STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY ONLINE COURSES

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Dr. John Mark Hunter,
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Date January 10 2003

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY ONLINE COURSES

A Field Study

Presented for the

Education Specialist

Degree

Austin Peay State University

Linda Kay Repka-Brake

December 2002

Dedication

This is dedicated to my parents, Audrey and Richard Repka, who provided me with the experiences and means necessary to begin this journey of higher education. And to my family, Terry, Christopher, and Allison, who continually support me in more ways than I could ever say, as I continue on this road toward my dream.

Acknowledgement

I would like to take this opportunity to give my sincere appreciation to Dr. John Mark Hunter who has supported me throughout this process. His countless hours of mentoring, guidance, and teaching have not gone by unnoticed. I also give thanks to Dr. Donald Luck and Dr. Carlette Hardin for agreeing to share on my committee and taking the extra time above that of committee members that was necessary in order for me to complete this process and obtain my Education Specialist Degree. During this research study, the Austin Peay State University Distance Education Office and Mr. Tom Moseley have provided many resources and much help all along the way. Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Terry, and children, Christopher and Allison, for all their help and support throughout my experiences at Austin Peay State University.

Abstract

Austin Peay State University began offering online courses in Fall 2000. After a year of courses evolving rapidly, instructors and administrators felt confident in their ability to present instruction using this medium. Could this confidence be supported by analysis of students' perceptions? The research question that was investigated was: Are students who receive online instruction with Austin Peay State University satisfied? The statement of the hypothesis was: Students who have completed an online course through Austin Peay State University have an overall positive perception of the experience. A non-experimental descriptive study using an online survey determined student perceptions. The sample yielded 56 responses from students who were enrolled in online courses at Austin Peay State University in the Fall 2001 semester. Results were transferred to numerical measures to determine a perception score. Higher scores signified a more positive perception toward web-based learning. The conclusions drawn from data are that the overwhelming majority of respondents have strongly positive perceptions toward their online learning experience at Austin Peay State University.

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Introduction

Background Information

Remaining current with technology and meeting student needs has become crucial to the competitiveness of higher learning institutions. The pedagogy by which institutions of higher learning now offer instruction to students continues to evolve and change into new and different models. The causative factor of this is twofold: student needs and technological advances have fueled this phenomenon into developing methodologies of service delivery.

There was a time when one image of the traditional college student defined the majority. They entered college directly from high school; they were not married, not employed, and lived in the dorms on campus. They are not the students seen in many universities today. In seeking an increase of enrolling non-traditional students who have full-time employment obligations and family roles to fulfill, the need for traditional college offerings needed to change.

The advancement of technology has created an emergent shift in the ability to meet the needs and desires of those students seeking higher learning. Distance education programs of the past decades utilized several media and technologies to deliver instruction: mail, radio, television, satellite broadcast, videotapes, teleconference, and videoconferences. There have been three dominant delivery methods in distance education that include one way prerecorded video, two way interactive video and audio, and Internet based technology (Gabrielle, 2000). Now research shows that Internet-based distance education is quickly becoming the predominant technology in distance education

(Ataya, Brown, Gorham, and Barker, 2002). "In the past, universities tended to own a local geography, but there is no geography to it anymore. In the industrial age, we went to school. In the communication age, the school comes to us" (Bataineh, 2000, Introduction ¶3). Currently, there has been a move towards creating virtual classrooms and even virtual universities. Mechitov, Moshkovich, Underwood and Taylor (2001) state that universities and colleges have quickly embraced this new information medium for a major reason: the Internet ideally suits a university mission and environment in the sense that universities are primarily information gathering and dispensing institutions. Through blending the classroom with seemingly unlimited informational resources, the Internet significantly enriches the educational process. This use of the Internet has aided those non-traditional students in having the courses conform to their work and family schedules, hence increasing enrollment. With higher education continuing to strive to meet the needs of its targeted population, this manifested in a method to expand their appeal to the public.

Statement of the Problem

Austin Peay State University has been providing online courses to students since Fall 2000. As time has progressed, courses have changed and further developed to provide quality education through the Internet. Austin Peay State University has experienced a dramatic increase in the amount of offerings available, as expressed in Table 1.1.

Table 1-1

Growth of Austin Peay State University Online Course Offerings

Semester	Courses Offered	Students Enrolled
Fall 2000	3	38
Spring 2001	6	136
Summer 2001	5	159
Fall 2001	35	450
Spring 2002	58	1,438

Opinions that APSU is providing students with quality online programming must, in part, be supported with an analysis of students' perceptions. As distance education becomes more popular, instructors must consider students' perception of online learning. The purpose of this research study is to obtain student perceptions towards their experiences of completing current online courses offered by Austin Peay State University.

Current available technologies combined with the changing demographics of the enrolled college student, forced higher education institutions to create new pedagogy to remain competitive. The move toward online instruction is one such shift in providing new methods and venues of instruction. Researching students' perceptions toward course content, professor availability, course requirements and peer-to-peer interaction will aid in future online development.

This paper will seek to investigate and answer the following question: Are students who receive online instruction with Austin Peay State University satisfied? Based upon the research question the following hypothesis was derived: Students who have completed an online course through Austin Peay State University have an overall positive perception of the experience.

Definitions of Terms

Austin Peay State University Online Student - A student currently enrolled in an online course through the University.

Distance Education - A form of instruction in which learners and instructors are separated by geographical distance and/or time (Bollinger and Martindale, 2001).

Graduate Student- any student who already possesses a Bachelor's Degree and is working towards a higher degree of education.

Non-Traditional student – At APSU, students are classified as non-traditional if they are at least 25 years old, returning to school after an extended absence from formal education, married, a parent or a military veteran. They may have full-time employment obligations and/or family roles to fulfill.

Online Course – A college level course that is taught, delivered, assessed, evaluated, and managed entirely over the Internet. All communication between students and instructor occurs entirely through the web. Neither face-to-face interaction is required between learners and instructor, nor physical attendance in a specific location is required.

Traditional Students – Students under the age of 25 years old, may live on campus and entered immediately following high school.

Undergraduate Student – any student working towards his/her initial Bachelor's Degree.

Web-based Course – synonymous with Online Course

Limitations of the Study

1. Student perceptions will only be obtained from a single Tennessee state university, so results will be limited to this population. Its findings cannot be generalized across all disciplines or educational entities.
2. Students will have had to be enrolled in the Fall 2001 semester to have access to the survey. As professors have additional exposure to presenting courses in an online environment, student perceptions may change.

Review of Related Literature

Institutions of higher learning must gauge success, at least in part, based on the satisfaction and perception of the students they serve. Valenta, Therriault, Dieter, and Mrtek (2001) believe that through researching and "understanding student perceptions, we can better design and provide instruction for web-based courses" (Introduction, ¶3). Biner (1997) also states the importance of researching student perceptions' by suggesting that students' attitudes toward distance education are as important a metric as students' achievements in determining the effectiveness of distance education. Sanders (1996) states "analyses show that student perceptions directly influence achievement through their positive and significant influence on one or more of the attitudinal and behavioral variables measured" (p.7). Although much research indicates the validity of assessing student perceptions', Valenta et al. found that "a bibliographic search of the ERIC database found only 194 citations (approximately 5 percent) dealt with student attitudes toward computer-mediated distance education, and once that search was further limited to include World Wide Web or the Internet it resulted in a retrieval of 20 citations (approximately 0.5 percent)" (Literature Review, ¶2).

Research concerning prevalence of online learning

Research from 1997-1998 shows that 78 percent of all four-year public institutions and nearly 19 percent of all four-year private colleges and universities offer complete degree programs through distance education (Palloff and Pratt, n.d.). "According to the Distance Education at Post Secondary Education Institutions report

for 1997-1998, 1.6 million students were enrolled in distance education courses in 1998, compared to 753,000 students enrolled in distance education courses in 1994-1995" (Sorg and McElhinney, 2000, p.2). With these numbers continuing to climb at an exponential rate and additional course offerings being embraced by higher learning institutions, it is imperative to examine student perceptions. Institutions have committed to various forms of online learning courses as strategies to increase flexibility for students, improve student learning outcomes, and make more efficient use of classroom space (Hartman and Thruman-Davis, as cited in Sanders, Morrison-Shetlar, 2001).

Research about student perceptions

A review of the related literature demonstrates the current ideology that student perceptions are indeed important enough to warrant an in depth study. Goldsmith (2001) completed a study that drew from a population of 2,500 students from the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium (CTDLC). These students were enrolled in one of 72 online courses offered by 15 colleges and universities that form the CTDLC. The study methodology was completed using an interview technique involving three open-ended questions to a sample of 400 students. This study concludes that over 90 percent stated they would take another online course and would recommend that others do so as well. Respondents overwhelmingly indicated that flexibility of time and place is the major reason for taking courses offered online.

A similar research study that was completed at the University of Alberta, Canada completed by Montgomerie and Harapnuik (1997) developed an online survey to obtain

student perspectives. About 50 percent of the 250 students enrolled in the class completed this survey. Once results were calculated, this study indicated that approximately 70 percent of the students stated they felt the online learning was a positive experience.

Interviewing combined with observation were the methodologies demonstrated in a research project completed by Sorg and McElhinney (2000). The participants of this study were seven students from Indiana University at Fort Wayne who were enrolled in an eight-week Internet-based sociology class. In the research project, the authors collected data from a series of four interviews with each study participant. Interestingly, researchers also were provided with the opportunities to observe the students completing work online. The population for this study was limited in size with only seven participants, whose age range fell between 31 and 42 years, which also appears limited. Conclusions in this study report that the majority of the adult students were satisfied with learning online (Sorg and McElhinney, 2000). In stark contrast to the small-scale study completed above, an extremely large sample was obtained in a study completed by the NKI (Rekkendel, 1999). The NKI is one of the largest non-governmental educational institutions in Norway. In Norway, NKI offers more than 300 online courses to over 15,000 students. They have completed a longitudinal three-year study of students' perceptions of online learning. Their last survey of students occurred in 1998, with the development of an online survey. Students were recruited for participation through an e-

mail announcement to gain awareness of the survey. The Institute received a survey completion rate of 24 percent. One important aim of the overall study was to examine whether offering the courses on the World Wide Web facilitated a general experience that was positive, measured by possible interest in enrolling in another course themselves, or if they would consider recommending others to take courses offered in the same fashion. Rekkendel concludes that clearly the students in all three years of the survey held positive attitudes of online learning.

Ataya, Brown, Gorham, and Barker (2002) also completed a research study with a large sample. The sample for this study was 965 undergraduate and graduate students along with 79 faculty members from a large New England university. Both a student survey and a faculty survey were developed. The student survey consisted of 29 Likert scale questions to assess perspectives. The researchers conclude that "the majority of students felt the use of the Internet enhanced the learning process" (p. 4).

A study completed by the Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness (2001) shows that fully online courses consistently have more females. Sanders and Morrison-Shetlar (2001) indicate that females are more inclined to have a significantly positive perspective of online courses than males. In this research study, 110 students were given an attitude scale to determine attitudes toward online instruction. Results were found to be generally positive. The mean attitude score (from 12 to 48) was 35.04 with a standard deviation of 4.85. Most students were comfortable working in an online environment.

Ewing-Taylor (1999) conclude that "in spite of increased time spent on course work, students said they found online courses worthwhile and would take additional

courses offered using this media" (p. 4). Research completed by the Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness at University of Central Florida (2001) on the student opinions of their online courses found that the majority of students in fully online courses reported that they were satisfied with their experience (85 percent) and would be positive about taking another fully online course (89 percent).

Factors affecting positive student perception

Multiple factors are involved in determining what affects ones perception toward the negative or positive in an online course. Valenta et al. (2001) state "the success of long-distance learning hinges on its capacity to simulate a dynamic campus classroom" (Introduction ¶2). Examining the Goldsmith (2001) research study, it was determined that 70 percent of the sampled population revealed that the two most important aspects that affect the quality of the course are interaction and the role of the faculty. Peer-to-peer interaction is singled out as the most specific aspect of online learning that enhanced the learning experience. Some conclusions state that students who were shy or less verbal within a traditional classroom were given an equal opportunity to be a part of the online class. Loftus (2001) indicates that in a real classroom, a few students may dominate the discussions, and shy individuals do not stand a chance of being heard. Other opinions indicated that without the limitations of class times, each student was given the opportunity to respond in discussions without being "cut-off". Additionally,

students preferred having time to think at length about posted questions and comments rather than having to respond immediately within a classroom discussion. Lastly concerning interaction, students responded that they felt freer to state their opinions, even when it included disagreeing with others, when one could not put a face to a name.

Goldsmith (2001) also found that the role of the faculty member was predominant when examining what affected students' views. "Students want their online faculty to be present, accessible, and available" (p.113). This study established a direct correlation between positive perceptions of students and the role of the faculty member in the online class. Kolloff (2000) states that interactivity in an online course becomes more critical as it is often the only 'life line' or connection between the distant student, instructor, and classmates. In this research study, three types of interaction are concluded as essential for any distance learning environment. These are learner-instructor, learner-content, and learner-learner interactions. Learner-instructor interaction is defined as the components of motivation, communication, and feedback between the instructor and student. Learner-content interaction is defined as methods by which the learners obtain cognitive information from texts and other resource materials such as web pages, videos, or journal articles. Finally, learner-learner interaction is defined as the communication and exchange among students about information, course content, assignments, and attitudes. Sanders and Morrison-Shetlar (2001) indicated that while student learning styles determine student attitudes toward online learning, that factor is not as important as a faculty member's ability to provide useful information in a format that is understandable, easily accessible, and engaging for students to navigate. Quitadamo and Brown (2000)

found that the majority of online students possess positive feelings when the instructor acted as a facilitator of the content presented. A study conducted at the University of Central Florida by the Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness (2001) surveyed the faculty of online courses concerning class interaction. They conclude that the majority of faculty indicates that more interaction occurs in their web courses then in their comparable face-to-face sections, and they feel that this interaction is of higher quality than what they typically experience.

An in depth study of what factors positively affect student perceptions was completed in 1996 using a population from eight higher educational institutions in Florida (Gabrielle, 1997). Two hundred fifty-three students responded to questionnaires via mail, facsimile, or electronic mail. Results based on an analysis of multiple regressions indicate a significantly positive relationship (=. 254) found between student-teacher interaction and perceptions of instructional effectiveness. The findings of this study revealed that student-teacher interaction was the most consistent positive predictor of student satisfaction.

Some additional relevant factors that impact upon a positive student perception are more internalized toward the learner rather than the university. A study conducted by Loftus (2001) indicated that an additional factor involved in students' views of online learning lies in part with their Internet Service Provider (ISP). The speed with which course pages load online and the frequent loss of an Internet connection can influence students' views towards the total presentation of a course. McMahon, Gardner, Gray, and Mulhern (as cited in Peters, 2001) reported that computer access accounts for 50

percent of the variance that exists among student attitudes toward online learning. Solloway and Harris (1999) found through their research that individual student level of computer knowledge has a direct relationship to student satisfaction of online courses. Student frustrations with technical problems early in the semester affected the overall attitudes of the entire course. This was also a major conclusion in the Ewing-Taylor (1999) study which states "prior experience with technology and experience with specific categories of computer usage all play important functions in attitude determination" (p.4). This was reiterated in Gabrielle (2000), when looking at the data on technologically advanced students, there was a significant positive relationship (=. 499) in student perceptions. Sorg and McElhinney (2000) show that course participants who reported adequate keyboard skills appeared to invest greater effort reflecting on course content than they did concentrating of the keyboard.

Research concerning students taking online courses

The competencies required for students to succeed in online education are not the same needed for success in traditional classroom. "Distance education places new demands on the learner. The competencies required for success with online education are not quite the same as those needed for success in traditional campus-based education" (Cravener, 2001, p.1). In all instances the environments are different, the relationships are different, and in many situations the learning activities are different. Valenta et al. (2001) state that distance education students earned higher grades than students in conventional versions of the same class.

When the Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness (2001) studied the demographics of the University of Central Florida's online students, they found several characteristics of online learners; the majority of online learners were also enrolled in traditional face-to-face courses, they are older, and roughly half of the students held full-time jobs. That study also pointed out that the racial and ethnic distribution of online courses equaled that of face-to-face courses. This study also found that the majority (79 percent) of students take online courses because of the convenience of not having to commute to campus.

A dramatic, different kind of freedom prevails online, despite relatively high levels of directiveness incorporated into well-designed distance offerings. Online course work, in most offerings, requires more independence and discipline. However, research completed by the Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness (2001) concludes that those who choose fully online courses are not those independent learners, but the high-energy students who succeed in all modalities. Web-based learning also entails using a new set of technology skills. Cravener (2001) indicated that even students who believe they are competent computer users may never have converted word processing documents, logically thought through how to follow and participate in a threaded bulletin board discussion, transferred files, and were not familiar with computer file structure. Knowledge of theses basic computer activities is extremely important if the online learning experience is to be a positively perceived experience. Frustration at these simple computer tasks has lasting effects on student opinions.

Another quality that potential online students should possess according to Cravener (2001) is a relatively high degree of self- motivation and commitment from the learner. In agreement with this is DesignOnline (2001), which states a strong foundation for success of the online distance learner is motivation, organization, self-direction, confidence in learning ability, and independence. Students who lack self-motivation dislike having to motivate themselves to do the coursework. This dislike affects both the perception and quality of the students' work. The online process takes a real commitment and discipline to keep up with the amount of work and flow of the process.

An additional quality that online students should possess, that shows up frequently in the related literature, is the ability to communicate through writing (Illinois Online Network, 2001). In the online course environment, nearly all communication is written, so it is critical that students feel comfortable in expressing themselves in writing.

Through researching the related literature, many assessment tools were found to be available to aid students in determining if they were in fact suited for an online learning experience. It is suggested that potential students seek out these assessment tools and complete them before participating in an online course through a university or college.

Methodology and Procedure

The Sample

The purpose of this descriptive survey was to determine the present perceptions of students toward their online experiences at Austin Peay State University. The sample was obtained from only students enrolled in an online course at Austin Peay State University during the Fall 2001 semester. The courses were APSU online courses that are not part of the Regents Online Degree Program. All other Austin Peay State University students were excluded, as well as students taking online courses at other institutions of higher learning. During the Fall 2001 semester, APSU offered 43 online courses with a total enrollment of approximately 450 students. Courses were offered at both the undergraduate and graduate level in many different disciplines. Out of the 450 students that were included in the total population as possible participants, 56 responded to the survey.

The researcher sent an e-mail to each online instructor requesting permission to place an announcement on the homepage of each course informing students of this research project. The announcement contained an introduction to the entire scope and goals of the study and a link to the Information for Participation in a Research Study (informed consent). Once students read and agreed to the Information for Participation in a Research Study, they sent the researcher their e-mail addresses consenting to become participants in the study. The researcher then sent each participant the link to the online survey of student perceptions.

The informed consent required that all study participants were over the age of 18.

The Procedures

The researcher developed a survey to assess student perception. It was examined by Dr. John Mark Hunter and the Distance Education Department and determined to be valid. It consists of a 25-question online survey based on an extensive review of the literature to determine students' perception of online courses. Of the 25 questions, four were seeking demographic information, four were seeking information concerning computer skills and online habits, and the remaining 17 used a Likert-type response scale asking participants to strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with statements about their perception toward online instruction. Participants could only select one answer for each question.

This survey of student perception was available to be completed the week before final exams to provide student enough time to become familiar with the online instructional modules and to develop opinions about the courseware.

Data Collection

Completed surveys were e-mailed back to the researcher for data collection and interpretation. The response 'strongly agree' was assigned a score of 4, 'agree' a score of 3, 'disagree' a score of 2, and 'strongly disagree' a score of 1. Questions were written both positively and negatively, requiring a reversal of the score of the negatively stated question in order to find an accurate total for each student. The lowest possible student perception score was 17, and the highest possible score was 68; a higher score signified a more positive perception toward web-based learning. Perception scores for each question

were averaged to compute a total perception score for each student. The top two quartiles were deemed as positive perceptions, and the bottom two quartiles were negative perceptions.

This chapter contains a summary of the results of data collected to test the research hypotheses. The data was analyzed according to the procedures outlined in Chapter 3. Results were determined from 56 surveys returned to the researcher.

The four questions pertaining to demographics of the students resulted in the following. The respondents returning the survey were 55.4% (n= 31) male and 44.6% (n= 25) female. One hundred percent of the entire sample was over the age of 18, as directed in both the informed consent and survey. Full-time students accounted for 33.9% (n=19) while 66.1% (n= 37) were part-time students. Students, who fit the definition of a traditional student, comprised 23.2% (n= 13) of the population of the study, while the other 76.8% (n= 43) were defined as non-traditional students. See Table 4-1. These results indicate that the majority of the students who responded to the survey were the non-traditional, part-time students. A higher number of males responded to this particular survey.

Table 4-1

Part One Analysis of the Survey of Student Perception

	n	Percent
Male participants	31	55.4
Female participants	25	44.6
Full-time student	19	33.9
Part-time student	37	66.1

Traditional student	13	23.2	20
Non-Traditional student	43	76.8	

Part 2 of the survey was intended to examine the computer skills and online habits of the participants. Every student who completed this survey had Internet access from his or her home or dorm. On average, 9% (n=5) spent between zero to one hour per week on completing work for the course, 32% (n=18) averaged two to three hours per week, 36% (n=36) spent four to five hours per week completing course activities, and 23% (n=13) of the students spent more than six hours completing work for this class. Concerning their computer knowledge, 25% (n=14) had rated themselves a novice user, 50% (n=28) rank themselves as competent users, and 25% (n=14) were listed as advanced users. Finally, 57.1% (n=32) stated they have taken an online course from Austin Peay State University in the prior to this semester, and 42.9% (n=24) replied that this was their first online course from APSU. See Table 4-2. In summary, the respondents to the survey all had Internet access available to them at their residence, spent 4 to 5 hours of week completing work for the course, considered themselves to be competent computer users, and had prior experiences with taking courses online through Austin Peay State University.

Table 4-2

Part Two Analysis of the Survey of Student Perception

	n	Percent
Internet access from home/dorm	56	100
Spent 0-1 hours completing course work	5	9
Spent 2-3 hours completing course work	18	32
Spent 4-5 hours completing course work	20	36
Spent 6 or more hours completing work	13	23
Novice computer user	14	25
Competent computer user	28	50
Advanced computer user	14	25
Taken an online APSU course before	32	57.1
First online APSU course	24	42.9

The remainder of the survey consisted of Part 3, where the questions received a Likert-type rating. The results of these questions were computed using standard deviation to determine how closely the responses were clustered around the mean. Survey questions fit into five different themes of information that the study was investigating: interaction, curriculum, learning outcomes, the contents of the web page, and general overall course perceptions. For a complete look at mean questions scores refer to Table 4.3.

The questions aimed at examining course interaction yielded the following results. Interaction provided to students from the Austin Peay Distance Learning Center were reported as clear in helping students adequately access and implement the course in a user-friendly way with a mean of 3.48 and a standard deviation score of .632. Students were also questioned on the availability and interaction with the course professor, either through e-mail or office hours, and replied with a mean score of 3.21 and a standard deviation of .868. The final area of interaction examined was that between students. When asked if they had interaction with students they did not know as a result of this course the mean score was 3.25 with a standard deviation of .858.

The area of curriculum included perceptions of subject matter covered, the teaching material presented, and teaching strategies. When presented with the question of, were the modules presented in the web-based course a good use of student time to learn the subject matter, the results were a mean of 3.41 and a standard deviation of .682. Asked to reply if the amount of work within each module was reasonable, the scores obtained were a mean score of 2.94 and standard deviation of .923. Questions concerning if the lectures and outlines provided in the course were useful and understandable yielded a mean score of 3.26 and standard deviation of .751. Student results on if the modules described and explained the subject matter clearly were rated with a mean of 3.30 and standard deviation of .784.

How the students perceived their learning was also examined. When asked if they were able to learn from the web-based course and felt confident in their knowledge of the subject matter, it yielded a mean score of 3.21 and a standard deviation of .847. The

questions concerning if students felt they learned less than in a traditional classroom, the question was asked in the negative, so the scores had to be inverted to show a positive response. After final calculations the mean score was 3.34 and standard deviation of .859.

A portion of the survey also dealt with the content and lay out of the courses website, and students were asked to rate their perception on many different aspects of the course. Questioned as to if the course was user-friendly to navigate, the students responded with a mean score of 3.48 and standard deviation of .687. When asked if the course goals and objectives were easily located and clear to read the mean score was 3.07 and standard deviation of .903. Asked if the organization of the web-based course was excellent and allowed for a good learning experience yielded a mean score of 3.44 and standard deviation of .737.

The final questions of the survey dealt with the overall perceptions of students about their experiences in an online course at Austin Peay State University and with learning online. Asked if they thought it was possible to achieve excellence in courses that are taught on the World Wide Web the mean score was 3.44 and standard deviation of .737. The question as to whether they thought their learning was damaged because the course was over the Internet and not face-to-face, was also asked in the negative and the results had to be corrected to the positive. The student's responded with a mean score of 3.39 and standard deviation of .731. Asked if they would enroll in another online-based course, the students results yielded a mean score of 3.48 and standard deviation of .809, and would they encourage a friend or colleague to enroll in an online-based course at

Austin Peay State University received a mean score of 3.39 and standard deviation of .799.

Table 4.3

Mean Question Scores

Question	n
9	3.48
10	3.48
11	3.21
12	3.07
13	3.41
14	3.34
15	2.94
16	3.44
17	3.26
18	3.30
19	3.21
20	3.44
21	3.39
22	3.25

23	3.30
24	3.48
25	3.39

Note: Mean scores for Questions 14 and Questions 21 have been calculated in positive terms and have been inverted.

The survey produced scores in the range of 17 to 68, the overall mean score obtained from the survey was 56.45. This would indicate a strong positive perceptions of students concerning the online courses they enrolled in at Austin Peay State University.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The research hypotheses investigated in this study were to examine the perceptions of students who took an online course at Austin Peay State University in the Fall semester of 2001. There is a plethora of literature available that isolates several factors that are variables in determining if a student experiences a positive or negative perception toward an online course.

The conclusions based upon the analysis of the results of the data, indicate that each of the factors stated in the review of the literature as having an impact on a students perception are also found in the courses offered to students at Austin Peay State University. The study indicated that students fell in the range from agree to strongly agree that they were provided with positive interactions in the course. Interactions are provided to the students on the three different levels: student-to-professor, student-to-student, and student-to-content information.

The results of the survey concluded that there is a general strong positive perception of the online courses offered by Austin Peay State University, thus proving the stated hypothesis. Students showed most positive perceptions about the following areas; the course was excellent and user-friendly to navigate, they would recommend to a colleague or friend to enroll in an online course, and that they do in fact, see the Internet as a tool in which excellence in learning can be achieved.

1. This study should be repeated at a later date to see if Austin Peay State University students are becoming more satisfied with online courses or if the level of satisfaction levels off as the courses are repeated.
2. The study should be conducted using a wider population that just one university to see if students have a positive perception of online courses in a broader geographic area.
3. A methodology should be developed to offer the survey to a greater number of students taking online courses at Austin Peay State University.
4. This study should be looked at in relationship to Austin Peay State University to determine if student perceptions are the same or different concerning online courses.

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APPENDIXES

Information for Participation in a Research Study

AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY

Title of Project: Student Perceptions of Austin Peay State University Online Courses

Name of the Researcher: Linda Brake, Graduate Student

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Please read the following material carefully. It describes the purpose of the study, the procedures to be used, risks and benefits of participation, and what will happen to the information that is collected from you. You may ask the researcher listed below about this study or you may call the Office of Grants and Sponsored Research, Box 4517, Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, TN 37044, (931) 221-7881 with questions about the rights of research participants.

1. The purpose of this research study is to obtain student perceptions towards their experiences of completing current online courses offered by Austin Peay State University. This will be a non-experimental descriptive research study. The results of this research study may be published or presented with the researchers permission. In all cases, data will be published or presented in a way that does not reveal the identity of any participant.
2. If you voluntarily agree to participate, you will be asked to fill out one three part online survey on what your perceptions were on the online course you just finished taking. The survey should take no longer than 15 minutes. Part One will contain demographic information, Part Two will concern your computer skills and online

habits, and Part Three will ask your perceptions of the class. Once finished you will be asked to click a submit button which will return your completed survey to me.

3. The survey will be stored on an off-campus server. The completed surveys will be e-mailed solely to the researcher. Completed surveys will be stored electronically with numbers assigned, not any identifying information. Access to the electronic data will only be open to the principal investigator and the major advisor. Your responses will be kept confidential and it will be impossible for anyone else to identify the participants of this study. Results will be analyzed and stored by the researcher and may be used for future research. If you would like a summary of the findings of this study, you may contact: Linda Brake or Dr. Mark Hunter.
4. There will be no compensation for participation in this research study.
5. Your participation is completely voluntary. There are no known risks for participating in this study. If you feel uncomfortable at any time during the study, you may choose to discontinue your participation. You do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer.
6. The results of this study may provide further development of the APSU Blackboard courses or in-service techniques of professors and course developers.
7. You may terminate your participation at any time without penalty or prejudice.
8. Completion and return of the survey constitutes your informed consent to participate in the project.

Linda Brake

Graduate Student in Education

2323 Dunbar Rd

Woodlawn, TN 39171

(931)920-8788

Dr. John Mark Hunter

Department of Education

Austin Peay State University

Clarksville, TN 37044

(931) 221-7677

Statement of Informed Consent:

I have read the above and understand what the study is about, why it is being done, and any benefits or risks involved. I understand that I do not have to take part in this study, and my refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of rights. I agree to participate in this study and understand that by agreeing to participate I have not given up any of my human rights. I understand that I have right to withdraw my consent and stop participating at any time during the study and all data collected from me will be destroyed. If I choose to withdraw, that choice will be respected and I will not be penalized or coerced to continue.

I agree to participate in this research study

AUSTIN PEAY STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (APIRB) APPLICATION FOR PROJECT APPROVAL

This form has been designed to provide the APIRB with the information it needs to evaluate your project. Please complete each item carefully. Items that sometimes cause difficulty are clarified on the reverse side of this form. You are NOT confined to the space provided under each item on the hard copy or electronic versions of this form.

1. **TITLE OF PROJECT:** Student Perceptions of Austin Peay State University Online Courses

2. **PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR INFORMATION:** (provide same information on all CO-Pis)

Name: Linda Brake, Graduate Student
Department: Education Department
Mailing Address: 2323 Dunbar Road
Woodlawn, TN 37191
Phone #: (931) 920-8788
E-mail Address: tlca@midsouth.net

3. **FACULTY SUPERVISOR:**

Dr. John Mark Hunter
Education Department
(931) 221-7677
E-mail address: hunterm@apsu.edu

4. **SOURCE OF FUNDING FOR THE PROJECT:** None

5. **PURPOSE OF THE INVESTIGATION:** The purpose of this research study is to obtain student perceptions towards their experiences of completing current online courses offered by Austin Peay State University. Current available technologies combined with the changing demographics of the enrolled college student, forced higher education institutions to create new pedagogy to remain competitive. The move toward online instruction is one such shift in providing new methods and venues of instruction. Researching students' perceptions toward course content, professor availability, course requirements and peer-to-peer interaction will aid in future online development.

Austin Peay State University has been providing online courses to students since Fall 2000. As time has progressed courses have changed and further developed to provide quality education through the Internet. Opinions that APSU is providing

students with quality online programming must, in part, be supported with an analysis of students' perceptions.

The following questions will be investigated:

a. Has this change in the service delivery led to a satisfied student?
b. What student qualities are prominent in satisfied students?
c. What are students' attitudes toward online courses that they have recently completed?

6. **A. THIS RESEARCH IS BEING CONDUCTED TO FULFILL REQUIREMENTS FOR A GRADUATE DEGREE.** YES__X__NO____

B. THIS RESEARCH IS BEING CONDUCTED TO FULFILL REQUIREMENTS FOR A COURSE. YES__X__ NO____

IF YES: DEPT- EDUC COURSE # EDUC6050/EDUC6990-Field Study

7. **DESCRIBE WHO PARTICIPANTS WILL BE, HOW PARTICIPANTS WILL BE RECRUITED, THE NUMBER AND AGE OF THE PARTICIPANTS AND ANY PROPOSED COMPENSATION.**

Participants in the study will include students enrolled in online courses at APSU during the Fall 2001 semester. The courses are all APSU courses that are not part of the Regents Degree Programs. All other students at APSU are excluded, as well as, students taking online courses at other institutions of higher learning.

If permission from the professors of the various online courses is granted to the researcher, participants will be recruited through their online course website. An announcement will be placed in the Announcement Section of each participating online course that will notify students of their opportunity to participate in the survey, and the steps necessary to complete their participation in this research project.

Professors will be asked to not compel their students to complete the survey. Participation is entirely voluntary.

An introduction of the Investigator and the scope and goals of the study will be included in the "Information for Participation in a Research Study" (informed consent).

Each potential participant will be asked to complete an online survey.

Currently there are about 450 students enrolled in online learning courses at Austin Peay State University. Participation in the survey will be open to all those students given that their professors have agreed to allow it.

Age of participants will vary, but since all students in the courses are enrolled in college courses, they will likely be 18 years old or older. The survey instrument will screen for participants under age 18 (by asking age) and those potential subjects will be discarded.

Participants will not be compensated for their involvement in this study.

8. **DESCRIBE THE RESEARCH PROCEDURE IN NON-TECHNICAL LANGUAGE:**

This will be a non-experimental descriptive research study of student perceptions of APSU online education courses.

a. Permission will be sought from each professor teaching an online course this semester, to post an announcement in the Announcement Section of their course webpage seeking student involvement in this research study.
b. Once students read the announcement they will have the option to link to the "Information for Participation in a Research Study". This link will take them to a website located on another server, so professors will not have access to results. After this document is read by the participants they will have the option of continuing in the research study.
c. To obtain access to the online survey participants will be required to provide an e-mail address and click an "I agree" button. With the click of this button, stating their intention and agreement to participate in this study, a reply will be sent to them and the researcher thanking them for their participation.
d. Once the "I Agree" button has been selected they will have access to the survey.
e. Students will be given instructions on completing the survey in its entirety. After the last question a "submit" button will be placed.
f. Selecting the submit button will e-mail the results of the individual student survey to the researcher.
g. Surveys that have been returned will be checked to ensure they are complete.
h. Results of surveys will be transferred into descriptive statistics using the methods of central tendency to determine the average student perception pertaining to each question asked.

i. Conclusions and results will be made based on the information obtained.

9. **POTENTIAL BENEFITS AND ANTICIPATED RISK.** Knowing students' perceptions towards their online learning experience can provide information on areas of needed change. It can provide staff development ideas for those courses still in development for future semesters.

There are no known risks for participating in this study.

10. **DESCRIBE THE INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS, INCLUDE A COPY OF THE INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT.**

Once an online course has been identified as containing the potential population, the procedures stated for determining the participants will occur. Completion and return of the survey constitutes their informed consent to participate in the project.

_____

Principal Investigator's Signature

_____

Faculty Supervisor's Signature

STUDENT PERCEPTION SURVEY

Part 1

1. I am:
   male
   female

2. I am:
   under the age of 18
   over 18 years old

3. I am a:
   full-time student
   part-time student

4. I am a:
   traditional student (Under the age of 25 years old, may live on campus and entered immediately following high school)
   non-traditional (At APSU, students are classified as non-traditional if they are at least 25 years old, returning to school after an extended absence from formal education, married, a parent or a military veteran.)

Part 2

5. **I have access to my online course and the Internet from my home or my dorm room**
   Yes
   No

6. **On an average, how much time did you spend completing work for this course in a week**
   0-1 hours
   2-3 hours
   4-5 hours
   more than 6 hours per week

7. **I would say, I am which type of computer user**
   Novice (just learning)
   Competent (I can do what is asked of me)
   Advanced (HTML, file structure)

8. I have taken an online course from APSU before
   Yes
   No

Part 3

9. The instructions from the Distance Learning Center were clear in helping me adequately access and implement the course in a user-friendly way
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

10. Overall, the web-based course was user-friendly to navigate
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

11. I was able to learn from the web-based course and feel confident in my knowledge of the subject matter
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

12. The goals and objectives of the web-based course were clear
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

13. The modules that were presented in the web-based course were a good use of time to better learn the subject matter
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

14. Overall, I feel I learned less than in a traditional classroom experience
   Strongly agree
   Agree
   Disagree
   Strongly disagree

15. I feel the amount of work within each module was reasonable
Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

16. The organization of the web-based course was excellent and allowed a good learning experience
Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

17. The lectures and outlines within the modules were useful and understandable
Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

18. The modules described and explained the subject matter clearly
Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

19. The professor was available for me (either by e-mail or office hours) when needed, in a reasonable amount of time
Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

20. From my participation in this course, I can state that it is possible to achieve excellence in courses that are taught on the World Wide Web
Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

21. My learning from this course was damaged because it was on the Internet
Strongly agree
Agree
Disagree
Strongly disagree

22. I had interaction with students I did not know as a result of this course
    Strongly agree
    Agree
    Disagree
    Strongly disagree

23. I would have taken this course if it were offered in a classroom setting
    Strongly agree
    Agree
    Disagree
    Strongly disagree

24. I would enroll again in another online-based course
    Strongly agree
    Agree
    Disagree
    Strongly disagree

25. I would encourage a friend or colleague to enroll in an online-based course
    Strongly agree
    Agree
    Disagree
    Strongly disagree

VITA

Linda was born in Moses Lake, Washington on July 20, 1962. She grew up in southwestern Pennsylvania where she graduated from Belle Vernon Area High School in May 1980. Choosing to major in Elementary Education, she attended Alderson-Broaddus College in Philippi, West Virginia from 1980-1984. She continued her education, obtaining a Masters Degree in Elementary Education with a concentration in Special Education from Fayetteville State University in North Carolina in 1995. She began attending Austin Peay State University in 1998. She is currently employed as a Special Education Resource Teacher at Byrns Darden Elementary School in the Clarksville-Montgomery County School System. She has been there since 1995.

Linda resides in Woodlawn, Tennessee with her husband, Terry and children, Christopher and Allison.