Measuring the Effectiveness of Online Faculty Development: Exploring Factors Leading to the Integration of Universal Design Concepts by Community College Professors

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

Donald E. Finn, Jr.
B.S., Radford University, 1991
M.S. Ed., Radford University, 1998

Director: John Kregel Ed.D.
Professor, School of Education

Virginia Commonwealth University
Richmond, Virginia
April 2005

INFORMATION TO USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleed-through, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

ProQuest Information and Learning Company
300 North Zeeb Road
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346

ABSTRACT

Measuring the Effectiveness of Online Faculty Development: Exploring Factors Leading to the Integration of Universal Design Concepts by Community College Professors

Donald E. Finn, Jr.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Virginia Commonwealth University

April 15, 2005

Dissertation Chairman: John Kregel, Ed.D

This study is a quantitative analysis that examines the effectiveness of delivering an online faculty development module about integrating materials and methods of instruction created according to universal design (UD) principles intended to effectively instruct a diverse range of students. The study focused on the responses of full-time, part-time, and adjunct professors employed as instructors at any of Virginia's 23 community colleges. The initial sample of participants included 75 professors from across the state that represented a wide range of instructional disciplines, ages, and years of experience teaching in the postsecondary environment. The study subjects completed an online faculty development module that introduced them to the concept of universal design and

provided them with the context of how universal design practices and applications will help to create an environment and materials that will effectively instruct all learners regardless of their ethnic or cultural background, preferred learning style, or disability. The module provided examples of universally designed materials, tools, and websites to help faculty to evaluate materials currently used in their curriculum and to gauge the potential effectiveness of materials to be used in future courses. The overall effectiveness of the module for presenting UD concepts received a high rating from the participants who completed the initial module, most of whom were new to the idea of universal design. A majority of the initial module completers reported that they would review their current instructional materials for UD characteristics and that they would seek out or create universally designed materials for future instructional use.

Study participants who agreed to continue in the study to provide additional follow-up input beyond the module's completion were randomly selected for inclusion into either an experimental or control group. Experimental group members received supplemental materials (in the form of articles about applying UD concepts into their instruction) via email at predetermined points in the study. Members of the control group received no additional materials about universal design during this time. At two predetermined points, all of the follow-up participants representing both groups were contacted by email to complete identical online follow-up questionnaires. The data gathered from these groups were analyzed and compared in a variety of areas to determine if differences

existed between the groups in how they applied the concepts of the initial module in different ways and to determine if the experimental group members demonstrated higher incidences of integrating universal design techniques into their instruction. After careful examination of the data, no statistical significance was found between the rate of integration of UD concepts into the instruction of the groups in this study.