher, with at least one online class reaching an unsuccessful

rate of 70.6% (MYCC, 2010). Because a large percentage of students in rural Appalachia do not complete their college education, it is important to understand what factors lead to their attrition (Haaga, 2004). I chose this rural community college as the research site because of its high rates of failure and attrition in online classes. The large percentage of students enrolled in distance classes was also a significant factor.

Researcher's Role

The Business and Information Technology Division is one of four academic divisions within the College. As the dean of this division, I am particularly interested in improving the success rates of the students enrolled in the programs served by this division, as well as those across the campus.

The dean, who is the administrator of the division, reports directly to the vice president of Academic and Student Services. According to the College's Faculty and Staff Manual, the dean has multiple responsibilities:

To assist the Vice President in implementing the educational mission of the college by (1) serving as a liaison between upper administration and full-time and part-time students and faculty in the division, (2) serving as a liaison between the division and the community – including schools, colleges, business and industry, (3) maintaining efficient operations and fostering morale within the division, (4) engaging in strategic planning and problem solving, (5) understanding and complying with MYCC and VCCS policies, procedures and practices, and performing assigned tasks and reporting requested information promptly and accurately. (MYCC, 2012b, p. 2-9)

The Business and Information Technology Division is one of two at the College offering non-transfer Associate of Applied Science (AAS) degree programs designed for

students to acquire technical skills and knowledge for employment upon graduation. It also provides a myriad of certificate and career studies certificate programs that are related to industries within the service region. Of the seven AAS degree programs under the division, four are offered completely online and large components of the others are available through web-based instruction.

Likewise, the majority of the classes within the certificate programs are offered in an online format. As dean of this division, I consider the success rates of students in online classes vital to the success of the programs offered under my leadership. Furthermore, I have a professional, as well as an ethical and moral obligation, to assist the College in solving its problems, one of which is a less than desirable success rate of the College's online students.

Meeting the needs of students being served by the College is of utmost importance to me on a personal level because I am also a product of this particular community college. As a lifelong resident of central Appalachia, my values and beliefs have been heavily influenced by the culture of the region. Growing up in a traditional coal mining community where females were expected to become stay-at-home mothers, I considered the community college as my only option to achieve a postsecondary education upon graduating from high school. My favorable experiences as a student in this setting led me to aspire to return to the College as an instructor. Having accomplished that goal and now serving in a leadership capacity, it is important for me to ensure the College's students have as positive of an educational experience as possible under my direction.

As a member of the College's leadership team, I have been actively involved in the planning and implementation of strategies to improve student success. As an

administrator who continues to teach on a regular basis, I have had multiple experiences with students who have been unsuccessful in online classes. These experiences range from being the instructor of the class wherein grades of D, F, and W have been posted, to investigating complaints of students who have been unsuccessful in online classes taught by others at the College. From a teaching perspective, the most frustrating aspect of teaching in an online setting and posting unsuccessful grades is that I often have no idea what happened to the student or students who simply stopped participating in class. Attempts to prompt students who have become disengaged generally result in a wide range of responses, from no response to those who respond and subsequently complete the class successfully.

Although I have taken several online classes in the past, I have not had an unsuccessful experience and do not understand how a situation manifests to the point of failure or attrition. Yet, in order to understand the experiences of those who have been unsuccessful in an online class, it was important for me to bracket out my thoughts and experiences as an instructor and as a student to avoid their influence on the findings of this research. Identifying the reasons students from rural Appalachia fail to succeed in online classes will complement the College's efforts to improve retention and graduation rates and also increase the body of knowledge regarding online attrition.

As an individual who seeks the answers to "why" in almost every situation, the phenomenon of online attrition intrigues me. The broad goal of this research was to determine what is *really* happening when students fail to succeed in an online class at a rural community college. In order to accomplish this, I needed the students' cooperation. While Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the investigator is the primary instrument in qualitative data collection and analysis, Moustakas (1994) referred to the participants of a

phenomenological study as co-researchers. As co-researchers, participants were asked to provide initial data for the study through surveys, focus group sessions, and individual interviews. The co-researchers were also given an opportunity to verify the emergent themes identified within the study.

The ontological assumption within this study was that the realities of online class experiences are whatever the students perceive them to be, not what faculty and administrators believe they are (Lavery, 2003). Creswell (2007) suggested that researchers conducting qualitative studies “are embracing the idea of multiple realities” (p. 16). Through the lens of social constructivism, it was my intention to rely on the students’ views of their experiences to understand those realities.

Research Design

The demographics of community college students across the nation indicate that the average student can be classified as a non-traditional adult learner, having characteristics that are distinct from the demographics of the typical undergraduate student who attends a four-year institution (Coley, 2000). The typical online community college student from central Appalachia corresponds to this model but likely faces academic and socioeconomic barriers that are unique to this region (Hand & Payne, 2008).

In order to understand the experiences of students who have unsuccessfully attempted an online class at a community college situated in rural Appalachia, it was necessary to obtain the students’ views of their experiences. A phenomenological study determines the essence of an individual’s lived experiences (Heidegger, 1972; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990).

Edmund Husserl, who is known as the father of the phenomenological movement,

was interested in understanding an experience or phenomenon as perceived by individuals. Although phenomenology is a qualitative research method, Husserl described it as a philosophy based on one's thoughts and perceptions (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology has also been described as a descriptive method, and it is not based on preconceived ideas (Lester, 1999). Crotty (1998) provided another description, identifying phenomenology as the study of "everyday experiences" (p. 83).

Moustakas (1994) identified several phenomenological research models: (a) ethnography, (b) grounded theory, (c) hermeneutic, (d) empirical phenomenological, and (e) heuristic. While the five approaches have common characteristics, the design leading to the portrayal of "the essences of an experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 100) is the empirical, transcendental phenomenological research method. Due to the students' Appalachian cultural background, I considered using an ethnographic approach, yet this method was not considered feasible. Because the experiences I sought to understand had already occurred, it would have been difficult to study online students in their natural setting (Creswell, 2007). Although a case study approach would have provided an opportunity to study the problem from a variety of perspectives at the College, the individuality of each student's experience might have been difficult to ascertain because the holistic case study approach would have focused on other aspects of the College's distance programs instead of the students' experiences (Creswell, 2007).

As the intent of this investigation was to obtain a thorough understanding of students' experiences in online classes and to determine if there were commonalities among those who were not persistent or who were otherwise unsuccessful, the transcendental phenomenology approach was chosen as this investigation's framework. Because this design is descriptive in nature rather than interpretive, it required me to

intentionally bracket out my personal experiences relating to the phenomenon. Utilizing this approach allowed me to discover the true meaning of the experiences of the rural Appalachian population who attend and drop out of online community college classes based upon the participants' descriptions of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). In essence, information and opinions provided by rural Appalachian students who have earned grades of D, F, U, or W in online classes were used to discover if there were common reasons for their unsuccessful experiences in an online environment.

Participants

In order to produce findings that were grounded in the transcendental phenomenological approach, the subjective views of students who received grades of D, F, U or W in online classes were needed. Individuals can have different perspectives on an identical situation; therefore, a variety of students who have had an unsuccessful experience in an online class could have multiple depictions of what they experienced and why this occurred. This was consistent with the phenomenological approach as the goal was to identify commonalities among the experiences of different participants by relying on the opinions and descriptions of their experiences (Hein & Austin, 2001).

From a social constructivist standpoint, the subjective views of individuals "are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals' lives" (Creswell, 2007, p. 21). The format of online classes brings together a group of students and engages them through discussion board forums, email, and group activities. The participants' unique cultural, ethical, and academic backgrounds contribute to the class. Hewling (2005) found that in a social world, the online classroom is a space where peoples' cultures, ideas, beliefs, hopes, and aspirations come together.

The maximum variation of purposeful sampling approach was used for the selection of research participants. Creswell (2007) indicated that maximum variation “consists of determining in advance some criteria that differentiate the sites or participants” (p. 126) and choosing the participants based on these criteria. For purposes of this study, maximum variation refers to the different categories of student enrollment, such as full-time or part-time.

In order to understand the experiences of those who have failed to succeed in an online class at a rural community college in central Appalachia, it was important for me to rely on the actual words of those who had lived through that experience (Cohen, 2001; Hein & Austin, 2001). I began the process by identifying all students who had earned an unsuccessful grade of D, F, U or W in an online class during the 2010-2011 academic year, using the query function of the college’s Student Information System (SIS).

Fall 2010 data from the SIS database revealed that 601 students received a total of 889 reported grades of D, F, U or W at the target institution in online classes. Spring 2011 data indicated that 541 students received a total of 796 unsuccessful grades. Of the 1,142 students, 291 students received at least one grade of D, F, U or W during both the Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 terms in online classes. This translated to a potential research pool of 851 students with a posted grade of D, F, U or W in at least one online class during the 2010-11 academic year.

As stipulated by the college’s IRB, my next step was to exclude all students from the potential participant pool who were enrolled in any of the Business and Information Technology (BIT) programs. This was required in order to avoid any potential ethical concerns due to my position at the college as dean of the BIT Division. The exclusion of these students resulted in a reduction of 362 students, leaving a balance of 489 potential

study participants.

This study incorporated a diverse representation of students' perspectives regarding this phenomenon. Because "the size question is an equally important decision to sampling strategy in the data collection process" (Creswell, 2007, p. 126), I used additional sampling criteria in order to obtain a manageable number of participants yet still have a sufficient amount for insight into the phenomenon. Sampling criteria for participant selection included online students who were unsuccessful and met at least one of the following conditions during the 2010-2011 academic year:

- Enrolled in classes on a full-time basis (12 credits or more) in a combination of online and traditional classes
- Enrolled in online classes on a full-time basis (12 credits or more)
- Enrolled in classes on a part-time basis (less than 12 credits) in a combination of online and traditional classes
- Enrolled in online classes on a part-time basis (less than 12 credits)
- Withdrew from an online class with a grade of W
- Were administratively withdrawn by their instructor
- Did not return to the College the subsequent semester
- Returned to the College the subsequent semester and enrolled in an online class
- Returned to the College the subsequent semester and enrolled in traditional classes only
- Have repeated a class in a traditional format after having an unsuccessful attempt in that class in an online format

Purposeful sampling permitted the selection of a variety of participants who had experienced the investigated phenomenon. Creswell (2007) suggested a sample size of 5 to 25 participants for a phenomenological study while Morse (1994) indicated at least six participants be selected for study. The large pool of potential research participants provided an opportunity to obtain the perspective of multiple students. Although all students meeting the sampling criteria were invited to participate, my intent was to identify at least three students for each of the criteria listed above for a sample of 30 students willing to participate in all three data collection phases of this study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended that qualitative studies include input from enough participants to achieve information saturation or redundancy within the data collected. Because a triangulated approach was used to collect data, the challenge was to obtain the consent of the participants to take part in all three phases of the study, including a survey, focus groups session, and an individual interview.

Demographics of Study Participants

Of the 489 potential participants invited to participate via an online survey, 61 initially responded. Of the 61 responders, 51 electronically consented to participate in the study and subsequently completed the survey. A review of the 51 responders indicated that there were sufficient participants to meet the purposeful sampling criteria, with the exception of one category. Only one of the 51 participants had not returned to the college as a student subsequent to their unsuccessful experience in an online class. Therefore, follow-up invitations to participate in the study were sent to the personal email addresses of those from the remaining pool who met this criterion. As a result, three additional responders who had not returned to the college as a student agreed to participate in the study, resulting in a total of 54 participants.

Although the personal characteristics of the participants were not an issue under review, the information was documented in the event it was needed. Nineteen of the 54 participants were male and 35 were female. Only two of the participants were non-Caucasian. The age of participants ranged from 19 years to 52 years of age. As noted in Table 1, there were sufficient participants to meet each of the identified sampling criteria.

Table 1

Enrollment Classification of Study Participants

Enrollment Type	# of Responses	% of Total
Enrolled in classes on a full-time basis (12 credits or more) in a combination of online and traditional classes	7	12.96%
Enrolled in online classes on a full-time basis (12 credits or more)	5	9.26%
Enrolled in classes on a part-time basis (less than 12 credits) in a combination of online and traditional classes	6	11.11%
Enrolled in online classes on a part-time basis (less than 12 credits)	5	9.26%
Withdrew from an online class with a grade of W	7	12.96%
Were administratively withdrawn by their instructor	5	9.26%
Did not return to the College the subsequent semester	4	7.41%
Returned to the College the subsequent semester and enrolled in an online class	6	11.11%
Returned to the College the subsequent semester and enrolled in traditional classes only	5	9.26%
Repeated a class in a traditional format after having an unsuccessful attempt in that class in an online format	4	7.41%

Procedures

As an academic dean of the College, I first discussed the focus of the proposed research with other administrators to determine if this type of study would be relevant to the needs of the institution. The College identified several initiatives relating to retention and completion rates of the institution's students during this discussion, leading to the establishment of a Student Success Committee in the fall of 2009. During this timeframe, the College was also undergoing its reaccreditation review by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

The process of reaccreditation involved the preparation and ultimate approval of the College's quality enhancement plan (QEP) titled *Simply the BEST: Building Engaged Students through Technology*. One of the plan's recommendations required the College to focus on the success of its online students (MYCC, 2010). This phenomenological study will assist the College in these efforts. Because I am a member of both the QEP leadership team and the College's Student Success committee, the administration deemed it appropriate for me to pursue the proposed study. As an administrator and a member of these groups, my duties have included reviewing student success data at the College.

The College did not have a formal Institutional Review Board (IRB) during the early development of this research proposal. Therefore, approval from the College president was obtained to proceed with the topic (Appendix A). Since that time, a new president has been appointed and an IRB has been established. This proposal was submitted to the local IRB for approval in July 2011.

A full review of the local IRB was conducted on August 15, 2011, and permission was granted to proceed with this study (Appendix B). Based on the board's

recommendation, past and present students enrolled in any of the Business and Information Technology programs were excluded from the sampling pool to avoid any potential ethical issues. This recommendation was also presented to Liberty University's IRB for their input. Pursuant to an email from the Liberty's IRB Coordinator, the recommendation from the College's IRB to exclude Business and Information Technology students was appropriate (Appendix C). A full review of Liberty's Institutional Review Board occurred upon successful completion of the proposal defense and permission to proceed with this study was granted on March 30, 2012.

Data Collection

A triangulated approach was used to collect data from the research participants. Creswell (2007) indicated that the use of combined sources of data provides greater credibility of a study's results. In order to glean a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, this investigation included the use of surveys, focus group sessions, and individual interviews with students who met the research criteria.

Surveys

A College-designed survey instrument was used as the initial data source for this study. I met with the college's director of Planning and Community Relations on several occasions to develop the survey. Discussions were held in-person and via email to review various drafts of the survey (Appendix D). The original design contained only three open-ended questions:

- Why did you choose to enroll in online classes at the College?
- How would you describe your overall experience in online classes at the College?
- What reasons do you feel led to your decision to withdraw from an online

class?

The initial survey of three questions evolved into 12 questions, including one with a Likert-type satisfaction scale. Yet, the satisfaction scale was deemed unnecessary because the goal of the study was to discover the experiences of online students through their words and descriptions. Several revisions followed the initial discussion, resulting in a student survey composed of five open-ended questions. The survey was designed to address the research questions guiding this study. The instrument provided an opportunity for the co-researchers to address their decision to take online classes, their experiences in the classes, the factors contributing to their lack of success, their feelings about their experiences, and how their opinions of online classes changed. The survey questions were open-ended so that students could describe their online experiences in their own words.

Upon completion of the revisions, the survey was submitted to the Office of Planning and Community Relations to establish this instrument's face and content validity. A face validity review ensured that the survey questions were clear and easily understood. Content validity was also addressed to determine how well the instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Cone & Foster, 1996).

The director of Planning and Community Relations and her staff are responsible for the collection and interpretation of data for institutional effectiveness and research purposes at the College (MYCC, 2012b). Collectively, the group has extensive experience in the design and dissemination of survey instruments and must approve all instruments used to gather data relating to the College. The director reviewed the final draft of the survey and approved of its use for this study. To further validate the survey instrument, a four-member panel consisting of a certified counselor, two certified online

instructors, and a community college research specialist reviewed and approved the survey instrument for clarity of its content and purpose in January 2012.

The college-designed survey instrument served as the initial data source for this study. The electronic survey was created using *Vovici* online survey software. The survey was delivered to all potential participants via their college email account. Both the email and survey form included the purpose of the study as well as an invitation to become a research participant. For tracking purposes, participants were assigned a unique identification number to ensure the confidentiality of their responses. Recipients of the survey were required to electronically consent or decline to participate in the study before viewing the survey questions. Prior to viewing the five open-ended questions, participants were asked to provide the name of an online class attempted unsuccessfully during 2010-11 and to answer the questions based upon their experiences in that particular class. This information was correlated to the potential participants' database to validate the responses.

The survey included the following five open-ended questions:

1. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of [ABC CLASS] at the College?
2. How would you describe your experience in this online class?
3. What problems did you experience that contributed to your lack of success in this class?
4. How has your opinion of online classes changed as a result of this experience?
5. How did your experience in this class make you feel?

As the initial data source, the survey provided participants an opportunity to respond to the five open-ended questions without influence of the investigator or

additional participants. The participants entered their responses electronically using the online survey software. The software automatically created a data file that was easily converted to an Excel spreadsheet for formatting purposes. Although the participants' responses often contained grammatical and typographical errors or misspellings, the answers were maintained in the database in the format they were received, with the exception of the redaction of names of faculty or individuals who were identified by the participants.

Students participating in the survey were also asked to participate in the study as a member of a focus group and individual interview sessions. This provided opportunities for students to discuss their online experiences in greater detail.

Focus Groups

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) described the use of focus groups in qualitative research as “group interviews that are structured to foster talk among the participants about particular issues” (p. 109). Since the 1930s, researchers have used focus groups, but successfully managing a focus group session can be difficult (Krueger, 1994). It requires the facilitator to maintain a flexible atmosphere and promote interaction among the group members (Creswell, 2007). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the investigator is the primary instrument in qualitative data collection and analysis.

Students who experienced an online class but were unsuccessful in their attempt had unique and individual insight on this subject. Therefore, they were considered “experts” on the topic under investigation and their open and thorough input was of value (Krueger, 1994). To prepare for this step in the research process, I reviewed the Focus Group Workshop materials of Dr. Steven Culver of the Office of Academic Assessment at Virginia Tech who presented on the topic in the fall of 2009. I also participated in

focus group sessions at the College, both as a participant and co-moderator.

My role within the focus groups was to moderate the sessions in a manner that promoted interaction and open discussion. I provided information to the participants to explain the purpose of the sessions and how their input would be used within the context of this study (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). The rules of confidentiality were explained to the students and were incorporated within the informed consent form required of all participants prior to their participation in the focus group sessions (Appendix F). As the moderator, I also set the time limits and ground rules, and I monitored the discussions to keep the group focused (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). My goal was to foster a discussion among the participants that would stimulate the sharing of thoughts and opinions among the group.

Whereas the survey responses provided an initial opportunity to understand the experiences of students who had been unsuccessful in an online class, the focus group sessions provided more in-depth information from the participants. The sessions were scheduled in the weeks following the participants' completion of the survey. Finding a time that all participants could gather as a group proved to be very difficult. As a result, only 29 of the 54 initial participants were able to participate in one of the four arranged focus group sessions; however, the results from the four sessions achieved information saturation or redundancy within the data collected (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Participants in the focus group sessions represented each of the sampling categories, although only one participant did not return to the college after his unsuccessful online experience. Nine of the participants had an unsuccessful experience in a math class while five indicated a grade of D, F, U or W in biology. Participants also had unsuccessful experiences in subjects such as English, psychology, music, criminal

justice, art, child development, meteorology, and natural science.

The focus group sessions were used as an opportunity to cover the phenomenon with the participants in an informal conversational atmosphere. A list of topics and broad questions were used to direct the discussion (Rubin & Rubin, 2004). While most of the conversations remained on topic, there were statements made by some participants that were unrelated to their online experiences. Since my role was to moderate the sessions in a manner that promoted interaction among the participants, I intervened as needed to lead the discussions back to the research topic.

The focus group topic guide and broad questions were reviewed and approved for face and content validity by the College's director of Planning and Community Relations (Appendix E). A panel consisting of a certified counselor, two certified online instructors, and a community college research specialist was also convened in January 2012 to review the focus group topics for clarity of content and purpose.

Each focus group session was scheduled in a location such as a conference room or office suite on the College campus, to ensure a comfortable setting free of interruptions. The initial focus group convened mid-morning in the tutoring lab on the college campus, followed by two afternoon sessions held in the college's Cyber Café and one session scheduled in the early evening in a classroom. Consent was provided by the first three groups to video record the sessions. The fourth group had some reservations and preferred that their session be recorded only by audio. Refreshments were provided for the participants for each of the sessions. All participants were encouraged to introduce themselves to each other prior to the recorded session, but were asked to choose a pseudo name for the session. The participants were also reminded of the purpose of the study and asked to verify their consent to participate. A professional

transcriptionist transcribed the recordings of all sessions (Appendix G). I verified the transcripts by listening to the recordings and simultaneously proofreading the transcripts. I also used this opportunity to redact any personal names mentioned during the conversations. Although participants were given the opportunity to review the transcripts, none of them felt it necessary to do so.

Reviewing the video aspect provided an even greater insight into the participants' non-verbal responses as well as any hesitations that may have been difficult to ascertain by audio alone. Any reference to personal names of the research participants and college personnel were redacted from the transcript of the focus group sessions. Pseudonyms were used to replace individual names mentioned during the data collection process. As co-researchers (Moustakas, 1994), participants were given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym to replace their name within the transcripts.

Interviews

One of the more common data collection techniques of qualitative research is the use of interviews in either a structured, semi-structured, or unstructured format (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Semi-structured interviews comprised the third approach used to gather descriptive data from the research participants in their own words. Identifying specific factors that contributed to their unsuccessful attempts in an online class was more easily achieved by the one-on-one approach of individual interviews. The one-on-one approach allowed me to clarify any responses of the interviewees that were vague or ambiguous.

Interviews are meant to be a “purposeful conversation” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 105) through which one individual obtains information from another. From a constructivist standpoint, the use of semi-structured interviews permitted participants to describe an experience from their own perspective and in their own words (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2000).

The use of semi-structured interviews can be a time-consuming and challenging approach of collecting data. In order to remain focused on the topic, I had to control the direction and the pace of the conversations. Because of the flexible format and large number of interviewees, it was important for me to have a clear plan to follow.

An interview guide was used to steer the discussions and provide a sequence of the topics to be covered (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Rubin and Rubin (2004) referred to this type of interview as a *guided conversation*. Questions to be used within the guided conversation or semi-structured interview were developed as a result of an extensive literature review related to online attrition and the characteristics of rural Appalachia (Table 2).

The development of the semi-structured interview guide involved numerous meetings with the College's director of Planning and Community Relations over the course of several months. Ultimately, the questions were reviewed and approved for face and content validity by the College's director of Planning and Community Relations in December 2011. To further support the validity of the interview questions a four-member panel was also convened in January 2012 to review the questions for clarity of content and purpose. The panel consisted of a certified counselor, two certified online instructors, and a community college research specialist.

Table 2

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Questions	Supporting Literature
1. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of [ABC class*]?	Hannay & Newvine, 2006; Hu, 2003; Park, 2007
2. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?	Cunningham, 2010; Knowles, 1980; Merriam, 2001; Tinto, 1975
3. How did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class?	Cunningham, 2010; Knowles, 1980, Merriam, 2001; Tinto, 1975
4. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as the result of your unsuccessful experience in [ABC class]?	Cunningham, 2010; Knowles, 1980, Merriam, 2001; Tinto, 1975
5. What type of expectations did you have when you began [ABC class]?	Hanna, Glowacki-Dudka, & Conceicao-Runlee, 2000
6. Do you feel the class met your expectations? Why or why not?	Hanna et al., 2000
7. What factors do you feel led to your lack of success in [ABC class]?	Liebow, 2010; Tinto, 1993, 1998; Xu & Jaggars, 2011
8. Do you feel you were prepared for online classes before taking [ABC class]? Why or why not?	Elliott et al., 2008; Ratliff, 2009
9. How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?	Elliott et al., 2008; Ratliff, 2009
10. How would you describe your social support system (family, friends, college personnel, etc.) in relation to your educational goals?	Felenz & Conti, 1989; Merriam & Mohamad, 2000; Schwartz, 2004
11. What type of support or assistance do you think would have helped you be more successful in [ABC class]?	Felenz & Conti, 1989; Merriam & Mohamad, 2000; Schwartz, 2004
12. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?	Felenz & Conti, 1989; Merriam & Mohamad, 2000; Schwartz, 2004
13. While enrolled in the class, what type of support services (academic or otherwise) did you seek from the College?	Felenz & Conti, 1989; Merriam & Mohamad, 2000; Schwartz, 2004
14. How would you describe your overall experience in [ABC class]?	Liebow, 2010; Tinto, 1993, 1998; Yukselturk & Bulut, 2007
15. How do you think taking online classes will affect your educational goals?	Davis, 1993; Huitt, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Stewart, Bachman & Johnson, 2010

* Individualize question for each student to a particular unsuccessful class attempt.

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of community college students living in rural Appalachia who do not successfully complete their online classes. It was important to first discover why the participants chose to enroll in an online class. Research indicates a variety of reasons why students select online classes when given a choice of other formats (Hannay & Newvine, 2006; Hu, 2003; Park, 2007). The first interview question was specifically designed to gather information to identify the factors leading to the online enrollment of rural students.

Questions 2, 3 and 4 were developed to measure the participants' feelings toward the concept of online learning. Knowles (1980) implied that the adult learning environment is affected by an adult's life experiences, the instructor's role within the class, and the individual student's perception of self. The intent of these questions was to discover how the perceptions of rural students evolve over the course of their enrollment in online classes and how these perceptions were related to their life experiences and other andragogical factors identified within the literature (Cunningham, 2010; Merriam, 2001).

Understanding the expectations of students within the online environment provided a platform for the development of an online course (Hanna et al., 2000). Questions 5 and 6 were developed to understand what students expected from their online class experience before the class began, and if the class met those expectations.

Evidence suggests that students often leave during their first-year of college for many reasons, including academic and otherwise (Liebow, 2010; Tinto, 1993, 1998). Additionally, comprehensive studies found that success rates for online community colleges classes are 8% to 12% lower than traditional classes (Xu & Jaggars, 2011). The purpose of question 7 was to determine what factors students attributed to their lack of

success in an online class.

The literature indicates that students in an online setting need to be college ready as well as technologically savvy (Elliott et al., 2008; Ratliff, 2009). Questions 8 and 9 were developed to determine if participants felt they were ready for an online class when they enrolled in a particular course that resulted in an unsuccessful attempt. Responses derived from these questions also provided insight into the level of computer experience the participants had prior to taking this online class and if this experience was sufficient for an online course (Kaminski et al., 2003).

Questions 10 through 13 were developed to obtain an understanding of the social and cultural aspects of rural community college students regarding their online class experiences. Fellenz and Conti (1989) stated the learning process could be influenced by the social environment and cultural experiences of an individual. It was unknown whether or not the independent and self-reliant nature of the rural Appalachian region's population played a role in their online experiences (Schwartz, 2004). Students' responses to these questions will add to the body of knowledge in relation to the cultural and social aspects of online classes in a rural setting.

The purpose of question 14 was to provide an opportunity for participants to describe their overall experience in relation to their unsuccessful attempt in an online class. The literature suggests that students typically dropout during their first-year of college for many reasons, academic and otherwise (Liebow, 2010; Tinto, 1993, 1993; Yukselturk & Bulut, 2007). Question 15 addressed how the participants believe taking online classes has or will affect their educational goals, including their motivation to persist in online classes (Davis, 1993; Huitt, 1991; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Stewart et al., 2010). While the participants' responses to questions 1 through 13 depicted specific

aspects of their experiences, providing another opportunity for the students to summarize their thoughts added credibility to their responses (Creswell, 2007).

The comfort level of the research participants with me as the interviewer was very important (Denzin, 1989). In order to talk freely about their experiences, participants needed to feel at ease. I conducted the interviews in an informal setting and reassured the participants by fully describing the purpose of the research and extended my appreciation for their assistance in understanding this phenomenon. Interviews were scheduled in 30-minute sessions to avoid conflicts with the participants' schedules. Additional time was available for interviews that did not conclude within the initial timeframe.

The flexibility of a semi-structured interview permitted me to engage the participants in a conversation to understand their experiences while also taking into consideration their use of words and phrases unique to the culture of the region. As a lifelong resident of the region, I was aware of the expressions and unique dialect of its people and was able to understand the participants without influencing their responses (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

A pilot of the interview process was conducted prior to the actual participant interviews. This strategy was used to test the amount of time required for an effective session, as well as an opportunity to review the interview topics, the clarity of the questions, and their sequencing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The initial plan was to schedule the interviews in one-hour segments. As a result of the pilot interviews, it was determined that 30-minute sessions would be sufficient.

Similar to the focus group method, the interviewees were asked to consent to being recorded by digital media. By recording the interview sessions, I was able to interact with the research participants without the concern of taking precise notes. A

professional transcriptionist under a confidentiality contract transcribed the digital recordings (Appendix G). Personally verifying the accuracy of the transcripts provided me an opportunity to listen to the interviews while proofreading the transcript. In order to ensure confidentiality, any reference to personal names of the research participants and college personnel were redacted from the transcripts and replaced with pseudonyms. As co-researchers (Moustakas, 1994), participants were given the opportunity to choose a pseudonym for their identity within the transcript data.

The following questions were used to guide this research project and the data collection process:

Research question 1. *What motivates adult community college students in a rural area to enroll in online classes?* The college offers many classes in a variety of formats: traditional day classes, night classes, off-campus, and online; yet, some classes are only available in an online format. When given a choice of formats, a substantial number of students choose to take an online class. The first question within the college-designed student survey addressed this topic. Additionally, students were asked to elaborate on the reasons they chose to take online classes during the focus group and personal interview sessions.

Research question 2. *How do rural community college students describe their online class experiences?* A triangulated approach was used to gather this information from research participants as well. This information was gleaned from student responses to Questions 2 and 3 of the student survey, input from the focus group sessions, and individual responses from student interviews. Interview Questions 7 and 14 were designed to address this research question.

Research question 3. *How do rural community college students' perceptions of*

an online course develop, change and give rise to consequences of attrition or failure? A triangulated approach was used to gather this information from research participants. Interview questions 5, 6 and 15 provided opportunities for participants to openly discuss their expectations of online learning while question 4 within the student survey specifically targets this research question. The focus group sessions with research participants were used to further identify factors contributing to their lack of success in online classes.

Research question 4. *How do rural community college students' emotional responses to taking an online course develop, change and lead to dropping out or failing the course?* Participant responses to survey question 5 provided insight into the feelings of students who have had an unsuccessful experience in online classes. This guiding question was used to determine how the participants' feelings about online classes changed as a result of their unsuccessful experiences. Interview questions 2, 3, and 4 further addressed these issues. The focus group sessions also provided an opportunity for participants to address the emotional aspects of taking an online course.

Research question 5. *How do rural community college students' social or cultural values influence their online class experiences?* This guiding question was used to determine if the participants had a social support network, academic or otherwise, to help them with their online experiences at the community college. Another important aspect of this question was the role of the students' cultural values in their online experiences. Interview questions 10, 11, 12 and 13 addressed the social and cultural aspects of rural community college students in regard to their online class experiences. Additional input from the focus group sessions provided a better understanding of how social support systems and students' personal feelings impacted online success.

Information and opinions provided by students in their responses to the surveys, focus group sessions, and individual interviews resulted in an understanding of what occurs when students fail to succeed in an online class at a rural community college.

Data Analysis

Collecting and analyzing the data and opinions related to students' experiences in online classes within a community college setting required a systematic and organized approach. The study's data were analyzed based upon the emergent design method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A team approach was used to read and document key words and phrases within the data. The team was composed of four members of the College's Student Success Committee who have experience with qualitative data analysis. As the investigator, I lead the team. The Student Success Committee has a natural tie to the research topic. The role of the committee is outlined within the College's Faculty and Staff Manual as follows:

The Student Success Committee is responsible for advising the Vice President of Academic and Student Services on matters pertaining to the retention/success of students. This committee will annually monitor student retention data and will make specific recommendations for improvement. (MYCC, 2012b)

The committee consists of six faculty members, a classified staff member, a counselor, two administrators, a TRIO Grant representative, and a member of the Institutional Research staff (MYCC, 2012b). The Vice President has approved the involvement of the committee in the analysis of data resulting from this study (Appendix A).

Moustakas (1994) outlined five key phases required in the analysis of transcendental phenomenological data: (a) epoché, (b) delineating units of meaning, (c) clustering the meaning units into themes, (d) synthesizing themes into textual and

structural descriptions, and (e) developing a composite description of the essence of the experiences of others to discover their true meaning.

Epoché

Moustakas (1994) emphasized that the basic step in the process requires the investigator to set aside any preconceived notions he or she may have about the phenomenon. This process, referred to as epoché or bracketing, is intended to eliminate any bias of the investigator as he or she seeks to uncover the realities of what others have experienced from their perspectives. Moustakas referred to this approach as transcendental because the investigator sees the phenomenon “freshly, as for the first time” without his or her personal experiences reflecting upon the study (p. 34).

Although I have taken numerous online classes, I have not received an unsuccessful grade of D, F, U or W. Therefore, I have no personal experience that would influence this study from that perspective. To achieve epoché, I had to set aside any judgments or opinions that resulted from my experiences with unsuccessful online students as an instructor or administrator. I also had to set aside any personal thoughts I formed as the result of the literature review, focus group and interview sessions, and the analysis of survey responses (Moustakas, 1994). This process involved documenting my thoughts and assumptions relating to unsuccessful online students prior to beginning the data collection process. Documenting these suppositions provided an opportunity to set aside these thoughts, with the realization that the data from this study may or may not support my original views of the online attrition phenomenon.

Delineation

Identifying significant statements within the data was necessary in order to group the data by themes or commonalities. This resulted in a broad representation of the

research participants' experiences. Moustakas (1994) referred to the process of analyzing collected data for significant statements as the process of horizontalization, which later results in the development of clusters of meaning or themes.

A team composed of four members of the College's Student Success Committee and I met on two separate occasions to review the survey data. The team discussed the planned analysis process as well as the requirement to set aside any preconceived ideas that we might have had on students' online experiences. In order to achieve epoché, all members were encouraged to talk about their thoughts and experiences with unsuccessful online students. By documenting the teams' preconceived ideas in a list format and posting the lists in the teams' meeting room, we were reminded to rely only on the data to understand the phenomenon of online attrition from the participants' points of view.

When I felt comfortable that we had established epoché, I provided each member a copy of the survey responses. Each member reviewed the data on his or her own time for significant statements and we later met as a group to review the data and delineate the relevant meaning of the participants' responses. With each reading of the transcripts, the team identified statements and phrases contributing to the phenomenon. The survey responses provided initial insight to the unsuccessful online experiences of the participants and served as a baseline of data for the focus group and individual interview sessions.

An analysis of the focus group and interview transcripts was conducted in a similar fashion to that of the surveys. In order to become totally immersed in the information provided by the study's participants, the process required reading the transcripts several times. Two members of the College's Student Success Committee and I met to complete the process of analyzing the focus group transcripts for themes and

subthemes. Four members of the team joined me in the analysis of the individual interview transcripts. At the beginning of each session, the team was reminded of the need to achieve epoché before reading the participants' accounts of their experiences. This process involved the review and documentation of the team's personal thoughts in relation to online attrition. Likewise, the team discussed the importance of setting those thoughts aside in order to view the participants' experiences without bias.

The team reviewed the transcripts individually for significant statements and then met in eight group sessions to cluster the responses into themes and subthemes. The process took approximately six weeks, which was longer than anticipated. Yet, utilizing a team approach provided greater trustworthiness and dependability of the findings.

Identifying Themes

As common themes emerged from the data, the statements were categorized into themes and subthemes. The results of each data collection method were analyzed independent from the others, beginning with the survey data. As the initial data source, the survey provided participants an opportunity to respond to five open-ended questions without influence of the investigator or additional participants. The participants entered their responses electronically using the online survey software. The software automatically created a data file that was easily converted to an Excel spreadsheet for formatting purposes. Although the participants' responses often contained grammatical and typographical errors or misspellings, the answers were maintained in the database in the format they were received, with the exception of the redaction of names of faculty or individuals who were identified by the participants.

In order to become totally immersed in the information provided by the study's participants, the process required reading the responses of the students several times. The

team met on four separate occasions to discuss significant themes and compiled a final list of textual and structural descriptions of the experience as relayed by the participants (Moustakas, 1994). Any disagreement in the process was discussed and negotiated until mutual agreement was reached. Descriptive statistics were used to report the frequency of identified themes along with selected quotations to support the data.

Textual and Structural Descriptions

Identifying the significant statements and themes within the data provided a basis to write a description of what the participants relayed during the data collection process. Textural descriptions were derived from common words and phrases used by the participants to describe their experiences. Based on the context of the participants' descriptions, the team was also able to determine from what setting the participants' experiences occurred, and particularly what was going on in the students' lives during their online experiences.

The descriptions were entered into an electronic database to develop a listing of major themes noted during the reading and re-reading of the responses. Although there are software programs available to automate the process of compiling responses by common terms, an automated system could hinder the interpretation of the responses (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Therefore, the act of personally reading and re-reading the responses provided me with a better understanding of the individual statements. This was also helpful in developing the structural description in that it allowed me to understand what it was like for the participants to unsuccessfully attempt an online class.

Composite Description

Integrating the textual and structural descriptions identified within the data resulted in a composite description of the experiences of online students (Moustakas,

1994). The interpretation of the data was the most arduous portion of this research process because of the wide range of data involved in a triangulated approach, but this comprehensive approach was necessary to achieve an accurate portrayal of the experiences of others. Statements provided by the research participants were used to contextualize student responses into a format that conveyed the essence of their experiences (Moustakas, 1994).

Various computer applications such as the Microsoft® Office Suite were used throughout the research process to store, sort, retrieve, and interpret the data gathered. Maintaining separate databases for each of the three sources (surveys, focus groups, and interviews) aided with the organization of themes identified (Appendix H). The data were ultimately analyzed in a combined database format to determine if structural corroboration exists (Moustakas, 1994). While available technology was used to record commonalities among the data, the true analysis was performed by the investigator's interpretation of what the data indicated.

Trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985) described four criteria used to measure the trustworthiness of qualitative research: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. To achieve credibility, readers must have confidence in the findings. The triangulated approach to data collection and analysis provides a structural corroboration to support the validity of this study (Creswell, 1998). Using three types of data collection (surveys, focus groups, and interviews) enhanced the confidence of the research findings. Asking the participants to verify the transcripts of their interviews and my interpretation of the findings also enhanced credibility.

The degree to which the findings of the research can be applied to other locations

is considered transferability. Of the four criteria identified by Lincoln and Guba (1985), transferability of the findings is perhaps the weakest validation aspect of this study because of the unique culture and demographics of the study's participants. Providing thick descriptions of both the participants and the research procedures will enable others to determine if the findings of this study will be transferable to additional settings.

Dependability was established by utilizing an inquiry audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Members of the College's QEP leadership team served as reviewers of the process of the study, as well as the findings. Triangulation of the data also enhanced the dependability of the study.

The extent to which research is free from bias is essential for confirmability. Well-documented research and solid descriptions within the data and findings support the overall trustworthiness of the study (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2006). As outlined by Moustakas (1994), a five-stage approach was used to analyze the data to increase the reliability of the findings. Implementing a team approach to analyze the data for themes further supports the study's validity, while the ongoing process of bracketing or epoché indicate confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

As an administrator of the College, I have an ethical obligation to its students, and I must also protect the integrity of this study. In order to accomplish this, I advised the participants of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Information identifiable to an individual participant has remained in my confidence. Electronic data has been secured under password protection on a personal computer while all paper documents were maintained in a locked cabinet at my home. While all research participants were provided background information on the reasons for the proposed

research, each was also assured that the confidentiality of personal issues identified in their responses would be preserved (Appendix F).

My intent was to avoid any potential conflict of interest or ethical concerns by eliminating any students who could come before me with a grade issue or other academic concern in my capacity as the College's dean of Business and Information Technology. Students who were enrolled or have been previously enrolled in programs within this division were excluded from the pool of potential research participants. I used a purposeful sampling technique to identify students from other areas of the college who had earned an unsuccessful grade of D, F, U or W in an online class during the 2010-2011 academic year. These students were approached to seek their voluntary participation in the study.

This study's findings will be used to inform initiatives of the Student Success Committee and provide a basis for institutional planning. When disseminating a report of the findings, it is my obligation and intent to protect the identity of those participating in this study as well as any College personnel or individuals who may have been discussed during the data collection process. Therefore, all references to personal names were redacted from the data and replaced with pseudonyms. If this study revealed any issues inhibiting the integrity of the College's online classes, it was my moral and ethical obligation to alert the College's administration of these issues. In the event I discovered students who were unsuccessful as the result of emotional or psychological problems, I would have referred those students to a College counselor for assistance.

Summary

This chapter has described a qualitative study using a transcendental, empirical phenomenological approach to identify the factors that result in the attrition of online

students at a community college in central Appalachia. A triangulated approach was used to increase the trustworthiness of the results. The proposed research design provided input from a wide range of students to gain a deeper and broader level of understanding relating to this phenomenon.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Restatement of the Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the experiences of community college students living in rural Appalachia who do not successfully complete their online classes. To do this, it was necessary to ascertain students' descriptions of their experiences and their perspectives on factors they attribute to their attrition or poor performance in online classes (Patterson & McFadden, 2009).

A review of the literature suggested attrition is typically associated with students' motivation, socioeconomic status, academic preparation, and connectivity to their peers and their college campus (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Davis, 1993; Tinto, 1975); however, there is this literature has focused upon undergraduate and graduate students at primarily four year, traditional universities. In my review of the literature, no study was found that focused specifically upon the attrition of online students in rural Appalachia. This study adds to the body of knowledge on the theoretical foundations of Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model and Bean and Metzner's (1985) Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition by noting why it is important to consider the unique cultural identity of an institution, the region it serves and its students when studying the problem of online attrition.

A synthesis of the data collected is presented in response to the questions used to guide this study, followed by an overall summary of the study's findings in relation to the study's theoretical framework. All iterations of statements made by the participants are exact transcriptions with the spelling and other errors included as they were provided.

Research Question Results

Five questions were used to guide this research project to determine what students in rural Appalachia experience from the time they choose to enroll in an online class through the point of their failure or withdrawal from the class. I compiled answers to these questions based upon my analysis of the collective data obtained through surveys, individual interviews, and focus group sessions.

Research Question 1

What motivates adult community college students in a rural area to enroll in online classes?

The first research question formed the basis of the participants' experiences in relation to the phenomenon of online attrition in rural Appalachia. The data related to this question provided insight into what motivated the participants' to enroll in online classes. Survey responses served as the initial data source and were consistent with the focus group and interview data. As noted in Table 3, participants identified several factors that influenced their decisions to take an online class. The factors included personal obligations such as work, childcare and elder care, the lack of an available traditional or in-person class, as well as transportation time and costs.

Table 3

Responses to Survey Question 1

Emergent Themes	# of Responses	% of Total
Work and/or Family Issues	17	31.48%
Lack of Traditional Class Option	16	29.63%
Transportation Issues	7	12.96%
Personal Convenience	5	9.25%
Personal Interest in the Subject	5	9.25%
Previous Successful Online Experience	4	7.40%

Seventeen of the 54 (31.48%) survey participants cited work and family issues as primary reasons for choosing to take an online class. Participants' conflicting work schedules, personal and family health problems, as well as child and elder care were motivators to enroll in an online course as it enabled them to work on class assignments when their schedules allowed them to do so.

Another 29.63% ($n = 16$) of the participants chose to take an online class because of the limited availability of classes. According to the participants, there were no traditional course options available at the time of their enrollment that would meet the requirements of their degree or certificate program. Nine of the 16 respondents did not indicate whether the limited availability was due to closed traditional classes resulting from limited enrollment, or otherwise. Yet seven of the participants in this category, or 13.73% of the survey respondents, reported that the college only offered their needed class in an online format regardless of the semester. Five of the participants' responses within this category indicated that they were advised to take the online class by an

academic advisor.

Transportations issues comprised another 12.96% ($n=7$) of the reasons why participants chose to take an online class. Included in this category were responses related to the costs of fuel and time required to travel to the college campus, as well as a lack of a reliable automobile.

Ten of the remaining 14 (18.5%) responses were equally distributed between personal convenience and personal interest in the course topic, while the remaining four participants indicated their choice of an online class resulted from a previous successful experience in another online class. The five participants who referenced convenience as their reason for taking an online class did not elaborate further. Participants who indicated they had a personal interest in the course topic were excited to have an online option. Two of the five were enrolled in a music class, while the remaining participants attempted an administration of justice class, an economics course and a psychology class.

The two primary reasons for choosing an online class prevailed within all three sources of data related to this question: (a) personal, familial and vocational responsibilities of the participants, and (b) the lack of other educational options. A lack of personal resources was noted as another reason for choosing online classes, but this theme was not as prevalent within the data.

Personal, familial, and vocational responsibilities. During the focus group and interview sessions, participants noted that they were motivated to pursue a degree for the purpose of improving their lives and those of their family members; however, they desired to do this while maintaining their family and vocational responsibilities. As such, the participants considered online classes to be a good option and thought they would be more convenient than taking traditional classes when attempting to balance vocational

and familial responsibilities. As noted by Patterson and McFadden (2009), the perception that online classes are more convenient has convinced many individuals to attempt online classes. The study's data correlates to the findings of Hagga (2004), Hannay and Newvine (2006), and Park (2007) who found that rural online community college students generally have work and family responsibilities that limit their ability to take classes in a traditional face-to-face setting. Moltz (2008) and Cooper (2010) also noted that online classes are viewed as a good alternative for working adults because they provide greater flexibility for students to manage their obligations and still pursue their educational goals.

As Susie stated, she “wanted it all out of life,” and online classes seemed to be a way to do something to better herself. Like many others, she referred to a daily schedule where she worked 8 to 10 hours per day, shuttled her children to football practice and band practice, cooked at least two meals, managed her household chores, and checked on her elderly parents who lived down the street from her. Her only time to work on class assignments was late at night when her family was sleeping.

Other participants, including Phyllis, Daisy, Katy and Joan, agreed that they had other family obligations that kept them from taking on-campus classes. As Joan explained, she does not work full-time, but taking care of an elderly parent limits the time that she can attend class:

I don't work full-time, but I have to take care of my mom, too, and that keeps me busy. Sometimes I can do one class on-campus, if it's early in the day, but for me the online classes seem to be a good option. I just learned that I can't do some of the subjects without a teacher's help.

As noted in previous research, and confirmed by the participants of this study,

online community college students have a variety of challenges and responsibilities beyond college, including employment and family obligations (Hannay & Newvine, 2006; Lokken, 2010; Park, 2007; Stanford-Bowers, 2008). Because of this and their desires to obtain a college education, the participants considered online classes as a feasible option.

Lack of alternative class options. Another reason participants took online classes was the lack of other options. The participants chose an online class because a traditional class was not available, while several reported that their advisor or someone at the college advised them to take the online class but did not question why this advice was given. Those who felt apprehensive about online classes indicated that they did not discuss this with an advisor. Participants expressed concern that the college limited their choices by not offering certain classes in a traditional format. As Alex stated, “online classes are just not for everyone.”

Lack of personal resources. The drive time and/or distance to and from the college made taking traditional classes more difficult or even impossible for a few students, especially those living in the outlying areas of the college’s service region. Of the 54 survey participants, only 7, or 13%, attributed their choice of online classes to the costs of transportation and/or the length of time or distance of travel to the campus. Because of the mountainous terrain and rural roads, residents of rural Appalachia typically have long commutes to their college campus (Eller et al, 1998). These students also considered online classes a better option from both a convenience and financial perspective. The following dialogue with Emma illustrates how some students at the college try to reduce the costs of transportation by managing classes both in-person and online:

EMMA: I live quite a distance from the college and I just can't afford to drive up here every day. I like to take in-person classes, but online classes help me with my budget. Like right now, I'm taking an on-campus class, but I've also got some online. I drive up here two days a week.

I: How long is your drive?

EMMA: I live down below Ewing. It's a little over an hour drive.

Emma's response illustrates one of the problems of living in rural Appalachia. Although the college is centrally located within the service region, nearly two-thirds of the residents within the area served by the college live at least an hour's drive from the campus (MYCC, 2012a). While the data produced as a result of this study revealed that transportation was not the most significant concern or reason why students chose to take online classes, the costs of attending class on-campus in terms of both time and money were significant for those who live in the outlying areas.

Research Question 2

How do rural community college students describe their unsuccessful online class experiences? The data revealed that the experiences of online students evolved over the course of their enrollment. Their initial impressions and experiences were generally affected by their inexperience and naïve impressions of online classes.

Lack of awareness and unexpected experiences. There was a general consensus among the first-time online students that their online classes were different than what they expected them to be. Participants reported that they anticipated a class that was similar to what they would experience in a classroom, with regular feedback and interaction from their instructors and other students. Several participants thought that online classes would be more flexible in terms of scheduling because due dates and

scheduled assessments were not anticipated. Some participants thought that online classes would be “easier” since so many people were taking online classes, while others admitted to not knowing what to expect.

When discussing her perception of online classes, Daisy explained that her online class was much different than what she anticipated.

I expected it to be a little more flexible, I guess, and engaging. They’re supposed to be more convenient, but I ended up spending so much time trying to figure stuff out on my own that it was much less convenient for me. They weren’t supposed to be that way.

Ann also found online classes to be nothing like she expected:

I think I said the other day that it was not knowing what I was getting myself into. I was trying to do a full schedule online in the summer. I couldn’t keep up with everything and had no idea that it was really left up to me to read the materials and understand them. I thought that there would be some type of instruction, like videos by the teacher or something. Within just the first few weeks, I was totally lost.

Many of the participants like Ann enrolled in an online class with a naive concept of what would be required. As Dennison (2012) noted, students often get the idea that online classes are not as difficult as traditional classes because of marketing campaigns that depict students in their pajamas, or in other comfortable settings. This misconception often leads to the students having unrealistic expectations of an online class, as noted in the following interview.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: My expectations? I thought taking class online was easier to do.

I: Ok. What do you mean by easier?

P: I guess I thought I wouldn't have so much to do, like homework and stuff, or at least that I could just do it when I had time.

I: What made you think that?

P: I'm not really sure. It's just the impression I had of them.

Lack of instructional presence and interaction. It was evident that most of the participants had high or positive expectations prior to attempting their online class, only to be disappointed by their experience in some way. For example, one student expected to have more engaging material and an interactive faculty member. Indicating he had several concerns with online classes, one participant described his experience as follows:

I really think it was the reading and nothing else. When I take classes, I expect to really get something out of them. You know, like knowing how to do something new. Reading something and taking a quiz on it just doesn't do anything for me. Especially when the quizzes didn't even seem to go along with the book. (What do you mean?) It was like the quizzes were just some canned program, and sometimes I swear the right answers were counted wrong. We all thought that, but I don't think the instructor cared about it. I'm really not sure if the instructor was involved with the class anyway. We just had to read and take the tests, so he didn't really have much to do with the class.

Tinto (1975) theorized that students are less likely to complete their college degree when they experience little or no interaction with their instructors in the academic environment. The findings of this study supported Tinto's theory. The survey participants reported that instructors failed to respond to emails as expected, or there was little, if any, interaction with their instructors. Likewise, during each of the focus group

sessions, participants consistently referred to faculty who did not respond to email and phone messages in a timely manner or were rude in their responses. This important finding supports the position of Dennen (2007) and McClure (2008) who suggested the role of the instructor in online classes is key to the level of the students' participation in a class.

Rich dialogue ensued among focus group members when asked to describe the problems they experienced in their online classes. During the second focus group session, Emma summarized how the lack of a teacher's presence or immediacy affected the participants' success in their online class:

That's the hardest part. Sometimes it's days before teachers get back to you. I know they have a life, too, but when you're trying to deal with family and work and everything else, you work on classes when you can. Sometimes I've sent emails in the middle of the night and I know they can't respond then, but the next day would be nice. I had one that would never respond until after the assignments were due so if you had a problem during the week with the assignment and asked for help, you were penalized for not turning it in by the due date. It was crazy!

Participants expected instructional support and assistance when requested, but learned early in the course that requests for assistance would go unanswered. Fred, who was very frustrated by his experience, stated that he did get a response to two of his requests, but the response indicated that he should "read the book" for assistance. He shared with me that if he had understood what he was reading, he would not have asked the questions. In his words, "students don't get their money's worth from that teacher." This was one example of many indicating a lack of teaching presence in the direction of social and cognitive processes (Garrison et al, 2001).

Dennen (2007) noted that the interaction between students and faculty was more difficult in online classes. In an earlier study, Carr (2000) surmised that the engagement level of online students was a reflection of the instructor's online activity. The triangulated data from this study corroborated the findings of both Dennen (2007) and Carr (2000) in that unanswered emails and a general lack of communication and engagement topped the list of factors the participants attributed to their failure to succeed in an online class. Nearly every participant indicated they found it more difficult to communicate with their online instructor than they thought it would be. As John explained, communication by email was a problem for him.

I felt I did not have the support of the instructor. It was like you were out there on your own. Whenever I tried to ask about a certain quiz question or other problem, there never was an appropriate answer that satisfied my concerns. Most of the time she just ignored me completely. I knew my email was working, but it would usually take two or three emails to her before she would reply. One time I actually put the words "third attempt" in my subject line and that really ticked her off. By the time she answered me she said it was too late anyway because the assignment was past due. I dropped it right after that. There was no way I was going to pass that class.

Several participants also reported that their instructors were not involved in their classes as there was no evidence that the instructor checked messages or posted anything new in the class. Two of the interview participants felt that their instructors were not involved in their classes at all because dates within their Blackboard sites were two or three years old.

Ineffective course design. Generally the participants considered their online

classes to be unorganized, describing them as “difficult to negotiate” and “confusing.” Several comments of the participants led me to believe that the courses lacked clear instructions. Twenty-four of the survey participants (44.44%) indicated that professors also did not explain concepts thoroughly. Included in this category were statements made by participants indicating that there were problems understanding what was expected within the class. This lack of prompt or clear communication resulted in poor outcomes to tests and other assignments and tasks. Likewise, two of the participants said there were so many buttons in the menu that they “got lost.” When asked to explain, one of the participants said that she had three different buttons for syllabi in her biology class – one for homework, one for lab assignments and another one that she did not understand at all. As noted by Gentry et al. (2008), faculty who lack the required skills to utilize online tools effectively can affect the success of their students.

One participant equated his online class to a correspondence course where his only responsibility was to read the book and complete an assessment. Others agreed with him, concluding that the lack of engaging materials and assignments contributed to both their lack of interest and success in the class. A variety of concerns were raised about math classes, including the participants’ disappointment in not being able to use Blackboard to submit their assignments or complete their quizzes and exams. In particular, students questioned why they should be required to mail or deliver their assignments to their instructor instead of submitting them electronically. Likewise, they reported there were no opportunities in their math classes to interact with other students using discussion boards or other online tools.

Lack of personal planning and motivation. While the majority of the participants’ problems were perceived to be with their instructors, a number of the issues

affecting their success were personal in nature, as indicated in Table 4.

Table 4

Responses to Survey Question 3

Emergent Themes	# of Responses	% of Total
Lack of Instructional Presence or Interaction	24	44.44%
Personal, Familial and Vocational Responsibilities	10	18.52%
No Specific Problems Identified	6	11.11%
Time Management Issues	4	7.40%
Lack of Instructor's Concern	3	5.56%
Lack of Self-Motivation	3	5.56%
Technology Issues	2	3.70%
Lack of Required Materials	2	3.70%

Twenty-four of the participants felt that there was a lack of instructional support, indicating that instructors failed to respond to emails as expected, or there was little, if any, interaction with their instructors via the course tools. A lack of personal planning and motivation also contributed to the participants' lack of success. Poor planning often contributed to their lack of motivation, as well as their problems with time management and inability to obtain required materials for their classes. Although familial and vocational responsibilities were the motivation for the students to take an online class, these obligations were also cited as problems experienced by 18.52% ($n=10$) of the participants contributing to their lack of success.

Time management issues were reported by five of the participants. Comments such as "I could not keep up," were prevalent within this category. One of the five

participants indicated that she felt rushed by the instructor and it was too much for her to manage with her other obligations. Two of the participants also had a problem obtaining the required materials for the class, noting they had ordered books from an online source in an attempt to reduce their costs, but did not receive them in time to complete their initial assignments.

Research Question 3

How do rural community college students' perceptions of an online course develop, change and give rise to consequences of attrition or failure?

In order to understand the phenomenon of online attrition as if it were experienced first-hand, it was important to determine not only what the students experienced, but also how their perceptions of online classes evolved over the course of their experience.

Misconceptions. During the individual interviews, participants were asked to describe their impression of online classes before, during and after their experience. The data revealed that when most of the participants enrolled in online classes, they had favorable impressions of this mode of learning and expected to be successful. However, as noted earlier, they were generally unaware of what would be expected of them as an online student, or what to anticipate in terms of instruction and the amount of work required. They also expected to experience the same level of instructor-student interaction as they experienced in a face-to-face setting, yet found it difficult to communicate with their instructors and experienced an overall lack of interaction in their online classes. Their misconception resulted in frustration, and ultimately their lack of success in the classes.

As a result of his experience, Kirk realized that what he expected and what he

experienced were also not the same.

I'd say they're not for me. I like the idea of them, and if it worked out, it would have been good because I think I could have taken more at a time. But I probably won't try that again. I didn't realize how much you got from talking about things in class. It's really different online. I couldn't stay focused and got so behind I just gave up.

In fact, despite beginning the online course with a positive attitude, the majority of the survey participants who were asked to describe what they experienced during their unsuccessful online class attempt described their experience as “the worst class ever.” Other negative terms such as “horrible,” or “a nightmare” were also used. Only four participants, (7.4%) used terms to describe their experiences in a positive manner, using words like such as “good” or “the class was okay.” Table 5 outlines the themes emerging from the participants’ perceptions of their online experiences.

Table 5

Responses to Survey Question 2

Emergent Themes	# of Responses	% of Total
Overall Negative Experience	15	27.78%
Lack of Instructional Presence and Interaction	14	25.92%
Feeling of Self-Defeat or Frustration	12	22.22%
Time Management Issues (Student)	5	9.26%
Positive or Satisfied with Experience	4	7.40%
Lack of Student Self-Motivation	2	3.70%
Misconception of Online Classes	2	3.70%

Because they thought an online course would be easy and they considered themselves to have good computer skills, the participants generally felt prepared for online classes when they began. Seventy-one percent ($n=22$) of the interview participants considering themselves to have *good*, *very good*, or *excellent* computer skills. Eight of the participants indicated that their technology skills were *satisfactory*, while one participant indicated that his computer skills were below what was needed.

Of the 31 interview participants, 58% ($n=18$) reported feelings of confidence, comfort or positive feelings about taking an online class before they began, while 42% ($n=13$) reported feeling apprehensive, using descriptors such as *uncertain*, *nervous* or *hesitant*. Of those reporting that they were not prepared, six indicated they had no idea of what to expect in an online class when they enrolled. An example of one of the student's comments portrays the feelings of those who felt unprepared:

No, I guess I wasn't. I should have asked more questions, but I didn't even know what to ask. It was simple enough to sign up for them, but then I didn't know what else to do from there.

The participants' unsuccessful experiences left them feeling frustrated and cautious about taking others, with 87% of the participants describing their overall online experience in a very negative manner, using terms such as *horrible*, *frustrating* and *stressful*.

Perceived lack of instructor's concern. Another perception noted within the data was the participants' perception that their faculty appeared to be unconcerned about what was happening in their lives or how they were doing in their classes. This lack of concern related to the need for an instructor's social presence in an online class (Garrison et al., 2001). Those who encountered personal problems such as the death of a loved one perceived a lack of sympathy or empathy from their instructors. Sally reported that she

notified the instructor of the need to attend a funeral out of state, but was told that she “might as well drop the class” since she would not be able to take a test on a scheduled date. Another fell behind with an assignment because he did not understand what he had done wrong on a previous assignment and had asked for an explanation from the instructor. Instead, the instructor advised him to drop the class. The participants who concluded that their instructors did not care about their success considered their teachers to be unprofessional and even rude in their responses.

As an adult student who served as the primary caregiver to his mother, Bo found himself in a tough situation and expected that his instructor would understand.

BO: ... If you get behind, it’s pretty obvious that you’ve got a problem. In my case, it wasn’t really the class, it was my mom. But still it was a problem. When she got so sick, I just couldn’t keep up with the deadlines and stuff. But I don’t think the teacher really cared what my problems were. It was either do it or you’re going to fail. If she could have given me a break on some of the deadlines, I could have finished the class. But that wasn’t even an option. We’re all adults, you know? It’s not like I was some teenager trying to blow it off. I was taking the class because I wanted to take it and needed it. I thought it would be more convenient online, but it wasn’t.

Debbie, who failed an online attempt in a math course, provided another example of the teacher’s social presence. She reported feeling intimidated by her instructor following an orientation session when she was told that the instructor would accept “no excuses.” In her opinion, she was “doomed” from the start because she was afraid to ask the instructor for help. Debbie felt that her instructor exhibited an attitude that made the instructor less approachable and even though she needed help early in the class, she was

afraid to ask for it.

Research Question 4

How do rural community college students' emotional responses to taking an online course develop, change and lead to dropping out or failing the course?

Progression of emotions. The participants reported feeling a myriad of emotions before, during and after their online class experiences. Fifty-eight percent ($n=18$) of the participants reported feelings of confidence and excitement about taking an online class before they began, while 42% ($n=13$) reported feeling apprehensive, using descriptors such as “uncertain,” “nervous” or “hesitant.” During their experience, their feelings evolved into frustration, confusion, anxiety and fear as a result of the problems they experienced. In particular, they became stressed and frustrated due to their instructor's lack of presence and interaction in their classes. As Phyllis indicated, her feelings changed as the class progressed: “I had lots of feelings. Nervous at first, mad, sad, frustrated. Maybe even dumb.”

A recent study by Cleveland-Innes and Campbell (2012) described emotion as a central factor in online learning. Their study supported the findings of an earlier investigation by Weiss (2000) who concluded that students do not perform well when feeling stressed in their learning environment. As noted in the data, several participants in this study were so stressed that they gave up or felt that their online class was too much to handle. As a result, the vast majority of the participants dropped out or stopped participating in their classes before the end of the semester. Less than a third of the participants remained active in their online course through the final exam.

Self-defeat. Twenty-seven of the 54 interview participants, or 50%, noted a feeling of personal defeat as a result of their unsuccessful online class attempts.

Likewise, 38.7% ($n=12$) of the interview participants indicated that they felt defeated as result of their experience. Included in this category were responses relating to a loss of dignity and believing that they had “let down” their family as a result of their failure to succeed.

The participants at times became very emotional when discussing their experiences. It was obvious that their experiences had impacted their self-esteem. While many were disappointed in themselves, there was also concern that their family and loved ones were disappointed in them. Several participants commented that they felt *stupid* or *not smart enough to attend college* as a result of their experience, noting that it was not something they would want to do again. When Daisy talked about how her experience made her feel, her demeanor notably changed. With her head dropped, she quietly said:

For me, I felt like a failure. Sometimes you just need to do well to know you’re not a failure, and then when you don’t, it’s like it just reinforces what you don’t want to feel, especially when you’ve heard it all your life. You start to think maybe they’re right. Maybe I’m not smart or I’m not as good as other people.

It’s not a good feeling.

Unfortunately, several in her focus group session remarked that they knew how she felt.

Research Question 5

How do rural community college students’ social or cultural values influence their online class experiences?

Loyalty to family and an inherent sense of responsibility for extended family have long been a part of rural Appalachian culture (Crissman, 1989). Yet, residents of rural Appalachia are also known to have an independent nature with an unwillingness to accept influences from mainstream America (Schwartz, 2004; Weller, 1965). A review of the

literature revealed that Appalachians differ from the mainstream because of their dialect and communication styles, their distrust of outsiders, their social hierarchy, their loyalty to family and their attachment to the area (Russ, 2010).

The results of this study indicate that familial connections, personal independence and a general distrust of outsiders are values that impact the educational experiences of students in this region. In this family-centered culture, education is respected, but the needs of the family are considered primary (Russ, 2010). As noted by Russ and confirmed by this study, if a family member is attending school and foregoing work as a result of their classes, the pursuit of an education will more than likely be deferred if the family needs additional financial or care and support from that person. This supports the findings of Al-Hunaiyyan, Al-Huwail, and Al-Sharhan (2008) who found that the values and traditions of an area, as well as the physical and geographical location, have an impact on the educational systems of a region.

Familial connections. Familial connections resonated in the triangulated data as one of the participants' most important cultural or regional values. In fact, familial responsibilities first prompted students to choose online classes. Likewise, it was important for the students to have their family members' support for their goals to obtain a college degree. Ninety percent of the interviewees ($n=28$) indicated that they had the support of their family and this was something that they were proud to report. The participants' children were their source of motivation, particularly for those who enrolled in online classes to improve their family's station in life. Several referred to those close to them as their "cheerleader," indicating that they needed the encouragement of those around them to stay motivated in their classes. The participants also wanted to be seen as role models for their family and deemed it their responsibility to show their children that

education could make a difference in their lives. An example of this was provided by Mandy, a single mother of three children.

I had such high hopes. Really college was supposed to be the answer to a lot of things for me. I wanted my kids to see that people like us could go to college and make something of ourselves.

Subsequently, family also became some of their greatest challenges during the course of their enrollment. Whether the participants were working to support their family or were dealing with childcare problems, or the illness or death of a family member, it was obvious that many of the participants struggled to manage personal and family obligations while enrolled. Because of their sense of familial responsibility, they simply chose to abandon their personal goals in order to take care of others and ultimately withdrew from their classes.

Personal independence. Another regional value identified within the triangulated data of this study was the importance of personal independence. Researchers who have studied the Appalachian region have agreed that there is a common sense of self-reliance among the people in this region (Russ, 2010; Schwartz, 2004; Weller, 1965). While this is thought to stem from the geographic isolation of the area, it has resulted in a population who depends only on themselves, their family members, and those who they would refer to as their “extended” family – close friends and fellow church members (Russ, 2010).

Discussions among the focus group participants alluded to their self-reliance as “a matter of pride.” Although the majority indicated that they would ask for help if it were needed, it became obvious that they would only ask for help from those they trusted such as their family or friends. Few sought academic help from anyone at the college when they had problems with their online classes. As noted in several of the interviews,

seeking help is not something that the participants “liked to do.”

P: I think I probably should have gotten help with this class.

I: What do you mean? Did you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: No, I didn’t ask.

I: Was there a particular reason?

P: I didn’t think it would help at the time, and it’s just not something that I like to do.

The participants generally felt that residents in the southwest Virginia region were more independent by nature and less likely to ask for help from others, especially from those who were not native to the region. As Sabrina noted, residents of rural Appalachia consider themselves to be different than people from other areas.

Well, I do think that those of us who are from southwest Virginia are a little different. I think we’ve got a different point of view. Not that it’s bad, but I think we tend to be more independent. Or we want to be, so we want to learn how to do things and then do them.

Distrust of outsiders. As explained by Weller (1965), Appalachian residents have been known to be unwilling to adapt to influences from those outside of their region, and to distrust those who attempted to come into the area and change a way of life known to them for generations. Much of this resulted from the exploitation of the region’s natural resources by large corporations who sought to make their fortune by taking advantage of an uneducated populous in the 1800s and early 1900s (Russ, 2010). Because of this, the rural Appalachian population is less trusting of anyone outside of their own communities.

When the participants of this study were prompted for comments relating to the social or cultural aspects of online classes, a number of discussions centered around their experiences with faculty members who were not native to the region. Participants reported having perceptions of uncaring attitudes and/or arrogance among some of the faculty members who were considered “outsiders.” This focus group conversation captured an example of how the participants noted a cultural difference between residents of central Appalachia and others:

KIRK: Well, I’ve lived in other places and I have friends in bigger cities. There is a difference in us, but I’m not sure that it’s good or bad. I think when you’re from around here, you expect people to be responsible for holding their own, if you know what I mean.

I: No, I’m not sure I understand.

KIRK: I mean, if there’s something that needs to be done by somebody, most of us who’ve lived here for most of our lives expect that’s what the person will do. But that’s changing, too, through the generations. Teachers have changed, but we’ve all changed a little. My generation was taught to respect our teachers, but now some teachers don’t care. They just put it out there and if we get it, we do, and if we don’t, we don’t. I think in the bigger cities, it’s always been that way, or at least that’s the way I perceive it. Used to when you didn’t understand something here and you asked the teachers about it, you always got an explanation or help. That’s not always the case now.

While this conversation touched on the perception that there is a different attitude among some instructors, it also brought forth what the students in this region expect of their instructors. This conversation supported the theme noted earlier that the participants

experienced a lack of instructional presence and interaction in their online classes.

During the first focus group session, a discussion ensued that further reflected why the participants felt they could not depend on outsiders:

P1: That's like he was saying, some teachers act like you're beneath them and the questions that you ask are like, well, I'm not going to answer that. You should already know that.

I: Can you explain that?

P1: Yeah. The teacher I had online thought that he was better than all of us. When I finally talked to him in person, he was just all about himself. You could tell that he wasn't from here. He's probably not worked a day in his life except for teaching, you know? I guess he couldn't handle us so that's why he moved back north (laughing).

As the data reflected, cultural values of the central Appalachian region have influenced the education of residents in this region. According to Fellenz and Conti (1989), cultural influences develop from geographical locations, socioeconomics, or ethnicity. These influences drive the way students communicate and interact with one another because they have developed an "internal set of operating standards" (p. 15) as a result of their life-long experiences. As noted by Russ (2010), some of these standards include self-reliance, loyalty to family, and distrust of outsiders.

Synthesis of the Data

The analysis team endeavored to categorize each key statement by theme and subtheme during the review of transcripts and survey data by delineating the relevant meaning of the participants' responses. The data revealed a variety of factors that influenced the online experiences of community college students in rural Appalachia.

What the participants experienced in online classes and how the experiences evolved over the course of their enrollment was determined by the triangulated survey, focus group and individual interview data. Although each participant had a unique perspective of his or her unsuccessful online experience, the identified themes resonated throughout the survey, focus group and interview data. Table 6 illustrates 12 common themes that emerged from the triangulated data.

Table 6

Summary of Emergent Themes

Emergent Themes
Lack of Instructional Presence and Interaction
Lack of Awareness & Unexpected Experiences
Ineffective Course Design
Students' Feelings of Self Defeat
Familial Connections
Personal Independence
Personal, Familial & Vocational Responsibilities
Lack of Personal Resources
Distrust of Others
Lack of Personal Planning & Motivation
Lack of Instructor's Concern
Lack of Alternative Class Options

Following the process outlined by Moustakas (1994), I completed the analysis of the data by synthesizing themes into textual and structural descriptions, to develop a

composite description of the online students' experiences in rural Appalachia. All three sources of data revealed common themes and subthemes which were divided into three broad categories: (a) student factors, (b) institutional factors, and (c) cultural and familial factors.

The correlation between the major themes identified within the data and these factors revealed five major factors that were student-related, four that were deemed institution-related, and three that emerged from external factors:

Table 7

Summary of Key Themes and Categories

Student Factors	Institutional Factors	Cultural/Familial Factors
Lack of Awareness & Unexpected Experiences	Lack of Instructional Presence & Interaction	Personal, Familial & Vocational Responsibilities
Lack of Planning & Motivation	Lack of Alternative Class Options	Familial Connections
Feelings of Self-Defeat	Perceived Lack of Instructor's Concern	Distrust of Others
Personal Independence	Inadequate Course Design	
Lack of Personal Resources		

Essence of the Phenomenon

As noted in the review of literature, theorist Tinto (1975) conjectured that the degree to which there was an institutional fit between students and the college, the more likely students were to persist to the point of degree completion. Based on his model, a number of factors influenced students' commitments to their educational goals, including

their social and academic interactions, and their individual backgrounds. Complimenting Tinto's theory of student integration, Bean and Metzner (1985) explained that external factors could likewise influence students' decisions to persist with their college goals. Through the lens of these theorists, an analysis of the data gathered in this study revealed 12 distinct factors that had an impact on the participants' experiences in online classes in rural Appalachia.

The experiences of community college students in rural Appalachia who unsuccessfully attempted online classes proved to be multifaceted. Much of the data supported previous research, including why students in this region chose online classes, as well as some of the problems associated with their attrition. Relying on Tinto's (1975) Student Integration Model and Bean and Metzner's (1985) Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition proved beneficial inasmuch as the data's emergent themes fit well within these models.

The phenomenon of online attrition in rural Appalachia manifested from a variety of situations. While there were commonalities among the participants' experiences, I learned that there were also aspects of the phenomenon that were different for each participant. Basically, no two experiences in online classes were exactly the same. Yet, the results of this study revealed that the participants experienced several common problems. Recognizing these problems could be helpful to rural community colleges in their efforts to reduce high rates of online attrition.

Based on the results of this study, the essence of online attrition at a rural community college in central Appalachia could be attributed to factors pertaining to the students, the institution, and external influences.

Student-Related Factors

Five student-related factors were prominent within the data: (a) a lack of awareness and unexpected experiences, (b) lack of personal planning and motivation, (c) feelings of self-defeat, (d) personal independence, and (e) lack of personal resources.

Students' lack of awareness and unexpected experiences. Participants enrolled in online classes under the impression that this format would be easier, more convenient or would require less time than attending traditional classes. What they experienced was not what they expected. This inaccurate perception of online classes resulted in the students feeling overwhelmed and frustrated, ultimately leading to their withdrawal or lack of success.

Lack of personal planning and motivation. The participants identified three individual factors that impacted their success in online classes: problems with time management, a lack of motivation, and a lack of course materials. All of these factors led to procrastination, resulting in late submission of assignments and lower grades.

Students' feelings of self-defeat. As a result of their unsuccessful experience, the participants expressed a wide range of emotions. Their early excitement or apprehension transitioned to feelings of humiliation, anger, frustration and a lack of self-worth.

Overall, the participants' online class experiences led to feelings of personal defeat.

Personal independence. Residents of rural Appalachia consider themselves self-reliant and choose to do things on their own instead of seeking help from those they consider outsiders. It "goes against their nature" to ask for help from anyone outside of their family or close friends. When faced with the need of academic assistance from their instructors or support from the college, the data revealed that few participants sought the help they needed, even though they acknowledged that they should have done so.

Lack of personal resources. Due to limited financial resources, students in this rural area also considered online classes a better option from both a convenience and financial perspective. Noting that they lived an hour or more away from the campus because of the mountainous terrain, several participants explained that the costs of transportation impacted their decisions to take classes online. Likewise, when faced with a decision to devote more than two hours travel time from their already busy schedules, the participants felt that online classes were their best option.

Institutional Factors

The data revealed four institutional factors that contributed to the participants' lack of success in online classes:

Lack of instructional presence and interaction. The most common theme resonating from all three sources of data was the lack of instructional support experienced by the participants. It became obvious that the participants experienced less interaction with their instructors and fellow classmates than they desired. The participants complained that their emails to instructors were left unanswered or answers were received too late to help them with their problems.

Inadequate course design. Poorly designed classes were also pinpointed as a problem experienced by the participants. Online classes that were disorganized or not up-to-date were frustrating to the participants. Complaints about the inaccuracy of test banks and lack of instructions also resonated within the data.

Instructor's lack of concern. Several participants perceived their faculty to be unconcerned with their success or personal welfare. When faced with problems relating to their personal health, or the health and welfare of their family, the participants felt that their instructors should understand why it was important to them to take care of those

issues and still be given the chance to return to class and complete any assignments or tests that they may have missed because of those situations. As a result, the participants considered their instructors to be uncaring.

Lack of adequate course options. Another college-related factor identified was the lack of equivalent alternative course offerings for many of the online classes. The data revealed that a number of the college's classes were only offered in an online format. Limited in-person sections were available for some classes, but were generally offered during the day when many of the participants were working and unable to attend.

Cultural and Familial Factors

The data also revealed three cultural and familial factors of importance to understanding the phenomenon of online attrition at a rural community college in central Appalachia. Personal obligations were determined to be both a reason for choosing online classes and a factor that impacted the participants' success. Likewise, familial connections and a general distrust of outsiders reflected how the culture of the Appalachian region influenced the educational experience of online students in this rural area.

Personal, familial, and vocational responsibilities. Rural community college students who choose online classes have multiple personal obligations that are uncommon for traditional college students. In addition to their pursuit of a college education, most work in at least one job, although some work in two or more part-time positions. They have children and are often single parents. They take care of their parents, siblings or other family members, and often struggle financially and sometimes emotionally with life's everyday problems. When "life gets in the way" of their college goals, they feel duty-bound to give up their personal goals to take care of others or to

manage their familial and vocational obligations.

Familial connections. The regional values and cultural beliefs of the central Appalachian population were evident among the participants in this study. Familial responsibilities were a primary reason for students to choose online classes; however, those responsibilities were also a factor that negatively affected their online experiences and ultimately led to their withdrawal or failure. Because of their sense of familial responsibility, they simply chose to abandon their personal goals in order to take care of others. Having the support of their family members was likewise important to the participants in their pursuit of a college degree. They also wanted to be seen as role models for their family and deemed it their responsibility to show their children that education could make a difference in their lives.

Distrust of outsiders. Due to its geographic location and mountainous terrain, the Appalachian region is isolated and considered segregated from mainstream America. Historically, the region has been victimized by the exploitation of its resources and its people. This has resulted in generations who have been distrustful of anyone considered an outsider of the local communities. Likewise, the participants in this study exhibited a lack of trust for the instructors who originated from outside of the region. They considered these outsiders to be less concerned about them and considered them to be more arrogant or rude than the faculty who were native to this region.

At its core, online attrition at this rural community college in central Appalachia could be attributed to unfulfilled students' expectations. Students enrolled in online classes with the expectations that (a) they were ready to take online classes because they had used computers in the past; (b) the classes would be convenient and easier to complete than traditional classes; (c) they would be able to continue to manage their

personal obligations while taking classes; (d) there would be other class options; (e) the classes would be well-designed and engaging; (f) their experience would be similar to classes held in a traditional setting; and, (g) their instructors would be professional, responsive, supportive, and available to them as needed. Unfortunately, the participants' experiences in online classes did not meet these expectations. As a result, the participants became overwhelmed and frustrated with themselves, their instructors and the college. This ultimately led to the participants' lack of success in their online classes.

Summary

This chapter outlined findings from the survey, focus group and interview data gathered to understand the experiences of rural community college students and the factors that result in their online attrition. Although each participant's experience was unique, the collective data revealed that the study's participants were motivated to take online classes as a result of their personal obligations or a lack of alternative class options. Yet, what the participants experienced in their online classes was not what they expected. While much of this was the result of their own misconception of online classes, other factors included a lack of adequate instructional presence, poorly designed classes, and a general feeling that the instructors were not concerned with the participants' success. How their experiences evolved were not only influenced by what they experienced, but also by the social and cultural values of the region.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Research Plan

To gain an understanding of the experiences of community college students in rural Appalachia who have withdrawn from or were unsuccessful in an online class, a phenomenological study was conducted. This method has been described as a process of listening to individuals to determine what their experience was in relation to a particular aspect of their lives (Moustakas, 1994). Specifically, this research method studies everyday experiences and attempts to understand individual perceptions free from any preconceived thoughts of the investigator (Moustakas, 1994).

The framework of a transcendental phenomenological study supports the process of identifying commonalities among the experiences of different participants by relying on the actual words of the research subjects (Cohen, 2001; Hein & Austin, 2001). This investigation included the use of surveys, focus group sessions, and individual interviews with students who met the sampling criteria. This triangulated approach to gather information provided a broad range of data for a more complete understanding of the phenomenon.

The survey administered included a series of five open-ended questions, whereas the focus group and interview sessions promoted a conversational atmosphere wherein the study participants spoke freely about their online experiences. Utilizing a triangulated approach to gather data enhanced the confidence of the research findings (Creswell, 2007).

Moustakas' (1994) process of analysis was used to identify themes or commonalities among the data collected, or the meaning of what the participants relayed

during the research process. After setting aside any preconceived ideas in relation to this phenomenon, the patterns, common words, phrases, events, and descriptions reported by the participants were identified and clustered into units or themes.

To strengthen the reliability of this phase, a team approach was utilized to read and document key words and phrases within the responses. The team was comprised of the investigator and two to four members of the Student Success Committee at the target institution who had received training in qualitative data analysis. Based upon Moustakas' (1994) process for conducting a phenomenological study, the team reviewed the data individually and then met to review responses and code themes and subthemes. Additional readings were completed until a consensus of key terms and major themes was achieved. The process incorporated to complete this study allowed for synthesis and interpretation of the experiences reported by students who had been unsuccessful in online classes at the target institution (Moustakas, 1994).

Summary of the Findings

This phenomenological study sought to understand the experiences of online community college students in rural Appalachia. Using a triangulated approach, the study was designed to identify commonalities among the experiences of several different participants by relying on the actual words of the research subjects. Therefore, it was necessary to obtain the participants' first-hand perspectives on factors they attributed to their attrition or poor performance in online classes. Fifty-four students provided input via an online survey, with 31 of those participating in an individual interview session. Twenty-nine of the 31 also participated in one of four focus group sessions.

Thoughts and opinions provided by the participants resulted in an understanding of why students in rural Appalachia chose an online community college class instead of a

face-to-face option, and what occurred when they failed to succeed in that class. There were three prevailing reasons why students chose to take an online class: (a) personal obligations, such as work and family responsibilities; (b) a lack of available equivalent face-to-face course offerings; and (c) a lack of personal resources.

Fifty-eight percent ($n=18$) of the interview participants reported they were excited about taking an online class when they first enrolled. Seventy-one percent ($n=22$) felt they were prepared for the experience, but found that their perceptions of online classes were not accurate. They reported being unaware of the amount of time or work required in an online class and expected it to be similar to that of an in-person learning experience. Those who were hesitant to take an online class ($n=13$) felt that their concerns were warranted and the experience only served to reinforce their preference of in-person classes. Eighty-one percent ($n=25$) of the interview participants reported that their online class experience did not meet their expectations.

Participants were asked to identify the factors they attributed to their unsuccessful online classes. The responses were among the most descriptive provided, with the greatest number falling into the category of a lack of instructional presence and interaction. Additional problems noted were the participants' misconception of online classes, their personal obligations and time management issues. A number of the participants also attributed their lack of success to the poor design of their online classes. Technology problems and self-motivation were also considered contributing factors by two of the participants.

The participants' emotional responses to their unsuccessful online experience ranged from disappointment or defeat to humiliation and anger. Many reported that their experiences were so stressful that they dropped out or stopped participating in their

classes well before the end of the semester.

Fifty-eight percent ($n=18$) of the participants reported that the experience had not had an impact on their overall educational goals, while another 32% indicated there had been a negative effect. Eight of the 10 participants reporting a negative consequence indicated that it would take them longer to complete their program of study. Three of the participants reported they were not sure if there had been an effect. Of the 29 participants who took part in all aspects of data collection, 27.6% indicated they felt that online classes were still a good option for them.

Having a strong social support system was important to the participants. During the individual interview sessions, 90% ($n=28$) of the participants felt that their family was very supportive of their educational goals, while 10% ($n=3$) felt they had no support system in place. The participants wanted to be considered as role models to their children, noting that they felt it was important for their children to see college as a possibility for them.

A number of conversations among the participants in the focus group sessions referred to the expectations and learning styles of people “in this area,” referring to rural Appalachia. There was an overall consensus from the focus group participants that residents in this region have an independent nature and that it more than likely influenced their hesitancy to seek assistance. While the majority indicated that they would ask for help if they felt it were needed, very few of the participants sought academic help during their courses. Of those who asked for assistance from their instructors, the majority felt that their requests were not answered in a helpful or timely manner.

Discussion

This phenomenological study was designed to add to the body of knowledge

relating to online attrition, specifically from the perspective of community college students living in rural Appalachia. While some of the findings are consistent with existing literature, the participants' personal descriptions of their unsuccessful experiences brought several problems experienced by rural online students to the forefront.

Before I could understand what it was like to fail to succeed in an online class, it was important to first determine why students chose to take classes in this format. I learned that there were three prevailing reasons among the participating group: (a) personal, familial and vocational responsibilities, (b) a lack of alternative class options, and (c) a lack of personal resources.

Personal, familial and vocational responsibilities. A factor found within the literature to contribute to the growth of online classes was the convenience of this mode of instruction for individuals with personal and professional obligations (Eller et al., 1998; Patterson & McFadden, 2009). As reported by 31.48% of the 54 survey participants, personal obligations such as work and family issues were their primary reasons for choosing online classes at the target institution. The circumstances reported were unique to each of the 17 participants, including irregular work hours, issues with child and elder care, as well as personal and family health issues. The data gleaned from the focus group sessions and individual interviews further substantiated work and family obligations as the primary reasons for taking online classes. While this was not new information, it was evident that the participants felt that online classes were the only way they could manage to take care of their responsibilities and still attend college classes. As noted by Cooper (2010), adult students generally benefit from online classes because of their work schedules, childcare and financial constraints. After learning about some of

the participants' personal lives, the fact that they were attempting to attend college at all was remarkable. The depressed economic conditions of this rural Appalachian region contributed to their circumstances (ARC, 2011).

Single mothers and fathers were juggling their children's schedules and trying to "make ends meet" by working as many hours as they could. Other participants were laid off from their jobs and were hoping that taking college classes would help them find new employment with good wages. One young mother talked about how important college was for her and how she had hoped it would change her children's lives. She was a single mother of three children and was attempting to gain admission to the Registered Nursing program by completing the prerequisite classes online. She worked a full-time job during the day, had a second job where she worked in an on-call position, and had a son with Crohn's disease who often needed special help. She was obviously worried about her children's future more than her own, noting that she wanted her children to see that going to college was possible for "people like them."

In a region where only 35% of high school graduates pursue a college education, compared to the national average of 63.3%, this mother's message to her children was very heartfelt and needed (ARC, 2011; Hu, 2003). Unfortunately, her failure to succeed in the online prerequisite classes may prevent her from accomplishing her goals. Not only does this affect her personally, but also her children and their futures. This student was not the only participant in the study with these types of dreams. Unfortunately, she was also not the only one with these types of problems.

Lack of alternative class options. The second most reported reason for choosing online classes by this study's participants had not been an identified factor in my review of the literature. Sixteen of the 54 survey participants, or 29.63%, chose online classes

because there were no traditional class options available for the particular courses they needed in order to complete their degree plan at the research site. The importance of knowing this is that 13 of those 16 participants reported feeling uncomfortable or apprehensive about enrolling in online classes and would have preferred a traditional class if it had been available. Their hesitancy to take online classes may have contributed to their lack of success.

Yukselturk and Bulut (2007) noted that students who were confident in their abilities were more likely to persist in an online class environment. In effect, these students were at a disadvantage in online classes even before they began. A number of negative experiences described by the participants only served to exacerbate their lack of confidence and reduce the likelihood of their continuing to take classes in an online environment. Without the availability of traditional classes, the participants felt that their chances of graduating were greatly reduced.

Lack of personal resources. Because of the region's topography, residents of rural Appalachia are dispersed across a wide geographical area with long commutes to a college campus (Eller et al, 1998). While this was once thought to be the principal reason for the low level of educational attainment in this region, the advent of the Internet and subsequent high-speed access provided the infrastructure to change this demographic (Stenberg et al., 2009). In an attempt to provide access to students in remote locations, community colleges, including the target institution, were among the first to use Internet technology to offer online classes (Baldwin, 1996). Even though online enrollment has increased community college enrollment in this region, the number of college graduates has not improved (Patterson & McFadden, 2009; VCCS, 2011). In fact, the number of college graduates in rural Appalachia 25 years of age and older averages only 13.2%,

which is well below the national average of 24.4% (ARC, 2011).

Contrary to earlier beliefs, this study revealed that transportation was not the most significant concern or reason why students chose to take online classes. Of the 54 survey participants, only 7, (13%), attributed their choice of online classes to the costs of transportation and/or the length of time or distance of travel to the campus. The cost of gas was mentioned by each of the seven participants, indicating that they did not have the financial means or personal resources to travel to the campus on a regular basis. Two of the seven lived in the outermost areas of the college's service region, with a one-way commute of an hour and a half to campus while the remaining five had more than a 45-minute drive one-way. Considering their other personal obligations and their financial means, devoting up to three hours of their time to driving was not a feasible option for these students.

Determining why students choose to take online classes provided a foundation to fully comprehend the online experiences of unsuccessful students. In order to better understand the progression of their experiences, I sought to learn what the participants expected from online classes, what actually occurred during their classes, the social and cultural aspects of their experiences, and how they felt about their experiences when their classes were completed.

Lack of awareness and unexpected experiences. Colleges and universities have advertised online classes in a manner suggesting that they are more flexible than traditional classes because the coursework can be done at any time of the day or night. Advertisements also suggest that the same quality of instruction provided in a classroom will be delivered online (Lewis, 2005). Depictions of students in their pajamas while taking classes have been common. This perceived convenience factor has led many

students to have the misconception that online classes are easier than their traditional counterparts (Denison, 2012). The results of this study confirmed that misconception could lead to problems for the students who have no other frame of reference in regard to online classes.

Twenty-two of the 31 (71%) interview participants within this study indicated that their online classes were not what they expected them to be. Participants who chose to take online classes because of other personal obligations originally perceived online classes as more convenient and were excited to have the opportunity to attend college in this manner. Those who enrolled in online classes because they had no other options available expected them to be similar to in-person classes, while participants who lacked the personal resources to cover transportation costs perceived online classes to be more economical and convenient.

As described by the research participants, their original perceptions were not completely accurate. The 14 participants who had other obligations realized that having classes available 24 hours a day did not make them easier or without deadlines. Meeting their deadlines often meant that they had to forego family obligations or reduce the amount of time for sleep. In the words of one participant, “it wasn’t supposed to be that way.” Participants reported that they expected their online classes to be similar to an in-person learning experience where they would receive lecture and instructions on a topic, have some type of assignment related to that, and then be able to apply what they learned in some way. Because the class requirements were not what they expected, the participants had problems managing their time and became frustrated. Several admittedly procrastinated and missed deadlines, ultimately resulting in their unsuccessful grades.

With no other traditional class options available, 12 of the participants who

needed a particular class for their degree plan were left with little choice but to take an online class. Since none of this group had prior experience in an online class, their expectations were based upon advertised characteristics and their perception that “everybody is taking them.” This group was apprehensive about online classes from the beginning, but thought they would be successful. The problems they experienced left them feeling incapable and frustrated, reinforcing their preferences for in-person classes.

The opinions of those who chose online classes because of transportation costs and travel time were less affected by their unsuccessful experiences than their peers participating in this study. Although they were unhappy with their poor grades, the seven participants in this group indicated that the costs of driving to campus had more of an influence on their class selections than the possibility of having a bad experience. Online classes would continue to be the choice of these students unless off-campus classes were offered closer to their homes.

Experiences. Although the participants’ opinions may have been tainted by the final outcomes in their classes, their experiences resulted in negative feelings about their instructors and online classes in general. Fifteen of the 54 survey participants described their experience as “the worst class ever,” or in a variety of other negative terms such as “horrible,” or “a nightmare.” The focus group and interview sessions provided an opportunity to find out why their opinions were so negative. Of the 29 focus group participants, 21 were left with a negative impression, while 22 of the 31 interview participants indicated that their opinions of online classes changed in a negative way as a result of their experience. The participants’ complaints revolved around their interaction experiences with their online faculty.

The literature has established that online students need interaction with their

instructors to be successful. According to the 2012 *ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology*, students want interaction from their instructors and need to feel they have their support (Dahlstrom, 2012). This report noted that the most common method of communication preferred by the students was email. However, Fisher (2010) noted that online students reported they were less likely to interact with faculty than their counterparts in traditional classes. The findings of this study were consistent with prior research reinforcing that students need interaction with their instructors but are less likely to get it in an online class (Lear et al., 2010). This important finding supports the position of Dennen (2007) and McClure (2008) who suggested the role of the instructor in online classes is key to the level of the students' participation and ultimately their success.

As noted by Garrison et al (2001), effective online education requires teaching presence from three aspects: (a) the design of the online class, (b) the facilitation of the class, and (c) the direction of cognitive and social processes. Earlier works of Anderson (1979) also noted that the more an instructor is considered approachable and available to students, the more likely a student is to have a positive learning experience. Anderson referred to this as teacher immediacy, indicating that immediacy exists when teachers are available to the students and make them feel comfortable with their class environment and course content.

The works of Anderson (1979), Dennen (2007), Garrison et al (2001) and McClure (2008) were upheld by this study. A lack of adequate instructional presence and interaction with instructors was perceived by 87% of the participants. They reported a lack of communication as well as little, if any, interaction within their online classes. Delayed responses or unanswered emails resulted in multiple problems for the students,

including their inability to complete assignments that were unclear. While technology was available to assist the instructor with the interaction needed by the students, the human factor involved was the problem, resulting in a lack of both instructional presence and immediacy.

Participants overwhelmingly felt that having contact with their faculty was important. As explained by Boettcher and Conrad (2010), effectively communicating with students ensures that students do not feel abandoned in an online course. Effective communications through frequent use of announcements, email and other forums would indicate to students that their instructors are available and care about their online experiences. However, this was found to be lacking by the study's participants.

It was surprising to learn from the data that there were some online classes being taught at the College with no opportunities for interaction among the students. Bean and Metzner (1985) suggested that social aspects were less important to the older or nontraditional student population; however, the findings of this study do not support Bean and Metzner's model. For example, the participants, who were all considered nontraditional, complained that tools such as the discussion board and other interactive links were not made available to them within the Blackboard™ course management system in several of the online math courses. More than one participant compared a particular class to a correspondence course because the homework assignments had to be mailed or delivered to the instructor instead of the students having the option to submit them online.

While Hacifazlioglu et al. (n.d.), noted that some instructors are reluctant to embrace the tools available to them in online course management systems, Gentry et al. (2008) reported that their reluctance could be the result of faculty lacking the required

skills to use the tools effectively. Regardless of whether the lack of interaction was the faculty's reluctance to use the tools within the course management system, or simply their lack of skills, the participants did not like feeling as if they were "on their own."

Social and cultural aspects. Socio-cultural values and traditions, as well as physical and geographical location, can play a significant role in the educational systems of a region (Al-Hunaiyyan et al., 2008). Merriam and Mohamad (2000) noted that the shared beliefs and values of a group of individuals in a geographic location could impact their view of learning activities. As indicated by the literature, residents of rural Appalachia have historically had an independent nature with an unwillingness to accept influences from mainstream America (Schwartz, 2004; Weller, 1965). Loyalty to family and an inherent sense of responsibility for extended family have also influenced the lives of rural Appalachians. As noted by Russ (2010), rural Appalachia stands apart from as a unique cultural identity because of their dialect and communication styles, their distrust of outsiders, their social hierarchy, their loyalty to family and their attachment to the area (Russ, 2010). The results of this study indicate that familial connections, personal independence and a general distrust of outsiders are values that impact the educational experiences of students in this region.

Their distrust of outsiders was obvious within the data. The participants' views of faculty native to this region were different from their views of those who were new to the region. Their overall perception was that "outsider" faculty treated their students as if they were "beneath them" and did not care about their students' wellbeing or success. It was interesting to note that those who had previously resided within other parts of the state or within a few hours drive of the region were still considered "outsiders." The participants considered non-native faculty as less approachable, uncaring and typically

rude. This, combined with their needs to be self-reliant, resulted in their hesitancy to seek assistance when it was needed in their online classes.

While the majority indicated that they would ask for help if it were needed, 25 of the 31 interview participants did not seek tutoring assistance or academic counseling during their unsuccessful online class attempt. The reasons given for not seeking help were vague, yet there was an overall sense that the participants' pride was a large factor. In the words of more than one participant, "asking for help is just not something I do." Yet, when they asked their instructors for help, they expected a prompt response.

Because several of the participants in this study did not receive timely responses to questions asked of their instructors, and there was a general sense that their instructors were not available to the students, there was an indication that participants transferred that expected standard to other areas of the college. In other words, they felt that asking for help from someone other than their instructor would probably be a waste of time. This feeling was not prevalent among all of the participants but was inferred by participants in the first focus group session and several others during the interview sessions.

Another social and cultural aspect identified by the participants in this study revolved around the importance of their families. Loyalty to family and an inherent sense of responsibility for extended family have long been a part of rural Appalachian culture (Crissman, 1989). There were references throughout the data suggesting that the underlying reason the participants were in college at all was to improve the lives of their families. There were multiple comments by participants who wanted their children to see them as role models, noting that they wanted their children to know that college was a option for "people like them."

In this family-centered culture, education is respected, but the needs of the family are considered primary (Russ, 2010). As noted by Russ and confirmed by this study, if a family member is attending school and foregoing work as a result of their classes, the pursuit of an education will more than likely be deferred if the family needs additional financial or care and support from that person. Even though their sense of responsibility to their family prompted them to attend college, those responsibilities often led to their lack of success in online classes. Overall, most of the participants felt as if they had disappointed those who were depending on them when they dropped out or failed their classes. Because of their sense of familial responsibility, they simply chose to abandon their personal goals in order to take care of those they loved.

Emotional outcomes. The emotional aspects of online learning have been the focus of a number of studies (Ingleton, 1995; O'Regan, 2003; Schaller, Allison-Bunnell, Borun, and Chambers, 2002). A qualitative study by O'Regan (2003) discovered that online students identified a full-range of emotions experienced by students who were enrolled in an online class, including frustration, fear, embarrassment, enthusiasm, excitement and pride. Enthusiasm and excitement were typical of students who were eager to experience online classes and were doing well, while students who found their online classes hard to navigate expressed emotions of stress, frustration, confusion and anxiety. Others were embarrassed by their inability to do well in their classes or felt proud when they were successful.

The results of this study corroborated O'Regan's (2003) findings. Fifty-eight percent of the participants reported feelings of confidence and excitement about taking an online class before they began, while 42% reported feeling apprehensive, using descriptors such as "uncertain," "nervous" or "hesitant." Unfortunately, over the term of

their online enrollment, participants experienced a number of negative emotions, including stress, frustration, sadness, anger, and disappointment.

When they fell behind in their work, participants reported feeling humiliated because they felt that others in the class or their instructors would think they were incapable of doing well. Their pride was hurt, noting that not completing their online classes made them feel “stupid.” They were also afraid of disappointing their families. Many participants were frustrated with their instructors and certain aspects of their classes, particularly the classes with unclear instructions or a perceived lack of organization.

Summarily, there was an overall sense of self-defeat among the participants who had an unsuccessful online experience. Those with little confidence in themselves were more likely to give in to self-defeat, while those who attributed their problems to unhelpful instructors or disorganized classes expressed feelings of anger toward their instructors and/or the College. Participants who experienced personal problems that contributed to their lack of success were typically disappointed and took more responsibility for their lack of success. They were also less likely to feel frustrated or angry about their experiences. As noted by O’Regan (2003) and confirmed by this study, “emotions play a critical role in the teaching/learning process” (p. 90).

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical models of attrition developed by Tinto (1975) and Bean and Metzner (1985) served as the framework of this study. As indicated by Tinto’s (1975) Student Integration Model, students who feel connected, both socially and academically, to their college are more likely to persist to completion of their educational program. Although Tinto’s model was based on traditional students in a residential setting, the

results of this study indicate that social and academic integration are likewise important to community college students in an online setting.

Noting the significant differences in the population served by community colleges and residential universities, I was concerned that Tinto's (1975) model alone was not sufficient to review the problem of attrition in online classes at a rural community college. Therefore, Bean and Metzner's Conceptual Model of Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Attrition was used to further support the structure of this study. This model identified four factors that predicted persistence: (a) academic variables such as the availability of courses and the adequacy of students' study skills; (b) students' backgrounds in relation to their age, educational goals, ethnicity, and prior academic grade performance; (c) academic and psychological outcomes; and (d) environmental variables such as work and family responsibilities, financial constraints, and encouragement.

According to Bean and Metzner (1985), the decisions of nontraditional students to leave college were generally attributed to socioeconomic and external factors (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Integrating the environmental factors identified by Bean and Metzner (1985) with Tinto's (1975) social and academic integration constructs provided a stronger model to understand the phenomenon of online attrition in a rural setting. Extending these models by adding the construct of regional culture ensured that factors contributing to the success of online students in rural Appalachia were considered.

Social Integration

Theorist Tinto (1975) considered social integration an important factor in a student's likelihood of completing college. Bean and Metzner (1985) agreed that environmental factors such as campus involvement, communication with peers and

faculty, and students' abilities to adapt to the routine of being college students, had an effect on attrition. Bean and Metzner (1985) also surmised that the backgrounds of students, their goals and intentions, as well as their satisfaction and commitment levels, all had an impact on college completion rates.

An analysis of this study's data indicated that factors contributing to the participants' lack of success or attrition in online classes related to the social integration model crafted by Tinto (1975). The most common factor reported by the participants was a lack of instructional presence and interaction, including unanswered email communications, and untimely responses. A lack of communication with peers was also reported with only a few indicating their participation in discussion board activities or other interactive assignments.

Environmental factors noted by Bean and Metzner (1985) were likewise indicated within the data. As nontraditional community college students, the participants faced socioeconomic problems that are less common for traditional students. Managing work schedules and family obligations caused their experiences to be more stressful. While it was the intention of the participants to complete their online classes successfully, and most felt that they were prepared to do so, the vast majority reported that their experiences were not what they expected. Their misconception of online classes and lack of guidance may have had an impact on their ability to adapt to this type of learning environment.

The reported lack of interaction among the faculty and students and the participants' dissatisfaction with their online classes confirmed Tinto's theory that students who frequently interact with their faculty are more likely to be satisfied with their college experience. Dennen (2007) indicated that the interaction between students

and faculty becomes more difficult in online classes because online and traditional learning require different pedagogical strategies. Yet, many of the participants felt they were on their own and that their instructors were not actively involved in the class. McClure (2008) referred to this as an instructor's presence, noting that an instructor's activity within an online class can generally motivate student participation.

Motivation

A review of the literature revealed that motivation plays a key role in whether a student persists in college. Students who are intrinsically motivated tend to perform better in an online setting than extrinsically motivated students (Davis, 1993; Huitt, 2001; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Stewart et al., 2010). Although this study did not seek to determine whether the participants were motivated intrinsically or extrinsically by nature, two of the participants revealed that a lack of motivation played a key role in their unsuccessful online class attempt.

As explained by Covington and Mueller (2001), having the support, encouragement, enthusiasm, and commitment from an instructor can make a difference for students who require extrinsic motivation. Even though only two participants referred to motivation as a problem, the majority of participants indicated that a lack of instructional support, or what could be deduced as a lack of extrinsic motivation, was a factor in their lack of success.

College Readiness

Online attrition levels have been associated with the technology readiness level of students entering college. A review of the literature also suggests that many freshman students are unprepared for the academic rigor required in college level classes (ACT, 2010; Elliott et al., 2008). Although I did not review the college readiness scores of the

participants, their statements indicated that the majority felt prepared for an online class, particularly from a technology standpoint. Unfortunately, their experiences suggest that most were not adequately prepared for the amount of time and rigor required in an online class. Many of the participants revealed that their perception of online classes was not accurate and the classes were not what they expected.

Cultural Variables

As noted by Fellenz and Conti (1989), an example of one cultural identity within the United States is the “Appalachian poor” (p. 16). While homogeneous in nature, yet considered different from “the outsiders,” the region’s cultural identity has long influenced the values of the region’s population and particularly how residents interact with one another.

Considering Tinto’s (1975) theory that a student’s commitment to completing his or her educational goals is directly influenced by the integration of that student’s background and the level of social and academic interaction with peers and faculty, it is important to note that culture plays a role in the way students communicate and interact with others (Fellenz & Conti, 1989). This study revealed that students in rural Appalachia have a strong sense of independence and typically do not ask for help from anyone other than their family when it is needed. Realizing that most community college students in this region are the first in their families to attempt a college education, any support received from their families is typically only for childcare or encouragement (Hand & Payne, 2008).

The data also revealed that students in rural Appalachia are less comfortable with faculty who are not native to this region. This stems from generations of Appalachians who have found their region’s natural resources and its people to be exploited by those

they consider “outsiders.” While this also supports the general thought that rural Appalachia has been unwilling to accept influences from mainstream America, the feelings have perpetuated to the point of students not connecting to faculty who could bring a variety of experiences to them (Schwartz, 2004; Weller, 1965).

Therefore, the theoretical implications of this study are noteworthy. While some have questioned the value of Tinto’s (1975) model in the community college setting, the findings of this study suggest that the Student Integration Model is applicable at this educational level (Karp et al., 2008). Integrating Tinto’s (1975) theory with that of Bean and Metzner’s (1985) model for nontraditional students creates an even stronger foundation to address the phenomenon of online attrition at the community college level. Doing so implicates the need for community colleges to develop opportunities for social and academic interaction among online students, while likewise investigating services to assist students with the environmental and external aspects of online learning.

Furthermore, there is an opportunity to advance these models by considering the cultural aspects of an institution and its service region in future studies. Adding the construct of cultural variables to the combined concepts of Tinto’s (1975) model and Bean and Metzner’s (1985) model, I learned that familial connections, personal independence and a general distrust of outsiders are values that impact the educational experiences of students in rural Appalachia.

Practical Implications

The practical implications of this phenomenological study have been based on supporting literature, as well as the words and descriptions provided by the participants in their portrayal of unsuccessfully attempting an online community college class in rural Appalachia. This study’s findings suggest that rural community college administrators

and faculty should consider a number of student concerns and comments when developing policies and procedures for the implementation and improvement of online classes.

Scheduling

Although colleges have a number of options available for the delivery of their classes, budget constraints, personnel limitations and classroom shortages often influence class scheduling more so than student preferences (Kolowich, 2010; Valentine, 2002). A 2007 report by the Sloan Consortium revealed that only 20% of their study's participants cited online delivery as their first preference, another 19% preferred a blended format, while 46% preferred courses and programs that were primarily or totally on-campus (Allen & Seaman, 2007). My findings also revealed that limiting traditional class offerings was detrimental to students who were apprehensive about taking online classes.

The primary reasons reported by the participants for choosing an online class were their personal obligations, followed closely by the lack of an equivalent traditional or in-person class. Those who were hesitant to take an online class felt forced to do so because there were no other options for that class requirement. Students expressed concerns that attempting to avoid online classes would prolong the amount of time required to complete their programs of study. Although the College's published Distance Education Philosophy states "distance education courses are intended to augment, not replace, on-campus offerings" (MYCC, 2012d, p. 7-2), the study's participants felt that many traditional classes were being replaced. My findings suggested that the College's philosophy has not been enforced and a review of scheduling practices is warranted. Alternative scheduling should be made available for classes that are only offered online, particularly those with historically low success rates.

Faculty Development

With 87% of the participants describing their unsuccessful online experience in a very negative manner, the need for improvements to distance education classes was apparent. The greatest number of participant comments related to a lack of instructional presence and interaction, followed closely by complaints about the format and organization of the classes. Many also felt that their instructors had a lack of concern for them as individuals, reporting that they often felt their instructor disregarded their personal situations that may have contributed to the late submission of assignments or need for alternative exam schedules. They felt that their instructors were not involved in the class or were otherwise unprofessional, and the students perceived a cultural difference between faculty who were native to this region and those who were not.

When asked about seeking support services from the College, there was an uncertainty among the participants about the types of assistance or support available at the College for students experiencing academic problems. According to a study by Russo-Gleicher (2013), online faculty were often unaware of the types of support services available to online students, while some who were aware of services thought that it was not their responsibility to make referrals. As a result, support information was not apparent or made available to online students.

Because the faculty at the target college did not share support services information with the students who were in danger of failing their classes, they may not have been aware of available services or simply did not share that information for other reasons. Either way, the findings of this study indicate there is a need for mandatory professional development activities for faculty who teach online classes, including topics of effective online course design, student engagement, and customer service skills,

including improved advising techniques for online students. It is further recommended that faculty orientation initiatives include an introduction to the regional values and unique cultural aspects of rural Appalachia.

Student Preparation

The majority (58%) of participants reported feeling good or confident in their abilities to perform well in an online class prior to this experience, but found their classes to be stressful and frustrating, and not what they expected. Although the participants thought they were prepared for online classes, their comments indicated that their perception of online classes was not accurate. The remaining participants were apprehensive about online classes from the beginning, indicating that they did not know what to expect or where to begin. The findings suggest that an orientation or preparatory session is needed for students who are enrolling in online classes for the first time.

This recommendation is well-supported within the literature (Nash, 2005; Wojciechowski & Palmer, 2005). In a pilot study of two online business classes, Ali and Leeds (2009) compared the retention rates of students who attended a face-to-face orientation session to those who did not. Their findings revealed that retention was significantly higher among the group who attended an in-person session, specifically 91% compared to 18% of those who did not attend. Their conclusions revealed that face-to-face sessions have a positive effect on online student success because they provided a sense of community and social support for the students. Since the lack of support was an issue discussed by the participants in this study, in-person orientations may have alleviated some of the problems leading to their lack of success in online classes in this rural setting.

Limitations and Delimitations

The findings of this research represent the experiences of students in online classes at the target institution located in rural Appalachia; however, the applicability of the results may be limited to community colleges in rural areas. The research findings may not resonate with others in associate degree granting institutions due to the target institution's distinct student and faculty demographics and its rural Appalachian setting. The degree to which the findings of the research can be applied to other locations is considered transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The unique culture of the central Appalachian region may isolate the transferability of the findings to a small segment of the community colleges located in this mountainous region.

The purposeful sampling procedure used in this study also decreases the generalizability of findings (Creswell, 2007). Although efforts were made to ensure wide representation using a maximum variant approach, limiting the number of research participants may have unintentionally precluded individuals who could have added further perspectives to the phenomenon.

In order for a study to achieve credibility, readers must have confidence in the findings. This can be accomplished through the coherence of the study's structure and triangulation of the data. Therefore, I used a three-pronged approach utilizing an electronic survey, focus groups sessions, and individual interviews to gather information from research participants to achieve triangulation. Dependability was also established by utilizing triangulation of data and the use of an inquiry audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Because of the target college's large number of unsuccessful students in online classes each year, I chose two specific delimitations for this study. The timeframe for the study was restricted to one academic year (2010-11) and I chose to limit the number of

participants in order to manage the research process in an effective and efficient manner. As recommended by Lincoln and Guba (1985), qualitative studies should include input from enough participants to achieve information saturation or redundancy within the data collected. This resulted in an overall sample of 29 students who were willing to participate in all three data collection phases of this study.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study, along with the identified limitations, suggest a number of opportunities for future research. The results of this qualitative study represent the experiences of online students at one small rural community college. The study could be replicated on a much larger scale to determine if the results resonate in other rural community colleges, or other institutions regardless of size or location, taking into consideration the cultural variables related to the target institution.

A more comprehensive study might include both qualitative and quantitative data designed to correlate student demographics and their experiences with online course success rates. Further research is also needed to determine if a correlation exists between college readiness scores and the overall success rates of online students in rural Appalachia. As indicated within this study, although participants felt prepared for an online class, particularly from a technology standpoint, their experiences proved otherwise.

The perceptions of online faculty were also left unexplored in this study. Investigating online attrition through the views of faculty would add another level of understanding to this phenomenon. It would not only be interesting to determine if faculty perceive student experiences and their online presence differently than what the participants of this study have reported, but this information would also be helpful to this

college as it works to improve the problem of online attrition in central Appalachia.

Significance of the Findings in Rural Appalachia

Why was it important to understand the experiences of unsuccessful online community college students in rural Appalachia? The literature has well established the growth of online enrollment in the United States, and particularly at the community college level (Denison, 2012). Within the past five years, community colleges in Virginia have witnessed an enrollment growth of over 63,000 in distance education (VCCS, 2013). In 2011-12, online students averaged 58% of the total enrollment at the four community colleges located in Virginia's Appalachian region (VCCS, 2013). Yet, Virginia's community colleges have reported that success rates of online students averaged 9% less than those enrolled in traditional face-to-face classes (VCCS, 2013).

Although colleges have invested significant resources in distance learning, this study revealed that increased online enrollment has not resulted in a significant increase in college graduates (Allen & Seaman, 2010; Xu & Jaggars, 2011). As Haaga reported in 2004, a large percentage of students in rural Appalachia do not complete their college education. This trend continues inasmuch as only 11% of the College's service region held a college degree in 2010, compared to 33% of the residents in the Commonwealth of Virginia (MYCC, 2012a).

Low educational attainment levels have significantly reduced the region's potential for economic development, as well as the availability of a viable workforce (Schwartz, 2004). Yet, the problem is much more personal than that for students who have attempted to improve their skill levels by enrolling in online classes. While students expect a college education to be a potentially life-changing experience, economic and political leaders in the region depend upon colleges to supply skilled workers.

With 58% of the region's community college students trying to improve their stations in life through online education, colleges have an ethical obligation to provide them a quality educational experience (VCCS, 2013). To do so would require an understanding of the online learning environment, including the factors leading to high attrition rates in online classes. What better way to understand this than to ask the students who have attempted online classes what is really happening when they fail to succeed? The challenge for this rural college is to acknowledge and address the issues that have been identified within this study.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of online community college students in rural Appalachia who do not successfully complete their classes. To discover what students have experienced in online classes, a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach was conducted. Using a triangulated approach, I identified commonalities among the experiences of the participants by relying on their descriptions of factors they attributed to their attrition or poor performance in online classes. Summarily, online attrition at this rural community college in central Appalachia could be attributed to unfulfilled students' expectations.

The study revealed that most of the participants chose to take an online class as a result of personal obligations or because no other options were available to them, and they expected to be successful. However, the majority of the participants were disappointed with their experience due to a lack of instructional presence and interaction or their own misconception of online classes. Although some of the participants will avoid online classes in the future, the majority indicated that their experiences had no effect on their educational goals.

There were a number of implications resulting from this study for college administrators and faculty to consider. Specifically, the results suggest that alternative scheduling should be investigated for classes that are only offered online, and particularly those with low success rates. A need for mandatory professional development activities for faculty who teach online classes is implied. The findings also suggest that an online orientation or preparatory session is needed for new online students.

As an administrator at the target institution, some of the findings were surprising. Although it was anticipated that there would be a few concerns related to instruction, the large number of concerns related to this was not expected. Likewise, the perceptions of those who felt that faculty had a lack of concern for students were alarming. The ontological assumption of this study stated that the realities of online class experiences were whatever the students perceived them to be (Lavery, 2003). Clearly, the administration of this rural community college in central Appalachia has some work to do to meet the expectations of its online students and thereby improve their online experiences.

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APPENDIX A
CORRESPONDENCE E-MAIL

APPENDIX A: CORRESPONDENCE E-MAIL

Survey Validation & Institutional Approval

-----Original Message-----

From: RP
Sent: Monday, July 26, 2010 8:13 AM
To: Vickie Ratliff
Subject: Re: Dissertation Help

I think the student success team is an excellent group to help with this. They are supposed to work with the QEP team anyway.

----- Original Message -----

From: Vickie Ratliff
To: RP
Sent: Sun Jul 25 21:32:20 2010
Subject: Dissertation Help

Dr. P:

In the course of research for my dissertation, I will be collecting data with the use of a survey to students who received grades of D, F or W in online classes during the 2009-2010 academic year. Within that survey, I have included two open-ended questions:

1. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of [ABC CLASS] at the College?
2. What problems or factors did you experience that contributed to your lack of success in [ABC CLASS]?

My dissertation chair has suggested that I use a team approach to interpret or code the student responses to these questions. It's my understanding from her that having a consensus of 3 reviewers strengthens the findings.

My question -- do you think the Student Success committee or a sub-committee of that group would be interested in this? It is related to our QEP, so should I talk with our QEP team about it?

I appreciate your help and guidance.

Vickie

From: SF
Sent: Monday, July 26, 2010 2:49 PM
To: Vickie Ratliff
Subject: Re: DL Survey

Sounds good. I'm interested in hearing about the next conference with your Chair.

SF, Ed.D.
Director, Planning and Community Relations
My Community College

From: Vickie Ratliff
To: SF
Sent: Mon Jul 26 14:46:25 2010
Subject: RE: DL Survey

Thanks. I agree – evaluate is probably not the best word. I have made the revision and the first question now reads:

Please provide your level of satisfaction with the following aspects of your online class experience in [ABC CLASS]: (etc.)

The only change made to 2 and 3 was to add the reference to a particular class ([ABC class]).

The survey is just one method being used to understand the online class experience from our students' perspectives. I will also be convening a focus group and individual interviews for more detailed information.

Vickie

From: SF
Sent: Monday, July 26, 2010 2:06 PM
To: Vickie Ratliff
Subject: RE: DL Survey

1. Perhaps you are not asking them evaluate, but rather to give their level of satisfaction. A subtle difference?

I can't remember if you have changed # 2 and #3. We talked about your 'coders' using items in #1 to code at least the academic reasons given in #3.

Otherwise, I think you want to keep it short and simple if these questions support your thesis questions.

From: Vickie Ratliff
Sent: Mon 7/26/2010 1:33 PM
To: Sharon Fisher
Subject: FW: DL Survey

Thanks again for taking time to talk with me about this process on Friday morning.

Per our discussion, I have revised the survey to include the following questions:

1. Please evaluate the following aspects of your online class experience in [ABC CLASS]:

- Class orientation
- Clarity of course requirements
- Relevance of course to your needs
- Interaction with the instructor
- Interaction with other students
- Assistance in using or understanding technology required
- Testing procedures
- Feedback on completed assignments

2. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of [ABC CLASS] at the College?
3. What problems or factors did you experience that contributed to your lack of success in [ABC CLASS]?

Your thoughts and approval to proceed would be appreciated.

Vickie

-----Original Message-----

From: SF
Sent: Monday, July 19, 2010 7:20 AM
To: Vickie Ratliff
Subject: RE: DL Survey

I would go with the new guiding question. You can say that all questions relate to answering your guiding questions.

As for relating to one class, we can discuss that.

-----Original Message-----

From: Vickie Ratliff
Sent: SF
Subject: DL Survey

Finally had a chance to work on this a little more. I think I'm trying to make it harder than it should be. See what you think about this:

Guiding question - #2:

2. Are students satisfied with their online class experiences at the College?

Survey "satisfaction" question:

Please evaluate the following aspects of your online class experiences:

Class orientation
Clarity of course requirements
Relevance of course to your needs
Interaction with the instructor
Interaction with other students
Assistance in using or understanding technology required
Testing procedures
Overall satisfaction with the online course

I took out the "academic" reference in both the guiding question and the survey, and added the "class orientation" as one of the aspects to be rated. Would this work or should the guiding question be more complex than that?

I've been trying to come up with a solution to your question about the student answering the survey for one particular class or all online classes. I would prefer that it be specific to their unsuccessful class experience. Couldn't I add a reference line or sentence in the letter and/or survey that indicates that it is for a specific class?

Hope you've had a good weekend!

Vickie

From: SF
Sent: Wednesday, July 14, 2010 6:34 AM
To: Vickie Ratliff
Subject: Re: DL Student Survey

I think the satisfaction questions are good/needed, just perhaps a guiding question to show relationship to your thesis. Why are they there? I also remember an issue you may have considered. If student had more than one online course, how can they be specific to each class? Are you identifying the class with unsuccessful grade?

From: Vickie Ratliff
To: SF
Sent: Tue Jul 13 17:57:29 2010
Subject: RE: DL Student Survey

Thanks!

I agree that the “overall academic quality” is vague. For one reason, if this is their only experience, they’ll not have anything to compare to as far as quality of instruction. Would it be better to have a guiding question related to the satisfaction level of students in online classes and use the remaining seven “aspects” to determine that answer?

Would an appropriate guiding question be something like: Are students satisfied with their online course experience? (Broad) Or should I have guiding questions about each of the aspects rated by the students? (Clarity, relevance, etc.)

The only reason that I included the satisfaction part was to find out what the students thought about the interaction levels, etc., to see if that could be an indicator of why they were not successful. But maybe that’s not relevant. However, the literature review suggests that there is a correlation of student satisfaction to success in online classes.

It’s been a long day – I’ll try to think through this more tonight and maybe we can talk later.

Vickie
From: SF
Sent: Tuesday, July 13, 2010 7:22 AM
To: Vickie Ratliff
Subject: RE: DL Student Survey

Vickie, sorry to take so long to respond. I have attached the survey letter; a couple of changes in red.

I think the survey is good; however, it appears of the 3 questions you state to answer from the survey, two (1 and 3) are obtained from the open-ended questions and one (2) is one question on the survey selection. This is also the one question I found possibly vague (Overall academic quality of instruction). the other questions are good, how do they directly related to the 3 questions you have posed. Perhaps your guiding questions

should reflect how these responses will contribute.

I would be glad to discuss with you.

From: Vickie Ratliff

Sent: Thursday, July 08, 2010 2:33 PM

To: SF

Subject: DL Student Survey

Thank you for talking with me about the validation of a survey for my dissertation research. Your review of the attached draft, as well as the cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey, would be appreciated. These drafts are a hard-copy version, but I hope to originally contact as many participants as possible through email, using the same questions and information provided.

Your input on the clarity of the survey would be appreciated. In order to determine if the questions are measuring the “right thing,” the following excerpt of my dissertation might be helpful. If you need more information, please let me know.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to determine why a significant percentage of online students do not successfully complete their classes at the target institution, herein referred to as “the College.” Over the last several years, enrollment in online classes has grown substantially at the College, similar to that of other institutions of higher education. During that same period of time, the retention and completion rates have not improved and in some programs have diminished substantially. Whether the decreased retention and completion rates are directly related to the increase in online enrollment is unknown, although this is anticipated.

Student attrition plagues universities offering distance education courses, inasmuch as attrition rates for classes taught through distance education are 10 – 20% higher than classes taught in a face-to-face setting (Angelino, Williams & Natvig, 2007; Park, 2007). Whether this holds true for students in a community college setting is yet to be determined. With such a large population of distance education students, it would be beneficial to determine what factors contribute to the lack of success of online students at

the College.

Guiding Questions

To determine what leads to the lack of success of online students within a community college setting, the following questions will be used to guide this research project:

1. Why do students choose to enroll in online classes at the target school?
2. Does the quality of instruction meet the expectations of students enrolled in online classes at the College?
3. Of the students receiving grades of D, F or W in online classes at the College, what factors do the students attribute to their lack of success?
4. Do students who were unsuccessful in an online class at the college re-enroll in classes in the subsequent term? If so, what percentage returns to online classes versus a traditional delivery format?

I hope to obtain the answer to #4 from PeopleSoft, so this question is not addressed in the survey. I appreciate your guidance!

Vickie

Consent to Conduct Study:

From: President
Sent: Friday, August 07, 2009 9:42 AM
To: Vickie Ratliff
Cc:
Subject: RE: Request for Dissertation Consent

This research could serve MYCC well. I approve.

TS, President

From: Vickie Ratliff
Sent: Friday, August 07, 2009 9:38 AM
To: TS

Subject: Request for Dissertation Consent

Dr. S:

During the past few weeks, I have completed the course work (48 cr. hrs.) required in pursuit of an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from Liberty University. My concentration area is in higher education administration. The next step requires me to submit a dissertation proposal by September 15, followed by comprehensive exams in early October.

As you know, I have a strong interest in distance education and the success rates of our students in online classes. In particular, I am concerned with the retention rate that we are experiencing in distance education. As a result, I would like to propose a qualitative study using a phenomenological approach to determine why students in online classes withdraw (or are administratively withdrawn), and what factors lead to their lack of persistence in online classes in a community college setting. Although the study will be conducted and reported upon using a pseudonym, I would like your permission or consent to conduct this study at MYCC, utilizing data available from our PeopleSoft system to identify potential research participants.

During the Fall 2008 and Spring 2009 terms, there were over 400 students who either dropped an online class or were administratively withdrawn. In my opinion, if there are issues identified by this study that can be addressed and/or corrected by the College, the efforts will be beneficial. The topic also complements the efforts of our QEP. My plans are to entitle the study "Online Attrition in a Community College Setting: A Phenomenological Approach." I will use a triangulated process involving the use of surveys, focus groups and interviews with students who attempted online classes during the 2009-10 academic year but withdrew from a class or classes prior to completion.

Your consideration and consent of this proposal would be appreciated.

Vickie

APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVAL OF TARGET INSTITUTION

APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL OF TARGET INSTITUTION



Mountain Empire Community College

3441 Mountain Empire Road
Big Stone Gap, Virginia 24219

September 1, 2011

Victoria Ratliff, Dean
MECC Business & Information Technology Division
PT147

Re: MECC IRB Review # 2011-001 – Online Experiences in Rural Appalachia
IRB Approval – Expiration Date: August 15, 2012

Dear Vickie,

This letter serves as your official notice that the MECC Institutional Review Board has **approved** your research proposal, entitled “Online Experiences in Rural Appalachia,” **contingent upon the following criteria:**

1. submission of updated documentation of human subjects protection training to the IRB Manager; and
2. submission of a copy of the electronic correspondence that will be distributed to potential survey participants, in order to document informed consent;

Detailed instructions on completing the online human subject protection course were provided to you in previous correspondence. If you need me to re-send that information, let me know.

MECC IRB approvals are effective for one year. Therefore, this approval will expire on August 15, 2012. If you expect for any part of your research, including data analysis, to continue beyond this date, you will need to apply for a renewal review by June 15, 2012.

Please note that any changes in the purpose or design of this project may have an impact on the criteria upon which this determination was made, and may require additional review by the IRB. If changes in the purpose or design of this project become necessary, please contact me to discuss possible impacts on the project’s IRB compliance status.

Congratulations on the approval of your research. Please let us know if we can be of further assistance.

Sincerely,

Nikki Morrison
MECC IRB Manager

276-523-7493 Virginia Relay Users Dial 711

APPENDIX C
IRB CORRESPONDENCE

APPENDIX C: IRB CORRESPONDENCE

From: IRB, IRB [mailto:IRB@liberty.edu]
Sent: Wednesday, August 31, 2011 10:34 AM
To: Vickie Ratliff
Cc: Shoemaker, Judy; IRB, IRB
Subject: RE: IRB Question

Good Morning Vickie,

I have talked with our Chair about your research and data collection methods, and he thinks the safeguards you have in place to exclude students from your area is an important one. With regard to students from other areas, you will just need to make sure you provide them assurances, both verbally and on the consent document, that their participation or lack thereof will not penalize their status at the college. It seems you are already sensitive to this and I am certain participants will sense your genuine concern to learn more about students who have not completed their courses.

We hope this helps as you move forward with your research study, and appreciate the time you are taking to ensure ethical safeguards are in place for it! If you have any additional questions, please feel free to email us.

Sincerely,

Tiffany Hartin, M.A.
Institutional Review Board Coordinator
The Graduate School

Fax: 434-522-0506

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY
40 Years of Training Champions for Christ: 1971-2011

From: Vickie Ratliff [mailto:VRatliff@me.vccs.edu]
Sent: Friday, August 26, 2011 10:12 AM
To: IRB, IRB; Ratliff, Victoria
Cc: Judy Shoemaker; Shoemaker, Judy
Subject: RE: IRB Question

Good morning!

Thank you for your prompt reply. The process used to determine who could be potential participants will be to run a query from our SIS system with specified parameters. Our IR department can develop the query so that it will include only students with a grade of D, F or W in an online class during the study timeframe, but will not indicate to me in the report what grade was earned by the individual students.

I imagine that the report would need to include the students' ID, program of study and contact information. Otherwise I would have to access the SIS system by their ID number to determine contact information and would then have access to all of their grades. I feel that would be both

time consuming and unnecessary. The program of study information is necessary to ensure that no one is chosen or contacted who is enrolled in a program under the Business & IT Division.

I welcome and appreciate any advice or suggestions you may have to ensure that there are no ethical concerns.

Vickie

Victoria Ratliff, CPC
Dean, Business & Information Technology Division
My Community College
3441 My Road
Big Stone Gap, VA 24219
(276) 523-6434

From: IRB, IRB [<mailto:IRB@liberty.edu>]
Sent: Friday, August 26, 2011 9:45 AM
To: Ratliff, Victoria
Cc: Vickie Ratliff; Judy Shoemaker; Shoemaker, Judy; IRB, IRB
Subject: Re: IRB Question

Good Morning Vickie,

Thank you for your email and for your careful attention to the ethical nature of your study. I would be happy to discuss this with our chair and email you back next week with more information on conflict of interest issues pertaining to your study. Do you plan to have personally identifiable information linked to the scores or will you be collecting the grades anonymously? This would certainly impact the planning of your interactions with students as they would probably be more comfortable knowing you are unaware of their actual grade qualifying them as someone who "unsuccessfully completed a course."

We look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,

Tiffany Hartin, M.A.
Institutional Review Board Coordinator
The Graduate School

Fax: 434-522-0506

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

40 Years of Training Champions for Christ: 1971-2011

From: "Ratliff, Victoria" <vratliff@liberty.edu>
Date: Thu, 25 Aug 2011 18:11:24 -0400
To: Tiffany Hartin <irb@liberty.edu>
Cc: "vratliff@me.vccs.edu" <vratliff@me.vccs.edu>, Judy Shoemaker <drjshoemaker@verizon.net>, "Shoemaker, Judy" <jshoemaker@liberty.edu>
Subject: IRB Question

Good afternoon!

As a student in the Ed.D. program at Liberty University, I am currently in the final development stage of my proposal. My committee has suggested that I contact the IRB office for advice relating to the selection of research participants.

My proposal is to conduct a phenomenological study to discover why a significant percentage of online community college students living in rural Appalachia fail to successfully complete their classes. I will be conducting the study using a triangulated approach with the use of surveys, focus groups and interviews.

As the Dean of Business & Information Technology at the target college, I plan to exclude any students who are or were enrolled in programs within my Division. Utilizing a purposeful sampling technique, I plan to approach students from other areas of the college who have earned an unsuccessful grade of D, F or W in an online class during the 2010-11 academic year to seek their voluntary participation in the study.

My intent is to avoid any potential conflict of interest or ethical concerns by eliminating any students who could come before me with a grade issue or other academic concern. My role as Dean is limited to the Business & IT Division. Therefore, my question: Is the exclusion of all students enrolled within a program under the Business & IT Division sufficient? Do you foresee any problem with me studying this issue through the experiences of students who were enrolled in online classes in other program areas of the college, i.e. health sciences, liberal arts, etc.?

Your advice and guidance will be appreciated.

Vickie

Victoria Ratliff, CPC
Dean, Business & Information Technology Division
My Community College
3441 My Road
Big Stone Gap, VA 24219
(276) 523-6434

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT INVITATIONS AND STUDENT SURVEY

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INVITATION AND STUDENT SURVEY

DRAFT

Victoria Ratliff
3441 Mountain Empire Road
Big Stone Gap, VA 24219
(276) 523-6434
vratliff@me.vccs.edu

(Date)

Student
Address
City, State Zip

Dear Student:

As a recent student in [ABC CLASS] at “the College,” I am inviting you to participate in a research project investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to any unsuccessful attempt to complete an online class. I have enclosed a short survey and encourage you to respond to the questions by returning the completed form in the postage-paid return envelope provided. Your responses will help the College in its efforts to improve opportunities for online students. Completing the form should take only a few minutes of your time.

There are no risks to you if you decide to participate in this survey and I guarantee that your responses will not be identified with you personally. All responses will remain in my confidence, and your name or identification information will not be attached to any comments or reports. Therefore, please do not include your name on the questionnaire.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the questionnaire or about being in this study, you may contact me at 276-523-6434 or vratliff@me.vccs.edu. The Institutional Review Board of the College has authorized this study. If you have any concerns about the validity of this investigation, please feel free to contact the Institutional Research Department of the college at (276) 523-7480.

I look forward to receiving your response!

Sincerely,

Victoria Ratliff

Enclosure

Distance Learning Student Survey

Please take a few minutes to complete this form. The purpose of this brief survey is to develop a list of common experiences of students in online classes at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. You will not be asked any information that will identify you, and all information obtained will be used for the sole purpose of this research.

Your input is important to this research. Please thoughtfully answer the following questions to provide a better understanding of your personal experiences in [ABC CLASS] at the College.
1. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of [ABC CLASS] at the College?
2. How would you describe your experience in this online class?
3. What problems did you experience that contributed to your lack of success in [ABC CLASS]?
4. How has your opinion of online classes changed as a result of this experience?
5. How did your experience in [ABC CLASS] make you feel?

Your participation in this research project is appreciated.

UPIN

Participant Invitation by E-Mail

Vickie Ratliff

DRAFT

To: ABC Student
Subject: Invitation to Participate in Research Study

Dear Student:

As a recent student in [ABC CLASS] at “the College,” I am inviting you to participate in a research project investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to any unsuccessful attempt to complete an online class. Your participation in this study will help the College in its efforts to improve opportunities for online students. The online survey consists of five questions and should take only a few minutes of your time. Upon completion of the survey, you will also be given an opportunity to participate in a focus group and individual interview session at a later date.

There are no risks to you if you decide to participate in this survey and I guarantee that your responses will not be identified with you personally. All responses will remain in my confidence, and your name or identification information will not be attached to any comments or reports. Therefore, please do not include your name in any of the responses. Participation in this research is entirely voluntary, involves no risk beyond experiences you encounter in everyday life, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without consequence.

If you have any questions or concerns about completing the survey or about being in this study, you may contact me at 276-523-6434 or vratliff@me.vccs.edu. The Institutional Review Board of the College has authorized this study. If you have any concerns about the validity of this investigation, please feel free to contact the Institutional Research Department of the college at (276) 523-7480.

Please click on this link (Online Survey) to access the survey. I look forward to receiving your response!

Vickie

Victoria Ratliff
(276) 523-6434

PPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP TOPICS AND INTERVIEW GUIDING QUESTIONS

APPENDIX E: Focus Group topics and Interview

Guiding Questions

Focus Group Topics

1. Why enroll in an online class?
2. Opinion or perception of online classes before enrolling, during and after?
3. Problems experienced during the class (academic or otherwise)?
4. How did this experience make you feel?
5. Social and academic support?

Interview Questions

1. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of [ABC class*]?
2. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?
3. How did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class?
4. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as the result of your unsuccessful experience in [ABC class]?
5. What type of expectations did you have when you began [ABC class]?
6. Do you feel the class met your expectations? Why or why not?
7. What factors do you feel led to your lack of success in [ABC class]?
8. Do you feel you were prepared for online classes before taking [ABC class]?
Why are why not?
9. How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking

this online class?

10. How would you describe your social support system (family, friends, college personnel, etc.) in relation to your educational goals?
11. What type of support or assistance do you think would have helped you be more successful in [ABC class]?
12. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?
13. While enrolled in the class what type of support services (academic or otherwise) did you seek from the College?
14. How would you describe your overall experience in [ABC class]?
15. How do you think taking online classes will affect your educational goals?

*** Individualize question for each student to a particular unsuccessful class attempt.**

APPENDIX F
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

DRAFT APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: *Online Experiences in Rural Appalachia: A Phenomenological Approach*

Victoria Ratliff, Investigator
My Community College

I, _____, agree to be interviewed as a participant in a focus group and/or individual interview for a research project entitled: *Online Experiences in Rural Appalachia: A Phenomenological Approach*. This study is being conducted by Victoria Ratliff as an authorized part of her Doctoral studies at Liberty University.

Purpose: I understand that the purpose of this study is to determine what factors lead to the lack of success of online students at a rural community college in central Appalachia.

Procedure: I understand that the investigator will conduct a 1 to 1 1/2 hour open-ended focus group session and/or interview wherein I will be given an opportunity to discuss my experiences in online classes, and that the session will be digitally recorded. I also understand that a transcriptionist will be employed to transcribe the recordings.

Consent: I understand that neither my name nor any other personally identifying information will be attached to any of my data, including the recorded interviews and transcripts, and that the data sheet linking my personal identity information with my data will be kept in a secure location.

Further, I understand that my participation in this research is entirely voluntary, involves no risk to me physically or otherwise beyond those experiences encountered in everyday life, and that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without consequence. I agree to maintain the confidentiality of information disclosed during focus group or interview sessions.

By signing this form I certify that I am 18 years of age or older.

Please check one of the following:

_____ I give my permission to be recorded.

_____ I do not give my permission to be recorded.

Participant Signature

Date

Investigator: I certify that the informed consent procedure has been followed and that I have answered any questions from the participant as completely as possible.

Investigator Signature

Date

APPENDIX G

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT TRANSCRIPTION SERVICES

APPENDIX G: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT TRANSCRIPTION

SERVICES

I, _____, transcriptionist, agree to maintain full confidentiality in regards to any and all audiotapes and documentation received from Victoria Ratliff related to her doctoral study titled Online Experiences in Rural Appalachia: A Phenomenological Approach. Furthermore, I agree:

1. To hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual that may be inadvertently revealed during the transcription of audio-taped interviews, or in any associated documents;
2. To not make copies of any audiotapes or computerized files of the transcribed interview texts, unless specifically requested to do so by Victoria Ratliff;
3. To store all study-related audiotapes and materials in a safe, secure location as long as they are in my possession;
4. To return all audiotapes and study-related documents to Victoria Ratliff in a complete and timely manner.
5. To delete all electronic files containing study-related documents from my computer hard drive and any backup devices.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if I disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which I will have access.

Transcriber's name (printed) _____

Transcriber's signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX H
SURVEY RESULTS

Appendix H: Survey Results by Question

Survey Results as of 6/14/12		Consent?	Please identify an unsuccessful online class that you attempted during 2010-11.	1. Why did you choose to enroll in this online class at the College?	2. How would you describe your experience in this online class?
#1	4/2/2012 17:56	Yes	ECO 120	Convenience	Not good
#4	4/2/2012 19:17	Yes	Bio 101 Web Lecture/Lab Spring 2012	I do not have transportation or time to go directly to campus.	I had a terrible experience with this class. I repeatedly attempted to schedule tests to be proctored and was ignored. I repeatedly asked for help and was ignored. The professor was not helpful at all and was just plain hateful.
#9	4/3/2012 16:40	Yes	English 3	My health, and daughter's school schedule made it easier for myself to complete my work from home, and to continue to be available for my daughter if she was not in school, or in the event of an emergency.	Things began to a slow, and awkward start, but I managed to make certain my assignments were turned in, at times later than requested, but maintained communication with my professor concerning my work.
#10	4/3/2012 19:27	Yes	math 3	my advisor advised me to do so	the teacher was way too fast and didnt explain things well. i got more info from a particular web page
#11	4/3/2012 21:11	Yes	Math 2	due to work and my son	it was good up until my Instructor told me I was falling if I didnt hurry

#14	4/4/201 2 17:27	Yes	economics	it was too much for me to do with the load i had	i never did anything in this class bc i dropped it before i got the chance
#20	4/5/201 2 9:40	Yes	HLT 110 - Concepts of Personal & Community Health	I had to have it to be a full time student.	The online class was alright, i just forgot about doing work sometimes because i didn't have anyone telling me i had to do it
#22	4/5/201 2 10:40	No			
#27	4/5/201 2 13:37	No			
#28	4/5/201 2 16:41	Yes	math	so I could work and go to school	good
#31	4/6/201 2 10:10	Yes	early childhood education	It was gonna be my major.	It was the worst class ever I had no will to do anything because it was all open book even the test.
#32	4/6/201 2 19:13	No			
#33	4/6/201 2 20:51	Yes	Music Appreciation I.	I have a strong background in concert/marching musical performance and am reasonably well-versed in musical theory. I needed a humanities course, and this seemed the appropriate choice.	Dismal. The semester did not go well for me for a variety of personal reasons, but this class was the first I dropped.
#35	4/9/201 2 9:16	Yes	HIS 122	It was part of my requirements	The class was alright, but there was no incentive, it's almost as if it were just something to do instead of an actual class.
#37	4/9/201 2 19:24	No			
#39	4/10/20	No			

	12 9:57				
#40	4/10/20 12 12:13	Yes	Eng 111	I have a full time job, and i thought that online classes would be the answer.	It was more of a challange than i thought it would be.
#41	4/10/20 12 20:44	Yes	spanish1	Needed it for degree	Awful
#43	4/11/20 12 10:04	Yes	Math 3	Because that was what was recommended after I took my placement test.	Not successful.
#45	4/11/20 12 21:12	Yes	ECO 202	I enjoy economics, and I will probably need to take basic micro and macro economics courses before I transfer. I couldn't take the 8 am classes in-person, which I would have preferred, due to transportation conflicts.	Generally frustrating. It didn't feel like there was anything to do aside from reading the book and taking a few quizzes. If I didn't understand a concept, there was nothing that expounded on the topic in a different fashion without having to contact the professor (which, admitting my own faults, I did not do). I guess I never felt engaged in learning anything, and felt like I could just read the book and learn the same amount. Also, deadlines were unclear at best.

#46	4/13/20 12 1:05	Yes	Spanish	It was easier with my work schedule and my childrens schedule to take the classes online.	It was great till the end of the semester. I had to go to Ga at the end of the summer, my father had passed. I was the only one to take care of his belongings.. I put his home up for sale and it sold right away.. I didn't have internet at the hotel or at my dads house.. and I was unable to take the final exam in both classes. Had I taken the final exam I would have had an A in both classes.. I emailed the instructors as soon as I could but grades had already posted..
#47	4/16/20 12 17:19	Yes	GIS 201	I was required to take it.	Horrible! Worst online class I've ever taken.
#49	4/16/20 12 21:16	Yes	MTH 163	I work full time during the day and have three children and this is the only time I could take it.	It was ok. The Professor always responded quickly to any questions I had. I only had problems at the end of the class which I explained on the next question.
#52	4/17/20 12 9:17	Yes	Bio 142	Because I lived in Weber City and worked at a day care. It would have been hard for me to make it to class on time.	I've taken a lot of online classes but for some reason this seemed to be the most difficult for me.
#54	4/17/20 12 11:59	Yes	Algebra 1 - Fall 2011	I am a single mom trying to get the pre-req for RN program. I work full time all day, have a prn job and a child with crohns	I enjoy online classes. It allows me to work at my pace and time

				disease. I cannot come to day classes	
#57	4/18/20 12 23:51	Yes	math 4	because i needed the math class	great
#59	4/19/20 12 13:31	No			
#62	4/23/20 12 3:00	Yes	Astronomy I	I live 45+ minutes from the college, I am a single mother of 4 children and I work full time so online seemed to be more convenient to try to work around my schedule.	The class itself was fine, however things in my personal life prevented me from keeping up with this class as I needed. Also, with this particular class I did procrastinate a bit due to no particular deadlines. But even still, I was not in a good emotional place to have put so much on myself after a move back to Virginia with 3 small children. I should have given myself more time to adapt to being back "home" again and adjusting to life before jumping head on into classes again.
#63	4/23/20 12 19:10	Yes	Math 141	Because I had vehicle issues and getting back and forth to the college and I have a 6 year old son that I was deeply involved with personal issues.	It was horrible.

#64	4/23/20 12 19:38	Yes	Math 126	I chose to enroll in this class online because of the experiences of my other classmates who took this class on campus.	I was intimidated after going through the orientation in which the professor referred to herself as "Iron Man" who accepted no excuses.
#66	4/24/20 12 12:43	Yes	Bio 101 Web Spring 2012	Work schedule, transportation issues.	Horrible and humiliating.
#68	4/25/20 12 13:58	Yes	Great Books II	I am taking care of my 86 year old Mother and am unable to attend classes at the college.	I felt a bit overwhelmed. I was enrolled in several other classes and just felt that I could not keep up.
#72	4/30/20 12 14:30	Yes	I was taken to many classes at the time	Because it was the only class available	It was ok at the beginning but as the class went on she wasn't a very good teacher
#75	4/30/20 12 17:16	No			
#77	4/30/20 12 18:49	Yes	Economics	It was a class that I had to have for graduation.	The class was okay. The instructor did not reply to email in a timely manner.
#81	4/30/20 12 20:36	Yes	Adult Corrections	major requirement	While I was enrolled I did learn from the class, so it was ok.
#85	5/1/201 2 10:34	Yes	math 03	I work full time and it was hard for me to come there during the day time because it was not offered at night.	I did not like it at all. The instructor went too fast and really didn't explain things well.
#86	5/1/201 2 10:40	No			

#90	5/1/2012 17:46	Yes	PSYC	I thought it was a class I would need to graduate.	I didn't enjoy the class. There was very little needed from the actual book, that was expensive to buy. Most of the information needed for the tests came straight off of the DVD's that never played well. They were either too loud or you could barely hear them.
#94	5/3/2012 10:46	No			
#98	5/6/2012 18:08	Yes	Math 141 Spring 2012	Because I was having vehicle problems and I thought that using the internet at my neighbors would make things easier and then getting an occasional ride to take an exam.	Horrible. And come to find out, Im not the first student to say the same thing.
#99	5/7/2012 10:34	Yes	PSY 120	I enjoy psychology	I really liked it, I just got to behind. My pregnancy has been really stressful and it was hard to keep up with everything.
101	5/11/2012 23:21	Yes	Public Speaking	This course is a requirement for my program. I enrolled online because my work schedule prevents me from taking the course on campus.	I never participated in the course other than receiving the syllabus.
#102	5/14/2012 6:47	Yes	bio142	To save gas and time.	bad

#104	5/17/20 12 11:51	Yes	BIO 101 & MTH151	Part of the requirements to pursue the Pre-Teacher program. I have a very busy schedule due to my 2 small children and job and thought it would be more convenient.	It was difficult to take these particular classes online. The amount of time required for the class is difficult to do at home or on your own time especially if you have a job and children. I have taken many online classes, but these courses would be better taken on campus.
#105	5/18/20 12 7:58	Yes	Biology 1	I typically take all on-line classes and I have always done well.	I felt overwhelmed (and that is the first class I have ever experienced that with). There was class work, labs and tests that you had to have a proctor for. Where I live no one was willing to do the proctoring part. I felt rushed and felt like there was not adequate time to complete assignments and even grasp one before moving to the next. I also felt (for the first time) this class was not very well organized..skipped around a lot..etc. I did not care for any parts of the class and I will not re-take this one again unless there is a different lay-out and syllabus.
#109	5/22/20 12 9:44	No			
#110	5/22/20 12 10:03	Yes	Biology 102 Spring 2012	So that I can work around my work schedule and spend more time with my daughter.	I did learn a lot in this online class.

#111	5/22/20 12 12:25	Yes	NAS 106	I enrolled in NAS 106 for a natural science credit, but I later found out my Biology credit would count.	Awful! I was very unhappy with the course instructor.
#115	5/23/20 12 11:30	Yes	W1 Psychology of Death and Dying SP12	I was trying to get closer for the lost of my young and only sibling who I lost in Wisconsin and arrived 15 after his passing	It was full of information
#117	5/24/20 12 15:25	No			
#118	5/24/20 12 23:35	Yes	psy 200 w1	because I thought I needed it to graduate.	The actual work to be submitted was fun to do and taught me a lot, however the tests were over so many chapters at once it was hard to remember everything.
#119	5/25/20 12 1:08	Yes	Spanish	yes	it was bad, the instructions were not clear
#122	5/30/20 12 4:19	Yes	HIS 121, HIS 122	I enrolled in these courses because I took time off from the nursing program, however, these courses would help if I decide to go further and get my BSN.	My experience was horrible in these courses. I understand that there is deadlines and time limits on things. However, the reason I like online courses is you can work at your own pace. However, that is not the case with these courses. The deadlines were strict and when asked for an extension, the professor said yes, but it was not given.

#123	6/1/2012 19:14	Yes	Pre-Calculus	It was a course that I needed in order to pursue the degree I was seeking. I chose online classes due to not having transportation to and from the campus regularly.	The experience was fine except that I found online classes extremely difficult for me.
#126	6/5/2012 14:29	Yes	English 112	I have kids, and it would be more convenient.	
#128	6/11/2012 20:12	Yes	Literature	I absolutely love literature. Especially poetry. I write poetry myself. History. I love history.	I was doing great until the last term paper. I just could not grasp how to complete the paper. In history I could not do the same. it was the papers. I waited until the last minute and realized I could not just zoomed it together in a few hours.
#130	6/12/2012 13:26	Yes	Diet & Nutrition	I have a full time job and a 17 month old. I also live on the lower end of lee county it takes me between 45 min. to an hour to get to the college.	lost, directions were not clear, by the time you got a response for your question the homework was pass due. I felt like pulling my hair out!!!!!!!
#171	6/12/2012 0:00	Yes	ADJ	It was part of my program and my advisor signed me up for it.	I started out excited about it, but it got frustrating. All we did was read and take tests. It was a waste of time because I didn't learn anything.
#180	6/14/2012 0:00	Yes	Math	I work and it's hard to get a schedule that lets me do that and go to school at the same time.	It was frustrating. I had never had problems with math before, and didn't understand why we had to do things the way the teacher wanted them. There's more than one way to

					come up with the right answer, but that wasn't acceptable.
#193	6/14/20 12 0:00	Yes	Psychology	My work schedule, but also the costs of gas and keeping up with my kids' schedules.	I got in over my head. It was more than I expected, I guess.

Survey Results as of 6/14/12		3. What problems did you experience that contributed to your lack of success in this class?	4. How has your opinion of online classes changed as a result of this experience?	5. How did your experience in this class make you feel?
#1	4/2/2012 17:56	Lack of time	I just don't like them	Frustrated
#4	4/2/2012 19:17	I couldn't get any help. When I attempted to correct my mistakes and catch back up, the professor ignored me. She later sent me an email stating I had been dropped for missing a test that I had been ignored regarding when I attempted to schedule it.	I don't know if I will be able to finish my degree.	HORRIBLE.

#9	4/3/2012 16:40	My main concern was receiving an overall Incomplete for the class, simply because the instructor chose to stop accepting work weeks before the end of the term. I had missed an announcement posted regarding the work, due to going out of state to attend my Mother's Memorial Services, and when I requested to submit the work within a day's time, I was refused and suggested to re-take the class at a later time.	I would have liked to have completed the class when I initially signed up for it during the fall, to prevent having to re-take the course, and to continue on with my other needed course requirements to successfully finish without prolonging any unnecessary processes. My other online classes have been extremely helpful, and I've learned a great deal in each subject. I must also give credit to my other Professors for their understanding, and wonderful communication skills.	I felt good in the beginning, but when I saw the Professor was only willing to accept assignments according to HIS timetable, I had no choice but to accept the terms, and re-take the course at a later date, hopefully with a different and more understanding instructor.
#10	4/3/2012 19:27	i could not get tutoring at the college due to my work schedule and i asked the teacher about it	no, i done well in my other online classes	i felt horrible that i failed this class and i refuse to take it over
#11	4/3/2012 21:11	lack of a babysitter to watch my son as I worked	no	dumb, after my Instructor told me I was failing I really seen no point in working on m math anymore
#14	4/4/2012 17:27	none	no	
#20	4/5/2012 9:40	I had to quit college in fall 2010 because my mom became very ill and ended up being omitted to the hospital.	i dont like online classes, i feel like i learn more when i sit in the class. i would much rather take a hybrid class.	I feel like no matter how easy the online class is, its still hard to do the work because i dont have a teacher telling me i need to do it
#22	4/5/2012 10:40			
#27	4/5/2012 13:37			

#28	4/5/2012 16:41	lack of clear communication from the teacher as to what they want the student to do.	yes i do not feel confident enough to take another one.	defeated and ignorant
#31	4/6/2012 10:10	I never opened a book because I needed a teacher.	I never want another.	Like I was not doing anything.
#32	4/6/2012 19:13			
#33	4/6/2012 20:51	Engaging in an online format is incredibly difficult for me. A lack of discussion kept me isolated from my content matter. I have had the same issues in every other online class I have taken.	No. I already hated them, but I was trying to achieve my diploma in a certain time frame and had to fit in eighteen credits that semester to do so.	Exhausted, and uneducated. The instructor left incredibly clear and informative instructions, and I was just unmotivated and uninterested throughout. It was extremely frustrating. I doubt that I will return to MYCC, but even in the future in other academic settings I will do my utmost to avoid online classes. I am now more likely to take a second or third choice class over preferred ones that only have an online option.
#35	4/9/2012 9:16	Connection problems were a big deal for me (that applies to the on campus classes with online segments as well)	I will never take another one.	Like crap, I had to retake the class oncampus this semester.
#37	4/9/2012 19:24			
#39	4/10/2012 9:57			

#40	4/10/20 12 12:13	Some of the problems were understanding the instructor and the class it self.	It has not.	I felt like i could have done better. For me online classes is the only way i can take classes.
#41	4/10/20 12 20:44	Lack of instruction	No	Frustrated.. upset
#43	4/11/20 12 10:04	I had difficulty learning and keeping up in an online class.	No.	Pretty stupid.
#45	4/11/20 12 21:12	Admittedly, I was having mental health issues and other problems which consumed most of my time; I would not blame my failure to complete the class on the professor but on myself. I didn't put in enough work, I was worried I would fail the course, but there was no one there to even acknowledge I was in the course so it wasn't a big deal.	I am far less likely to take online classes, but I attribute that more to my learning style than to the content in the online classes (though I do believe there is a lack of content and interaction in general).	Honestly, I felt like a failure for not being able to keep up with the deadlines that I missed.
#46	4/13/20 12 1:05	A death in my family caused me to travel and I was unable to complete the requirements of the course ontime..	I understand the need for students to adhere to the policies of the class.. but this is an adult environment.. and sometimes emergencys happen.. There should be some flexibility depending on the situation..	I feel very bad, I had made great grades to that point..My GPA really went down after that semester. Having two F's on my transcript made me question weather I should or could continue in my efforts to finish school.. thankfully I didn't give up...

#47	4/16/20 12 17:19	The teacher did not explain concepts well at all. I felt like there was no way I could make a good grade in this course no matter how hard I tried. It was often extremely hard to reach the teacher by email.	I am not sure if I want to take any more courses online through MYCC.	It caused a great amount of frustration for me.
#49	4/16/20 12 21:16	I had to have a hysterectomy at the end of December therefore I missed my exam. A lot of things has happened in the spring including my 86 year old mother's lung cancer came back. We had to put her on a ventilator and take her off after three days in which she passed away three days later. All this caused me to wait till the last week to try and take my exam. This time has been very stressfull and when I asked the Professor to take it that last week I received an e-mail saying that he was disappointed in me for waiting this long to take it. I am 44 years old and to have a Professor tell me this really bothered me. Things happen that is out of some students control and if the college puts a deadline on when the last day you can take a exam why would the Professor even comment on it. His attitude on this just	I have taken alot of online classes and had great experiences with them. This just showed me that I will not be able to take MTH 163 at MYCC.	I believe that some Professors need to be more sympathetic to students. They need to realize that sometimes students don't wait till the last minute to do things because they want to. Students have families that they may need to take care of. They also may have to deal with the passing of a parent and their child's grandparent which is very hard to do. This professor saying he was disappointed in me really upset me. I am doing my best at trying to work and raise a family. Losing my mother has been very emotional for me and my children and I guess him saying he's disappointed in me just made me look at his class and him as a Professor differently than at the start of the class.

		caused me to not even take it. So now I have failed the class.		
#52	4/17/20 12 9:17	I studied but it seemed like the test had nothing to do with what I studied, the labs also never made any sense to me.	I'm actually enrolled to take online classes again. I like that you can work at your own pace.	It does make you feel a little negative and hesitate about taking more online classes but I've passed all my other classes with good grades that I've taken online!

#54	4/17/20 12 11:59	I finished the modules required to go to on to the next required Math class and since my son had become ill, I spoke with the professors and was advised I did not have to complete the class that I could withdraw, so I chose not to finish it. It was a personal decision based on my sons needs.	No, I am in another online class this summer. I would not consider my experience as unsuccessful.	The online class was good. My decision not to complete the class was based solely on personal issues. I had met my requirements and did not finish it to take care of my son.
#57	4/18/20 12 23:51	none	no	horrible i didnt like it
#59	4/19/20 12 13:31			
#62	4/23/20 12 3:00	I guess I just answer this above, unintentionally.	No, not at all. In fact, this semester I have 4 classes online.	I was disappointed in myself for not being able to keep up with things but I have learned from the experience and just do the best I can with my classes now.
#63	4/23/20 12 19:10	I tried my best and even had help from previous students and still was withdrawn from the class after missing the midterm due to circumstances beyond my control and was refused a chance to make up the midterm even though I was 2 chapters ahead in the MYMATHLAB homework.	I had no obstacles or problems with my other online classes, only Math.	I felt as though the instructor did not care and was not willing to work with me or any other students that had issues in the class, and found out that prior students had the same issues before when they were in this same class.

#64	4/23/20 12 19:38	I was constantly receiving emails stating that I was behind and to log in today and get caught up when the due date was at least 8 days in the future. For example, I was sent an email on Feb 28 stating that i was behind and needed to log in today to get caught up and the due date was March 9th. I was never late turning in any of my assignments and even hand delivered all of my hand in assignments for fear of her not receiving it by the due date.	I have enjoyed my two years at MYCC up until this point and it has made me not want to complete my courses.	It made me feel stupid to be honest with you.
#66	4/24/20 12 12:43	The professor took weeks to respond to my e-mails and the test proctor took so long to respond to my emails that I missed the tests I needed to take and was dropped involuntarily from the class.	I don't even want to be in school anymore.	Humiliated.
#68	4/25/20 12 13:58	The books were not interesting enough to keep me reading. My mother also became ill and was diagnosed with Dementia and I fell way behind.	It hasn't changed my opinion at all. I love online classes and really appreciate them.	I am upset that I was unable to complete this class.
#72	4/30/20 12 14:30	Due to that there is no book for the class its an online book and if use it it woouldnt be the way she wanted you to do the work in the class.	No, I have enjoyed my other classed and did well this just needs a better teacher that will be able to help at any time.	very stressful.
#75	4/30/20			

	12 17:16			
#77	4/30/20 12 18:49	Just that the teacher didn't respond in a prompt manner to my emails.	I am still taking plenty of online classes to further my education. It has not held me back at all.	I just didn't feel that I was important to him as a person.
#81	4/30/20 12 20:36	I ordered my books from amazon.com, and all of them were mailed to my house on time except the one for this class. By the time i finally received my book i was a month behind in my class, and had several projects to work on.	no	My experience in the class was fine, I only dropped because I was so behind.
#85	5/1/201 2 10:34	Things was not explained to good. I asked about tutoring but the times that was available I was at work so I couldn't attend any of them.	No. I am doing great in my other online classes.	Like a big idiot!!! I hate math now!
#86	5/1/201 2 10:40			
#90	5/1/201 2 17:46	I would rather have a more book oriented class. I do better comprehending classes that the information comes from the book.	I try to avoid classes that have DVD lectures and stick to the books.	I felt like I was a failure. I answered the information from the book but was unable to recall the DVD information that I needed.
#94	5/3/201 2 10:46			
#98	5/6/201 2 18:08	The way the notes and videos were done on blackboard and the fact that the instructor was not willing to give a makeup test date even though I was 2 chapters ahead in the homework & current with the other work.	I am so frustrated and angry about it that I dont know if I even want to bother with the whole mess of classes anymore or anything because I busted my behind and it still made no difference and she wouldnt work with me at all.	The instructor made me feel like what I had to say and the fact that I had some problems meant absolutely nothing and that she was the only one allowed to have any issues arise whatsoever and the only one that was allowed to have to miss out on

				anything or not post something for us.
#99	5/7/2012 10:34	complications in pregnancy	no	It was ok. But online is harder, I think.
101	5/11/2012 23:21	I was enrolled in 6 classes at the beginning of the Spring semester. I felt like I could not devote the time and effort to this course as it requires to complete it successfully.	No, I am enrolled in this course this summer.	I felt like this class requires a lot of effort and time because of the heavy work load assigned. I felt it was best to withdrawal until I could give 100% effort.
#102	5/14/2012 6:47	Rediculously hard. I had an 88 average in 141 on campus. I put in just as much if not more study time in for 142 failed first two tests. I did not want my GPA to drop, so I dropped the class. I studied all the online test prep the teacher had on his blackboard. Learned it one end to the other. Neither of the first two tests had a single question covering the material on blackboard.	No. I enjoy online classes. All the other online classes I have taken have been a great success.	It made me feel like I will absolutley not recommend anyone take his online classes.

#104	5/17/20 12 11:51	I have a full time job along with a 3 year old and I was pregnant at the time. It was difficult to work the classes into my already busy schedule. I had a class that I went to on campus along with another online class that I was already taking. I overloaded myself.	I still prefer to take online classes especially since I have a family and a job. However I believe certain classes that require more time, such as classes that involve a Lab, should be taken on campus. The two classes I dropped are two of my weakest subjects, and I should have taken them on campus but I was unable to at the time.	I felt really let down and very overwhelmed with the amount of work that was required. If was able to take the tests online at home it would have possibly worked out for me. It also worried me that it would affect me in receiving financial aide in the future.
#105	5/18/20 12 7:58	My biggest problem was the feeling of being rushed. I don't think there was adequate time to let material sink in before moving to the next topic.	It has made me more cautious yes. I never want to experience another class like that again-ever.	Frustrated, upset, annoyed, defeated, and overall sad that I couldn't finish a class I needed.
#109	5/22/20 12 9:44			
#110	5/22/20 12 10:03	I could have dedicated more time to the class.	I now know that I need to take online classes more seriously in order to raise my grade.	The class made me realize I had to take more responsibility. I don't like being a failure.
#111	5/22/20 12 12:25	I found the directions to be unclear. The instructions were to do the work and turn it in on a weekly basis and the instructor would email me work that was turned in several weeks prior and say my answers were insufficient. It took several hours to complete each set of questions and I wrote paragraphs for each answer yet my answers were "not long enough". I could not get ahead in my	No. I still believe online classes are very effective.	I thought this experience was very disheartening. I felt like I gave up on this class but I really felt like I had no other choice. I was putting so much time into this class I was doing only enough to get by in my other classes. Once I dropped this class I was able to concentrate on my other classes.

		work because I was constantly backtracking. Once I realized this credit was not needed I withdrew from the class to avoid stress and a low grade.		
#115	5/23/20 12 11:30	I did not have a real problem. However I had just lost my only living relative and just been diagnosed with breast cancer as did my brother who I also just lost.	Great class just could not focus due to up coming surgery and had to complete the class because I was due for surgery	At the time of the class, very scared
#117	5/24/20 12 15:25			
#118	5/24/20 12 23:35	Having four tests for the entire semester. We covered right at four chapters and the tests were spread apart. It is hard to remember that much information for one test.	To only take classes I have to have and try harder.	That my brain doesn't retain enough information over time.
#119	5/25/20 12 1:08	there was no clear instructions.	i do not recommend people to take online classes just take the class when the teacher is present	really bad being that i lost my financial aid

#122	5/30/2012 4:19	This past semester I had several problems. I had surgery and then complications from that surgery. Therefore, that put me behind in all my online classes for a month and was hard to get caught up. Then, my mother had a cancer scare and I was the only one available to drive her to those appointments. Like I said previously, when asked for an extension or to make up the work, I would get a yes, but the work would never appear on blackboard.	Yes my opinion of online classes have changed. If it can be avoided, I will never take another online class.	This experience makes me irritated and all other types of emotions. Since I was not successful in this class I will not be reinstated with financial aid and that will be a burden.
#123	6/1/2012 19:14	I found it difficult to learn from just the computer and no teacher-student face-to-face interaction.	If I can help it I will not take another online class. I prefer a classroom.	It actually made me feel disappointed in myself as a student, but also made me realize that online classes are not for me.
#126	6/5/2012 14:29	Had a hard time being motivated to complete the work.	Yes	I still enjoy online classes, you just have to be able to set aside time for work and studying on your own because you really are on your own.
#128	6/11/2012 20:12	Not staying on course syllabus dates. Trying to play last minute catch up.	Yes. You must definitely stay on schedule. On-line courses require much self-discipline.	shame and regret on my part. I wish I could begin again. I absolutely loved Sci-Fi literature and the History and Literature classes.
#130	6/12/2012 13:26	lack of direction and communion	well im going to try it again this summer with a religion class	not very smart, at the end i just gave up

#171	6/12/20 12 0:00	The tests didn't match the book and I was just wasting my time.	Yes, if they're all like that one, I don't want to take another one.	Aggravated.
#180	6/14/20 12 0:00	Several things, really. If you didn't agree with the instructor, you were in trouble because there was no explanation of why you were wrong.	No, not really. I'll still take them because I really don't have a lot of other choices.	Disappointed and frustrated.
#193	6/14/20 12 0:00	I think I was trying to do too much at one time. When I signed up, I got all online classes because I thought I could handle it. If my sister-in-law hadn't tried to help me, I wouldn't have even got started. I didn't really know where to even start.	Yes. I won't be trying classes again, at least not online. I just don't have what it takes for that,.	It was very stressful and I'm disappointed in myself.

Thematic Responses to Survey Questions

Table 8

Responses to Survey Question 1

Theme	Number of Responses	Percent of Total
Work and/or Family Issues	17	31.48%
Lack of Traditional Class Option (Degree requirement or advised to take course by college personnel)	16	29.63%
Transportation Issues	7	12.96%
Personal Convenience	5	9.25%
Personal Interest in the Subject	5	9.25%
Previous Successful Online Experience	4	7.40%

Table 9

Responses to Survey Question 2

Theme	Number of Responses	Percent of Total
Overall Negative Experience	15	27.78%
Lack of Adequate Instructional Support or Engagement	14	25.92%
Feeling of Self-Defeat or Frustration	12	22.22%
Time Management Issues (Student)	5	9.26%

Positive or Satisfied with Experience	4	7.40%
Lack of Student Self-Motivation	2	3.70%
Misconception of Online Classes	2	3.70%

Table 10

Responses to Survey Question 3

Theme	Number of Responses	Percent of Total
Lack of Adequate Instructional Support or Engagement	24	44.44%
Work and/or Family Issues	10	18.52%
No Specific Problems Identified	6	11.11%
Time Management Issues	4	7.40%
Lack of Instructor's Concern for Student Welfare or Success	3	5.56%
Lack of Self-Motivation	3	5.56%
Technology Issues	2	3.70%
Lack of Required Materials	2	3.70%

Table 11

Responses to Survey Question 4

Theme	Number of Responses	Percent of Total
No Influence on Opinion of	20	37.04%

Online Classes		
Negative Influence on Opinion of Online Classes	15	27.78%
Lack of Adequate Instructional Support or Engagement	7	12.96%
Lack of Instructor's Concern for Student Welfare or Success	5	9.26%
Lack of Self-Motivation	3	5.56%
Work and/or Family Issues	3	5.56%
Time Management Issues	1	1.85%

Table 12

Responses to Survey Question 5

Theme	Number of Responses	Percent of Total
Feeling of Personal Defeat or Frustration	27	50%
Time Management Issues	8	14.81%
Lack of Adequate Instructional Support or Engagement	6	11.11%
Lack of Instructor's Concern for Student Welfare	5	9.26%
Lack of Self-Motivation	4	7.41%
Work and/or Family Issues	4	7.41%

APPENDIX I
FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPTS

Focus Group 1 – Transcript of Session

Location: Gain Center – MYCC

Date: Tuesday, June 19, 2012

Time: 10: 15 a.m.

Number of Attendees: 4

Transcriber: Vickie Ratliff

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Before we begin, I would like to introduce myself and explain for the record why we are here today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class. While we're talking today, please think about a particular online class that you did not complete successfully. Just to clarify, any class resulting in a grade of D, F, U or W is being considered an unsuccessful attempt.

Also, please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P1: Yes, I have.

P2: I understand.

P3: Yes, I understand.

P4: Yeah.

I: I appreciate your willingness to meet with me today.

P1: No problem.

I: Are there any questions before we begin?

(No response)

I: Ok. Please tell me why you chose to enroll in the particular online class that I've asked you to think about today, the one that you were not successful in? What influenced you to enroll in that class?

P1: I had to have the class for what I'm in. I'm in Corrections. I'm going to be a Parole Officer and it's the only class available. I had taken it once before and my teacher dropped me from it because I got too far behind.

I: Ok.

P1: And the reason I got too far behind is because when you take an online class you have to specifically focus on what you're doing at all times because if you get side-tracked, you know, with somebody wanting you to come and do something for them or hollering at you or just arguing with you, that will get you off-track. And it takes a lot to get your mindset back to where you were able to keep focus on what you were doing.

I: So you took it because it was only offered online, is that the reason?

P1: Yeah, yes. I'm retaking it again now.

I: Ok, ok. How about you?

P2: Um, I usually go for online classes because of the convenience. I don't have to drive all the way up here. I'm from Fort Blackmore, so it's quite a drive.

I: Ok.

P2: And right now, I'm doing online classes through ODU, too.

I: Oh, are you? So not only are you at My Community College, but you're working on your Bachelor's Degree?

P2: Yes, in Psychology and it's all online so I really don't have a choice with those.

I: Ok, thanks. So, what about your reasons for choosing an online class?

P3: I didn't have a choice as far as, I didn't, the time that I needed to take it. I had to do it online. But it's the last online class that I've taken. I've not taken any more online.

I: Ok. We're going to get to that, too. So, you really didn't have a choice, you had to take the class and that was the only way you could do it?

P3: Yeah, there was a conflict as far as when the class was offered.

I: Ok. And you?

P4: Well, I had to have it and that's the only way it would work with my schedule. I didn't really have a choice either.

I: Ok. Before you registered for these classes that you've mentioned, what did you think about online classes? Did you have a preconceived notion about how it was going to go, or...?

P4: Yeah, I had heard, the teacher that I had, I had heard that he was really rough and not much of an open-door policy type of person.

P3: I think that with doing online classes, I'm a visual learner, and I have to see it broken down before I can really understand it, and as far as you know those little things that they give you to read over, they're not that helpful. I mean they really don't break things down like I think they should.

P2: I don't think that math classes should be online at all.

P1: No, I don't either. If you're going to have math class, you have to be right there so the instructor can explain how to do it, not like online where you try to work it out on the computer and you're like, what am I doing? Like he said, the hands-on, and I'm taking another class, it's Terror and Terrorism class and that one I seem to be doing pretty well at. I mean it's fairly easy to understand and it just, that one flows. But the corrections class, that's the one I'm having a bit of trouble with currently, but I'm working on it.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking online classes before this experience? Would you say that you were apprehensive or did you want to take the class online when you signed up for classes?

P3: I was apprehensive. Because math is my worst subject. I mean it really is. This certain teacher, there were problems on there that weren't even in the book. I mean it was far harder than what we were going over because mine was just the basic math. I think it was Math 3. It was the one you have to take before you take any of the graded ones.

P4: It depends on which class you were going into.

P3: I was going to go into the basic algebra. I mean anyways, there was like trig problems on there and stuff. And if you're going to do online classes, I think there should be a committee. I honestly do. You should get the input from everybody in, if it's the math, the math teachers. You should just pass it around and nobody knows who marked what, but I think that everybody should go over the class. I've had other teachers here that are far better explainers than some, and I wouldn't want to say smarter than some, but more understanding as to the people they are dealing with, you know. And I think they should have a say or if not, at least the chair should have a say, you know. And I'm sure it's not done like that, it's not looked out. That teacher goes through and puts whatever he wants, whenever he wants, until they jump on him for so many students failing and I'm sure...I'm sure there's talks like that and then he may change curriculums. Or as far as this professor goes, I think he's up at Southwest or somewhere. I think they transferred him.

P2: I'm ok with online classes. I was ok most of the time. There was a few that I struggled with but now that I'm also at ODU, it's very...I get very nervous about taking online classes. They're harder, but I feel like I'm ok with them.

I: Ok.

P2: I'm more motivated, self-motivated now. That has a lot to do with it.

I: How so?

P2: You have to motivate yourself to do it or you're not going to.

I: What are your majors?

P2: I'm getting my Bachelor's degree in Psychology.

P3: Psych.

P1: I'm in Corrections.

P4: General Studies.

I: Well, did your opinion of online classes change as a result of your non-successful experience?

P3: Absolutely. Like I said, I've not taken any more and I know when I transfer that I'm going to have to take some, and I'm just hoping that the teachers are more accessible.

P4: There's a lot of times I had questions and my teacher just blew me off which just absolutely burnt me up. I cannot stand to be done like that. Especially when I have a legitimate question.

P2: It really didn't change much for me because I knew what I done wrong. If I had tried harder maybe it would have changed the outcome. I mean, like I said, I still have to take online classes, that's all they offer.

P1: Yeah, if I could, I would rather be in the classroom where the instructor is telling me exactly like it is. But like I said, if you take an online class, you've always got distractions. And I'm somewhat of a person that gets distracted real easy and it's hard to get your mentality to go back to it.

I: I understand. When you started the classes that we've been talking about, you may have had some expectations. Did your class meet those expectations or not?

P3: No, I would say no. Mine was far harder than I thought.

P4: I had just come out of a very bad, I mean, I had to come into remedial classes because I was in trade school. That's where I went in high school and that counted as my math credit so all this basic algebra and stuff, I didn't have it. And after taking the first class, I thought the second part would build on the first, but they really didn't relate much at all. They did in the book, but as far as what the instructor was giving out on the computer, it was like, you know...

I: So did you have different instructors for each level?

P4: Yeah. And I took a different instructor. I failed that class online so I took a different instructor the following year. Which I'm not that great at math and I realize that. You know, that's probably my weakest point. But that's another thing students should look at. You know, if you've got a really strong point, you might be good taking that course online, you know, if you really understand that stuff. But if you have problems with it, you know, I think you should really think about whether you want to take an online course or find a way to take the course in class.

P2: I think most of them were up to my expectations. I mean I had some that were harder. But, I feel like as long as the instructor gives you the assignments and things that you need, what to do when, like a course calendar type thing, I'm fine with that.

I: So, the deadlines and things you thought were necessary?

P2: Yeah.

P1: I wish they could make the corrections and terror/terrorism class to where you could be with the instructor and make them go over it with you because I believe I could do a whole lot better with that.

I: Ok. What do you think kept you from being successful? What led to your non-success?

P1: Procrastination!

I: Procrastination?

P1: Yeah, basically. It's hard once you get off-track. You think if I put it off, I can do it later, and then when you go back, you think, why did I do that?

I: Yeah?

P4: If you can, it's best to get it done when you're doing it right then, cause I procrastinate a little bit.

P1: Yeah, I'll have about two more chapters to do and then I'll get caught up and be ahead of it, but...

P2: That I feel like is a little bit of my problem, too, but sometimes the pace that they go is a little faster than I'm normally used to and I think that's what gets me a lot of the time, too. Because they're going over so much material. Like in one class for instance, it was over like seven chapters for one test and that was extremely hard for me and it was timed. Ugh...that's the worst.

I: Ok, can you explain?

P2: When it's a timed test, and knowing when you can see the time, how much time you have left, you're always worrying about it.

P3: Yeah, that's something that absolutely needs to be taken off. That clock

I: It stresses you?

P3: Yeah. I think it does everybody. It's not just, you know. I think they should just get rid of that and say you've got an hour or whatever. If you want to check the time, fine, if you don't, fine.

P1: You're talking about the one that counts down like...

P3: Yeah, or some teachers use the hourglass thing. Either way, you've got something there to remind you that I've got so much time left. To me that's a big stressor.

I: Well, what would you say that really led to your nonsuccess in that class?

P4: Getting aggravated.

P3: You know, I think once you're to the point that it's just, you know, I'm not going to get this...

P2: You get frustrated...

P3: Yeah, you just give up on it. I mean, that's human nature. That's what's going to happen.

P1: That's like he was saying, some teachers act like you're beneath them and the questions that you ask are like, well, I'm not going to answer that. You should already know that.

I: Can you explain that?

P1: Yeah. The teacher I had online thought that he was better than all of us. When I finally talked to him in person, he was just all about himself. You could tell that he wasn't from here. He's probably not worked a day in his life except for teaching, you know? I guess he couldn't handle us so that's why he moved back north (laughing).

P3: I think that one of the things with this teacher had said was that he needed somebody at Burger King to flip some burgers.

I: I'm not sure I understand. So instructor attitude has a lot to do with it?

P1: Well, if it wasn't for the people flipping burgers, the instructors would go hungry.

P3: I think that was his, that was what he was getting at.

P1: Yeah.

P3: You know, just in a rude sort of way.

P1: Oh, yeah.

P3: Like, if you can't pass the class, maybe you need to look at flipping burgers. That wasn't said to me, that was...

P1: General consensus?

P3: No, that was something that was said to another student.

I: Do you think you were prepared for an online class before you started it?

P3: No, and that's another thing. You know, in the SDV, I know they have a lot of stuff to go over, but that could be a great thing they could talk about. As far as these SDV classes, and say, you know, give them the rundown of what most of the online classes are like and how much harder they are.

P4: And tell them, you know, as far as if they procrastinate, maybe you should look at other options.

P3: A lot of these people don't realize how hard it's going to be.

I: So do you think that online classes are harder than classes in-person?

P3: Absolutely.

P1: Yeah, yeah they are.

P4: Because if you're in class, you've got the instructor right there explaining it to all the class.

P1: In the online classes, you have to go back and the way they word the questions, sometimes you've got a different answer for the same question, three ways. And you're like...

P3: And if you're not good with a class and you have problems with it, if you don't understand it, I don't care how many times you sit there and read it, if you don't understand it, you're not going to get it.

I: So in most of your online classes, the way it is presented, is it mostly reading the text and doing the assignments and taking the tests?

P4: Yeah.

I: Has there been any type of lecture materials or what was provided for reference?

P2: I had PowerPoints. I would look over them and read them and that was what your tests were on usually, along with the book reading.

I: So in your classes here at My Community College, do you have that?

P1: PowerPoints.

P3: I didn't in math.

I: You didn't?

P3: No, not in math.

I: Ok. Well, what would you say your level of computer experience was before taking an online class? Did you feel you were proficient in using a computer?

P2: I did.

P1: Yeah.

P4: Yeah, I was ok.

P3: I had ITE before I took the online class.

P1: Yeah, I did, too.

P3: I think sometimes that that should be a requirement before you take online classes, because everybody has to have it. And I think that should be a pre-req before you take online classes. A lot of these people will get in here and take online classes and never fool with a computer.

P4: Right there is already a stressor that you're adding to it.

P1: Yeah, computer illiterate. Or not even have a computer at home.

P3: Yeah, that happens a lot. And then they try to run in here in the tutoring lab and get everything done and they just read over it real quick. I know I see that a lot in anatomy and physiology.

I: That's a tough class anyway.

P3: Yeah, it's a killer.

P1: What is it, what class?

P3: Anatomy and physiology. I tutor in that class.

I: Ok. In relation to what you are trying to accomplish with your education, how would you describe your social support system? Do you have family that's supporting you – not financially – but as cheerleaders and encouraging you? Or is there anyone here at the college from that aspect?

P3: Yeah, I mean, most of the people here at the college have an open door policy. Especially in the Gain lab, you know, we try to help each other. The counselors here, you know, you don't get a lot of negativity here, especially from any of the tutors. We try to pat you on the back and say it's going to be ok...

I: So did you go to anyone for support during the time when you were having this negative experience?

P2: My grandmother. She's like my biggest cheerleader. And my parents, of course.

P1: Yeah, my mom. My mom's behind me 100%. When I graduate, I'll be the first one in my family to graduate from college.

I: So do you think they play a key role in your success in college?

P1: Definitely.

P2: Yeah, if you have no one to believe in you, why would you believe in yourself?

P4: Yeah, I've had enough of that in my lifetime. All the negativity, from some of my family.

I: Did you seek any help here at the college?

P1: Yeah, tutors. I've come in here and they've helped me a whole lot. I've had tutoring in English, Tim, who is sitting right over there. And I've had another who has helped me in math. I've passed the first part. The book we have has nine sections and I'm on about the 5th or 6th and I've got four more and, hopefully, I'll graduate in May of next year.

I: That's good. How do you feel about asking others for help? If you were taking another online class and got into the situation that you were in before, do you think you would hesitate to ask for help or would you seek it?

P1: I would ask.

P3: The first time I walked in these doors, I was hesitant. I mean because I don't like to ask people for anything. It makes me feel bad to, you know, especially the first time. Now once I got in here and feel comfortable, if I need something, I'm going to ask.

I: How do you feel about it?

P2: It was hard for me to ask for help. It really was because I never struggled in high school and then I came here and I struggled and I had to ask for help. But now, it's comfortable.

I: Ok. Do you think there are any support services that the college could offer that it doesn't currently?

P2: No, I believe they've got the bases covered.

I: Do you think other students know about the services?

P2: I don't think so. I think it needs to be advertised more.

P1: Yeah, that would be good. What is it the Red Fox Flier? They need to get more stuff in there about if you're having any problems to come see the counselors in the Gain lab.

I: Do you think other students in online classes know that this exists? What do you all think? Had you heard of it when you took the online class that you struggled with?

P1: No.

P2: No, I didn't.

P3: Actually one of my other teachers told me about it.

P2: I think that maybe like the Gain tutors could go to each class like when the Fall semester starts and talk about it. I think that would be good.

P3: They could go during SDV classes.

P4: That could...

P3: I'm sure all of the tutors could find the time to go up there. I mean I wouldn't care a bit to go up and talk to students. That wouldn't bother me at all...as long as they paid me (laughter).

I: Ok. Well, just a couple more questions. Just in general, how would you describe your overall experience in that online class where you were not successful? If you had to say it in a few words, how would you describe it?

P1: Well, I'm doing a whole lot better this time than I was the last time because I know what to expect this time.

I: Ok, so you know what to expect now?

P1: Yeah. Still a little bit of procrastination, but I'm working at it.

P2: It was a struggle, but a learning experience.

I: Ok.

P3: I've not transferred yet, so I'll have the same online classes that she's having.

I: Well, how about the one you were not successful in, I think it was Math?

P3: Yeah.

I: How would you describe it?

P3: Just aggravating. Because I'm the type of person that I'm usually good in stuff and it's not hard for me to figure out, but I'm a visual learner. You know, if you set up a problem on a board or write it down on a piece of paper, every step of it, I get it like that. But if you just give me this problem up here, for some reason, if it can't be written down and they can't explain how to do it, I just don't grasp it.

I: Ok.

P4: You know, maybe that's a thing they could also offer. You know, there's testing to see if you're a visual learner or if you are...

I: So, do you think learning style has a lot to do with online classes?

P3: Absolutely.

P1: I'm more of a visual learner than I am an online person, too.

P3: I think most people, like I was saying before, that it may be a stereotype that's good for this area, because I honestly think that most people are visual learners, hands-on, you know. Or show it to me in a way that I can understand it.

I: Do you think that comes from just being in this region and the way that you were raised, or...

P3: Yeah, absolutely. I think the mentality of the hard work in this area, you know, let's get it done. You know what I mean? That has a lot to do with it.

P2: Uh-huh.

P3: That has a lot to do with all of us. All of our kids, you know, are the same way. Because that's the way your parents done it and so that's the way you do things. I mean, it's just that way. We learned to work hard with our hands.

I: Ok. Do you think so, too?

P2: Yeah.

P1: Yeah, I do.

P4: Uh-huh.

I: Well, do you think that taking online classes, or the particular class that we've been talking about, affected your goals in education? Did it change your mind about getting your degree?

P2: No.

P4: I don't think so.

P2: It just made me work harder.

I: Made you work harder?

P2: Yeah.

P3: Yeah, kind of with me. I would go on and do something in science but my math skills are so bad. I mean, I got through anatomy and physiology because I enjoy it, but as far as taking the higher chemistries and stuff like that, I don't think I could pass it.

I: Is there any kind of support that the college could provide that would make you feel that you could?

P1: Well, it would be good if they could have a support group for students who do have online classes, or maybe the same ones, where they could get in there and discuss what problems they're having and maybe see if they could work it out, like a big study group for online. I don't know if they could do that, but it would be nice if they did.

P3: Yeah, we do it for other stuff. We have supplemental instruction for all of our biology classes, so I mean, it could be done. It would be a lot of work to do, and I don't know if there are enough students in online classes that could get in here. Like I said, with mine, it was a time restriction. You know, I was working all day and taking that math class. And you really don't want to come down here after working all day, or at least I didn't.

P2: Yeah.

P3: But there was really no other time I could take it. I probably would have found time to come if it were available.

I: Ok. I really appreciate your contributions to this. Is there anything else you would like to say about the online experience you had, or any questions you have for me?

P3: How do you feel about the people in this area visually learning as opposed to verbally learning?

I: I would think you are probably correct. I'm also a visual learner, very hands-on.

P1: Were you raised in this area?

I: Yes, I was. I'm a coal miner's daughter from Appalachia.

P3: Yeah, my dad was a coal miner, my step-dad had a welding shop, and I started welding when I was 13. Everything to me was hands-on.

P2: And it was all about work, too.

I: Yes, when I grew up, it was all about work. You were raised to go to work whether you felt like it or not.

P3: Yeah, you worked in the garden and everything else.

P1: That's just the way people in this area do things. You know?

P3: I don't know if it's changing or what. I know a lot of kids don't work like we used to. I used to work in the hay fields every year. That was just part of growing up in this area.

P1: Yeah.

P4: I think that's what's wrong with a lot of things now. Kids just aren't taught to work hard. They cry or come up with some excuse and they don't have to go to school. Then when it comes time for them to go to work, they do the same thing. And then they don't understand when they get fired. They should have grown up here a few years ago.

I'm not that old, but I sure remember having to do whatever I was told to do or I would regret it.

P3: You didn't go to work when you're sixteen back then, or at least I didn't. I was like 13, welding and stuff like that, plus doing hay during the summer. It's a mentality of this area.

P1: Yeah, and if you work with your family, you bond with them a whole lot better, too.

I: Ok. I realize we're running over on our time. Again, thank you. I do appreciate you taking time to talk with me today.

END OF – (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Focus Group 2 – Transcript of Session

Location: Cyber Cafe – MYCC

Date: Thursday, June 28, 2012

Time: 1:30 p.m.

Number of Attendees: 8

Transcriber: Amanda Olinger

Number of Tapes: 1

I: I realize that most of us met on Tuesday for your individual interviews, but for the record, I will introduce myself and explain why we are meeting today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

As I explained earlier, it is important that we refrain from using your names while in this session. I've asked each of you to choose a pseudo name and I appreciate your willingness to do so. For the transcriptionists' benefit, I'll ask that each of you identify yourself by your pseudo name. Also, please refrain from using others' given names, such as your instructors or others that you may speak of during the session. Would you mind to start and introduce yourself to the group with your pseudo name?

P1: Sure. I'm Susie.

P2: Hi, I'm Emma.

P3: I'll be Joan.

P4: And I'm Kelly.

P5: I guess I'm Ashley.

P6: Ok. And I'm Ann.

P7: I always wanted to be Elizabeth, so that's my name today.

P8: I'm just Fred.

I: Ok, great. I believe I have obtained all of your signatures on the informed consent forms. However, please verify for the record that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time. Is that correct?

SUSIE: Yes.

EMMA: Uh-huh.

JOAN: Yes.

KELLY: Yeah, I signed it Tuesday.

ASHLEY: Me, too.

ANN: Yes, I did.

ELIZABETH: Yes.

FRED: Yes.

I: Great. Again, I appreciate your willingness to meet today. The format today is going to be a little different from our first meeting. I will introduce a topic or thought, and would like for you to provide your opinion, experiences, or thoughts related

to your experiences in an online class where you were unsuccessful. It's my understanding that most of you have had multiple online classes. Is that correct?

EMMA: Yeah.

JOAN: Yes.

(Several non-verbal responses.)

I: For the record, I would ask that when you respond you do so verbally so that I can be certain to capture everything. Were there any of you who have only had one online class?

ELIZABETH: Yes, I've only had the one.

I: Ok. So those of you who have had several, we're going to talk today about only the online classes where you were unsuccessful. I realize it's hard to distinguish between them sometimes, but I'm particularly interested in a class that was an unsuccessful attempt. The purpose of my research is to determine what it is like to have that experience, how did it make you feel, what caused it, etc. Does anyone have any questions about that?

EMMA: What if we've had more than one?

I: Well, if you want to share both of the experiences or more than one that will be fine. However, I may need to clarify the classes with you as we talk about them. Most all of you are taking classes on-campus this semester, is that correct?

SUSIE: Yes.

EMMA: Yeah, biology.

JOAN: Me, too.

KELLY: Yes, I'm taking a couple on-campus and a couple online.

ASHLEY: Yes.

ANN: Yes, I have a couple, too.

ELIZABETH: I'm not taking any this semester.

FRED: I started out in an online class this summer, but I dropped it the other day.

I: Ok. Let's talk about the reason that you chose to take an online class. In particular, I'm interested in one that you were not successful in. Would you share with the group why you took an online class?

SUSIE: Well, I really couldn't fit it in my schedule any other way. I work and have kids so it's hard to manage. I thought about night classes, but there's just no way for me to work all day and get the kids to ball practice and then be here at night, too. My problem is that I need and want it all out of life. I know that going to college will be better for my family in the end, but it's hard. I have to shuttle my kids to and from football and band, and of course that changes with the season. I also take care of my elderly parents who live down the street from us. And finding time to cook and clean the house and all that goes along with being a mom, well, you know. It's just hard when you want to do what you know is needed. You just choose what you think is the best option and you go for it.

JOAN: I would agree with that. I don't work full-time, but I have to take care of my mom, too, and that keeps me busy. Sometimes I can do one class on-campus, if it's early in the day, but for me the online classes seem to be a good option. I just learned that I can't do some of the subjects without a teacher's help.

EMMA: I live quite a distance from the college and I just can't afford to drive up here every day. I like to take in-person classes, but online classes help me with my budget. Like right now, I'm taking an on-campus class, but I've also got some online. I

drive up here two days a week.

I: How long is your drive?

EMMA: I live down below Ewing. It's a little over an hour drive.

I: Ok. Thanks. How about you all?

ELIZABETH: Well, the reason I took the one that I didn't pass was that it was the only way it was available when I needed it. I'm a hands-on kind of person and I should have known better. But I really didn't think it would be as bad as it was.

KELLY: I'd say I took it for the convenience. I don't like spending time in the classroom and it just seemed like a good idea.

I: Was it your first online class?

KELLY: Actually, I took three online and one in-person my first semester. I struggled, but did ok in the class that I took at night down in Lee County, but I really struggled with the online classes. I got in over my head.

ASHLEY: Yeah, I did, too. I had no idea how to get started or anything.

I: And why did you take classes online?

ASHLEY: Everyone else was doing it and it seemed like that's what I was supposed to do. I wanted to get into nursing and thought I could do the first classes online before I had to be up here all the time. I didn't realize it was going to be so hard.

I: Are you talking about the classes that are required to get into the nursing program?

ASHLEY: Yeah. I had to do some developmental stuff, too. Like math and English.

I: Ok. How about you two? Why did you take classes online?

ANN: One of them I didn't have a choice because that was the only way it was available. I started in the summer and it was hard to get a full schedule if you didn't take

online classes. Since I was already going to take one online, I thought I might as well do the others that way, too. Wasn't the smartest decision I've ever made.

FRED: I really just took the class because I thought it would be interesting. I don't think they had it in any other way, but I've taken others online, too. This one was just messed up. There was no real instruction. Just read the book and take a test. And then the tests didn't match the book. It made no sense at all! When I tried to ask the teacher about the tests, I was told just to read the book! If I had found it in the book, I wouldn't have asked the question. It was just frustrating!

I: So, he's opened up my next question. Let's talk about what happened in your classes that caused you to be unsuccessful.

FRED: Well, like I said, this one particular class was just confusing and really a waste of time. I thought I would enjoy it because it's something that I'm interested in, but I could have just read a book and save a lot of money. You'd never know that there was a teacher. The instructions were like read chapters 2 and 3 and take the test by the deadline. But then the only date you could find was in the grade book and it was like two or three years ago. And I swear, the tests didn't go with the book. It was like it was a different version or something.

EMMA: I've had some of that same kind of thing before. The due dates would be different in Blackboard than they were on the syllabus. And sometimes there were things on the syllabus that never did show up in Blackboard. When I asked the teacher I felt like I was bothering her or something. When she'd respond, she'd just say go by what it has in Blackboard. But that didn't make any sense because I couldn't find them in Blackboard. I got really frustrated and finally just gave up. I felt like I was wasting my time.

SUSIE: When I started getting low scores on everything, I knew I was going to fail. I thought it was ok to withdraw, so that's what I did. I didn't want to get an F.

I: Why do you think you got the low scores?

SUSIE: Well, I guess it was mostly my fault. It was my first online class and I really didn't understand what I was supposed to do. There was no clear instructions on how to get started or how to submit the work. I tried emailing the teacher a time or two and was told just to follow the instructions on the system, but I didn't understand them. It took me a while just to figure out how to get into Blackboard and by that time, I was already late on some things. I had to get a friend to show me that. She tried to explain things to me, but I just didn't get it. I finally figured out how to do the tests and then it marked all of my answers wrong, when I know they were right. It was very frustrating.

I: Were they fill-in-the-blank or essay response questions?

SUSIE: Yeah, I think they were fill-in-the-blank. There was some other kinds of questions, too. After I failed the first two tests and had a zero for the first assignment because it was late, I knew I couldn't pass. I just gave it up and withdrew.

I: How about you all? What happened?

KELLY: Well, like I said earlier, I got in over my head. I tried three online classes my first semester. I wish someone had talked me out of that, but I just didn't think it would be that hard. I couldn't keep up with what was due. They all had different assignments and different due dates. Two of them were just read and take a test, but the other one had lab assignments and all this other stuff to do. I was trying to take a math class, a biology class, and a health class online and had English at night. I don't know what I was thinking. I made it through by the skin of my teeth in the health and English class, but I failed the other two. I tried. I really did.

ASHLEY: Yeah, I tried biology online, too. That's why I'm taking it in the class now. I just couldn't get through it. It was confusing and the instructions were too hard to follow. I ended up withdrawing from it because I knew it was going to go bad for me.

ANN: I think I said the other day that it was not knowing what I was getting myself into. I was trying to do a full schedule online in the summer. I couldn't keep up with everything and had no idea that it was really left up to me to read the materials and understand them. I thought that there would be some type of instruction, like videos by the teacher or something. Within just the first few weeks, I was totally lost. Now that I know more of what to expect, it's ok. I know that if I feel lost in the beginning, it's not going to get any better, so I just drop it and pick up something else. And, I've worked out my schedule so I can be on-campus some, too.

I: And how about you?

JOAN: I guess my real problem was that I need someone to show me how to do some things in person. I'm definitely not a math person and I don't get biology either. I've tried both online and didn't pass either one. I just can't read and understand some of that stuff. It's been a while since I was in high school, so maybe that's it. But I don't even remember talking about some of the math stuff that we're doing now. Things have just really changed. But if I have someone who can work with me and show me stuff, then I get it. You can't get that kind of help online.

I: Ok. How did your feelings about online classes change as a result of these experiences?

SUSIE: Well, I felt good about it at first because I thought I was going to get to spend time with my kids and still go to college, but it wasn't what I expected. I ended up spending so much time worrying about the class that I didn't get to do things with the

kids like I thought I would. It was frustrating and overwhelming. I still think they're a good idea, but I think you have to be careful with the kind of class that you take online.

FRED: I'm probably more cautious now. I had taken others and was pretty confident about it, but this one was a mess. Now I look at everything that's on Blackboard and if it doesn't make sense, I just get out of it. Most of them are ok. But if you have to search for things that should be easy to find, then that's a bad sign. And if the dates are out of date, you know the teacher's not going to care one way or another.

ELIZABETH: I was really unsure about taking an online class and that hasn't really changed. I'm still not sure about them. Sometimes you just know that something's not for you and that's really how I feel. I'll avoid them if I can.

I: Would you all like to add anything about how you feel about online classes? Before and after your unsuccessful experience?

EMMA: I thought it would be the best option for me because of my long drive. And really, it's still better for me. I just have to be careful with my choice of classes. Like I know that I can't do math online. I learned that the hard way. So, I just have to be careful with my schedule. If I can get classes on two days a week, like Tuesday and Thursday, I will take as many as I can and then do one or two online. But I look at them, too. If a class doesn't make sense when you first get into it, it's not going to get any better.

ASHLEY: I'd say that my feelings didn't really change. I felt uncertain about taking some classes online and my experience just confirmed that. The material in the biology class was just too hard to follow, and the math wasn't good either. We had to do so much that I just couldn't keep up. I felt like I was in a race and it didn't matter if I understood what I was doing, I just had to do it by a deadline. When I messed up, there wasn't time

to go back to understand what I was doing wrong, and there wasn't really a way to find out what I was doing wrong.

I: What do you mean?

ASHLEY: I don't know. It was like if you questioned why something was wrong, you never really got an answer that made sense. I finally decided that I wasn't smart enough to do this stuff online and that's why I'm taking some of them on-campus now.

JOAN: Don't that make you mad? I've had teachers that either wouldn't respond at all or some that did and their answers were so rude that it just made me mad.

Sometimes they just don't care if you get it or not, or at least that's the way it seems.

ASHLEY: Yeah, I know what you mean. You learn who they are after a while.

I: Have any others had that problem?

SUSIE: Oh, yeah. I've had some really good teachers and some really bad ones.

EMMA: Yeah, me, too. For the most part, I'd say they've been pretty good, but when you get a bad one, it's just bad. You can usually tell. If they don't post messages and things, you know they probably aren't going to respond when you need them. That's the hardest part. Sometimes it's days before teachers get back to you. I know they have a life, too, but when you're trying to deal with family and work and everything else, you work on classes when you can. Sometimes I've sent emails in the middle of the night and I know they can't respond then, but the next day would be nice. I had one that would never respond until after the assignments were due so if you had a problem during the week with the assignment and asked for help, you were penalized for not turning it in by the due date. It was crazy!

JOAN: I bet I know which one you're talking about. I had that same problem. I ended up asking someone who had had the class to help me and made it through it, but I

could have done a lot better if the teacher would have helped when I needed it. She really didn't care. At least that's how I felt about it.

I: You've been a little quiet (to Ann). Is there anything you would like to share about how you felt before, during or after your online class?

ANN: I guess not a lot changed. I didn't know what I was getting into and maybe that's my fault. I got overwhelmed pretty quick. I'm just glad that someone told me I could drop it. I'm sure I would have failed it if I hadn't dropped. I'm still not as comfortable with them as I am with a teacher, but I know more what to expect, and what to look for when I start a new one.

I: Ok, thanks. Let's talk about how your unsuccessful experience in this class made you feel?

SUSIE: Whew, I'd say frustrated. I wanted to do well, and usually I do. It just seemed like I was doomed before I even got started.

JOAN: Oh, I'd say that I was angry. I never had to worry about my grades when I was in high school. Of course that was a few years ago, but I don't think I've lost it all up here. But all that stuff we had to read just did not make sense. Maybe I have lost some of it (laughing).

KELLY: It was just too much for me to handle.

I: What do you mean?

KELLY: I'd say the whole experience was too stressful. It was too much. I got in over my head.

EMMA: I guess I was disappointed. I really needed it online classes to work for me, but they don't always. It kind of makes you feel stupid, you know? Seems like if others can do it, everyone should be able to, but that's not the case for me. At least not

with some classes.

I: How about you all?

ANN: Like I said before, I was overwhelmed. But that made me frustrated and a little mad, I guess.

ASHLEY: I just wanted out of it. It was really a bad experience for me because I don't usually give up on things. That's not a good feeling.

ELIZABETH: I don't think my feelings changed any.

FRED: I felt like I had wasted my time. I like to learn something when I take a class and this one didn't do anything for me other than cost me money. I'll tell you that student don't get their money's worth out of that teacher.

I: Did all of you drop or were withdrawn from the classes that we've been talking about?

KELLY: No, I failed the two I had – math and biology.

SUSIE: I dropped.

EMMA: I just quit. I didn't know I had an option to drop the class, so I got an F.

JOAN: I think the teacher dropped me out of the math class, but I failed biology.

ASHLEY: I dropped it.

ANN: Yeah, I withdrew.

ELIZABETH: I didn't pass it.

FRED: I gave in and dropped it. I was wasting time and definitely wasted money.

I: Do you think there is anything that would have helped you succeed in these classes?

SUSIE: I really don't like asking for help. That's probably not the smartest decision, but it seems like that should be what the teacher is for. But when you ask them

and they don't really help, then why should any one else?

JOAN: That's true. It's even hard to raise your hand in class because you're afraid someone will think you're stupid, but when the teachers ignore you, you realize that you probably are asking something that everyone else already knows. Why put yourself through that?

EMMA: Well, I don't mind asking questions. The problem is some teachers don't want to answer them or don't explain things very good when they do.

SUSIE: Yeah, sometimes they just ignore you.

ANN: I don't think all of them are like that. I've had some that will email you right back or at least pretty quickly. But then there are some that it's like you're questioning their integrity or something when you ask a question. I think it's a personality thing.

ASHLEY: Probably so.

I: Are there some type of services that the college could offer that would have made a difference for you?

ELIZABETH: Probably, but I don't know what they would be. I was only in it because that was my only choice. If there had been a night class, I probably wouldn't have even had the class anyway.

FRED: Maybe some teacher training. I've had some classes that are really interesting and have videos and projects and things. This one was just a waste to time. Read the book, take the test. And the two didn't even match. I just wonder if the book changed and the teacher didn't update the site or something. That's what it seemed like to me.

KELLY: I don't like asking for help either, but I wish someone had told me upfront

what I was getting myself into.

I: Did you see an advisor when you signed up for classes?

KELLY: I saw some guy, but he wasn't my advisor. It was during one of those orientation sessions so I didn't ask a lot of questions.

I: Ok. I know some of you have a class in just a few minutes. I certainly appreciate you talking with me today. Is there anything else you would like to add or say about your experience?

EMMA: I still think online classes are a good option. Some of them could just be better, I guess.

SUSIE: Yeah, they really do help when you have other obligations. I wish some of the teachers could be a little more helpful or understanding. But like he said, that's the difference in personalities. I don't think there's anything you can do about that.

I: Again, I appreciate your participation today. If you have any questions or think of other things you would like to add, please get in touch with me. My office is in Phillips Taylor in the Business suite. Also, if you'd like to review the transcript or results of the study, I'll be happy to share them with you. Just let me know. Have a good afternoon and thanks, again.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

Focus Group 3 – Transcript of Session

Location: PT 117 – MYCC

Date: Tuesday, July 17, 2012

Time: 1 p.m.

Number of Attendees: 7

Transcriber: Amanda Olinger

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you all for being here today. Before we begin, I would like to introduce myself and explain for the record why we are here. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

We talked earlier about using pseudo names during this session. It's important that you not refer to each other by your given name or refer to college personnel or other individuals by their given name. I appreciate you agreeing to wear a name tag with your pseudo name and would ask that if you want to address each other, you do so by the name on the tags.

Let's first get started by confirming that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Also, remember that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time. Please audibly indicate your understanding of this and provide the transcriptionist with your pseudo name.

PHYLLIS: Ok. Yes, I understand. You can call me Phyllis.

SOPHIA: I understand, too. I'm Sophia (laughing).

SABRINA: Me, too. And I'm Sabrina.

KIRK: Yes. My name is Kirk.

BO: Yeah. I guess I'm Bo.

DAISY: Yes, I agree. I will be Daisy.

TOMMY: I should have been Luke (laughing). Yes, I understand. And I'm Tommy.

I: Great. I appreciate your willingness to meet with me today. I'm just going to get us started and ask that you jump in as you think you have something to contribute. I have some general questions, but really want to learn what it was like for you to take an online class at the college. First, let's talk about why you chose to take an online class. What influenced you to enroll in the online class that you were not successful in?

SOPHIA: My problem is that I generally don't have transportation or time to go directly to campus.

PHYLLIS: Yeah, I kind of had that problem. But I have kids, too, and that makes it harder.

SABRINA: Because I needed a math class, and that's the only way I could get it at the

time.

KIRK: I took it online because I was having vehicle problems and I thought that using the internet at my neighbors would make things easier and then getting an occasional ride to take an exam.

SOPHIA: Transportation is really an issue, I think.

BO: That really wasn't my problem. I just took it because I thought it would be more convenient.

DAISY: I have a full time job and a 17 month old. I also live on the lower end of Lee County it takes me between 45 minutes to an hour to get to the college. So I guess I had multiple reasons.

TOMMY: I thought with time constraints, an online version would be best for me.

I: So, transportation, child care, time. Were there others?

SABRINA: Yeah, because that was the only option.

I: You're right. Sorry about that. What were some of the classes you took online that didn't end successfully?

SOPHIA: Biology.

PHYLLIS: I've had a couple. Accounting and Economics.

SABRINA: Math.

KIRK: Yeah, math for me, too.

BO: Personal Health.

DAISY: Early childhood education.

I: And you?

TOMMY: I've had several, too, but the worst was Spanish.

I: Ok. Let's talk about your experiences in these online classes, particularly

the ones that you didn't do well in. Can you describe your experiences to me?

SOPHIA: I had a terrible experience with this class. I repeatedly attempted to schedule tests to be proctored and was ignored. I repeatedly asked for help and was ignored. The professor was not helpful at all and was just plain hateful.

DAISY: I'd say it was the worst class ever. I had no will to do anything because it was all open book, even the tests. It felt like a waste of time.

SABRINA: The teacher was way too fast and didn't explain things well. I got more information from a particular web site than I did the instructor.

KIRK: I just didn't have enough time to devote to the class. It was just too much, and it was too fast, like she said.

TOMMY: I didn't like it at all. It was generally frustrating, awful.

BO: I guess the class was ok, but I didn't have any motivation to do anything. I just forgot about doing work sometimes because I didn't have anyone telling me I had to do it.

PHYLLIS: Yeah, I kind of had that problem, too. And I just didn't have time to do all the work. Even though there were deadlines, I just couldn't remember what to do when and keep up with everything else. It's easier when a teacher reminds you at the end of class. You know, remember we have a quiz on Wednesday, just stuff like that.

I: Was that a problem for all of you?

SABRINA: Pretty much.

KIRK: Yeah, I guess I hadn't thought about it, but it does help.

SOPHIA: I kept a calendar, but I just couldn't get help coordinating proctors and things.

TOMMY: Yeah.

BO: (No verbal response, nodding head)

DAISY: We didn't have reminders or anything from the instructor but instructions to read and take the tests. I'm not sure that I needed reminders for that.

I: Ok. We've touched a little on the problems you've experienced. Are there specific problems you think contributed to your lack of success in the class?

SOPHIA: I just couldn't get any help. When I attempted to correct my mistakes and catch back up, the professor ignored me. She later sent me an email stating I had been dropped for missing a test. And it was the test that I needed to schedule and she just ignored me when I attempted to schedule it!

PHYLLIS: That's just not right.

SOPHIA: Tell me about it!

SABRINA: I couldn't get tutoring at the college because of my work schedule. I asked the teacher about it, but she couldn't help, or she didn't.

I: Do you think that would have helped?

SABRINA: It would have been nice to have. Maybe it would have, I don't know.

PHYLLIS: I really dropped it before I could pinpoint anything specific. It was mostly just too much for me to do with everything else I had to do. I think I could have done it with no problem if that's all I had to do, but I was taking other classes and working and I've got kids to keep up with, too.

KIRK: I just couldn't keep up. It seemed like we were trying to get too much done in one semester, or something. I couldn't grasp one chapter before we were moving on to something else. I felt lost for the beginning, really.

TOMMY: In my opinion, my problem was a lack of instruction. It just didn't make a lot of sense to me.

BO: I ended up quitting because my mom got sick. When she was put in the hospital, I just couldn't keep up with everything. And without someone reminding me, it just didn't work out.

DAISY: Well, I needed a teacher. All you had to do was read and take a test, but I didn't see the point in that. I expected to have a teacher who would explain things, similar to the classroom. Why bother with that? I can read all kinds of books, but until I can do it or talk about it, it doesn't mean anything to me. Online just didn't work for me.

I: Someone mentioned a lack of instruction. How do the rest of you feel about that? Do you think the level of instruction is different in online classes compared to in-person classes?

PHYLLIS: Oh, yeah. It's definitely different.

SABRINA: Sure. You're just on your own in online classes.

SOPHIA: Yeah, I agree. Sometimes it feels like you don't even have a teacher.

BO: I think you just learn more in a class with a teacher.

KIRK: Yeah, me, too. It is different.

TOMMY: It was me that said lack of instruction. I've had other online classes that were fine, but there was more interaction than in the Spanish class. I guess it's hard to communicate online in another language, but that would have helped me understand it, I think. You know, some kind of discussion with the teacher and the other students, or something.

I: Ok. Has your opinion of online classes changed because of the one you were unsuccessful in?

SOPHIA: It worries me. I don't know if I will be able to finish my degree now.

I: What do you mean?

SOPHIA: Well, I have to take several more and I can't get to campus like most people. If I have to take more online like this one, then I may not be able to finish my degree.

PHYLLIS: I've had others online and they were ok, too. I don't think I'll let this one keep me from taking others, but I'll be more careful about it.

KIRK: I just think math shouldn't be taken online, or at least I can't do it that way. I know there are others that I have to have that are only taught that way, so hopefully they'll be better. If not, I guess I just won't be able to finish for a while.

SABRINA: Actually, I don't feel confident enough to take another one.

BO: I don't like online classes. I feel like I learn more when I sit in the class. I'll avoid them from now on if I can, but I might like the hybrid ones, I'm not sure. Seems like that would be better.

I: What about you? Has your experience changed the way you think about online classes?

DAISY: Yeah, I don't ever want another one.

TOMMY: I don't know. I've had some good ones. But you know what they say about one bad apple. It kind of just spoiled it, I guess. I'll take them if I have to, but will avoid it if I can.

I: Ok. Can you explain how your experiences in this unsuccessful class made you feel? Not what you experienced, but how you felt about it. What do you think?

SOPHIA: Horrible!

PHYLLIS: I had lots of feelings. Nervous at first, mad, sad, frustrated. Maybe even dumb.

KIRK: I felt horrible that I failed this class, and I just refuse to take it over. I know I'll have to at some point, but I won't do it with the same teacher, and definitely not online. I'd say they're not for me. I like the idea of them, and if it worked out, it would have been good because I think I could have taken more at a time. But I probably won't try that again. I didn't realize how much you got from talking about things in class. It's really different online. I couldn't stay focused and got so behind I just gave up.

SABRINA: Defeated and ignorant.

BO: I felt like I couldn't do anything right.

DAISY: For me, I felt like a failure. Sometimes you just need to do well to know you're not a failure, and then when you don't, it's like it just reinforces what you don't want to feel, especially when you've heard it all your life. You start to think maybe they're right. Maybe I'm not smart or I'm not as good as other people. It's not a good feeling.

SABRINA: Yeah, I totally understand that.

TOMMY: Probably mad, but also frustrated.

I: Can you think of any type of support services or help that would have made a difference? What would have helped you succeed in this class?

SABRINA: I guess tutoring could have helped, but I was generally working on the class late at night. I'm not sure who would have helped me then.

SOPHIA: I think more one-on-one with the teacher would have made a difference. If the professor would have just answered my questions instead of ignoring me, that could have helped. At least, I think it would have.

KIRK: Just feedback from the instructor. When I got things wrong, that's all that I knew, they were wrong. I needed someone to tell me why, or at least explain how to do

it differently.

PHYLLIS: I'm not sure what would have helped. Do you think someone would take care of my kids while I study? (Laughing)

BO: That would help a lot of people! Really, I can't think of anything. Maybe some better communication with the teachers.

I: Can you think of anything?

DAISY: No, not really.

TOMMY: I think the online system could be better. We had videos, too, but that didn't help either. I'm convinced that it's really all about how much effort the instructor puts in a class.

I: Ok. What about your support system? Do you have family or friends who support you or encourage you as you take classes?

PHYLLIS: Yes, my husband is my cheerleader. He knows that I want to get a degree and he totally gets that.

SABRINA: Yeah, I have a good one, too. I couldn't make it sometimes without my family behind me.

SOPHIA: Nobody in my family has ever been to college, so they really want me to do good. But I guess they don't really know how to help me, either.

BO: Yeah, I'm the first one in my family, too. But I'm not sure that mine is fully behind me. But I do have a lot of friends here.

I: That's good. What about you all?

KIRK: Not really. I guess the people here at the college are pretty supportive, but I don't really have anyone at home that supports me. I've been on my own for a while now.

DAISY: I have my husband, but he's not been to college either. He tries to take care of our baby sometimes when I'm studying, but he works a lot, too.

TOMMY: Yeah, I guess mine's pretty decent. My wife wants me to finish. Of course, she thinks I should already be done with it!

I: How do you feel about asking for help?

SOPHIA: I don't like to ask for help. It's just hard, you know?

PHYLLIS: I think it's hard to ask, too, but I will when I have to.

SABRINA: No, I don't like to ask for help, either. It makes you feel stupid, especially when the instructor doesn't really respond. I tried to ask the teacher about tutoring, but it didn't help.

KIRK: I may not like to ask, but I do. Sometimes teachers help and sometimes they don't. But you don't know until you ask.

BO: It looks like they would have to help if you asked for it. But I agree. Sometimes it's a waste of time to even ask, but at least in the classroom other students can help, too.

I: Did you try asking your classmates online?

BO: No. With this class, I really didn't have anything to ask about. I just got so behind that I couldn't get caught up.

DAISY: I don't mind to ask for help at all. I've learned more by asking questions in classes that I have from reading the books.

TOMMY: Yeah, me, too. If I could I'd be in the classroom for everything. When I am, I ask lots of questions and things just make more sense. Especially if it's something we can do and not just read about.

I: Do you mean like hands-on activities or something like that?

TOMMY: Yeah. I'm a little older, but we used to learn by the teachers explaining things, and then we would try it and then talk about how it went. It kind of reinforced what was being taught and I remembered it better.

SOPHIA: I agree with that. Things just make more sense that way. But it's hard to do that online.

KIRK: I would say that everyone learns better that way. But now there's not time to do that. I know in high school now kids just memorize things, but they don't really apply them. I went to a math bee not too long ago for one of my nieces and it was so weird to watch how this one kid could multiply big numbers in his head, but when the teacher asked basically the same kind of question in a word problem that was related to money, he couldn't do it. It was like he couldn't apply the same principles.

SABRINA: That's weird.

KIRK: Yeah, I don't know why I thought of that. But when you do hands-on work, it just makes more sense. I think this kid learned how to do the math, but he couldn't apply the same math when it was worded as a money problem.

I: Ok. So are you saying that online classes need an applied approach?

KIRK: Well, I think it would help. I don't know exactly how that would work, but maybe if I knew why or how I could use the math that I was trying to learn, it would have made more sense.

SABRINA: Yeah, I would agree with that.

TOMMY: That's kind of what I was saying earlier about Spanish. I need to use it somehow to really be able to understand it. I mean the whole point of taking it was to be able to understand it when someone uses it, and then be able to talk back to them. Even if I had been successful in this class, I don't think I could have done that.

DAISY: Yeah, maybe more projects or activities or something. Really, I don't get anything out of reading the book and taking tests. It's just not practical. I know a lot of people don't even read the chapters before taking the tests, unless it's proctored. If you can do the test with the book, why even read the chapter?

PHYLLIS: I'll admit to being guilty of that.

SOPHIA: I'd say that anybody who has had an online class could say that!

I: Hmm...well, let's think more about the approach to online learning. Do you think learning styles play a role in whether you're successful or not in online classes?

KIRK: Yeah, definitely.

SOPHIA: I agree.

PHYLLIS: I think so, but I'm not sure what kind of learning style works best. I know I'm a visual learner. I have to see things and have them explained to really understand something.

SABRINA: Me, too. I really like hands-on the best. But if I see something done, or have someone to demonstrate something to me, I can usually repeat it.

BO: It's like learning when you're little. Your parents usually show you the things you need for your life skills and you repeat them. You know, like tying your shoes. Sure, maybe you change them a little to make it work better for you, but at least you've got that foundation to build on.

DAISY: Yeah, even in lecture classes like History. If you discuss something that happened in the early 1900s and then see it in a video or something, it sticks with you better. But when you just read about it and answer questions from the book, it doesn't work so well.

TOMMY: I would agree with that.

I: Do you think living in this area makes a difference?

SOPHIA: Only for those teachers who aren't from here. You can always tell. They don't have the same way of doing things as most people who've lived here most of their lives. I know I can tell a difference in the teachers who have worked in other jobs before becoming teachers and those who just came right out of college. You can tell that for some it's just a job. But there are some that care enough to want to do a good job. I really think it makes a difference.

PHYLLIS: That's a good point. And I don't think the ones from here are as rude, either. Some of them are just plain rude. I guess not the majority, but I've had a few.

SABRINA: Do you mean with the way we learn?

I: Yes. I should have clarified that, but you can talk about anything that you think is relevant to your experiences in online classes.

SABRINA: Well, I do think that those of us who are from southwest Virginia are a little different. I think we've got a different point of view. Not that it's bad, but I think we tend to be more independent. Or we want to be, so we want to learn how to do things and then do them. I know I'm here to learn, not just to take classes for the sake of taking classes, or even to get a degree. I want to be able to use what I learn someday. Even if it's not a program class. If it's something that I've been advised to take, it should be something that will help me someday.

BO: That's probably true. I guess some people don't care if they can use what they were supposed to learn in a class, but the whole point of taking classes is to be able to do something better or know more than you did when you started. If you don't get that out of a class, then you've wasted your time.

KIRK: Well, I've lived in other places and I have friends in bigger cities. There

is a difference in us, but I'm not sure that it's good or bad. I think when you're from around here, you expect people to be responsible for holding their own, if you know what I mean.

I: No, I'm not sure I understand.

KIRK: I mean, if there's something that needs to be done by somebody, most of us who've lived here for most of our lives expect that's what the person will do. But that's changing, too, through the generations. Teachers have changed, but we've all changed a little. My generation was taught to respect our teachers, but now some teachers don't care. They just put it out there and if we get it, we do, and if we don't, we don't. I think in the bigger cities, it's always been that way, or at least that's the way I perceive it. Used to when you didn't understand something here and you asked the teachers about it, you always got an explanation or help. That's not always the case now.

I: Oh.

KIRK: I guess that's teaching style, not learning style, huh?

SABRINA: It's a little of both, but I agree with you. It goes back to whether the instructor cares or not, I'd say.

SOPHIA: Yeah, I think that makes a difference. When students don't care one way or another, we just get dropped or drop ourselves, or sometimes get an F. But if a teacher doesn't care, it hurts us, too.

I: Do you think that comes across in online classes?

SABRINA: Oh, yeah. I think so.

PHYLLIS: I agree. I think it's pretty obvious. I've been in others that I've done well in, even though it was like the teacher wasn't even around. As long as I did the work that was required, or took the tests, I was ok. Maybe you would hear from the teacher if you

didn't do something, I don't know. It's just like you're out in Blackboard on your own sometimes.

KIRK: But when you need help, you need help. And if you ask and don't even get a response, it's like, well, why bother?

DAISY: Yeah, you have to be self-motivated to take online classes, but it helps to have a teacher that can motivate you, too.

I: I see.

SABRINA: And if you ask for help, you should get it. That's what they're paid to do, right?

BO: You would think. But sometimes you shouldn't have to ask for help. If you get behind, it's pretty obvious that you've got a problem. In my case, it wasn't really the class, it was my mom. But still it was a problem. When she got so sick, I just couldn't keep up with the deadlines and stuff. But I don't think the teacher really cared what my problems were. It was either do it or you're going to fail. If she could have given me a break on some of the deadlines, I could have finished the class. But that wasn't even an option. We're all adults, you know? It's not like I was some teenager trying to blow it off. I was taking the class because I wanted to take it and needed it. I thought it would be more convenient online, but it wasn't.

DAISY: That's too bad.

BO: Yeah.

I: I realize that most of you have class in a little while so we'll try to wrap this up in the next few minutes. I certainly appreciate you taking time to meet with me today. Is there anything else you would like to share about your online experiences?

KIRK: I'd like to say that it's good to hear that I'm not the only one who has had

problems. When I failed the class, I was mad at myself and also at the teacher. I just needed more help from the instructor and I think I could have done it. It helps to know that maybe it wasn't just me.

SABRINA: That's so true. When you don't do well in a class, you do feel like you're out there by yourself. And then trying to explain it to your family or your partner...it's just not a good feeling.

PHYLLIS: Yeah. And I think teachers need to realize that most of us are taking several classes at the same time. When you work or have kids and other responsibilities, it's tough. I know that's not their fault, but if we had a little more say in how or when we could turn in things, it might be better.

SOPHIA: That's not going to happen! (Laughing)

PHYLLIS: Well, it's wishful thinking anyway.

BO: Some flexibility would be good. I know we have to have structure, but it doesn't have to be made of steel. Some classes you can work ahead in and that helps to take off some of the load if you can work ahead and get one out of the way.

DAISY: Still, I think there needs to be more interaction or some kind of hands-on work. That's not needed in some classes, but we need to do something besides reading and taking a test that the teacher didn't even put together. I'm not even sure my teacher had even looked at the tests.

TOMMY: Yeah, I've had classes like that. I did ok, but I really didn't learn anything, I guess.

I: Ok, folks, we're out of time for this session. If you think of anything else you would like to talk about, please let me know. My office is just downstairs in the business suite, room 147. I also invite you to email me or call if you have any questions

about the study. Your input has been very helpful and will be valuable to my research.

Do any of you have questions before we leave?

SOPHIA: I don't think so.

KIRK: No, I don't.

PHYLLIS: I appreciate being able to give my opinion. I hope it helps.

SABRINA: Yeah, me, too.

I: Again, thank you. If you want to talk further, please just let me know. I hope you all have a good evening.

END OF SESSION (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Focus Group 4 – Transcript of Session

Location: PT 220 – MYCC

Date: Tuesday, July 17, 2012

Time: 5:30 p.m.

Number of Attendees: 10

Transcriber: Vickie Ratliff

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Good evening! I appreciate your cooperation this evening. As you know, we're here to talk about some of the experiences you have had in online classes. For the record, I will start by introducing myself and explaining why we are meeting today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

It looks like I have obtained all of your signatures on the informed consent forms. I realize there are some reservations about recording this session on video, so we will go with the audio recording only. For the record, please verify that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time. Is that correct?

P1: Yes.

P2: Yeah.

P3: Yes.

P4: Yeah, I put it on the table.

P5: Me, too.

P6: I've signed it, too.

P7: Yeah.

P8: Yes.

P9: I have.

P10: Yeah, me too.

I: Ok. Before we started the session, you all chose pseudo names so that your identity is not compromised. I'll ask that if you need to address each other, please use the name placed on the other person's nametag. Would each of you please identify yourself by your pseudo name?

P1: I'm Mandy.

P2: Donnie.

P3: Katy.

P4: Jordan.

P5: I'm Sam.

P6: Alex.

P7: Chrissy.

P8: Jackie.

P9: I'm John.

P10: And I'm Susie.

I: Great. Again, I appreciate your willingness to meet today. The format for the session will be a little different from our individual meetings. I will introduce a topic or thought, and would like for you to provide your opinion, experiences, or thoughts related to your experiences in an online class where you were unsuccessful. For the record, I would ask that when you respond you do so verbally so that I can be certain to capture everything.

We're going to talk today about only the online classes you've attempted but were unsuccessful. I realize it's hard to distinguish between them sometimes, but I'm particularly interested in a class that was an unsuccessful attempt. The purpose of my research is to determine what it is like to have that experience, how did it make you feel, what caused it, etc. Does anyone have any questions about that?

John: I've had several. Do we just pick one?

I: It would be good if you can share experiences from just one, or if you think it's important, you can talk about others. However, I may need to clarify the classes with you as we talk about them. Are any of you taking classes on-campus this semester?

DONNIE: Yeah, I have a couple of night classes.

KATY: And I've got one.

SAM: Me, too.

ALEX: I had one in person, but it got cancelled. Not enough people enrolled so I had to choose an online class.

I: Ok. Let's talk about the reason that you chose to take an online class in

the first place. In particular, I'm interested in one that you were not successful in.

Would you share with the group why you took an online class?

MANDY: I've got a full load with my work and kids. I've got a full-time day job and do some PRN work at night, and I have three kids. Online was my only choice, really. I really want to do better for my family and college will help me do that, I think. The only way I can go to college and not sacrifice time with my kids is to work on the classes at night while they're asleep. It's hard, but you got to do what it takes sometimes.

KATY: I've got children, too, and it is hard. I only work part-time, but my work schedule is really crazy. I may work four days one week and then just two the next. I never know, so I can't really plan a schedule unless it's online.

JOHN: I needed the class to graduate and that's the only way that I could get it. It wasn't my preference, but I had to have it.

I: Was it only offered online or were the other sections closed?

JOHN: I think it was only offered online.

I: Ok. Thanks. How about you all?

CHRISSY: My advisor signed me up for it. It was a required class.

I: Did you want the class online?

CHRISSY: I didn't really know the difference. I just took the schedule that she gave me.

I: Ok. Any others want to share why they took an online class?

JORDAN: Yeah, I thought it would be better for me. I'm trying to find a job, so I didn't want to tie up all of my time. And I thought it would be easier that way.

I: Easier? Do you mean that the class would be easier or that it would be easier on your schedule?

JORDAN: I guess a little of both. Everybody seems to be taking them, so I thought they would be easy to do.

I: Was it your first online class?

JORDAN: Yeah, but I had three of them. My only in-person was a CPR class.

I: And why did you take classes online?

SAM: I was trying to get the classes done that are required to get into respiratory therapy. I just chose what was available when I tried to sign up.

I: Are you talking about the pre-requisite classes?

SAM: Yeah. I had to do some developmental classes and I needed biology and I think some others.

I: Ok. Why did you take classes online?

ALEX: I think that was the only way it was available.

JACKIE: I don't think my class was offered any other way, either.

SUSIE: I was trying to save money, I guess. I thought it would be cheaper to take them online so I didn't have to pay for so much gas. I was planning to transfer to another college, so I thought it would be ok to do my general studies online.

I: Thanks for sharing that. So, let's talk about what happened in your classes that caused you to be unsuccessful.

JACKIE: I think it was a lot of things, really. I didn't understand what the instructor wanted and she didn't really help any. If you asked a question, it was like you were ignored. I didn't like that.

DONNIE: I'd say that I just lost interest. All we had to do was read the book and take a test. I guess I've got a low attention span or something, but it was a waste of time for me to read the book. The tests were so hard that I couldn't even find the answers in

the book.

I: Did you use your books on the tests?

DONNIE: Yeah, it didn't say that we couldn't. But it didn't matter. It was like there was something missing. I needed someone to explain to me in words that I could understand what I was supposed to do. I can't just read a book and understand it. In class, at least you can ask questions. I didn't feel like you could do that online.

MANDY: I started getting behind because one of my kids got sick. He has Crohn's disease and sometimes he has a hard time. I can't miss work because I need the money. When you're a single mom, you have to put things off for yourself sometimes, and I put my classes on the back burner and got behind. The problem was the teacher really didn't care that I had a lot going on. I guess she's never had kids or something, but they come first. When she wouldn't give me a chance to get caught up, I had to quit.

I: Did you drop the class?

MANDY: I don't think so, but I got a W for it. I guess she dropped me.

I: How about you all? What happened?

JORDAN: Well, I got in over my head. When you don't know what you're getting yourself into, and then you find out that it's not what you expected, you're kind of in shock, you know? I tried to keep up, but I really didn't understand what I was supposed to do. I emailed my homework cause that's what I thought I was supposed to do, and I got this hateful email back that said I had to post it on Blackboard, but I didn't know how. By the time I figured it out, I had already gotten a zero for it. That really made me mad and then it went downhill from there. I thought, why bother?

SAM: Yeah, I had something similar to that. I didn't get along too well with the teacher. I don't know if he didn't understand me or I didn't understand him, but either

way, it just didn't work. His instructions were really vague.

ALEX: I probably was to blame in my case. I let everything pile up and then couldn't get caught up. I thought we were able to work on our own timeframe and I always do better when I am up against a deadline, so I just put things off. Then I found out that it was too late to turn my stuff in. The teacher didn't care either. She said I should have kept a calendar with due dates. How was I supposed to know that?

I: And how about you?

KATY: I don't think math should be taken online. That's the only way I could get it in my schedule, but it was just too hard. I needed someone to show me what we were doing.

I: Ok. How did your feelings about online classes change as a result of these experiences?

MANDY: I had such high hopes. Really college was supposed to be the answer to a lot of things for me. I wanted my kids to see that people like us could go to college and make something of ourselves. But it's been so hard. Now all they know is that college is too stressful. I still think online classes are a good idea, but I just can't manage too many classes at a time and some things just aren't good to take online.

JACKIE: I didn't think too much of them in the first place. I'm ok on a computer, but I don't really like to sit in front of one for very long. Especially if it's not interesting. I'd say that my feelings haven't really changed because I still don't care for them.

CHRISSY: I was really unsure about them, too. Since I didn't do too well, I've avoided them since then.

SAM: If given a choice, I'd do all my classes in-person. But I know that's not possible. Sometimes life is just too busy to get up here for classes.

ALEX: Yeah, when you work and have other responsibilities, it's hard. But if we're going to get a good job around here, we've got to take classes someday.

SUSIE: That's a true statement. But you've got to pass them before they'll do any good.

ALEX: (Laughing). Yeah, I guess you're right.

I: Donnie, what about you? Would you all like to add anything about how you feel about online classes? Before and after your unsuccessful experience?

DONNIE: Well, beforehand I thought it would be a good idea. But I thought it would be more like the in-person classes. I really like the interaction in the night classes and I missed that. It's like you're in the class by yourself or something. I just didn't find it to be interesting.

KATY: I've had classes like that, too. I didn't get anything out of one of the classes. Read the book and take a test. That's it. I did ok, but I couldn't tell you a thing that I learned in that class. It was a real waste of time.

I: What about the one you had that was unsuccessful?

KATY: I was just lost in that class. I'm not strong in math and was lost from the start. When I take it again, I'll do it where there's an instructor to help me.

SAM: Yeah, at least when you're in a class, the instructor will usually help you. Some of them online aren't helpful at all.

I: Have any others had that problem?

MANDY: Oh, yeah. There's some really bad ones out there. It's like they're too good to help you if you aren't doing ok in the class.

I: What do you mean?

MANDY: Well, I had a couple of friends in one of my classes and one of them

doesn't do too well in her classes. The other one's really smart. The teacher would always seem to respond to my smart friend, and she just ignored the other one. It was like she wasn't good enough for the teacher to bother with her.

DONNIE: Yeah, I've seen that, too. Actually, I've been the not too smart one before and it's not a good feeling. Some things I do real well in because they interest me. But if it's something that I don't like to do, like writing papers and stuff, well, I need help with that. I remember asking for help and was just told to look it up. I had looked it up! But I needed examples or something.

KATY: Yeah, that's pretty common. I guess we're supposed to know so much when we get into some of these classes, but when it's been a while since you've had stuff like English, it's hard to remember what you're supposed to do.

I: Let's get back to how or if your opinion of online classes changed.

ALEX: I'm still not comfortable with them. I just think that online classes are not for everyone.

SUSIE: Yeah, I try to avoid them when I can.

I: Ok, thanks. Let's talk about how your unsuccessful experience in this class made you feel?

MANDY: Oh, disappointed and frustrated.

KATY: I'd say I was pretty mad about the whole thing.

JORDAN: Stressed. Frustrated.

DONNIE: I'd say pretty disappointed. It was a waste of time and money.

I: How about you all?

ALEX: I was kind of ticked off by it really.

JOHN: It was really a bad experience. Not one that I want to have again.

CHRISSY: I'd say I don't want to do it again, but when they're your only option, you don't have much choice.

JACKIE: I didn't really care for them in the beginning and I know I don't like them now.

I: Do you think there is anything that would have helped you succeed in these classes?

MANDY: Maybe if the teacher would have been a little more understanding. It's hard to admit that you can't handle something. Then when you try and the teacher just knocks you down, that's tough to swallow.

KATY: That's true.

DONNIE: Maybe if the class had of been a little more interesting, I would have done better.

SUSIE: I think it's hard just being out there on your own. Maybe some study groups or something. Even if we did them online someway.

ALEX: That's a pretty good idea. But they'd have to be in the middle of the night or something. I'd say most of us do our work late at night, unless we work at night.

SAM: Probably so.

I: Are there some type of services that the college could offer that would have made a difference for you?

CHRISSY: I don't really know what's available.

JACKIE: I'd say that the teachers need to take an online class to see how it is. That way they might be able to explain things more on our level.

JORDAN: (Laughing). Yeah, they need to take each others' classes.

I: Ok. I realize that night classes start in a little while and a few of you have

class. Before we finish up, is there anything else you would like to add or say about your experience?

MANDY: I don't think so.

JACKIE: I think the college needs to know that some of us really try hard, even when we don't do well. Maybe the teachers who are from here could teach the others a thing or two about how to treat people.

I: What do you mean?

JACKIE: Well, it's just something that I've seen in my classes. You've got a few teachers who have some really bad attitudes. I don't care if they've had two Master's degrees, that doesn't make them more important than anyone else. We're trying to get an education just like they have and just because we didn't have the money to go to a big university somewhere doesn't mean that we're not good enough to do it.

SAM: I would agree with that. Some of them need to understand what it's like to work for a living.

SUSIE: Now I'm following you. That's really true. Some of them have no concept of working two jobs, taking care of the kids and trying to go to college at the same time. But I'd say that some of them that grew up here do know a little about that. We think it's normal because that's what's done here, but some of the ones who moved here to teach really don't understand that. They've gone to a nice high school, went straight to college and then started teaching. It's like they say about walking in some else's shoes. You never understand what it feels like until you've done it.

MANDY: I like how you explained that.

I: Ok, I think that's about all the time we have. Again, I appreciate your participation today. If you have any questions or think of other things you would like to

add, please get in touch with me. My office is in Phillips Taylor in the Business suite.

Also, if you'd like to review the transcript or results of the study, I'll be happy to share them with you. Just let me know. Enjoy the rest of your week.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

APPENDIX J
INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Interview 1 – Transcript of Session

Location: Cyber Cafe – MYCC

Date: Tuesday, June 26, 2012

Time: 10 a.m.

Participant ID: Shel6005

Transcriber: Amanda Olinger

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Before we begin, I would like to introduce myself and explain for the record why I've asked you to talk with me today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: I understand.

I: I appreciate your willingness to meet with me today. Ok, let's get started. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: If you don't mind, please identify the subject or title of the class that you're referring to.

P: It was a biology class.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: I was new to the school and had too many classes to take for my schedule.

I: So it wouldn't fit in your schedule any other way?

P: That's right.

I: How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: Unsure.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Well, I withdrew from it.

I: Ok. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: I've taken other online classes since then and been successful.

I: That's good. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I didn't know what to expect really. It was an unknown for me, you know?

I: Sure, that's understandable. Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No, not really.

I: In what way?

P: The materials were just too hard to follow. There was a video component and it didn't really make sense to me.

I: Do you think that was a factor that led to your lack of success in this class?

P: Yes, definitely. It was just too hard to follow.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: No, I guess I wasn't. I should have asked more questions, but I didn't even know what to ask. It was simple enough to sign up for them, but then I didn't know what else to do from there.

I: Why not?

P: Well, I was new to the school or college, and had been out of school for so many years. Really didn't know what to expect.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: Comfortable. I was really comfortable using computers.

I: Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yeah, I've got excellent support. That's not a problem.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: No, not really.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I don't like to ask for help. It's just something that I don't want to do.

I: What about for this class? Did you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: No. I just withdrew from it.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: I can't really because I just dropped it. It was too confusing for me.

I: Ok. Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: No, it hasn't. I've taken online classes successfully since then. It was just the way that class was delivered, I think.

I: I understand. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, not really.

I: Ok. Again, thanks for spending some time with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE B)

Interview 2 – Transcript of Session

Location: Cyber Cafe – MYCC

Date: Tuesday, June 26, 2012

Time: 10:30 a.m.

Participant ID: Hill234

Transcriber: Amanda Olinger

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Before we begin, I would like to introduce myself and explain for the record why I've asked you to talk with me today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I have.

I: Ok. I appreciate your willingness to meet with me today. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yeah.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: It was a music appreciation class.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: I needed the credit and that's the way it was offered.

I: So there wasn't an in-person session for it?

P: I don't think so.

I: How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I was kinda nervous at first.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: I just didn't understand it very well at first.

I: Ok. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: I feel way more comfortable now.

I: That's good. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I figured I would do well. But that didn't happen.

I: Ok. Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: I guess so. I retook the class the following semester and completed it with an A.

I: Did you take it online the second time?

P: Yeah.

I: What factors do you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I had problems with my internet messing up and I didn't understand some of the stuff in the class.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: I thought so.

I: Why?

P: I have used computers a lot.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: Good. I don't have any problems with them.

I: Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yeah, I'm good with that.

I: Who do you consider your support?

P: I guess my friends.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: No, not really.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I've learned to ask for it, but I don't like it.

I: Do you mean you don't like the help or asking for it?

P: No, I don't like to ask for it. If somebody offers it, it's ok, but I'm not going to beg someone to help me.

I: What about for this class? Did you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: No.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: Frustrating.

I: How did it make you feel?

P: Like I was dumb, I guess.

I: Ok. Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: No, it hasn't. I'm good with them now.

I: That's good. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: I don't think so.

I: Ok. Again, thanks for spending some time with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE B)

Interview 3 – Transcript of Session

Location: Cyber Cafe – MYCC

Date: Tuesday, June 26, 2012

Time: 11:10 a.m.

Participant ID: Spe123

Transcriber: Amanda Olinger

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Before we begin, I would like to introduce myself and explain for the record why I've asked you to talk with me today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yeah, I've signed it.

I: Thank you. I appreciate your willingness to meet with me today. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: It was English 112.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: I guess, time. I couldn't fit it into my schedule.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I felt ok about it.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Yeah, it was very time consuming.

I: Could you explain that a little more?

P: It just took too much time. I had a really busy schedule, too.

I: Ok. Has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: I think it's just too hard to explain things online.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I didn't understand what it would be like.

I: Had you asked anyone about the class before you signed up for it?

P: No, not really.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No. It was too much for one class.

I: Do you mean the amount of work required?

P: Yeah.

I: What factors do you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I just don't think the instructor explained things good.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: I, yeah, I think so.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I'm on them all the time.

I: Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yeah, it's ok. I can count on them.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to

be more successful in this class?

P: Haven't really thought about it.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: It's not something that I like to do.

I: What about for this class? Did you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: No, I didn't think it would help.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: It was just too much for me to handle.

I: Ok. Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: I know to avoid online classes if I can.

I: Ok, that's about all of I have. I appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, that's it.

I: Ok. Again, thanks for spending some time with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 4 – Transcript of Session

Location: Cyber Cafe – MYCC

Date: Tuesday, June 26, 2012

Time: 11:50 a.m.

Participant ID: Ald2819

Transcriber: Amanda Olinger

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Before we begin, let me introduce myself and explain for the record why I've asked you to talk with me today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I have.

I: Thank you for taking time to meet with me today. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: It was a Biology class.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: I think it was only available online or maybe only offered online. I'm not sure.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: Honestly, I was worried about it.

I: How so?

P: I just didn't know what to expect, I guess.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Not a lot changed. I just had a hard time keeping up.

I: Ok. Has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your experience in this class?

P: No, not really.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I was told that help would be available if it was needed, whether it be by telephone or email.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No. I couldn't get a response to my questions. After I had already withdrew from the class, I got the answer I needed. It was a little late then!

I: What factors do you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: Well, I wasn't able to keep up due to the lack of response to my questions from the professor. There just wasn't a clear work expectation.

I: For you or the instructor?

P: I guess for both.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: No. I didn't learn much about it during the orientation.

I: Do you mean the orientation for the online class or orientation to the college?

P: The class.

I: Ok. How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: Moderate. That wasn't a problem.

I: Ok. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college

personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yes. My family is very supportive of my goals.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: Yeah, more faculty support.

I: What do you mean?

P: You know, for them to be more supportive to the students.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: If I need it, I do not mind to ask.

I: Did you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: No, I didn't.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: Bad. I had to drop it because I just could not keep up.

I: Ok. Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: It has slowed me down. I'm afraid to take an online class so I have to wait on an in-class option to become available. Sometimes they're just not offered in person.

I: I understand. I appreciate you talking with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, I don't think so.

I: Ok. Again, thanks for spending some time with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 5 – Transcript of Session

Location: Cyber Cafe – MYCC

Date: Tuesday, June 26, 2012

Time: 1:00 p.m.

Participant ID: Ree438

Transcriber: Amanda Olinger

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for being here. Let me introduce myself and explain for the record why I've asked you to talk with me today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: I have.

I: I appreciate that. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: I've had several, but probably the MTH 126 class.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: I was comfortable with the subject and really it was easier due to having children.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I was a little nervous because I didn't know what to expect.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: I guess I became comfortable with it being online.

I: Ok. Has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your experience in this class?

P: No, I don't think so.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I felt it would better fit my lifestyle due to the lack of running to campus. But I also wanted to make sure that I truly understood the materials.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: Yeah, I guess it did.

I: What factors do you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I wouldn't really consider it unsuccessful.

I: What do you mean?

P: Well, it might not transfer, but at least I finished it.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yeah, I'm pretty self-disciplined. I think that's really needed for online classes.

I: That's good. How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I had computer classes in high school, so I would say very good.

I: Ok. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yes. My husband and children fully support me. That's important.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: I'm not sure.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: If I see that I need help, I will ask for assistance.

I: Did you seek any type of support services from the College for this class?

P: No, I didn't think I needed to.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: I think it was a good experience. If nothing else, it was a learning experience.

I: Ok. How do you think taking online classes will affect your educational goals?

P: I think it's helped me because I can take more classes during a semester when I take some of them online.

I: That's good. I appreciate you talking with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: I just think some classes are ok online and some are not. I've taken several and have done fine with most of them.

I: That's good. Again, I appreciate you talking with me today. If you think of anything else you would like to add, just let me know.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 6 – Transcript of Session

Location: Cyber Café – MYCC

Date: Tuesday, June 26, 2012

Time: 1:30 p.m.

Participant ID: BAI123

Transcriber: Amanda Olinger

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for meeting with me today. Although we've met before, I'll introduce myself and explain why I've asked you to talk with me today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand you are voluntarily participating in this study, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I have.

I: Ok. I'm just going to ask a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yeah.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: I think it was called diet therapy or something like that.

I: What program are you in?

P: I'm going into nursing. I think it's listed as general studies now.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of the diet therapy class?

P: It was the only way I could take it.

I: What do you mean?

P: I think that's the only way it was offered or something. It's one of the prerequisite classes and I needed it to get into the program.

I: How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for the class?

P: Honestly, I was unsure about it.

I: Why?

P: Well, it was my first online class and I didn't really know much about them.

I: Did you ask anyone about it first? Your advisor or anyone at the college?

P: No, not really. I talked with some of my friends about it. They said it would be ok.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: I'm still not sure about them.

I: Ok. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: It is ok in some respects. I like the short PowerPoints because they were helpful.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began the class?

P: I guess I expected someone to instruct me on how to do the class on the computer and how to complete the assignments. Especially the group assignments and that kind of stuff. Those were really weird for me.

I: Do you feel the class met your expectations?

P: No! I needed additional instructions on how to complete the assignments and what was expected.

I: What factors do you feel led to your lack of success in the class?

P: I'm really not sure.

I: Was there anything in particular that caused you problems?

P: Lots of things, really. I didn't know how to get started, so I was late with my first work. By the time I figured it out, I was already behind. I really never got caught up. I

didn't expect to have deadlines either. I thought you did online classes kind of on your own schedule.

I: Why did you think that?

P: I'm not really sure. Just the impression I had of them, I guess.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: No, I guess not.

I: Why not?

P: I just didn't know what to expect.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: It's ok, I think.

I: Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yes, I have a great support system. My husband and my mom and step-dad help me with things.

I: How about at the college?

P: I don't know. I guess I haven't asked anyone for help, but I think they would help me if I asked. I'm not sure.

I: Would you know whom to ask?

P: No, not really. My instructors, I guess.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: Yeah, an hour or two of orientation would have been great. I think that would have helped.

I: How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I feel comfortable with it.

I: What about for this class? Did you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: Yeah, I talked to the nursing department about it.

I: That's good. Did it help?

P: I guess somewhat, but it was really too late to do any good. My only choice really was to drop it.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: Not very good.

I: How did it make you feel?

P: Pretty disappointed. I thought it would work out better than it did.

I: Do you think your experience in the class has affected your educational goals?

P: No, not really. It's ok.

I: That's good. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, I don't think so.

I: Ok. If you think of anything, feel free to come by my office in Phillips Taylor Hall. Again, I appreciate your spending some time with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 7 – Transcript of Session

Location: Cyber Cafe – MYCC

Date: Tuesday, June 26, 2012

Time: 2:05 p.m.

Participant ID: Whit524

Transcriber: Amanda Olinger

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for meeting with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain why I've asked you to meet with me today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I have.

I: Ok. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yeah.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: It was a composition class.

P: English Comp?

I: Yes.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: It worked best with my work schedule and my life schedule, my family obligations.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for

this class?

P: I was a little hesitant because of the uncertainty of how it was going to go.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Unfortunately, they didn't change all that much secondary to miscommunication. There was a lack of communication with the professor.

I: Do you mean between you and the professor or from the professor?

P: I guess both. The teacher didn't really communicate with the class that much.

I: Ok. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: Well, technically I passed the class, but it won't transfer. I didn't do as well as I felt that I could have because of the lack of mentoring.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I expected to be able to communicate questions and problems with the professor; however, each time I tried I was ignored. If they actually did answer, the response was always rude.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No, I know the class was online and not face to face, but you had no sense of support at all. I felt like I was on my own.

I: What factors do you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: Having unanswered questions and a complete lack of understanding of the materials and assignments.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: I felt prepared until the class actually started.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: Excellent! Computers do not pose a problem for me.

I: Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yeah, very supportive, even in trying times.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: Actually, assistance from the professor would have been nice.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I'm comfortable with it if needed.

I: What about for this class? Did you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: Yeah, I got some online tutoring help.

I: That's good. Did it help?

P: I think so.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: I passed with a D, but didn't feel very successful after I finished the course.

I: Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: Not so much my goals, but it has made me extremely cautious when signing up for online classes. I know they're not always what you would think.

I: Ok. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: I don't think so.

I: Ok. Again, thanks for spending some time with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE B)

Interview 8 – Transcript of Session

Location: Cyber Cafe – MYCC

Date: Tuesday, June 26, 2012

Time: 3:00 p.m.

Participant ID: Bon122

Transcriber: Amanda Olinger

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for meeting with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain why I've asked you to meet with me today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: I have.

I: Thank you. I'm going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: Biology 101.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: It was easier on me for a couple of reasons, gas and babysitting. Both are expensive.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I was exciting about taking online classes. Really, I still am.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: It made me nervous. I was very nervous about getting such a low grade.

I: Has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: Not really. I still think it is a good idea to take online classes when it is easier on you.

I: What do you mean by “easier?”

P: Mostly for managing other obligations. I couldn’t really afford to pay gas, a babysitter, and all of costs for classes.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I had high expectations.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No. I didn’t like how the teacher done the tests.

I: What do you mean?

P: They were worded to where it was too hard to understand.

I: What factors do you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I really think it was mostly the tests and the way the questions were asked. Some of them just didn’t make sense.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yes. I knew that it was going to take self-discipline and a lot of hard work.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I’m very experienced with computers and always have been good at them.

I: That’s good. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yes, I have great support.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: My problems really just related to the tests, not the support.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I think I probably should have gotten help with this class.

I: What do you mean? Did you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: No, I didn't ask.

I: Was there a particular reason?

P: I didn't think it would help at the time, and it's just not something that I like to do.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: In one word...stressful!

I: Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: Well, besides that one class bringing down my GPA, it hasn't really. Online classes are a good option for me.

I: Ok. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, not really. But I do think that the way the tests in that class are prepared needs to be looked at by somebody.

I: Ok. Again, I appreciate you talking with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE B)

Interview 9 – Transcript of Session

Location: Cyber Cafe – MYCC

Date: Tuesday, June 26, 2012

Time: 3:25 p.m.

Participant ID: Mth6001

Transcriber: Amanda Olinger

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for taking time to talk with me. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain why I've asked you to meet with me today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I have.

I: Ok. I'm going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: It was Meteorology. I'm not sure what the class number is.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: When it was offered on-campus I couldn't attend, so I had to take it online.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: Good. It allowed me to spend time with my kids and also work.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the

class? If so, how?

P: Yes. I was overwhelmed. I felt as if I was in way over my head. It was really not what I expected.

I: Has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: Now I value the feedback and the time spent with instructors on-campus. I didn't really think about that before I took this class.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I thought it would be laid out better, with more instruction.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No. I did not learn anything. It was just too overwhelming.

I: Can you identify what factors led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I had no idea what I was doing. It wasn't my understanding of the materials. I just didn't know what I was supposed to do.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: I guess I wasn't prepared. I didn't have any idea what we were going over.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I've got very good experience with computers.

I: Ok. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yeah, my family is very supportive.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: Maybe more feedback from the instructor. If they don't respond to you, it's hard to know what to do. And maybe hand out notes, or some kind of notes from the instructor.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I'm fine with that. I'll ask when I need it.

I: What about with this class. Did you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: I work during the day so I was limited by that. There wasn't a lot of people I could ask at night.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: Negative. I like to learn something from a course or I feel like I've wasted my time. I really wasted my time with this one.

I: Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: I guess so. It's made me more skeptical of taking online classes.

I: Ok. I appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: I don't think so.

I: Ok. Again, I appreciate you talking with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 10 – Transcript of Session

Location: Cyber Cafe – MYCC

Date: Tuesday, June 26, 2012

Time: 3:50 p.m.

Participant ID: Rif260

Transcriber: Jackie McPherson

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for taking time to talk with me. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain why I've asked you to meet with me today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: I've signed it.

I: Thank you. I'm going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yeah, unfortunately.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: Math 126. It's the nursing math class.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: It was required for my degree and I wanted to take it online to avoid extra trips to the college.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I was excited, but yet knew it would take a lot of self-discipline.

I: How did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Okay, I guess. I began to feel like there could've been more things to do to make students be more interactive with the studies.

I: Do you mean with the other students, or what do you mean by "more interactive with the studies?"

P: I don't know. I guess I mean it could have been more interactive. Not just examples, but sample online questions or something.

I: Ok. Has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: I know it really does take more self-discipline than what you expect.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: To do more in the math class than what we had done. To be more interactive. I'm not sure I got a lot out of it.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: Not too much, no. I've been in other math classes previously and I think the professor makes a difference. I'm retaking this one now in-person and it's better.

I: Ok. What factors do you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I don't think there was enough work to be turned in for the online class to really help me learn the math.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yes, I think so. I could've had more discipline, but I think a lot also depends on the material and how it's covered in the online class.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I'd say it's pretty fair.

I: Ok. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: I guess it's average, like most of the people around here. They're around when I

need them.

I: Do you mean your family and friends, or the college personnel?

P: I guess both.

I: Ok. Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: I think there needs to be more online video tutorials in online classes. Those really help.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: So-so. I will ask for it when I have to.

I: What about with this class. Did you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: No, it wouldn't have helped me. At least I don't think so.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: Basically I'm learning a lot more in the math class that I'm in now than I did in the previous class. We're doing a lot more. I guess it's because we're in the classroom.

I: Do you think taking online classes will affect your educational goals?

P: I'm not sure. I'm hoping maybe it was just a bad class and they're not all that way.

I: Ok. I appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, that's about it.

I: Ok. Again, I appreciate you talking with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 11 – Transcript of Session

Location: Cyber Cafe – MYCC
Date: Wednesday, June 27, 2012
Time: 2:00 p.m.
Participant ID: Rus137
Transcriber: Amanda Olinger
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain why I've asked you to meet with me today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I've signed it.

I: Thank you. I'm going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: The Diet and Nutrition class. It's a health class.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: Well, I'm taking care of my mother and online classes are more convenient for me. I can't really be away from home very long.

I: I understand. Can you tell me how you felt about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: Um, I would say that I felt confident that I would succeed.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Yes. It made me feel like I couldn't achieve my goals.

I: Has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: Yeah, now I feel like I maybe shouldn't try at any other.

I: Not take them?

P: Right. I'll avoid them if I can.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: That I could succeed and get a better education.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No. Most of the questions on the tests were not even out of the chapter in the book. I don't know where they came from.

I: Can you explain?

P: Maybe it was me, but I don't think so. I could read the chapter several times before taking a test and not even recognize what it was asking. The book just didn't seem to match the tests.

I: Oh. Were there certain factors that you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: Yes. When I was getting really low scores on the tests in the first module and then also on the second, I just didn't feel like I could make it.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yes. I had confidence that I could do this.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I'm pretty knowledgeable. I've taken several computer classes in the past.

I: That's good. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: I would say they are very supportive – my family and my friends. I'm not really here that often, but I would say the people here are helpful, too.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: The instructor could have took the test questions out of the chapters that we had to read. That would have really made a difference, I think. It's like they just didn't match.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I do not care to ask for help. Sometimes you have to.

I: Did you seek any type of support services from the College when you starting having problems?

P: No, I really didn't have that opportunity. There's no one available anyway when I'm usually working on my classes. Sometimes it's the middle of the night.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: Well, I did the best that I could. I guess that's all that counts.

I: Do you think taking online classes will affect your educational goals?

P: I have taken a few and I feel they have helped tremendously because of my other obligations. It's really hard for me to come to campus for classes. I think having online classes is better for me and I'd say for many others who do not have the time to take the actual classes.

I: Ok. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: I don't think so.

I: Ok. Again, I appreciate you taking time to talk with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 12 – Transcript of Session

Location: Cyber Cafe – MYCC
Date: Wednesday, June 27, 2012
Time: 2:30 p.m.
Participant ID: Lan455
Transcriber: Amanda Olinger
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Good afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain why I've asked you here. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Ok. Yes, I understand.

I: Thank you. I'm going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: It was Math 2.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: It's more convenient, and a good alternative to having to attend the classroom version on a regular basis.

I: Can you tell me how you felt about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I felt like it would be a more flexible solution for filling the requirements of my program of study. I was also worried about how much assistance I would receive if I ever needed help.

I: So you have some reservations, but the convenience was good for you?

P: Yes.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Yes. The way I felt changed for the worse. The online class being more convenient was also more arduous to navigate. It had an odd and clumsy menu.

I: Has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: I don't think all online classes can be judged from my experience with this one. With this class in particular, you shouldn't expect assistance or feedback from the instructor. If you can manage the menus and happen to find your assignments with due dates on the same page, you should be fine. But it was a real problem for me.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I expected the assignment, due dates, and short tutorials on how to work the problems to be easily found and utilized.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No. It certainly didn't.

I: Were there certain factors that you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I just found the class to be unorganized and confusing. Nothing seemed to go in order. It was already a hard class, but that made it worse for me.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yeah, I was prepared for it, but the instructor and the Blackboard weren't.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I had basic knowledge. Enough to do what I needed to do, I'd say.

I: Ok. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: I'm not sure that it would have helped, if I did. I guess I have some support, but mostly I'm on my own.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: No, not really. Maybe the instructor could have used some to make it a better class.

I: How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I usually just suck it up and do it myself. I don't like to ask for help.

I: Did you seek any type of support services from the College when you starting having problems?

P: No.

I: Was there a reason why?

P: That's just not something I do.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: It was frustrating. Not something I want to do again. But, again, I think it was mostly just this class.

I: Do you think taking online classes will affect your educational goals?

P: I'll be more careful with the classes that I choose to take, or maybe the instructors. If it doesn't look organized to begin with, then I'll just get out of it. I don't want to mess with another class like this one again.

I: Ok. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No.

I: Ok. Again, I appreciate you taking time to talk with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 13 – Transcript of Session

Location: Cyber Cafe – MYCC
Date: Wednesday, June 27, 2012
Time: 3:00 p.m.
Participant ID: Mea135
Transcriber: Amanda Olinger
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain why I've asked you to meet with me. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Ok. Yes, I understand.

I: Thank you. I'm going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: Diet and nutrition therapy.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: I've got a lot of responsibilities at home and I thought this would be more convenient. It was a way I could finish the class without interrupting my duties at home.

I: Can you tell me how you felt about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: It was comfortable. I usually enjoy taking online classes.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: I really felt disconnected to the teacher and the other students.

I: Has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: Yes. It has made me more aware of what to expect and how I should look at the materials more thoroughly.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I was excited to learn about this subject. I thought it would be a fun class.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No. The material from the book was not in the quizzes or lessons. I don't feel like I learned anything.

I: Were there factors that you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: The fact that the teacher expected online research to be our means of education instead of the book that was required for the class was a real problem. It made it even worse that she didn't let us know this until late into the semester.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yes, I had taken many online classes before and thought I knew what to expect.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I am very experienced with computers. I have taken many computer classes throughout the years.

I: That's good. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Mostly the support is great.

I: What do you mean?

P: I mean from my family and some of the people at the college.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: The support of the instructor would have been nice. The instructor did not seem to connect or care about the students' success.

I: How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I am comfortable and do not mind to ask for help.

I: Did you seek any type of support services from the College when you starting having problems?

P: I have financial support from the college and sometimes academic support. There really wasn't anyway for anyone to help.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: The class was a disappointment. It led to a failing grade which really made me disappointed in myself.

I: Do you think taking online classes will affect your educational goals?

P: I have had great experiences with other online classes. This is a one time event for me and I hope it doesn't happen again. I think online classes are a great way to get an education when you don't have the time or means to actually go to the college.

I: Ok. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, I believe that's it.

I: Thank you. Again, I appreciate you taking time to talk with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE B)

Interview 14 – Transcript of Session

Location: Cyber Cafe – MYCC

Date: Thursday, June 28, 2012

Time: 10 a.m.

Participant ID: Mpr344

Transcriber: Amanda Olinger

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain the purpose of our meeting. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I have signed the form.

I: Thank you. I'm going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: It was a math class.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: Well, I work full-time and online classes are a convenient way for me to continue my education. There are not many other alternatives if you work all day.

I: How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: Well, I've had other online classes before this one. Since I have taken several online classes, I felt confident that I could do well in this class, too.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: As time went on, I began to feel like the instructor was not concerned with my finding the correct answer to the quiz questions.

I: I'm not sure I understand what you mean.

P: Several times I questioned why my answers were not correct and I was not given an answer. It was like if you didn't use the same process that she used, even if you got to the same answer, it was still incorrect. I didn't understand why. There are a lot of ways of arriving at the correct answer. Sometimes I know her formulas were just wrong. If she would have explained to me why they weren't wrong, I would have felt better about it, but really I just felt like there was no use in studying hard because I wasn't going to do well anyway.

I: Ok. Has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: Yes, I guess in a way it has. Now I try to take classes with instructors that I have had in the past to avoid these kind of problems.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: My expectations were the same as with my other classes. Most instructors welcome questions and are willing to listen to my answers. I usually feel comfortable communicating with instructors so I didn't expect that to be a problem.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: This class did not meet my expectations at all.

I: Can you explain why not?

P: I felt I did not have the support of the instructor. It was like you were out there on your own. Whenever I tried to ask about a certain quiz question or other problem, there never was an appropriate answer that satisfied my concerns. Most of the time she just ignored me completely. I knew my email was working, but it would usually take two or three emails to her before she would reply. One time I actually put the words "third attempt" in my subject line and that really ticked her off. By the time she answered me she said it was too late anyway because the assignment was past due. I dropped it right after that. There was no way I was going to pass that class.

I: So do you feel this led to your lack of success in this class?

P: Yeah. The instructor was just unable or unwilling to listen to my questions about the quiz answers. Even if I emailed her with specific questions and asked about specific

page numbers, it didn't help. It's hard to do this stuff on you own.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yes, since I had taken several online classes with no problems before, I felt I was ready for this math class.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I would say I was very experienced since I had taken several computer classes prior to taking this class as well as having taken several online classes.

I: Ok. How would you describe your social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, in relation to your educational goals?

P: I have a great support system. My sisters are taking many of the same classes I am. My husband and children are very helpful and supportive of my education. I also have many friends who are also classmates, so that helps.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: I just feel if the teacher had been willing to listen to the questions I had about the class, it would have helped. It just makes a difference if the instructor will explain why things have to be done a certain way. I understand process and procedures, but when the process is just wrong, at least tell me why it's required that way. A good instructor connects with the students and makes them feel comfortable when they ask questions. It just wasn't like that with this class.

I: How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I'll just say this – I am learning more and more through my college experience that having friends and colleagues who you can ask for help is invaluable.

I: Did you seek any type of support services from the College when you starting having problems?

P: I did not seek tutoring or other help because I did not feel I had a problem with the material. I did go to the computer lab and use the computers on-campus.

I: Were you having computer problems or was there another reason you came on-campus to work on this class.

P: I thought maybe I was missing something on my computer with the formulas or something, but that really didn't make a difference. They were the same.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: It was stressful because I did not know when I had mastered the concepts because of the quiz answers that were marked I correct when I felt they should have been correct. It was frustrating.

I: Do you think taking online classes will affect your educational goals?

P: Well, without the availability of online classes, I would not have been able to complete the amount of credits I have so far. Due to the cost of travel, I may have had to dropout had it not have been for the ability to work from home on my classes.

I: Ok. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, but I'm glad someone is asking these questions. Maybe it will help someday.

I: I hope so, too. It has been really nice to talk with you. Again, I appreciate you taking time to meet with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 15 – Transcript of Session

Location: Phillips Taylor 147
Date: Thursday, June 28, 2012
Time: 10:40 a.m.
Participant ID: Grij141
Transcriber: Amanda Olinger
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain why I've asked you to meet with me today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yeah, I understand.

I: Thank you. I'm going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: The only one I've had a problem with was math. It was the nursing math, but I'm not sure if that's the right name for it.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: I took it in the summer and that's the only way that it was offered. I couldn't fit it in my schedule in the other semesters.

I: Ok. Can you tell me how you felt about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I've had positive experiences in all my previous online class, so I was good with

it, I thought.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Yes.

I: How did they change?

P: It became frustrating. I felt the positive and negative feedback and opinions about how to complete a problem were stifled.

I: I'm not sure I understand.

P: You know, if someone questions something, but the person being questioned doesn't like that, then you are less likely to ask more questions.

I: Ok. Has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: I just feel like the classroom setting allows you to feed off of ideas and helps students to think outside of the box. I like the interaction and it's was not encouraged in this class.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: Well, I expected feedback and more flexibility. The main reason I like online classes is flexibility in scheduling.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No. The reason for getting behind in class was not an excuse, but the instructor didn't want to hear that. She basically told me to drop the class. I just wanted to her to explain why my answers weren't correct before I went on to the next assignments, but that didn't happen.

I: What factors do you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I would say it was a lack of flexibility.

I: In what?

P: Well, not just scheduling, but the way things are done.

I: Ok. Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: I was prepared prior to this class because I had taken multiple online classes before.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I have an above average level of experience with computers because of my past military experience. I have several certifications in programming and other IT areas. That was definitely not the problem.

I: Ok. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yes, my support system was and has always been great. Both my family and the college personnel helped me when I needed it most.

I: Did that include the instructor for this class?

P: No, I can't say that. It was mostly my advisor and some of the other teachers.

I: Ok. Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: Probably more one-on-one time with the instructor, or even discussion boards. I think that helps, too.

I: How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: Well, I don't like to ask for help. I've always felt like it's my job to do this on my own.

I: Did you seek any type of support services from the College when you starting having problems?

P: No. I guess I really didn't understand that I had a problem until she told me to drop the class. I thought I could work with her and get caught up.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: It was really an unpleasant experience. I don't want to have another one like it.

I: Have you taken the class again?

P: No, not yet. I was really waiting for a different instructor to teach it, I guess in-person, because I don't want a repeat of this one.

I: Do you think taking online classes will affect your educational goals?

P: I would say that the ability to take online classes has helped me to complete my educational goals. If the classes were not available online, I just would not be able to graduate. When you've got other obligations, it's just really hard to go to college, you know?

I: I understand. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, I guess not.

I: Ok. Again, I appreciate you taking time to talk with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 16 – Transcript of Session

Location: Phillips Taylor 147
Date: Thursday, June 28, 2012
Time: 11:15 a.m.
Participant ID: Bnd101
Transcriber: Jackie McPherson
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Good morning. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain why I've asked you to meet with me. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Ok.

I: Thank you. I'm going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Uh-huh, yeah.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: I don't know what it was called, but it was an ADJ class.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: It was part of my degree program and I needed it.

I: Were there options other than online for the class?

P: I'm not sure. The teacher just signed me up for it that way.

I: Ok. Can you tell me how you felt about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I was really excited about it.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Yeah, I got frustrated pretty quickly. It made me paranoid about online classes.

I: How so?

P: Just that one class changed me to try to come to the school to take classes, if possible.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I really had high expectations.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No way! All it was was reading and nothing else. I really didn't learn anything.

I: Can you explain if there were factors that you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: Yeah. I really think it was the reading and nothing else. When I take classes, I expect to really get something out of them. You know, like knowing how to do something new. Reading something and taking a quiz on it just doesn't do anything for me. Especially when the quizzes didn't even seem to go along with the book.

I: What do you mean?

P: It was like the quizzes were just some canned program, and sometimes I swear the right answers were counted wrong. We all thought that, but I don't think the instructor cared about it. I'm really not sure if the instructor was involved with the class anyway. We just had to read and take the tests, so he didn't really have much to do with the class.

I: Oh. Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yeah, I've had several other online classes before this one.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I've had a lot of computer classes and I'd say that I'm incredibly skilled (laughing).

I: Well, that's good. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yeah, it's pretty normal. Basically my family is my only support. I don't like to depend on anyone else.

I: Ok. Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: I guess I think all the classes need to have class time with hands-on work.

I: How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: If it's needed, I'll ask.

I: Did you seek any type of support services from the College when you starting having problems?

P: No. I doubt I could get anyone to help me read!

I: Did you finish the class?

P: No, I dropped it. I felt like I was wasting my time.

I: Are you still enrolled at the college?

P: Not this semester, but I'll probably go back. But I might try another program, one that's more hands-on.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: In a word? Terrible.

I: Do you think taking online classes will affect your educational goals?

P: I'm just a hands-on person so online classes are hard for me to do unless I have diagrams, drawings and maybe some discussion or something. I'm just not good at reading and getting it. I guess I get bored too easily.

I: Ok. Again, I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, that's about all I can say on this.

I: Ok. Again, I appreciate you taking time to talk with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 17 – Transcript of Session

Location: PT 117 – MYCC
Date: Thursday, June 28, 2012
Time: 1:30 p.m.
Participant ID: Olg274
Transcriber: Jackie McPherson
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for meeting with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain the purpose of our meeting. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I have.

I: Thank you. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: It was an online math class for allied health.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: It was more convenient for me because I work and have two kids.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I felt good about taking it because I had taken online classes before.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Well, it didn't really change how I felt about online classes. It did change how I felt about certain instructors. I got the impression that they were only there for the paycheck, not to help the students.

I: Ok. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: After this experience, I realized I needed to ask someone if it was good to take certain classes online.

I: Who would you ask?

P: Probably someone who had had the class before, or maybe my advisor.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: More communication.

I: What do you mean?

P: Just communication with the instructor. I thought there would be more of that.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No. I really thought the instructor was very unprofessional.

I: Can you identify what factors you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I really think that a lack of communication on the instructor's part was a big factor.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yes, I had taken online classes before so I didn't expect to have any problems.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: Really good. I use them at work for a variety of things and have had several computer classes.

I: Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Everyone has always been real supportive except for this particular instructor. She made you feel more or less like you were stupid.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: If the instructor had been more supportive and fair about things that would have helped.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: Oh, I'm always open for assistance if it is needed. I don't mind to ask questions. I think that's what got me in trouble with this class.

I: What about for this class? Did you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: I worked with some of the other students in the class. We got together and tried to figure out what was going on, but I'm not sure that any of us ever did.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: The class was horrible. The instructor was just very unprofessional and rude.

I: Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: I completed my program taking online classes. This was the only class that I had the problem in. The problem really wasn't the class, but the instructor. I retook it with another one and made it just fine.

I: Ok. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, not really.

I: Ok. Again, thanks for spending some time with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 18 – Transcript of Session

Location: PT 220 – MYCC
Date: Tuesday, July 17, 2012
Time: 1:30 p.m.
Participant ID: Fer141
Transcriber: Jackie McPherson
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain the purpose of our meeting. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I understand.

I: Thank you. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: Psychology, but I don't remember the number.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: I had to have a psychology class as part of my studies to graduate.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I wasn't real sure how to navigate the online system.

I: Do you mean Blackboard or in general?

P: I guess the Blackboard system. I wasn't sure how to get started.

I: Ok. Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: No, not really. I don't think it really changed.

I: Ok. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: No, not really. I still think they are a good option if you have to have a class and it won't work in your schedule.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I thought I would be able to get a response from the instructor when I needed help. But this did not happen sometimes for two weeks.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No. I didn't think there was enough instructor-student help. The teacher would always say if you had a question to look in the book.

I: Can you identify what factors you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I think the instructor was not willing to put in the time to help. She may have thought she did, but I didn't think so.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: No, I guess I really wasn't.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I had some experience, but obviously it wasn't enough.

I: Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yes, I have a wonderful support system. I couldn't be in school without my family helping me.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: It would have helped if the instructor could have been reached and would engage more with the students' problems. It's no fun being out there on your own and trying to guess what the teacher wants you to do.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I get help where I can find it. If I'm having a problem, I will try my best to achieve a solution.

I: While you were enrolled in this class, do you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: Yes, actually I went to the GAIN center and a tutor helped me some.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: I guess overall it was ok. I just didn't like how it turned out.

I: Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: No, not really. But I try to avoid online classes. I'll take them if I have no other choice, but I'd rather not.

I: Ok. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: I do think if you have a problem, the instructor should be able to assist more. But I guess that's really left up to the instructors. That's really all I have.

I: Ok. Again, thank you for talking with me.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 19 – Transcript of Session

Location: PT 220 – MYCC
Date: Tuesday, July 17, 2012
Time: 2:00 p.m.
Participant ID: Col609
Transcriber: Jackie McPherson
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain the purpose of our meeting. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I've read it and signed it.

I: Ok, thank you. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: It was a music appreciation or theory class.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: The class wasn't available in a classroom on a day or at a time that I could take and juggle the rest of my responsibilities. I needed it for an elective.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: Oh, I was confident.

I: Had you taken other online classes before?

P: Yes, and they were fine.

I: Ok. Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Yeah, I got a little frustrated because of the response time for questions to instructors. I wanted faster results, but that was beyond my control, I guess.

I: Ok. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: I don't think so. I've not really taken any others since then.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I didn't expect interim timeframes.

I: I'm not sure what you mean. Can you explain that?

P: Sure. I thought it was more self-paced like some of the other programs that are online.

I: Ok. Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No. I really think some of the material was dated.

I: Can you identify what factors you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I guess really it was a lack of interest on my part and aggravation with the instructor. I just like it in the classroom because if I have a question, I get an answer right away. It's not like that online. And, really, I don't like all the reading. I get more out of hands-on classes or the interaction in the classroom.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: No. I would like to have had a Blackboard navigation seminar before diving in to time or one-time access testing. I really didn't like that at all. Even if I knew the material, the timed test made me nervous because I kept looking at the time remaining. I don't like that clock at all.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I guess you would say that it's intermediate. I can certainly use them enough to do my homework.

I: Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yes, I would say that I have an excellent support system.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: Again, I think some type of seminar or program before the class would have helped. It was hard to navigate when you didn't know where things were. I was worried that I would miss something that I was supposed to do.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: Oh, I do it all the time. I'm not too shy to ask for help when I need it.

I: While you were enrolled in this class, do you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: No, not really. But I've used GAIN for tutoring and have pestered the daylights out of my advisor. Really the financial aid department made the impossible become possible for me.

I: That's good. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: It was a little aggravating, but really I can't complain too much.

I: How did your experiences in this class make you feel?

P: Really that I need to be more disciplined when taking online classes.

I: Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: Well, I think it has helped in some ways. If I didn't take the online classes, I wouldn't be able to progress toward my degree as quickly.

I: Ok. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, but if you need more input, just ask.

I: I appreciate that. Again, thank you for talking with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 20 – Transcript of Session

Location: PT 220 – MYCC
Date: Tuesday, July 17, 2012
Time: 2:20 p.m.
Participant ID: Sta522
Transcriber: Jackie McPherson
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain the purpose of our meeting. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I have.

I: Ok, thank you. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Actually, I've had a few of them – math and a couple in child development.

I: Ok. Let's choose one that you would like to talk about. Is there a particular one that you want to discuss?

P: I guess one of the child development classes.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: Really it was easier because I didn't have a vehicle and no money to pay anyone to bring me to the college.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I was really nervous about it.

I: Had you taken other online classes before?

P: No, I'm more of a hands-on person. But I thought I could do it.

I: Ok. Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Yeah, it made me even more nervous after I got started. I just couldn't keep up with everything, but I was trying to do several online classes at once and it just didn't work out.

I: Ok. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: Well, I think if you are in a classroom with the instructor of the class, you can learn more. At least that's what my experience made me think.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: My expectations? I thought taking class online was easier to do.

I: Ok. What do you mean by easier?

P: I guess I thought I wouldn't have so much to do, like homework and stuff, or at least that I could just do it when I had time.

I: What made you think that?

P: I'm not really sure. It's just the impression I had of them.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No, because I'm more of a hands-on person. Just reading and taking tests are not hands-on to me.

I: Can you identify what factors you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: Yeah, because the assignments weren't correct on one particular CHD class last summer. It really confused me and I couldn't get any clarification from the instructor when I needed it. I got really frustrated and I guess just pushed it to the side and worked on other classes, but by the time I tried to get back to it, it was too late.

I: What do you mean by "too late?"

P: The teacher had dropped me from the class.

I: Oh. Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yeah, I think so.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I know just about everything there is to know about computers. The thing of it is in my CHD classes, nothing was updated properly. I think the assignments were from some other semester or something.

I: Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: My family and everyone is very supportive. They know I can make it through the classes, but they are there to help me when I need it.

I: That's good. Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: Just knowing what to do. Everything should have been updated from the beginning.

I: How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I think getting help from others is a good thing. It helps you to figure out what you are doing sometimes just to talk about it.

I: While you were enrolled in this class, do you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: I didn't get any help from anyone from the college on my math class, but I did call the instructor in my CHD class. It was too late for the one where I was dropped, but she helped me by explaining what to do in the other class.

I: That's good. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: I guess it was ok.

I: How did your experiences in this class make you feel?

P: Nervous. I would say that it was really stressful.

I: Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: Yeah, I think I probably won't be taking any other online classes if I can make it to school.

I: Ok. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything

else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, I don't think so.

I: Ok. Again, thank you for talking with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE B)

Interview 21 – Transcript of Session

Location: PT 220 – MYCC
Date: Tuesday, July 17, 2012
Time: 3:05 p.m.
Participant ID: Owe203
Transcriber: Jackie McPherson
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain the purpose of our meeting. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I have.

I: Ok, thank you. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of the class?

P: Yeah, it was a health class in the pharmacy program.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: I couldn't get an on-campus class. I don't know if it wasn't offered or maybe it was full, but that was all that was available at the time.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: Great! I have taken several online classes and felt good about attempting this one.

I: Ok. Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Yes, I didn't like the way this one was taught.

I: What do you mean?

P: It was just organized differently or something.

I: Ok. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: No, it's really not had a negative impact. It was what it was, but it wasn't for me.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I guess I thought it would be more involved.

I: Ok. Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No, because I withdrew.

I: Can you identify what factors you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I think it was really the instructor. It was just not what I expected.

I: Ok. Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Absolutely. I have had success with other online classes.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I already have an Associates in Applied Science in Data Processing from another college, so I would say my experience is definitely above average.

I: Ok. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: No, not really. I would say my support is in the very low category.

I: Oh. Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: If the instructor had taken a different approach, I think it would have helped. It just seemed really disorganized to me.

I: How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I have no problem with asking questions. Sometimes too many, I guess.

I: While you were enrolled in this class, do you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: No, I just withdrew from it when I realized that it wasn't going to get any better.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: I'd say not good.

I: How did your experiences in this class make you feel?

P: Honestly? It made me feel stupid.

I: Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: No, it hasn't. I'm just more careful with the classes that I choose now.

I: Ok. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, not really.

I: Ok. Again, thank you for talking with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE B)

Interview 22 – Transcript of Session

Location: PT 220 – MYCC
Date: Tuesday, July 17, 2012
Time: 3:1530 p.m.
Participant ID: Bea606
Transcriber: Jackie McPherson
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain the purpose of our meeting. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yeah, I've signed it.

I: Ok, thank you. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of the class?

P: A math class. It was called Technical Math, I think.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: It was the only one available at the time.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: Positive. I thought it would be fine.

I: Ok. Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Yes, I hated it.

I: Ok. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: Yeah, I'll never take another online class again.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I expected to make an "A," but that sure didn't happen.

I: Ok. Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No, not at all. What little interaction we had felt forced. And really there was no content.

I: Can you identify what factors you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: Yeah, it was really boring. There was no motivation to do anything.

I: Ok. Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yeah, I don't think that was the problem at all.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I work as a computer tech so I would say that my experience is really good.

I: Ok. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: No, it's really nonexistent.

I: Oh. Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: I really don't know the answer to that.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I don't. And I don't want to ask for help.

I: While you were enrolled in this class, do you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: No.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: If I were giving the class a grade, I'd give it a Z minus, if there were a grade that low.

I: How did your experiences in this class make you feel?

P: I'm not sure you want to know.

I: Yes, please give me your opinion.

P: I think online classes suck.

I: Ok. Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: No, not at all. But I'll not take another one online.

I: Well, I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No.

I: Ok. Again, thank you for talking with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 23 – Transcript of Session

Location: PT 220 – MYCC
Date: Tuesday, July 17, 2012
Time: 4:00 p.m.
Participant ID: Cal352
Transcriber: Jackie McPherson
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain the purpose of our meeting. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I understand.

I: Ok, thank you. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of the class?

P: It was an art class, but I'm not sure if it was listed as an online class. Part of it was video, too.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in that section of the class?

P: It allowed me to go to school and work at the same time.

I: That's good. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I was nervous. I wasn't sure about how it would be conveyed, or what to expect.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: No, I guess I enjoyed it because it meant that I didn't have to give up work. It was just more stressful than I thought it would be.

I: How so?

P: I don't know. I guess it was so different than what I was used to. It took a while to get comfortable with it.

I: Ok. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: Not really. They're still a good option for me. My other classes have been successful.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I expected to learn something and further my education.

I: Ok. Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: Somewhat because I was able to study classes I normally would not have been able to take. Even if I didn't do as well as I wanted, it still satisfied my elective, I think.

I: Can you identify what factors you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I would say that the only issue I had was communication issues with the instructor.

I: What do you mean?

P: It just takes a while to get a response online and that's frustrating. If you can't get an answer right away, sometimes you can't go forward until you do.

I: Ok. Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yes. I've taken others in the past and had an idea of what to expect. This one was a little different because of the videos.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I currently work in the computer field. I've had years of experience with computers.

I: That's good. What about support? Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yeah, everyone around me is supportive of my educational goals.

I: Good. Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: I think more teacher interaction in some way would help. That was really lacking and when reaching out to the instructor for help, there was little feedback.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: Oh, I'm comfortable asking for assistance. That's how we learn and grow, isn't it?

I: Yes, I think so. While you were enrolled in this class, do you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: No, not really.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: Overall my experience was good, I guess. Just a little stressful.

I: How did your experiences in this class make you feel?

P: I had conflicted feelings, I guess. Good in some ways, frustrated in others. But it did make me feel like I was part of something that everyone seems to be doing.

I: Ok. Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: It let me know that I can pursue other degrees and training online. I know more of what to expect, I think.

I: I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: Overall, my experiences at the college have been good. I'm working on another degree now.

I: That's good. Again, I appreciate you talking with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 24 – Transcript of Session

Location: PT 220 – MYCC
Date: Tuesday, July 17, 2012
Time: 4:30 p.m.
Participant ID: Gib356
Transcriber: Jackie McPherson
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Good afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain the purpose of our meeting. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I understand.

I: Ok, thank you. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Unfortunately, yeah.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of the class?

P: Well, it was the orientation class. You know, the SDV one that everyone has to have.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in that section of the class?

P: It was the only time I had available for the class. I take classes at night and that was really my only option.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I thought it would be hard without being in a classroom, but then I thought, how hard could an orientation class be?

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: I found out you really had to be dedicated or you would fail easily.

I: Ok. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: I made a D in it, so I guess it was harder than it would have been if I had it in the classroom. I just wasn't motivated to do it, really.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I expected to do it in my spare time but I had to put in more time than I thought it should have taken.

I: Ok. Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: Yes and no. I learned stuff about the college because I had to go look for it, so I guess it helped. But really, I didn't get a lot out of some of the assignments.

I: Can you identify what factors you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I guess it was all on me. I think you have to be really dedicated or you can easily get behind and fail in online classes.

I: Ok. Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: No, I guess I didn't know what to expect.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: Oh, I'd say advanced. I work with them all the time and have had several computer classes, but they were in the classroom.

I: Ok. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yes, I'd say that I have a good support system.

I: That's good. Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: No not really. I think it's left up to the person. If you're not motivated, it ain't good.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: If I need help, I ask. But in online classes it is hard.

I: What do you mean?

P: Sometimes you just don't get an answer when you need it. Not so much in this class, but I've had that experience in others since then. I've passed them, but it's because now I know that it's left to me to do. You can't really rely on the teacher being there when you have a question.

I: I see. While you were enrolled in this class, do you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: No. I would have felt pretty stupid asking for help for an orientation class (laughing).

I: Oh, I don't think so. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: I think I had to devote about twice the effort of an in-person class because I had to do it all on my own.

I: How did your experiences in this class make you feel?

P: It made me only take online classes as a last resort. That's still the way I feel, really.

I: Ok. Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: Yeah, it really has helped in some ways. I have to work and can't get off during the day for classes. If you didn't have night classes, and I guess some of the online ones, I wouldn't be able to go to college at all.

I: I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: I think it's good that the college has online classes. But I think students need to know what to expect upfront. It makes it a little easier to know what to expect, I think.

I: Ok. If you think of anything else you would like to tell me, please let me know. Again, I appreciate you talking with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE B)

Interview 25 – Transcript of Session

Location: PT 220 – MYCC

Date: Tuesday, July 17 Thursday, July 19, 2012

Time: 4:30 p.m.

Participant ID: Kur512

Transcriber: Jackie McPherson

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain the purpose of our meeting. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Ok. Yes, I've signed the form.

I: Ok, thank you. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: I've had several, but the only one I didn't do well in was Pre-Calculus.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in that section of the class?

P: I take online classes when my work and other classes conflict. Sometimes that's the only way I can get the class.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: The pre-calculus was my first one. I was really curious because I hadn't had one before.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Yes. I would say it was both easier and harder than I expected. I guess my

feelings didn't change that much other than having my curiosity sated.

I: Ok. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: No, not really. I still have to take them if that's the only way I can get them.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I expected it to be harder, I guess.

I: Do you mean because it was online?

P: Yes. I knew I would have to be self-motivated.

I: Ok. Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: Yes, I think so. It taught me what I expected to learn and in some ways taught me more about myself.

I: What do you mean?

P: Self-discipline. I don't think you can take an online class without it.

I: Ok. Can you identify what factors you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: Probably motivation. I needed more of it.

I: Ok. Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: I think so. I tried them years ago, too, and couldn't do it. But now I'm more mature and have a better handle on my life and goals. I think that really makes a difference.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: Very experienced.

I: That's good. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yes, my family and coworkers are very supportive and help however they are able to.

I: That's good. Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: Perhaps more face-to-face help. I know that's the opposite of an online course, but sometimes you just have to have help.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: Well, I'm very prideful and do not like needed or accepting assistance. But sometimes, you just gotta give in and ask.

I: While you were enrolled in this class, do you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: No. I probably should have. You know what they say about hindsight?

I: Yes, I think so. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: Satisfactory. I can't say that it was all bad.

I: How did your experiences in this class make you feel?

P: Relieved! I was just glad to get through the course. The grade could have been better, but I'll take it again later so it will transfer. I think it will be easier the next time since I know what to expect.

I: Ok. Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: I don't really feel they've been any different than normal classes in affect to my educational goals. Um, other than enabling me to take more classes, I guess.

I: I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, I don't think so.

I: Ok. If you think of anything else you would like to tell me, please let me know. Again, I appreciate you talking with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 26 – Transcript of Session

Location: Phillips Taylor 147

Date: Friday, July 20, 2012

Time: 1:30 p.m.

Participant ID: Tra037

Transcriber: Jackie McPherson

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain why I've asked you to meet with me. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I understand.

I: Good. I'm going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: It was a terrorism class.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: My schedule changes often, and I am also always on-call. My work schedule keeps me from attending classes on campus.

I: Ok. Can you tell me how you felt about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I thought it would be helpful to me in my line of work, so I was excited to see it

on the schedule.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Yes, I was highly disappointed.

I: How so?

P: Don't get me wrong. It wasn't the topic or the material. I found that very interesting. It was just the way the class was handled and the way the instructor reacted to my emails.

I: So did your opinion of taking online classes change as the result of this experience?

P: Yeah, I would avoid classes with this professor online in the future. I'm not sure how he is in the classroom, but I hope he is easier to talk to in person than by email.

I: What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: Well, I was excited about the topic, so I was looking forward to the experience. But I expected a professional attitude from the instructor. That's not what I found.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: Absolutely not! The instructor put forth little to no effort with a piss-poor attitude toward his students, or at least in helping his students.

I: What do you mean? Were there factors you can identify that led your lack of success in this class?

P: Yes. The quiz system was flawed. On more than one quiz, the system counted answers that were word for word from the book wrong. The instructor's poor communication and attitude led me to believe he did not care about the flaws that were adversely affecting the students. There were just a few of us in the class, and others that I talked to about what I was experiencing were having the same problem. Basically the instructor didn't want to be bothered about it.

I: What about before you took this class. Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yes. In my line of work as a police officer, I have had many classes of this nature prior to taking this one. Again, it wasn't the content or how hard the class was. I've already earned a bachelor's degree and took several online classes while doing that.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking

this online class?

P: I would say highly experienced.

I: Ok. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yes, I have a very supportive system.

I: That's good. Who do you consider your support system?

P: My family, really. I don't know anyone at the college enough for them to be supportive.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: An instructor who cared about being fair to his students, for one thing.

I: How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I attempted to get help with my problems. But it didn't get me anywhere.

I: What do you mean? Did you seek help from the College when you starting having problems?

P: Yes. I contacted the instructor and his secretary on multiple occasions. My request for help was only met with hostility or apathy. I still have the last email from him. Believe me, he'll not have to worry about me asking him another question.

I: Did you talk with anyone else about it?

P: I did ask some of the other students if they had had any problems, and they were having the same experiences. But I'm not sure if they questioned the instructor or not. I wondered if he was rude to them, too, or if it was just something with me. He basically let me know that unless there was an emergency, I was not to contact his secretary. And then he let me know that test scores were not an emergency. But he didn't even say it that nicely. Maybe it wasn't an emergency, but his voice mail said that if we needed help, to contact his secretary. If he didn't mean that, then he shouldn't have those instructions. If he would have responded to my earlier emails, then I wouldn't have had to call anyone else. I just wanted some assurance that he would give us credit for answers that were counted wrong but were right. It was as simple as that.

I: Are you still enrolled at the college?

P: No.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: Extremely disappointed. There was just an overall lack of professionalism.

I: Do you think taking online classes will affect your educational goals?

P: I've had other classes online that were positive, but I would say that this class had a strong negative impact on my thoughts about pursuing another degree online here. But I probably will try it again at another college.

I: Ok. Again, I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: I don't think so.

I: Ok. Again, I appreciate you taking time to talk with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 27 – Transcript of Session

Location: PT 147 – MYCC
Date: Friday, July 20, 2012
Time: 2:45 p.m.
Participant ID: Bol358
Transcriber: Jackie McPherson
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Good afternoon. Thank you for agreeing to talk with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain why I've asked you to meet with me. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I understand.

I: Thank you. I'm going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: It was NAS 106, a natural science class.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: I had to have a natural science for my transfer program, and online classes work better with my schedule. I also work full-time.

I: Ok. Can you tell me how you felt about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I had been successful in other online classes so I did not expect to have any problems.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Yeah, I guess my feelings changed about this class, but not online classes in general.

I: Ok. So your opinion of taking online classes hasn't changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: No, I still believe online classes are very beneficial. When you work, it's hard to get a schedule that works otherwise. My schedule requires me to work in the evenings on a rotating basis, so I can't even get a night schedule to work.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: Well, I expected to be successful!

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No! The assignments were not well explained and the professor would not provide any further explanation. Believe me, I tried. I contacted him, but he was not helpful at all.

I: Did he respond to your requests?

P: Not really. He would email me back, usually days later, but his answers were so short and rude that I felt like I was bothering him or something.

I: Were there specific factors that you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: Yes, the professor did not make the directions for the assignments clear. When I would turn in assignments, he would send them back and say my answers were not long enough. But there was nothing that told us how long they needed to be. I've always been told to keep things simple, short and clear. I answered the questions, but I guess he wanted more fluff to go along with it.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yes, I had been very successful in other online classes.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: Well, I would say that I have a considerable amount of experience. I have to work with them every day.

I: Ok. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Oh, yeah. Everyone in my family is very supportive. My friends are, too.

I: What about anyone at the College?

P: Not really. I guess I've never had to deal with anyone but my teachers. Most of them are helpful. This one was really different.

I: What do you mean by "different?"

P: You know, uppity or something. Like he's too good to answer questions, I guess. You can tell he's not from here. I got the feeling that he thinks most of us are just country hicks.

I: What made you think that?

P: Just the way he...well, I don't know how to explain it. Since he didn't respond to my emails, I just had to go with what he put on the course site. His comments were like we should already know what he expected without him having to explain himself. I guess it was just an attitude or something.

I: Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: ANY feedback from the professor when he was contacted for help would have been nice.

I: How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: Oh, I have no problem seeking help or asking questions. But I don't think he liked me asking questions.

I: What do you mean? Did you seek help from the instructor or any type of support services from the College when you starting having problems?

P: Yes. I repeatedly emailed and called the professor asking what I was doing wrong. His replies were "make answers longer" and "please turn in all due work." I just wanted to know how long they should be or what was I missing that gave us the required length. He never did tell me. It was obvious that I wasn't going to make it in the class, so I dropped it. I have to pay for my classes, so I really wasted not only my time, but also my money on this class. That's hard to swallow.

I: I understand. If you were to describe your overall experience in the class, how would you describe it?

P: Very disappointing.

I: Do you think taking online classes will affect your educational goals?

P: No, I can't let it. With the exception of this class, I have had some great experiences in online classes. I want to transfer to a university in the fall, so I have to finish my program. The only way I can do that is to take other online classes. I'm just glad I don't have to have this class again. I'll take another science to satisfy my requirements.

I: I hope it works out for you. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, I believe that's it.

I: Thank you. Again, I appreciate you taking time to talk with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE B)

Interview 28 – Transcript of Session

Location: By Phone

Date: Friday, July 20, 2012

Time: 3:30 p.m.

Participant ID: Jes497

Transcriber: Amanda Olinger

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for taking time to talk with me this afternoon. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain why I've asked you to talk with me today. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I have.

I: I appreciate your help. I'm going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Sure have.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of that class?

P: It was a math class.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in an online section of this class?

P: That's the only way I could get it.

I: What do you mean?

P: Well, I had to have it that semester and that's the only section that was open. I think that's the only way it was offered, but I'm not sure.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for

this class?

P: I was skeptical. I did not know what to expect with it being math. I guess deep down I knew it would be harder online, especially after the teacher tried to scare us to death during orientation.

I: What do you mean?

P: Well, she said that her nickname was Iron Man XXXX, and that she accepted no excuses. It didn't matter to her what our problem was, if we didn't get the work in, she said she wouldn't accept it. I felt like we were all doomed from the start.

I: Oh. How did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: It was very hard. The professor expected so much and sent emails to prove it. But I really think she expected us to just know how to do the work on our own.

I: Ok. Has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: Yes, I was very apprehensive to take any more classes online because of her class.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I knew it was going to be rough, since I only took the required math in high school. Of course, that was in the 70's! I'm too old for this, I guess.

I: Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: Oh, no. She gave no sympathy. She assumed everyone should know math regardless of how old they were or what their circumstances were.

I: Ok. What factors do you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: Lots of things. I had health problems, and the class just caused more stress, which made things so much worse. I had worked so hard to achieve my goals and this class was going to prevent me from graduating. The teacher just didn't care about the students. Only completing the homework and tests.

I: Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Well, yes, I do. I had taken other online classes, so you would think if I could do one, I could do others.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: I've used a variety of programs. However, it depends on what programs the classes are using. One of my problems with this class was that not all of the questions would download in Blackboard and she would not reset it. She said she could not and would not. Some of the questions would just come up blank. How could you answer a question that you couldn't see?

I: Ok. Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yes, I do. I wouldn't have been able to make it this far if I didn't have my family and friends. Some of the professors were good to help, too. Just not this one.

I: Ok. Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: The professor having a heart would have helped! When I was diagnosed with a blood clot in the last two weeks of class, I sent out emails to all my teachers and they were all supportive except for this one. I saved her email because it upset me so much. She said you need to go to the enrollment office and withdraw from my class immediately. If I had done that it would have caused all kinds of problems for me, but she didn't care. No, 'sorry to hear of your illness or nothing.'

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: This was and always has been an issue with me. I don't feel comfortable asking people for help. It really makes me uncomfortable.

I: What about with this class. Did you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: Other than asking her to reset my test and to understand what was going on with me, no. Not that it did me any good to even try to talk with her.

I: Did you have to retake the class?

P: Yeah, I took it at night the next semester with a different teacher. It was like an entirely different class! I felt like I actually learned something about math.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: It was terrible.

I: How did your experience in this class make you feel?

P: Like a failure. She actually gave me zeros on the quizzes that I couldn't finish because they didn't load right. And even though I wasn't supposed to be walking on my

leg with the clot, I came to the college and took the final exam anyway. It was a disaster.

I: Do you think taking online classes has affected your educational goals?

P: I tried not to let this class affect me with my other classes, because I know my other teachers wanted me to succeed.

I: Ok. I appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: I truly believe this teacher does not want her students to succeed. It's like someone has wronged her in the past and she's making everyone pay for it. Maybe it was me and I reminded her of it or something (laughing).

I: I'm sorry you had that experience. If you have anything else you'd like to add, just stop by and see me.

P: I appreciate that. If you need to contact me, I'll make myself available.

I: That sounds good. Again, I appreciate you talking with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 29 – Transcript of Session

Location: By Phone

Date: Friday, July 20, 2012

Time: 4:30 p.m.

Participant ID: Dal211

Transcriber: Amanda Olinger

Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for agreeing to talk with me this afternoon. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain the purpose of our meeting. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yeah, I'm ok with it.

I: Ok, thank you. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of the class?

P: It was an Econ class.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in that section of the class?

P: It was only offered at 8 a.m. on campus and I just couldn't get there by that time. I ride with somebody else and their schedule didn't start until 9, so I had to take the online section.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I thought it would be fine.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Yeah, I got pretty frustrated with it.

I: Why?

P: Well, the instructions weren't very clear, and there was a lot I didn't understand. I read the material, but I just couldn't get it on my own. There were no other examples or anything from the teacher. Just the book. And he thought we should be able to read it and understand it that way.

I: Ok. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: Well, I'll avoid online classes when I can. It may be more convenient, but it's not worth it.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I expected it to be a little more flexible, I guess, and engaging. They're supposed to be more convenient, but I ended up spending so much time trying to figure stuff out on my own that it was much less convenient for me. They weren't supposed to be that way.

I: Ok. Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No, I was really disappointed with the whole thing.

I: Can you identify what factors you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I'd say that I felt like I didn't really have an instructor. It was like I was on my own to get it.

I: What do you mean?

P: There was just no help available from the teacher. Or at least I felt like there wasn't.

I: Ok. Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yeah, I didn't expect to have any problems.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: Oh, I've had lots of experience with them. I'd say that it's really good.

I: That's good. What about support? Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: I think so. My family takes care of me.

I: Good. Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: I guess more interaction with the teacher. He could have offered to help, but I don't think that he ever did. At least not while I was enrolled.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: I'll ask if I have to, but it's not easy.

I: While you were enrolled in this class, do you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: No, not really.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: It was disappointing and aggravating.

I: How did your experiences in this class make you feel?

P: A little frustrated. I'd say I really felt like a failure, too. I didn't like it at all.

I: Ok. Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: I can't let it. But it probably changed the way that I think about choosing classes. I know to ask more questions about them now before I sign up.

I: I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: No, I don't think so.

I: Again, I appreciate you talking with me today. Enjoy your weekend!

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 30 – Transcript of Session

Location: PT 147 – MYCC
Date: Tuesday, July 31, 2012
Time: 1:00 p.m.
Participant ID: Edi047
Transcriber: Amanda Olinger
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for stopping by to see me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain the purpose of our meeting. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Yes, I understand.

I: Ok, thank you. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of the class?

P: It was a GIS class.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in that section of the class?

P: That's the only way you can take those classes.

I: Ok. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: I had had others, so I was ok with it.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: Not really online classes in general, just this one and its instructor. Worst ever.

I: What do you mean?

P: There were no explanations or directions given at all. And you were wasting your time to email the instructor. He never did respond to me.

I: Oh. So has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: Not really. I just changed majors. I knew I'd have to deal with this guy more if I stayed in that program. This is my first semester back, so I'm not sure how it's going to go.

I: Are you in online classes now?

P: Yeah, but just a couple.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began the GIS class?

P: I thought it was going to be something interesting and something that could help me get a good job.

I: Ok. Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No, no way! I think everybody in there deserved a refund.

I: Were there specific factors you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: I'd say not being able to get in touch with the teacher was a big problem, and just the general setup of the class. It didn't make sense to me and there weren't any instructions.

I: Ok. Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Oh, yeah. I've had some others.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: Really good.

I: That's good. What about support? Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: Yeah, my friends and family support what I'm doing. They know I'm trying to

do this to get a good job for my family.

I: Ok. Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: Probably a different teacher for this class. Otherwise, I don't think anything would have made a difference.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: It's not something that I like to do, but sometimes you have to ask for help.

I: While you were enrolled in this class, do you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: Other than from the instructor, no.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: Really frustrating. I felt like just giving up on going to college because I was afraid that the rest of my classes were going to be like this one.

I: How did your experiences in this class make you feel?

P: Like I said, like giving up.

I: Ok. Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: Well, it changed my career goals, I guess. I'm in a totally different program now.

I: Is that working out better for you?

P: Well, it's my first semester back. I think it's going to be ok.

I: That's good. I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: I don't think so.

I: Ok. Again, I appreciate you talking with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)

Interview 31 – Transcript of Session

Location: PT 147 – MYCC
Date: Tuesday, July 17, 2012
Time: 3:30 p.m.
Participant ID: Per062
Transcriber: Amanda Olinger
Number of Tapes: 1

I: Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. For the record, I'll introduce myself and explain the purpose of our meeting. My name is Victoria Ratliff, and I serve the college as the Dean of Business & Information Technology. I am also a student in the Educational Leadership Doctoral program at Liberty University. As part of my doctoral program, I am investigating the experiences of online students at a rural community college located in central Appalachia. I am particularly interested in any factors that may have contributed to students' unsuccessful attempts to complete an online class.

Please allow me to confirm that you have read and signed the informed consent form and that you understand your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, that you may refuse to answer any questions, and that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

P: Ok. Yeah, I understand.

I: Ok, thank you. I'm just going to ask you a few questions related to your experiences at the college in online classes. At some point in your past, have you had an unsuccessful experience in an online class that resulted in a grade of D, F, U or W?

P: Unfortunately, yes.

I: Ok. Would you please identify the subject or title of the class?

P: It was an astronomy class.

I: Ok. Why did you choose to enroll in that section of the class?

P: Several reasons, I guess. I'm a single mom, with four kids. I have a full-time day job and I live about 45 miles from here. It's even farther than that from my work, so it's hard to get here for classes.

I: I understand. How did you feel about taking an online class when you first registered for this class?

P: Well, I thought it was going to be easy and convenient. I was mistaken about that.

I: What do you mean?

P: I just thought I was going to be able to work whenever it was convenient for me, and I guess in some respects it was like that. But not really. There were deadlines and just more than I expected, I guess.

I: Did your feelings about taking an online class change during the course of the class? If so, how?

P: No, not really. I still think that they're best for me. I just have to be careful with the kind of classes I take.

I: What do you mean?

P: Well, if it's going anything at all to do with math or calculations or science of some sort, I just need them in person. Now, I can write papers and stuff like that, but without someone to explain technical things to me in person, I just can't do it.

I: Ok. How has your opinion of taking online classes changed as a result of your unsuccessful experience in this class?

P: No. I'm still taking classes online. I've done ok with most of them. This one was just particularly hard for me.

I: Ok. What type of expectations did you have when you began this class?

P: I'm not sure. I think you really need a science background before taking astronomy, and I certainly didn't have that. Of course, I didn't know that when I signed up for it.

I: Did you see an advisor when you enrolled in this class?

P: No, I just signed up for it online. I thought it would be a good elective.

I: Ok. Do you feel that the class met your expectations?

P: No, I can't say that it did.

I: Can you identify what factors you feel led to your lack of success in this class?

P: Well, I'll take some of the blame for that. I should have planned my time better. I procrastinated with the things that I didn't understand and that led to me failing the quizzes. It was just not what I expected it to be.

I: What do you mean?

P: I don't know. I just expected online classes to be easier, I guess.

I: Ok. Do you feel that you were prepared for online classes before taking this class?

P: Yes, I think so.

I: How would you describe your level of experience with computers prior to taking this online class?

P: Good. I use them everyday.

I: That's good. What about support? Do you have a social support system, like family and friends, or even college personnel, to support you in your educational goals?

P: My kids really look up to me for going to college. I want them to have a mom that they can be proud of, so even if they don't really do anything as far as support, just knowing that I'm trying to improve our lives gives me the real incentive to keep going.

I: That's good. Can you think of any type of support or assistance that would have helped you to be more successful in this class?

P: No, not really. But maybe some more upfront information about the classes would help. Like if I had known what I was getting into, I might have been better prepared or maybe I would have taken a different class.

I: Have you repeated the class?

P: No, and it's not likely that I will. I'll choose a different elective.

I: Ok. How do you feel about seeking assistance from others?

P: Oh, I'm ok with it, I guess.

I: While you were enrolled in this class, do you seek any type of support services from the College?

P: No, I didn't. Probably should have, I guess.

I: Ok. How would you describe your overall experience in the class?

P: I'd say that it was a little stressful. But my whole life is pretty stressful. Four kids will do that to you. (Laughing).

I: I imagine so. How did your experiences in this class make you feel?

P: I was disappointed, mostly with myself. I didn't want to let my kids down and failing a class just means I wasted my financial aid. I don't get that much and I'm afraid that I'll run out before I finish my program, but that's a whole other issue.

I: Ok. Do you think your experience in this class has affected your educational goals?

P: It's slowed me down a bit. I have to be real careful with the classes that I choose and I've put several off hoping that they might offer them in Gate City or somewhere closer to me. I'll probably eventually have to take the ones that I'm dreading online if I ever want to finish.

I: I really appreciate you taking time to talk with me today. Is there anything else you would like to say about your online experience or any questions you have for me?

P: Not right now. But if I think of anything, I'll let you know.

I: That's good. Again, I appreciate you talking with me today.

END OF INTERVIEW (1 TAPE; SIDE A)