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Interpreting Students' Perceptions of a Blended Degree Program

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Abstract

The use of blended learning as a delivery model is prevalent in higher education today and takes advantage of both traditional face-to-face and online instruction to deliver academic courses. This study was designed to examine student perceptions of a blended graduate degree program in ASL-English interpreter education pedagogy. The study examined information regarding the overall blended degree program, student perceptions about the online aspects of the program, effectiveness of the delivery methodology and a general concept of ways to strengthen the program. Through a survey and interviews, students provided insight into their experiences with instructors, courses, delivery formats, decision factors in joining a blended program, and the program as a whole. Participants also provided recommendations for courses and program design.

Introduction

The physical classroom has become less and less critical to the delivery of education than in days past. Not long ago, much of what transpired in a typical college degree program happened within the confines of four walls. This is not so much the case today. The use of technology, media, computers, the Internet, electronic collaboration tools, and so forth, has enabled learning and teaching to happen at any time and at any place.

As suggested by Wu and Hwang (2010), "teaching and learning are no longer restricted to traditional classrooms, while e-learning (electronic learning) has become one of the powerful supporting tools which have diversified the traditional context of learning in colleges" (p. 312). E-learning has been defined in many ways that connect the use of the Internet, computer technologies, and instructional materials while emphasizing that faculty and students are not in the same space or time. Zhang (2013) presents a simple definition of e-learning as "to use the Internet or intranet to enhance learning and teaching" (p. 1). There are many noted benefits of e-learning, such as presentation of content over extended periods of time, access to learning around the clock, learning support that is not dependent on time or space, and flexibility of learning (Dziuban, Hartman, & Moskal, 2004; Osguthorpe & Graham, 2003; Zhang, 2013). Likewise, disadvantages have been noted, such as "hindrance of the socialization process of individuals, lack of sufficient recognition between the teacher and the learner and limitations concerning the communication among learners" (Akkoyunlu & Soylu, 2008, p. 183).

A review of the literature revealed no empirical research relative to e-learning, blended learning, online learning or student perceptions of online learning within interpreter education programs. Although there has been prior research on student perceptions of online learning (Akkoyunlu & Soylu, 2008; Essex & Cagiltay, 2001; Glogowska, Young, Lockyer, & Moule, 2011; Kim, Liu, & Bonk, 2005), there have not been such studies about interpreting programs utilizing a blended approach to their program. A prevalent topic in education today is distance learning, broadly

defined, and blended learning is of particular interest within the realm of distance learning. When we discuss blended learning, we can approach the topic from a global program perspective or from the course perspective. For the purposes of this study, the term *blended*, when used to describe an overall degree program, means that students take a combination of fully online, partially online (hybrid), and face-to-face courses. Likewise, the term *blended learning* applies to individual courses in which students are required to meet face-to-face for class while also having a significant portion of the class held online. While we are seeing a rise in the number of online and blended degree programs in the United States, there are understandable concerns about the quality of online learning in these programs. In order to ensure the highest quality possible, it is critically important that programs become aware of student perceptions and expectations in these online and blended programs. There are currently three master-level degree programs in ASL-English interpreting in the United States and two of the five focus on interpreting pedagogy. This study has been designed to gather data on student perceptions of online and blended interpreting graduate programs, and provide guidance for the enhancement of online programs as well as the future design and implementation of similar programs at other institutions.

Literature Review

E-Learning

Higher education has been significantly transformed over many years by e-learning and the changes in how, when and where teaching and learning originate and occur. In the 1890s, the establishment of correspondence education marked the beginning of distance learning in the United States (Mattheos, Schitteck, Attstrom, & Lyon, 2001). Similar to today, distance learning during these early stages had the goal of providing access to education that led to the innovative concept of correspondence learning for students who could not attend education and training in person. In their recent book on e-learning transformation in higher education, Miller et al. (2014) state, “the basic purpose of a distance education program is to provide better access to the institution’s academic programs for students who otherwise may not be able to fully participate in a program” (p. 1). While the goal of distance learning today is similar to what it was during the time of correspondence education, the methods used have evolved greatly, combining technology and the Internet to teach and learn.

According to Chaloux and Miller (2014), “e-learning has been a disruptive change in American distance education and, indeed, for distance education worldwide” (p. 3). Teaching and learning are no longer limited by physical space or time. Both can occur at or from any location at any time. Technology and the Internet have made this possible and form the basis of e-learning. At its core, e-learning is the use of technology and the Internet to deliver instruction and learning and is emerging as a relatively new paradigm of education (Wu & Hwang, 2010). The notion of e-learning can mean fully online courses but could also refer to the use of technology to deliver all or part of a course (Oblinger & Hawkins, 2005), and applications of e-learning can include “online learning, virtual classrooms and digital collaboration, etc.” (Wu & Hwang, 2010, p. 313).

Research focusing on e-learning in education has found several benefits and challenges. Some noted benefits include the flexibility of learners to access the course both in regard to time and

physical location, provision of instant feedback relative to online quizzes and exams, longer exposure to content and materials, opportunity for more self-directed learning, ongoing access to resources, and individual attention (Al-Busaidi, 2013; Lenards, 2011; Wu & Hwang, 2010). Challenges include the direct and indirect costs associated with its development and use (Al-Busaidi, 2013; Baldwin-Evans, 2004), effective design of courses to meet the learning styles of adults, technical skills of learners (Rakap, 2010; Ruey, 2010; Wuebker, 2013), and technical problems with the equipment, general usability, bandwidth, and so forth (Al-Busaidi, 2013).

Blended Learning

Blended learning occurs when a faculty member chooses to have a portion of the class occur in an online environment (such as in a learning management system like Blackboard or Canvas), while other course aspects occur during live, face-to-face sessions. There are many definitions of blended learning in the literature, but nearly all of them reference the blending or combining of different pedagogical approaches and delivery methodologies. According to Stacey and Gerbic, “the blending of pedagogy and technology has produced a range of approaches to teaching and learning” (2007, p. 165). The approaches used by faculty in delivering blended learning experiences vary considerably with relatively few standards for what or how much is blended. Harris, Connolly, and Feeney (2009) conducted a review of numerous studies of blended learning and found that no two designs were the same. Another key component of blended learning includes the idea of enabling personalized learning (Patrick, Kennedy, & Powell, 2013). Blended learning has also been described by the Online Learning Consortium (OLC) in terms of the percentage of a course that is online versus face-to-face. In its most recent report, OLC maintains its definition of blended learning as instruction that has “between 30 and 80 percent of the course delivered online” (Allen & Seaman, 2013, p. 7).

Stacey and Gerbic (2007) presented a review of the literature that demonstrated the variations in defining what blended learning means. They examined several studies that illustrated a vast range of definitions and approaches to blended learning. Akkoyunlu and Soylu (2008) describe blended learning as the integration of the advantages of both e-learning method and the more traditional face-to-face method of teaching. Brown (2003) suggests that blended learning supports the benefits of the overall e-learning approach, such as access, convenience, cost reductions, while also taking advantage of the more personal and interactive aspects of face-to-face sessions. It is important for designers and educators to seek a balance between the online and face-to-face learning environments when developing blended learning experiences (Akkoyunlu & Soylu, 2008).

Student Perceptions of Online Learning

There have been numerous studies documenting student perceptions, both favorable and unfavorable, about online learning. The studies reveal that various factors in distance learning play an important role in how students perceive their learning experience. The interaction of instructors with the students is identified across multiple studies as a factor that impacts student perceptions of online learning experiences (see Bernard et al., 2009; Chapman, 2005; Glogowska et al., 2011; Kim, Liu, & Bonk, 2005; Song, Singleton, Hill, & Koh, 2003). Another factor that impacts student perceptions is active learning and engagement of the student (Benek-Rivera &

Matthews, 2004; Johnston, Killion, & Omomen, 2005). Online courses need to be developed in a fashion that fully engages students in every aspect of the course. Active learning and involvement of students can be readily achieved in online courses by appropriately using and integrating web-based activities and full utilization of modern learning management systems' features. Interactive learning and instruction has been shown to lead to positive student learning outcomes (Picciano, 2002; Watkins, 2005). Studies have also cited flexibility as a strength that students perceive relative to online programming (Ke & Kwak, 2013; Song et al., 2003). In these reports, flexibility refers to the time of learning and instruction, as well as flexibility in overall completion of work. Another significant factor that impacts student perception of online learning is prior technological skills and experiences of students and faculty. Studies show that technical difficulties and overall skill level using technology are challenges students face in online learning; these challenges can lead students to experience stress and anxiety, and have a negative impact on overall student perception (Al-Busaidi, 2013; Essex & Cagiltay, 2001; Smart & Cappel, 2006; Song et al., 2003).

In an early study of student perceptions regarding the effectiveness of both online and distance learning, O'Malley and McCraw (1999) found that students generally perceive that online learning has "a significant relative advantage to traditional methodologies" (p. 10). The advantages identified included saving time, providing a better fit with their schedules, and being able to take more courses than through traditional formats. Following a comprehensive review of literature, Lenards (2011) concluded, "feedback from these surveys demonstrated clear, repetitive responses with both positive and negative perceptions of the online learning environment" (p. 183). In a table presented by Lenards, common perceptions of students of online learning experiences included positive perceptions such as flexibility, freedom to communicate, working at their own pace, not being required to go to campus, and overall convenience. Additionally, Lenards identified negative perceptions such as feeling isolated, lack of interaction with students and faculty, lack of technology skills, time management, and lack of feedback from the faculty.

Methodology

The objective of this study was to examine the students' perceptions of a blended graduate degree program in ASL-English interpreter education pedagogy. The findings provided important information regarding the overall blended degree program, perceptions of students about the online aspects of the program, effectiveness of the delivery methodology and a general concept of ways to strengthen the program. The major findings of this mixed-methods research design are based on a survey and an analysis of student interviews, and this report offers recommendations to address the relevant findings. Mixed-methods research uses qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection to find answers to research questions (Hewson, 2006). According to Cresswell (2003), a concurrent mixed-methods research strategy is one in which both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods are used simultaneously. The online survey consisted of 19 questions in varying formats and a personal interview with an external interviewer.

Ethical Issues

Ethical issues are inherent in research involving human subjects. Principles foundational to conducting ethical research include the premises that (a) research will do no harm to those researched, (b) participants will provide informed consent after understanding the study's purpose, (c) the researcher will maintain the privacy of those being researched, and (d) the researcher will ensure that the information collected will only be used for its intended purpose (Sumner, 2006). The researcher values these principles of ethical research practice and designed this study accordingly. In an effort to apply these principles, the study was reviewed and approved by the university Institutional Review Board (IRB). Following the receipt of IRB approval, data collection began.

Data Collection

A staff member in the researcher's department sent an email to prospective participants describing the study and asking for their participation. Information about informed consent and confidentiality was provided, and the email also included a link to the online survey. A follow-up email was automatically sent two weeks after the study's launch, reminding those who had not yet participated to do so. The survey consisted of 19 questions and was disseminated using *Qualtrics*, an online survey tool. The survey followed a mixed-method approach combining both closed and open questions. Closed-ended questions followed a 5-point Likert scale format to measure student perceptions of a variety of aspects of their blended program, including instructors, courses, delivery formats, decision factors in joining a blended program, and the program as a whole. Open-ended questions asked students for overall recommendations for courses and program design.

After participants completed the online survey, one-on-one interviews were conducted during a weeklong, face-to-face meeting. The interviews, with participants' consent, were videotaped for detailed analysis. The interviews were conducted by a research assistant/interviewer who was not a university employee nor a student. The interviewer met with each participant privately to ask seven questions, following an interview protocol developed by the researcher. The interviewer was encouraged to ask additional, probing questions to follow relevant topics introduced by the students.

Following the collection of responses to the online survey and one-to-one interviews, the data were processed, organized and analyzed. To ensure fairness and an ethical research process, the researcher, who was the instructor for one of the summer courses for the students, did not access the interview data until after grades were submitted for the summer course. This was made clear to the participants in both informed consent documents and the invitation to participate.

Participants

The participants in this study were graduate students enrolled in the first cohort of the blended master's in interpreting pedagogy program at a comprehensive master's university in the southeast United States. Ages varied from mid-20s to mid-50s (nine in the 26-35 range, three in the 36-45 range, and two in the 46-55 range); there were four males and 10 females. When asked

if they worked while in the program, 85% indicated they worked full-time while enrolled. Seven students had not taken any online courses prior to the program and four had taken more than one class online prior to the program.

All participants were nationally certified ASL-English interpreters and either currently instructional faculty or intended to be in the future. Participants were in the fourth of five semesters and had taken a course in how to teach online. The students had completed four, fully online courses with no face-to-face aspects, three blended courses with both face-to-face and online aspects, and would be enrolled in three blended courses during the data collection period.

Results

Students' Overall Perceptions of the Blended Program

One area the study examined was the students' perceptions of the overall program. The survey presented questions that asked students to evaluate the instructors, the blended degree program as a whole, and the courses in the program. Three broad questions were asked using a Likert scale to assess student perceptions of the instructors as a whole, the blend of online and face-to-face courses, and general organization of the courses. To gauge student perception of the instructors, students were presented a list of instructor activities or tasks and asked the degree of their agreement as to whether or not the instructors exhibited such practices. Table 1 presents student responses to the question.

Table 1

Overall Student Perception of Instructors in the Full Program

| Instructor Characteristics | % Strongly Agree/Agree | M |
|--|---------------------------|------|
| Had the ability to communicate concepts. | 71 | 2.14 |
| Were successful in communicating or explaining subject matter. | 64 | 2.36 |
| Had an online presence in the courses. | 64 | 3.14 |
| Created a style of delivery appropriate to the courses. | 71 | 2.71 |
| Demonstrated organization with course materials. | 50 | 2.64 |
| Had the ability to involve students with classroom interaction. | 71 | 2.29 |
| Were responsive to email. | 93 | 1.86 |
| Motivated student interest and intellectual effort. | 71 | 2.29 |
| Were available to students. | 71 | 2.14 |
| Provided feedback in a timely manner. | 71 | 3.00 |
| Provided feedback in a manner that was constructive and non-threatening. | 57 | 2.71 |

Another question asked students to evaluate the overall design of the blended program. Questions focused on the balance between online and face-to-face courses in the program as well as the general integration of the online components and the face-to-face meetings into a single blended degree program. Combining the strongly agree and agree responses, 77% of the respondents indicated agreement that the proportion of online and face-to-face learning as a whole was appropriate to meet their needs and that overall the face-to-face and online components worked well together as an integrated degree program. When asked if they would choose a blended degree program again, 92% indicated they would.

Students' Satisfaction with the Online Courses

Several questions were asked regarding their online courses to reveal perceptions about course syllabi, faculty and student interactions, technology skills required, and the effectiveness of online discussions. Table 2 presents responses of students to several of the questions related to the online courses.

Table 2

Student Perception of Online Courses

| Statement | % Strongly Agree/Agree | M |
|---|---------------------------|------|
| Before starting the courses, I was advised about the technology and skills required to be successful in online courses. | 86 | 1.50 |
| The course syllabi were clear. | 65 | 2.29 |
| The content of the courses was pertinent in attaining my professional goals. | 57 | 2.50 |
| The course discussions were conducive to learning. | 71 | 2.21 |
| The work required for the courses was appropriate for the program. | 57 | 2.50 |
| My interaction with the instructor and students was facilitated through a variety of ways. | 79 | 2.14 |

Students' Satisfaction with the Various Components of the Program

Students were asked about their satisfaction with a variety of individuals, offices, and/or services related to their program. The greatest degree of satisfaction, either satisfied or strongly satisfied, was found with their face-to-face courses. The second greatest area with which students were satisfied was library services. An interesting note about the library services offered by the university is that the library has a dedicated librarian whose focus is distance learning students and programs. She develops support service programs for the distance students, offers assistance to students via video and audio conferencing and live chat technologies. She is available to help distance students with research, locating library resources, and other services available to

students on campus. In general, the majority of respondents were either satisfied or strongly satisfied with their online courses, instructors and technology support, indicating satisfaction in five key areas: face-to-face courses, library services, online courses, instructors, and technology support.

Factors Influencing the Decision to Join a Blended Learning Program

As the literature review indicated, several factors influence students' decision to choose a distance program. One of the questions of this study asked students how important various factors were in their decision to enroll in the blended degree program. Table 3 provides the factors and percentage of respondents identifying each factor as very important, important, neither important no unimportant or unimportant. Four of the factors, family responsibilities, convenience, cost and the faculty, were identified by 92% of the respondents as being very important to their decision to enroll in the blended program. Their work was identified by 100% of the respondents as either very important or important in their selection of a blended program.

Table 3

Factors Important To Students' Decision To Enroll In The Blended Program

| Factor | % Very Important/Important |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------|
| Work schedule | 100 |
| Family responsibilities | 92 |
| Convenience | 92 |
| Cost | 92 |
| Faculty of the program | 92 |
| Conflicts with personal schedule | 77 |
| Distance from campus | 55 |
| Courses not offered online | 54 |
| Recommendation from employer | 50 |

Recommendations for Improvements to the Program and Courses

Responses to two questions on the survey and responses to the face-to-face interviews provided additional insight into the students' evaluation of the online courses and general satisfaction with the blended program. Students were given an opportunity to provide suggestions for improving the online courses and for improving the overall design of the blended degree program. Their responses were categorized into the following themes: faculty, course organization, course sequence, frequency of face-to-face meetings, and timing. Specific responses for each theme are provided as examples in the following paragraphs. Note that the questions were designed to focus responses on where improvements are needed.

Respondents expressed their opinions on the program faculty and their overall effectiveness in online instruction. The program faculty were a clear draw for many students: one respondent stated, "The faculty for the program at the university was a major reason I applied to this

program; their experience and knowledge in the field is highly regarded.” Suggestions offered by the students for improvements relative to instructional staff centered primarily on the training and experience in effective practices for online teaching. Ideas were also offered for how to best support the faculty so that they are able to deliver their online courses effectively:

“I would also require instructors to have experience or at least a practical course on how to teach online courses. “

“Implementing some kind of support for instructors who are unfamiliar with the technology of teaching online. Consider having a person on staff build the platform for them and plug in their content. Also, just as online learning isn't for all students, it is also not for all educators.”

“Perhaps co-teaching or assigning teaching assistants who are skilled in distance learning would improve the online courses.”

Another theme in the respondents' suggestions for improvement was overall organization of the online courses. Students found that faculty across the program used different structures within the learning management system and indicated that this made it challenging to know where course materials were located and how to effectively use the online course materials. Students offered practical suggestions for improvement:

“Each semester there was a learning curve in figuring out each instructor's set-up and management style. I would recommend that the program agree on one type of general set-up that could be used and familiar to the students.”

“I would recommend that all the professors utilize the same Blackboard shell for each course. Also, I would recommend that an instructional designer or someone else handle putting the material into the course, as many instructors struggled with this and it often left challenges in navigating particular courses.”

Students also expressed their opinions about the sequence of the courses within the program and the frequency of face-to-face meetings. Responses from students to both survey and interview questions suggest that the program could be better if the order in which the courses are delivered is modified to be more developmental. One recommendation was that the course focused on curriculum development and objective writing would be better if it were first in the sequence. Students suggested:

“The order of the courses needs to be addressed. I do not feel that there was a rhyme or a reason to the course layout.”

“The order of the courses should also be re-arranged. Teaching Adult Learners, Teaching Online, and Curriculum Development should have been offered the first semester to set the foundation for the program.”

“It would be difficult and costly, but more frequent face-to-face meetings would be helpful.”

“I really enjoyed the amount of time when we were required to be face-to-face. I would have liked to meet my instructors in person at some point during the program for those classes that didn't have a face-to-face component.”

Time was another theme in the student responses. Several comments were made regarding the length of the program overall, the time between online and face-to-face components, and timing of major course assignments within a semester. These issues support general findings in the literature about time involved in online programs. Students offered several suggestions for the program to consider, including:

“My ideal program would go an additional semester so we only ever have two classes at a time.”

“The one major suggestion I have to improve the blended, distance-learning program is to schedule time away from Blackboard and homework assignments the week before traveling to the on-site facility.”

“I would suggest cutting back on the amount of work that is assigned leading up to the face-to-face sessions or being intentional about what is assigned.”

“If two classes are being taught in one semester to run them sequentially eight weeks each, so that the focus could be on only one class at a time to more deeply understand the information.”

Conclusions

Summary of Findings

This study was undertaken to examine student perceptions on a blended graduate program on interpreter pedagogy. The researcher set out to not only obtain data on student perceptions but to also gain insight into the enhancement of this program, that could also be applied to the design and implementation of similar programs at other institutions. As identified in the literature, students look to distance learning courses and degree programs for more flexible options in higher education and to find programming that fits within their schedules and lives. The literature indicates that many factors influence student perceptions of the e-learning experiences including interactions with faculty and peers, the use of active learning strategies, technical skills of the faculty and the students, and experience and preparation of faculty for teaching in an online and blended environment.

As indicated, students' greatest degree of satisfaction was with the face-to-face interactions of the program. This finding suggests that while students may have chosen the program because of the flexibility it offered and the access to quality programming at a distance via online courses, they still valued the time spent together with their peers and the instructors during the face-to-

face meetings. The interpreter education program should consider at the very least maintaining the face-to-face meetings within the program or adding such a meeting.

The results of this study suggested that students were generally satisfied with their overall program, courses, instructors and technology support. While 92% of respondents indicated they would choose a blended program again, there were areas of the program that could be enhanced so that student perception of the value or effectiveness would be more positive. Only 57% of the respondents found the content of the courses pertinent to their own professional goals, and the same percentage of respondents found that the work associated with the program was appropriate, suggesting two areas of potential enhancements. Factors that lead students to choose a blended learning program were consistent with findings in the literature. All of the respondents indicated that their work or employment situation was important in their selection of a blended degree program. Other factors such as family responsibilities, convenience, and program faculty were also of high importance in their consideration of a blended degree program.

Implications for the Design and Delivery of Blended Programming

This study identifies several implications for the development and delivery of blended degree programs as well as for future research. Student responses produced themes regarding the experience of the instructors, the organization of the courses, the sequence of courses, the frequency of face-to-face interactions, and timing of workload and course delivery. Suggestions made by the respondents parallel the recommendations found in the literature around best and effective practices for online teaching. Based on student responses, both the program in question and other programs looking to develop and deliver instruction via online courses and blended programs should consider the following recommendations:

1. Develop and use a standard structure and design of the learning management system (LMS). By using a template for all courses in the LMS, students and faculty become very comfortable with the course layout. This makes finding course content and navigation within the course much more user-friendly.
2. Take advantage of instructional designers with expertise in learning experience design and LMS, thereby freeing the faculty member to be the true subject matter expert (SME). Faculty tend to have expertise in the content of a course but may not have in-depth preparation in effective learning design. By using an instructional designer, a program can provide significant support to the faculty and in the end the students as well.
3. Provide in-depth training for faculty who will teach online courses and, when possible, require faculty in the program to have experience in teaching online.
4. Ensure that faculty have a clear understanding of what blended learning means and provide training for the faculty on how to effectively teach a blended course. There are strategies that can help faculty develop and deliver effective courses that make the most out of online and face-to-face components.
5. Review the order of courses within the program and ensure that the scope and sequence is developmentally appropriate and structured in a manner that allows students to learn prerequisite skills first.

6. Examine the program schedule and plan for a sufficient number of in-person interactions so students feel connected to one another and to faculty. Plan opportunities for at least some face-to-face interaction with all faculty during the program.
7. Give careful consideration to the structure of semesters or terms in which face-to-face sessions occur. Students who are engaged in online coursework should be afforded time to transition from the online learning to the face-to-face programming.
8. Create a curriculum map that identifies all learning outcomes in all courses and the corresponding learning and assessment activities. This can be very helpful in ensuring that all desired learner outcomes find an appropriate place within the program and allows faculty to visualize what is required in each semester. Adjustments can then be made if a particular semester is heavy with both assessments and assignments or if a particular semester has more than a balanced share of outcomes to be achieved.

Limitations

This study was conducted on a population of students in a specific blended degree program in interpreting pedagogy. The instrument was designed for this specific purpose following a review of the literature. As such, there is no evidence of validity or reliability since the instrument was not used before. In addition, the sample size surveyed and interviewed was small because it was limited to students enrolled in the program. However, all participants submitted responses, and a variety of views were provided. Additional limitations include the fact that there are not other blended programs of the same nature in the field of interpreter preparation, nor are there many other traditional interpreter pedagogy programs to compare. Despite these limitations of sample size, similar programs for comparison, and lack of prior validation of the instrument, the findings of the study do provide ideas for enhancement in this and future programming.

Recommendations for Future Research

It is recommended that a similar study examine faculty perceptions. As Cavanagh (2012) states, “Faculty and course-development services will need to be expanded to prepare and support faculty who will also be moving back and forth between modalities just as their students do” (p. 226). Just as student opinions and perceptions of their learning experiences are valuable and provide significant feedback for future enhancements, a study of faculty could provide meaningful insights into how to further develop the program and provide ideas for faculty enhancements in other programs. Such a study could explore faculty perceptions of their own training, experience and effectiveness in teaching online and blended courses, and examination of what faculty believe would improve their teaching and the student learning experience. As students made specific recommendations about course design and faculty training, a study of faculty could investigate the direct impact of a training intervention on their own teaching effectiveness.

There is no doubt that there is an upward trend in the percentage of students choosing online and blended learning (Cavanagh, 2012). With this in mind, interpreter education programs would be well served to carefully determine how to develop and deliver effective distance programming,

and support faculty and students in their multi-modal consumption of learning. Further research that examines student achievement of learning outcomes in face-to-face courses as compared to online courses would also benefit the field. In particular, whether students achieve the same degree of mastery in online versus face-to-face courses and what factors (e.g., student, faculty, content) influence achievement would be informative to programs considering online and blended programming.

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