**To**: Timothy Eatman, Ph.d

**From**: Megan Rawlings, Lauren Polak, Steffon Gray, and Peter Harding

**Re**: Distance Education Qualitative Study

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**Cc**: Sivilay Somchanhmavong

The qualitative study we are conducting for our project will be explanatory. The goal of our study is to examine why adult learners decide to receive degrees through distance education programs. When conducting our research we’re going to focus research on defining an adult learner, the challenges the adult learners face, and the factors that motivate adult learners to take advantage of distance learning programs.

Distance education programs are expanding in colleges and universities across the world.  More and more people are taking advantage of these resources to easily obtain various degrees.  Through this study we will gain insight on why some adults choose to get their degrees entirely online rather than both online and on campus, or strictly in the classroom.  Adult learners, while like traditional students, have aspects of their lives that complicate their abilities to attend college. With the information from this research study colleges and universities alike can design distance education programs that are centered on the needs and desires of adult learners due to those complications.  The acquired information can also help schools decide on which programs and courses should be available online.

Part of our inquiry is focused on factors that attribute to reasons adult learners choose distance learning as a means for obtaining a higher education. Research has shown that adult learners have been able to maintain full-time jobs, raise families, and still have time to commit to learning online and obtaining their degree (Beleaner &  Jordan, 2004; O’Lawrence, 2006). A study survey research project conducted by O’Lawrence (2006) showed that adults favored distance learning due to its flexibility, convenience, and their ability to perform other tasks outside of academics and still obtain their degree. Furthermore, because of its popularity, distance learning has increased over the past decade and is continuing to expand due to the demand of technical skills needed in the workforce.

In order to best understand the population we are targeting we are going to have to get to know them very well.  By personally interviewing at least one former student who has completed a degree online or a person that is in the process of completing an online degree, we hope to have a better understanding of their behavior and reasons why they chose an online education.  We are hoping this could reveal some unknown challenges that we may not have explored.  Under the confines of this brief study, we understand the limitation and could gain a more in-debt knowledge if we get a higher sample. Working within these confines, we will show that the literature supports our hypotheses regarding reasons why adult learners chose online education.

References

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O'Lawrence, H. (2006). The influences of distance learning on adult learners.*Techniques, 81*(5), 47-49.