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Online Students Demographics and Motivations to Enroll in Class

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**Appalachian State University
Boone, NC**



**Edited by:
G. David Shows and Pia A. Albinsson
Appalachian State University
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2017 Appalachian Research in Business Symposium

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It is our pleasure to present the *Proceedings of the 4th Annual Appalachian Research in Business Symposium* from the 2017 conference held March 30-31 hosted by the Walker College of Business at Appalachian State University. The Appalachian Research in Business Symposium provides a venue for presenting new research, discovering contemporary ideas, and building connections among scholars at Appalachian State University, Eastern Kentucky University, East Tennessee State University, and Western Carolina University.

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ONLINE STUDENTS DEMOGRAPHICS AND MOTIVATIONS TO ENROLL IN CLASS

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Introduction

Distance education traces its origins to mid-19th century Europe and the United States. With the development of infrastructure and technology, universities began to offer distance education via the internet to reach the prospective students, facilitate the learning process and accommodate their needs. With an increase in popularity and demand, the enrollment for online classes has been strong for the past ten years. According to Allen and Seaman (2013), there were 572,000 more online students in fall 2011 than in fall 2010 for a new total of 6.7 million students taking at least one online course. Another recent study conducted by Aslanian and Clinefelter (2012), surveyed 1,500 undergraduate and graduate students found that only 15 percent of all college students are in a fully online program (Carl, 2014). Therefore, this is still a promising market that requires more research to understand how to encourage students to enroll in a qualified and convenient program to accommodate their needs.

Literature Overview

In this study, we examine how student demographics relate their motives to enroll in online classes. Student demographics such as age, gender, income, as well as education, have been reported as important predictors of student online learning experience and performance (Colorado and Eberle, 2010). When designing online learning for today's dynamic student

population, universities need to take demographics into account to better serve different students' need. In this study, we propose and investigate the following research questions:

- R1: Do females more likely to have a better online learning experience than males do?
- R2: Do students 24 or younger more likely to perform better than older peer do?
- R3a: Do students that hold full-time job position more likely to perform better than part-time students do?
- R3b: Do students that hold full-time job positions more likely to perform better than unemployed students do?
- R3c: Do students that hold full-time job positions more likely to perform better than students who are business owners do?
- R4: Do students with income less than \$39,999 more likely to perform better than students with higher income do?

Methodology

The data collection was administrated using an online survey. This technique made it possible to collect a variety of demographic information and participant's opinions towards the Eastern Kentucky University online degree program.

The questionnaire consisted of 104 questions and was developed using Qualtrics research software. Self-report scales were used to measure what different opinions and judgments participants had on a particular topic. Closed-ended questions using a 5-point rating scale (Likert Scale) ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) were used to measure the level of agreement or disagreement with a specific subject. Open-ended questions were used to collect students' comments and descriptions of their opinions. Finally, some dichotomous and rank order scaling questions were placed to collect demographic information of participants.

The population of interest was all Eastern Kentucky University students enrolled in full online degree programs in spring 2014. The participation was voluntary and anonymous. The survey was distributed to 1,970 participants and the response rate was 6.1% of all online students. The sample consisted of 119 students that were pursuing degrees in diverse areas.

The ANOVA was used to analyze the differences between group means and the impact of independent variables on dependent variables. Correlation was used to determine relationships between variables. A contrast was done to compare levels of dependent variables between groups in significant results found by ANOVA. The quantitative data was used to support the findings of the qualitative method.

Results and Implications

Data was collected using Qualtrics research software. The results were exported and recoded on SPSS statistics software for analysis. Data for the study was collected from 119 undergraduate e-campus students. In an attempt to retrieve reliable results, a specific question was designed to highlight inconsistency. Students that proved inconsistency were excluded from this study. The

sample analyzed in this study consisted of 119 participants.

The study found that the majority of students are white (88.2%), males (54.5%), between 25-34 years old (36.1%), with English being their first language (91.6%). They are senior undergraduates (54.7%), living in a suburban area (46.2%), within 126 miles or over from campus (47.1%). Over half of them had previous experience taking online classes (58.8%), hold a full-time position job (66.4%), and have an income less than \$39,999 (32.8%). 29.4% of students do not have children, and students with 2 children represent 24.4% of the respondents.

The questions were intended to measure factors that express interest and enjoyment of activities. They were related to satisfaction, self-confidence, time-management, self-determination, self-efficacy, responsibility, persistence, self-motivation, and autonomy. The following results are:

R1: The results suggested that females seemed to be more motivated than males for every category of motivations. They scored high levels of satisfaction, persistence, and self-determination.

R2: The results suggested that age was not related to students' performance.

R3: The results suggested that unemployed students showed high levels of responsibility, self-efficacy, self-determination and time-management. This interesting finding contradicts the R3 but supports the last argument made by Aslanian and Clinefelter (2012) that suggests two in every five fully online students are unemployed and therefore seeking higher education to improve their job prospects.

R4: The results suggested that low-income students (less than \$39,999) scored highest level of responsibility, time-management, autonomy, and self-efficacy while high-income students (over \$85,000) showed lower levels of self-efficacy and the least interest in taking more classes than they were currently taking. A negative correlation was found between income and desire to take more classes, between income and autonomy, and between income and self-efficacy suggesting that as income increases the desire to take more classes, self-efficacy, and autonomy decreases.

Conclusion

The results provides a strong support that females and students with income of less than \$39,999 are more motivated in online classes than other groups. The research findings don't support that full-time students are more motivated than students that hold part-time jobs, unemployed and business owners; but reveal very interesting information of a new group emerging in this market. This group of middle-age students with little to no income poses high levels of responsibility and self-motivation. Also, the findings do not support that older students have high motivations to enroll in online classes. Finally, high-income students presented lower levels of self-efficacy and least interest in taking more classes because of time-management issues, causing a decrease in their level of autonomy. Educators can develop better program to help various groups of students to achieve maximum values from taking online classes.

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