Adult Learners' Expectations of Ideal Course Environments Based on the Adult
Classroom Environment Scale

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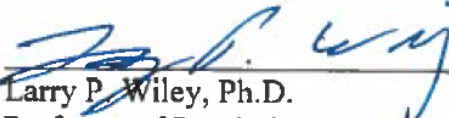BA, Westminster College, 2004

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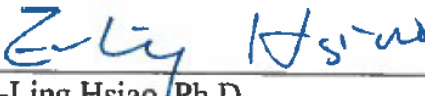
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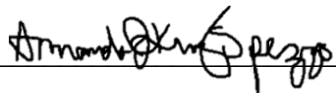
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ABSTRACT

Exploring adult learners' expectations of ideal course environments is important because the social climate of learning environments influences learners' satisfaction (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989). The Adult Classroom Environment Scale was employed in this study, specifically the task orientation, teacher support, and student influence dimensions (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986) based on Murphy and Cifuentes' (2001) assertion that such variables contribute to a sense of community within a course. The purpose of this study was to provide faculty and administrators at a comprehensive university in south Georgia with insights into their adult learners' expectations of the social climate of ideal online course environments, which may aid in sustaining a sense of belonging within the course environment. No significant differences were found between means of ideal face-to-face and online course environment ratings or between adult learners' expectations of ideal online course environments based on age. Female adult learners had significantly higher ratings for task orientation and teacher support in ideal online course environments than male adult learners did, but no significant differences were reported for student influence. White adult learners reported significantly higher ratings for teacher support in ideal online course environments than Black or African American adult learners; however, no significant differences were noted for task orientation or student influence. Participant ratings for similar expectations provide feedback about which elements these diverse adult learners universally expect in online course environments, and as such, instructors can plan to maintain consistent methods for elements where no significant differences were noted and focus attention on varying other aspects based on differing student expectations.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thank you, Dr. E-Ling Hsiao. I know this has not been a traditional dissertation process, and I appreciate you agreeing to be on my dissertation committee. Your feedback has enriched my writing and made my work stronger. I am thankful for your service in the eventual goal of sharing my findings more broadly.

The pursuit of education does not occur within a vacuum, and I cannot proceed without expressing my immense gratitude to my husband, Dr. Vincent King-Spezzo. We met in 2001, both working on our undergraduate degrees at Westminster College. I could not have hoped for a better peer, friend, husband, colleague, and soulmate to share my life with. You have been my rock in this process. When I wanted to give up you reminded me of my dream and prodded me when I needed that extra push to continue writing. Because of you we can now both be the Drs. King-Spezzo. I am eternally grateful.

Thank you to my family and friends for believing in me and supporting me in continuing my education to this point. This accomplishment is not mine alone, and I appreciate your time, energy, and feedback as I walked this path. Your support encouraged me through long days, and I hope this work makes you proud.

DEDICATION

       This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Mr. Michael Cowger and Dr. Joe Mitchell, two friends and members of the Valdosta State University community, who passed away too soon. Michael continued school while battling a terrible illness, maintained a high GPA, and managed to graduate early. His perseverance inspired me to continue working on my dissertation through fractures, surgeries, and unexpected life events. Joe shared stories of his own dissertation experience and how I would be able to feel when it was time to complete. His words rang true. I am proud to have shared their friendship, and I hope this dissertation honors Michael and Joe.

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

Higher education students are increasingly taking online courses, ranging from at least one course to obtaining full degrees at a distance; however, online instructional delivery is not yet universally accepted. Based on data collected for their annual report, Allen and Seaman (2016) stated higher education enrollments in distance learning courses are continually increasing, and the number of students not taking any distance courses is dropping. Based on their results over the last 12 years, less than one-third of chief academic officers believe faculty at their institution bought into the value and validity of online learning. When responding to Allen and Seaman's fall 2015 survey question to confirm online learning was critical to their institution's long-term strategic plan, 13.7% disagreed, 23% remained neutral, and the number of positive respondents dropped to 63.3%, down from 70.8% in 2014. Whereas the faculty and administrative perception of online courses may be trending less positively, the need is evident with 14% of higher education students taking their courses exclusively online, and an additional 14% of higher education students taking some but not all of their courses online (Allen & Seaman, 2016).

Georgia's commitment to "create a more educated Georgia" (Davis & Anderson, 2015, p. 2) through the Complete College Georgia initiative aligns with online learning trends nationwide. Allen and Seaman (2016) reported that 53% of higher education students reside in the state where they were receiving exclusively online instruction. An

impetus for the Complete College Georgia initiative is the high workforce demand for

employees who hold a higher education credential; estimates expect more than 60% of

jobs in Georgia will require a certificate or degree by 2020 (Davis & Anderson, 2015;

Office of the Governor, 2013). Georgia needs to graduate its current students in addition

to 250,000 new graduates to meet this need in just a few years (Davis & Anderson, 2015;

Office of the Governor, 2013). Georgia colleges and universities are concentrating on

several strategically oriented goals focused on improving college readiness, reaching at-

risk and underserved populations, and innovative instructional methods, among others

(Davis & Anderson, 2015).

Goal 7 of Complete College Georgia is of specific interest, stating the need for

innovation in instructional delivery in order to encourage student success and excellence

in academic quality through the use of online learning, open educational resources,

flipped classroom approaches, and other pedagogical methods (Davis & Anderson,

2015). Twenty-two of the University System of Georgia's (USG) 30 institutions are

implementing high-impact strategies to achieve goal 7 (Davis & Anderson, 2015). To

measure the success of this aim, Georgia colleges and universities report on several

metrics related to online course completion, the percentage of degrees that include at least

one online course as well as statistics for other alternative delivery models (Davis &

Anderson, 2015). When reporting on the USG's efforts, Davis and Anderson (2015)

shared success in the area of restructuring instructional delivery for institutions using

interventions at key points for students, but due to resource and scalability challenges, not

all institutions adopted such methods as of their report. For Georgia to meet its goals,

there is a need for "new approaches, new thinking, and new systems" (Davis &

Anderson, 2015, p. 10) to ensure current students are successful, persisting through to graduation, and attracting and retaining new students, including enticing Georgians with some college to return to higher education and obtain their degree.

Theoretical Framework

Darkenwald's research on adult learners' expectations of social exchanges in the course environment utilizing the Adult Classroom Environment Scale (ACES) forms the theoretical framework for this study (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986). Beer and Darkenwald (1989) expressed why the social experience of an adult learner classroom is of great importance stating, the course environment "affects not only learning outcomes but also the persistence of adults in educative activities. A climate that is not appropriate for adults will not facilitate learning or lead to satisfaction with learning experience" (p. 33). In their aim of developing an instrument to assess the social climate of course environments for adult learners, Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) created the ACES, which measures student and instructor perceptions of affiliation, involvement, organization and clarity, personal goal attainment, task orientation, teacher support, and student influence.

In a review of online course persistence and satisfaction research, students who persisted in online courses reported their class experiences as significantly more satisfying than online students who did not continue in their online courses (Herbert, 2006; Huett, Kalinowski, Moller, & Huett, 2008; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Levy, 2007; Müeller, 2008; Park & Choi, 2009; Pittenger & Doeing, 2010; Reio & Crim, 2013; Willging & Johnson, 2009; Yen & Liu, 2009), which aligns with Beer and Darkenwald's (1989) assertion that adult learner's satisfaction with their learning experience influences

persistence. Whereas persistence is important and is impacted by the social climate of educational environments (Beer & Darkenwald, 1986), it was not examined directly in this study as the focus was to provide feedback to faculty at a comprehensive university in south Georgia on their adult learners' expectations of online course environments, specifically of selected ACES dimensions: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence, with the intent that faculty can reduce gaps between how they are delivering their courses and what their adult learners expect.

Murphy and Cifuentes (2001) studied courses designed and facilitated based on the constructivist paradigm that promotes active learning, collaboration, relevance of materials and activities, and learner influence, among other variables, resulting in learning and bonding as a community. Murphy and Cifuentes concluded adult learners engaging in courses with a high beginning level of structure (task orientation) and instructor support (teacher support) that transitions towards more learner influence (student influence) as the course progresses results in a sense of community among learners. Such a sense of community influences the social climate of the course environment (Ausburn, 2004; Huett et al., 2008; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Müeller, 2008; Murphy & Cifuentes, 2001; Wlodkowski, 2008; Young & Duncan, 2014). Additionally, several researchers concluded learning communities promote student persistence (Huett et al., 2008; Müeller, 2008). As shown in Figure 1, I have concentrated on the ACES' aspects of task orientation, teacher support, and student influence, based on their sustainment of a sense of community and influence on the social climate of a course environment leading to student persistence.
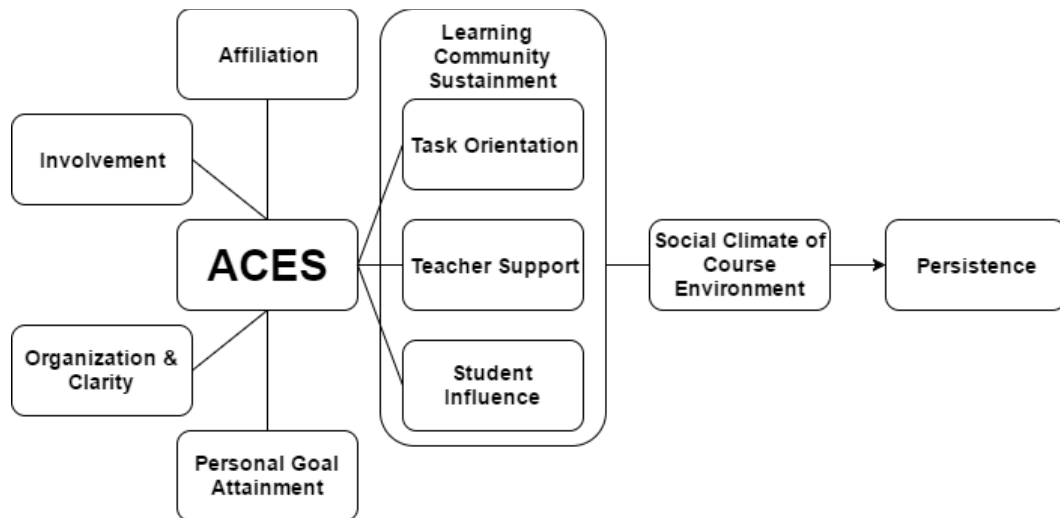
Figure 1. Concept Map of Theoretical Framework.

Statement of the Problem

With ready access to online education, adults are increasingly taking courses online (Allen & Seaman, 2016). With a need to appeal to former students with some higher education and potential adult learners who have prior knowledge and skills that align with educational outcomes, online classes are a way to reach adults needing: convenient options, scheduling flexibility, ability to participate while geographically distant from the institution's location, and additional support services when entering or re-engaging in higher education (Davis & Anderson, 2015; Wuensch, Aziz, Ozan, Kishore, & Tabrizi, 2008). Institutionally, offering online courses makes sense for current students—existing fully online students, one option for residential students as a way to provide additional sections without using valuable classroom space, and for mostly face-to-face students to alleviate course scheduling frustrations—and with Complete College Georgia in mind, online courses are a way to serve underrepresented populations, such as adult learners (Allen & Seaman, 2016; Davis & Anderson, 2015).

Higher education institutions in Georgia should be concerned with persistence of students due to the implementation of outcomes-based funding incorporating, among other factors, retention, progression, and graduation rates (Office of the Governor, 2013). Further, Seidman (2012) described how institutions advancing students' critical thinking skills and developing students as informed citizens leads to those students contributing to society by working and developing in their chosen career path thus reducing financial loss for institutions and students. Part of the challenge in Georgia meeting its educated workforce goals is getting adult learners with some higher education to return to college, but that alone is not enough to achieve this goal; these adult learners with some college, current students, and learners new to higher education will need to persist to degree completion.

Institutions across Georgia have demonstrated a commitment to improving access to priority and underserved communities, including adult learners and minority students and working to reduce time to degree attainment (Davis & Anderson, 2015). Ideally, current and incoming students will persist to graduation to fulfill their goals and help meet growing workforce demands in Georgia, and by delivering instruction to adult learners that meet their expectations instructors in Georgia could positively influence student persistence (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Davis & Anderson, 2015; Miglietti & Strange, 1998). Miglietti and Strange (1998) described the need for such research; in order to serve learners well, researchers should investigate learners' teaching style preferences, course environment expectations, learning styles, and how a combination of these factors relates to student success and satisfaction. They went on to describe that the importance of the learner's role in an active learning environment is well documented;

however, there is room for additional research into the facilitator's role in student learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide faculty and administrators at a comprehensive university in south Georgia with insights into their adult learners' expectations of the social climate of ideal online and face-to-face course environments in order to sustain a sense of belonging within the course environment. Researchers agree that the field of online education is continually changing and with it the need for instructors to be adaptable, knowledgeable, and informed of and skilled with newer technologies in order to be successful (Wuensch et al., 2008; Young & Duncan, 2014). Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) believed research on adult learner's social course environment could provide valuable feedback to instructors and enable them to alter their facilitation behaviors to be more in line with student expectations. Imel (1991) shared insight into how instructors can create optimal learning conditions for adult learners by utilizing results from the ACES via acknowledgment of the instructor's role in creating and maintaining effective adult learning environments and through collaboration with adult learners to establish an environment that is conducive to learning. Imel went on to provide recommendations for program administrators who influence the course environment by working with instructors to (a) encourage in-class administration of the ACES and utilization of the results to improve teaching practices, (b) offer development opportunities for instructors to focus on their role in shaping and maintaining an optimum learning environment, (c) provide constructive feedback on how instructors can hone

their teaching practices to be effective with adult learners, and (d) recruit and hire instructors who are respectful of adult learners.

Using the ACES to consider student expectations of ideal online and face-to-face course environments and how these may differ will inform faculty's online instructional strategies for maintaining task orientation, teacher support, and student influence and potentially attribute to gains in student satisfaction and persistence (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Miglietti & Strange, 1998; Wuensch et al., 2008). An additional focus of this research was how demographic variables may influence adult learners' expectations of ideal online course environments based on previous research examining the potential for characteristic differences based on age (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Darkenwald & Novak, 1997; Harrell & Bower, 2011; Levy, 2004; Park & Choi 2009; Miglietti & Strange 1998), gender (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Ausburn, 2004; Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Darkenwald & Novak, 1997; Harrell & Bower, 2011; Levy, 2004; Miglietti & Strange, 1998; Park & Choi, 2009; Wessel et al., 2009; Willging & Johnson, 2009), and race/ethnicity (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Darkenwald, 1975; Harrell & Bower, 2011; Willging & Johnson, 2009). Measuring and responding, as appropriate, to adult learner's perceptions of their social course environment is one strategy institution leaders can utilize to aid in retaining, progressing, and graduating students who are satisfied with their educational experience and have met the necessary learning outcomes along the way (Miglietti & Strange, 1998). Additionally, Wlodkowski (2008) described how active learning environments, relevant subject matter, and increased student engagement contribute to increased adult learner persistence and success.

The aim of this research was to identify adult learners' expectations of ideal online and face-to-face course environments at a comprehensive university in south Georgia using the ACES and determine to what extent demographics influences adult learners' expectations of the ideal online course environment based on the selected ACES dimensions: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence.

Definition of Terms

Adult learner age. For this study, adult learners were operationally defined as current students at a comprehensive university in south Georgia or recent students from a comprehensive university in south Georgia, aged 18 years or older.

Adult learner gender. For this study, adult learner gender was operationally defined as male, female, or gender neutral/no gender (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Ausburn, 2004; Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Darkenwald & Novak, 1997; Harrell & Bower, 2011; Levy, 2004; Miglietti & Strange, 1998; Park & Choi, 2009; Wessel et al., 2009; Willging & Johnson, 2009).

Adult learner race/ethnicity. For this study, adult learner race/ethnicity was operationally defined as white, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino, or other (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Harrell & Johnson, 2011; Willging & Johnson, 2009; Wlodkowski, 2008).

Course environment. For this study, course environment was operationally defined as the social climate of a course, encompassing teacher and student behaviors, interactions (teacher-student and student-student), and student expectations of the environment (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987). In the online course environment, instruction primarily occurs virtually via the Internet where

participants connect via a web browser or mobile app instead of meeting in a physical location. In the face-to-face course environment, instruction primarily occurs in a physical location where participants are in a local, face-to-face setting.

Adult Classroom Environment Scale. The ACES was the instrument used in this study to assess adult learner's expectations of their ideal online and face-to-face course environments (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986).

Task orientation. For this study, task orientation was operationally defined as the extent to which instructor and students remain focused on the subject matter of the course through the accomplishment of class activities (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990).

Teacher support. For this study, teacher support was operationally defined as the instructor's sensitivity, help, encouragement, and friendship towards students (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990).

Student influence. For this study, student influence was operationally defined as a learner centered course environment that allows for students' collaborative impact on the class (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990).

Research Questions

1. Are there any significant differences between adult learners' expectations of ideal face-to-face course environments and their expectations of ideal online course environments using three subscales of the ACES: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence?

2. Are there any significant differences between adult learner demographics (age group, gender, and race/ethnicity) and their expectations of ideal online course environments using three subscales of the ACES: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence?

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative design with a self-report survey as the research strategy (Creswell, 2014). The online survey was created in an online survey tool, Qualtrics. Qualtrics was available free of charge through a site-wide license at a comprehensive university in south Georgia. This survey tool has modern features of allowing anonymity, branching questions, randomization, and security features, among other options that made it easy to create, distribute, collect, retain, and download study data. This study was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) as exempt from requiring review (see Appendix A). After receiving IRB exemption, an initial marketing e-mail was distributed to the student listserv at a comprehensive university in south Georgia, followed by Facebook posts to promote the survey. Marketing communications included: a synopsis of the study topic, link to the online survey, information about participant rights, including anonymity and voluntary participation, age restriction (at least 18 years of age), details about a raffle, how to be entered into the drawing and drawing date, that survey participation was not required and could not be linked to survey submission, and how to contact me and IRB (see Appendix B). A follow-up marketing e-mail prompt and Facebook post were sent before the study survey closed.

Much of the survey introduction was the same as the marketing e-mail, with the exception of raffle information. Participants read the introduction and voluntary

participant agreement information and proceeded to the main survey content.

Participants were asked to complete two versions of the ACES student ideal form, one for

their ideal online course environment and one for their ideal face-to-face course

environment, along with three demographic questions for age, gender, and race/ethnicity.

The two ACES versions, online and face-to-face, were randomized, so some students saw

the ideal online course environment questions first, followed by the ideal face-to-face

course environment questions, and other students saw the versions in the reverse order.

Directions instructed participants to rate how well they believed each statement described

the ideal course environment in question, online or face-to-face, and were prompted that

each survey version should take approximately 10 minutes to complete (Harrell &

Johnson, 2011). Participants completing the study survey were brought to a thank you

page that prompted them to click on the raffle link, which was a separate survey, if they

wished to participate in a drawing for a chance to win one of four $25 Amazon gift cards.

Significance of the Study

Several USG institutions do not yet strategically pursue the Complete College

Georgia goal of restructuring instructional delivery in support of student success through

innovative pedagogical practices, such as online learning (Davis & Anderson, 2015).

However, most USG schools are already utilizing interventions to reduce time to

graduation and improve access for underrepresented students (Davis & Anderson, 2015).

Davis and Anderson (2015) noted that institutions pursuing innovative pedagogical

restructuring reported improvements on measured outcomes, but limited resources and

difficulty scaling interventions was a limitation. Utilizing the ACES at a comprehensive

university in south Georgia would be a low-cost intervention that could be implemented

relatively easily by instructors. Results from this study could influence instructional

delivery strategies of instructors at a comprehensive university in south Georgia by

knowing what differences exist between adult learners' expectations of ideal face-to-face

and online course environments employing elements of task orientation, teacher support,

and student influence and if there are differences based on student demographics (age

group, gender, race/ethnicity). As a result, faculty could tailor their teaching practices to

align with elements most desired by adult learners at their institution, which would allow

the university to demonstrate pursuit of an important Complete College Georgia goal.

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Course environment research—encompassing a range of social classroom experiences, behaviors, interactions, perceptions, and expectations—is extensive (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Freddolino, 1996; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000; Gardner, 2010; Imel, 1991; Kariuki, 1995; Kelly & Bronstein, 2003; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Macy, Rooney, Hollister, & Freddolino, 2001; Miglietti & Strange, 1989; Moos, 1979; Paliokas, 2009; Potts & Hagan, 2000; Rowbotham, 2010; Stocks & Freddolino, 2000). Moos (1979) popularized social environment research and assessed the social climate of elementary and secondary education environments using the Classroom Environment Scale. Whereas Moos' Classroom Environment Scale was a reliable and valid instrument for studying elementary and secondary education settings, this instrument was not as useful for adult learners (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987).

Development of the Adult Classroom Environment Scale

In the proceedings of the 27th Annual Adult Education Research Conference, Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) expressed there was a known reciprocal impact between people and their environmental setting, but they observed a gap in research focused on adult students' face-to-face social classroom experience, including a lack of valid and reliable instruments for this population. Together with a team, Darkenwald and

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Valentine conducted semi-structured interviews with 28 adult learner teachers and 35 adult students, reviewed existing environmental measures, and brainstormed to create the initial item pool for the instrument that would become the ACES. After removing duplicates and inappropriate items, a group of experts inductively classified the remaining items into seven dimensions: affiliation, involvement, organization and clarity, personal goal attainment, task orientation, teacher support, and student influence (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986). This process resulted in an initial 89-item ACES which was pilot-tested and reduced to 49 items based on the resulting feedback from the pilot participants and item analysis statistics (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986). Darkenwald and Valentine designed the ACES to assess student and instructor perceptions and expectations of actual and ideal face-to-face course environments.

The ACES consists of three forms (student ideal, student actual, and teacher actual) that allow participants to rate their agreement with 49 statements using a 4-point Likert scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree, with two items for each dimension being reverse-coded (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Imel, 1991). The three forms are the same with the exception of the instructions referring the participant to rate actual or ideal classroom social environments and the tenses of the items (Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990). Statements about the seven dimensions were randomly ordered on the scale; seven statements for each of the seven dimensions (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986). Affiliation refers to positive interaction, camaraderie, and cohesion among students (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990). Involvement measures student attentiveness, active participation, and satisfaction with their class environment (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987;

Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990). Organization and Clarity refer to structuring class activities in a way that makes sense and is understandable to students (Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990). Personal goal attainment measures the degree to which class activities are flexible and allows students relevant opportunities to follow and share their interests (Imel; 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990). Task orientation is the extent to which instructor and students remain focused on the subject matter of the course through the accomplishment of class activities (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990). Teacher support encompasses instructor sensitivity, help, encouragement, and friendship towards students (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990). Student influence is the extent to which the course environment is learner-centered, allowing for students' collaborative impact on the class (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990).

Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) collected data from different educational settings (community college, large state university, and large community adult school) in an attempt to gather a large, heterogeneous sample. Their results included 355 student actual surveys, 375 student ideal, and 46 teacher actual surveys, with 60.7% female respondents, and the following age ranges: 32.3% aged 25 or younger, 32.8% aged 26-33, 34.9% aged 34-72, noting only 3.3% of the latter age group reporting ages 57 or older (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986). Darkenwald and Valentine determined the ACES to be reliable as a single instrument with individual subscales and demonstrated internal validity through content validity, concurrent validity, and discriminant validity. Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) created the ACES to examine preferences and

expectations of the social climate of course environments for adult learners and their

instructors. Darkenwald and Valentine surmised the ACES could be utilized for the

following purposes: (a) examining cross-cultural similarities and differences, (b)

comparing course environments across different institutions, (c) analyzing student

perceptions of ideal and actual ratings for discrepancies, (d) creating case studies of

various ACES dimensions based on different course subjects and student characteristics,

and (e) comparing student and instructor perceptions of ideal and actual course

environments. Several studies utilizing the ACES were conducted using various course

environments: face-to-face (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Kariuki, 1995; Kelly &

Bronstein, 2003; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990; Miglietti & Strange, 1998; Rowbotham,

2010), technology-enhanced (Littlefield & Roberson, 2005), and face-to-face compared

to video-conferencing sites (Freddolino, 1996; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000), but few

studies examined fully online course environments and only compared to other online

courses (Stocks & Freddolino, 2000). Through the years and as new educational delivery

methods emerged and changed, research on the social climate of courses continued (Coe

& Elliott, 1999).

Uses of the Adult Classroom Environment Scale

Modifications from the original research are not unprecedented; other researchers

utilizing the ACES have conducted studies using modified versions of the ACES,

allowing them to focus on specific dimensions or variables of interest (Beer &

Darkenwald, 1989; Freddolino, 1996; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000; Langenbach &

Aagaard, 1990; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Miglietti & Strange, 1998; Stocks &

Freddolino, 2000). Researchers studying adult learners employing the ACES have had

various goals for their studies, including assessing and comparing course/program quality (Freddolino, 1996; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000), evaluating teaching methods (Kelly & Bronstein, 2003; Little & Roberson, 2005; Rowbotham, 2010; Stocks & Freddolino, 2000); exploring gender differences (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989); comparing learning styles and course environments (Kariuki, 1995; Miglietti & Strange, 1998); and examining the ACES' factor structure (Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990). Interestingly, several studies utilizing the ACES were conducted within the social work discipline (Freddolino, 1996; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000; Kelly & Bronstein, 2003; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Stocks & Freddolino, 2000).

To establish the comparable quality of face-to-face and distance courses, Freddolino (1996) used the ACES, in conjunction with course evaluations and informal interviews, to measure Masters of Social Work (MSW) students' perceptions of the course environment, either face-to-face or at a distance via video conferencing. Freddolino found that students at the face-to-face and distance sites rated their course experiences similarly, except the affiliation dimension, where the distance students expressed significantly higher levels of affiliation than did the face-to-face students. Freddolino explained this logically due to the distance students' strong bonds from working together throughout their classes at the offsite location.

Freddolino and Sutherland (2000) continued this research when comparing students' perceptions of 13 MSW courses, face-to-face and distance video conferencing sites, from 1994 through 1998 using a modified version of the ACES. Freddolino and Sutherland found no significant differences between the face-to-face and distance sites overall or between sites for two of the courses, research and human behavior and social

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environment, but there were significant differences found between sites for policy and practice courses and overall ACES scores, although the effect sizes were small/moderate. Freddolino and Sutherland attributed these differences to favorability of program offerings as a whole due to the more remote nature of one of the distance sites for the policy course and how face-to-face students had overall less social work experience than distance students did, attributing to their appreciation of the practice course.

Additional MSW research utilized the ACES in relation to the use and evaluation of a folder feedback system intended to structure student learning, increase instructor communications, and encourage student-teacher relationship building with a bit of fun (Kelly & Bronstein, 2003). Kelly and Bronstein (2003) established the importance of actively engaging adult learners via utilization of adult learning theory (andragogy) in a reciprocal student-teacher relationship built upon mutual respect, relevance, organization, and feedback. In their study, two research courses taught by the same instructor during the same semester were as similar as possible, except that one course utilized a folder feedback system and the other course did not use the folder feedback system. The students in treatment course using the folder feedback system were provided a folder with their name on the first day of class that included a feedback sheet with a cartoon related to the topic of the day and outline of the material to be covered. The students wrote questions or concerns and returned the folder to the instructor at the end of the class day. The instructor reviewed and replied to each of the students and returned the folder to the students to repeat throughout the semester, along with returned assignments, supplemental materials, and departmental messages, as appropriate during the course. Whereas Kelly and Bronstein hypothesized the students in the treatment course would

score higher than those in the control course on all measures, their data indicated the only significant result was that the treatment group students had higher final grades than those in the control group did. They attributed the small study population as rationale for the lack of statistical significance.

Littlefield and Roberson (2005) studied the use of feminist pedagogical strategies—empowering students through a collaborative learning environment, encouraging community building, and leadership development—in face-to-face MSW courses using a modified version of the ACES by Stocks and Freddolino (2000), student perceptions of discussion board usage and changes in technology skills. Several instructors taught 16 sections of a racism and diversity course that participated in this study. Two of the courses used an online learning management system for three assignments, discussion board, digital poster created as part of a group research project, and summarizing and critiquing articles. Overall, they indicated students believed the course environment to be collaborative, supportive, and conducive to student learning, even though there was noted over-participation in online and face-to-face discussions by a particular student. Thus demonstrating the need for instructors to monitor discussion expectations and guide topics as appropriate.

Rowbotham (2010) investigated undergraduate nursing students' perceptions of their course environments compared to instructor teaching perspectives over several semesters using the ACES and a modified version of the Instructional Perspective Inventory. Rowbotham found significant differences between the student cohorts who responded to the ACES, and due to this, the cohorts served as a covariant in further analyses. Statistically higher ratings for teacher support, task orientation, involvement,

and organization and clarity were related to ratings of instructors with high responsiveness; however, the effect sizes were small.

Stocks and Freddolino (2000) conducted a quasi-experimental study over 2 years using online MSW courses to compare differences in teaching methods. The initial course offerings utilized online lectures, reading and lecture discussions, journal critique assignments, study question e-mails requiring instructor responses, and a face-to-face final exam, and the second iteration continued to use those materials and activities, with a change to automate study question feedback, as well as additional opportunities for students to participate online via self-tests and additional discussion opportunities. They found that students in the updated, more interactive course rated several items significantly higher than the initial courses did, including that the course was flexible enough to meet a variety of student learning needs, instructor provided encouragement and cared about students, and students looked forward to and paid attention in class, all of which had medium to large effect sizes.

Beer and Darkenwald (1989) explored gender differences in adult learner course environments specifically focused on the affiliation and involvement dimensions of the ACES. They added additional questions to measure student's satisfaction and level of learning associated with a course. Beer and Darkenwald found female students rated courses as being significantly higher on affiliation and involvement dimensions than male students did.

Kariuki (1995) compared instructors' and undergraduate education majors' learning styles for congruency, using Kolb's Learning Style Inventory, in relation to student perceptions of the course environment and aimed to identify if any changes were

needed in the course environments based on participants' perceptions and expectations of actual and ideal course environments, using the ACES. Instructors and students from foundations-level courses participated in the study during the same semester. His research identified significant differences in students' ideal course environment ratings, with female students rating ideal course environments encompassing the dimensions of teacher support, student influence, involvement, affiliation, personal goal attainment, and organization and clarity significantly higher than male students did. However, a comparison of actual course environment preferences displayed no significant differences based on gender. Students rated organization and clarity and teacher support as the most common characteristics of their actual course environments. They found that instructors perceived actual course environments as significantly more positive than students for all ACES subscales, except organization and clarity.

Miglietti and Strange's (1998) research focused on the relationship between adult learner's ages compared to their expectations of ideal course environments, using a modified version of the ACES from Langenbach and Aagaard (1990), and preferred learning styles, using the Principles of Adult Learning Scale and Adaptive Style Inventory. Instructors and students from remedial math and English courses participated in the study, completing the ACES during the second week of the semester. Researchers also received end of course grades and evaluation feedback from participating courses. They indicated that student age did not significantly account for differences in learning styles and student expectations of the course environment; however, they attributed the lack of significance to the dichotomous categorization of ages (Miglietti & Strange, 1998). Course environments characterized as employing learner-centered approaches

were associated with higher student grades, greater sense of accomplishment, and higher overall satisfaction (Miglietti & Strange, 1998).

Langenbach and Aagaard (1990) conducted a factor analytic study of the ACES using the student ideal form in varied adult learner settings, community college, large state university, and large community adult school, similar to Darkenwald and Valentine (1986). Langenbach and Aagaard determined a factor analysis was warranted, as it was not conducted when the ACES was created and believed the subscales may not be as uncorrelated as previously thought. In the first factor analysis, five factors loaded clearly and formed the following factors: (a) teacher activities, (b) student affiliation, (c) student activities, (d) teacher domination, and (e) student prerogative. After eliminating non-loading items, the revised scale was used in the second analysis. In the second factor analysis, six factors loaded: (a) teacher activities, (b) student affiliation, (c) teacher domination, (d) student prerogative, (e) student activities, and (f) unrelated discussion. The student activities factor split into the sixth factor, unrelated discussion. Three items failed to load in the second-factor analysis. Langenbach and Aagaard concluded that the ACES' original seven dimensions were not fully supported, and proposed that a revised ACES would be more reliable than the original was, using the six proposed factors with possible item additions to smaller factors that have between 2-4 items.

ACES Dimensions for Sustaining Learning Communities

Wlodkowski (2008) described the importance of creating a community that learners identify with as the basis for developing and maintaining a sense of inclusion within a course environment. By setting and maintaining communal norms via instructional strategies, faculty were poised to aid adult learners in solidifying a sense of

belonging within the university community, thus promoting learner persistence (Ausburn, 2004; Huett et al., 2008; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Müeller 2008; Murphy & Cifuentes, 2001; Wlodkowski, 2008; Young & Duncan, 2014). Beer and Darkenwald (1986) indicated that student persistence could be influenced by the course environment, and Darkenwald and Valentine's (1986) ACES assesses perceptions and expectations of the course environment. Specifically, the ACES dimensions of task orientation, teacher support, and student influence were selected for this research based on Murphy and Cifuentes' (2001) study that concluded adult learners engaging in courses with a high beginning level of structure (task orientation) and instructor support (teacher support) that transitions towards more learner influence (student influence) as the course progresses results in the sense of community among learners.

Task Orientation

Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) defined task orientation simply as focus and accomplishment. They found that the internal consistency of the task orientation subscale was satisfactory, .58-.68 for teacher actual, student ideal, and student actual forms, respectively. Additional results between the task orientation score and questions gauging student satisfaction and success showed a moderate positive correlation, .51. The concept of task orientation has garnered research attention for decades (Ray, 1973), and at varying educational levels from secondary levels encompassing middle and high school (Cosmovici, Idsoe, Bru, & Munthe, 2009; Kilian, Hofer, & Kuhnle, 2013; Seegers, van Putten, & de Brabander, 2002) to higher education (Ausburn, 2004; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Freddolino, 1996; Kariuki, 1995; Kelly & Bronstein, 2003; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Miglietti & Strange,

1998; Rowbotham, 2010; Stocks & Freddolino, 2000), and the workplace (Sari, 2015). Ausburn (2004) categorized adult learners' rankings of online course features of blended university courses into tiers, and the first category, encompassing the top three ranked online course features all supported the importance of helping students maintain focus and stay on-task within the course. Stocks and Freddolino (2000) indicated that students reported paying more attention and looking forward to online classes that incorporate varied activities and ways for students to interact. Rowbotham (2010) reported statistically higher ratings for task orientation were related to ratings of instructors with high responsiveness; however, the effect sizes were small.

Teacher Support

Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) defined teacher support as sensitivity and encouragement. Based on their research, the internal consistency of the teacher support subscale was acceptable, .74-.85 for teacher actual, student ideal, and student actual forms, respectively. Additionally, teacher support subscale and student satisfaction and success questions showed a strong positive correlation, .70. Teacher support research focuses on educators teaching at various educational levels, including preschool (Zinsser, Christensen, & Torres, 2016), elementary (Brock & Curby, 2016), middle school (Shin & Ryan, 2017; Tennant et al., 2015), high school (Phillippo & Stone, 2013), and higher education (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Freddolino, 1996; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000; Kariuki, 1995; Kelly & Bronstein, 2003; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Miglietti & Strange, 1998; Rowbotham, 2010; Stocks & Freddolino, 2000). Researchers found teachers rated their level of teacher support to be significantly higher than the levels reported by students, indicating a discrepancy between how

teachers and students perceive the course environment (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Kariuki, 1995). Freddolino (1996) described results in a broad manner and based on course evaluation feedback and informal interviews, noted the importance of relationships between students and the instructor, the local classroom environment, and with the technology used in maintaining a quality program. Littlefield and Roberson (2005) utilized Stocks and Freddolino's (2000) modified version of the ACES and found high levels of agreement with items related to instructor respect of students, care about student learning, and instructor assistance to reach learning goals. Rowbotham (2010) indicated significantly higher teacher support ratings for instructors who were rated as responsive; however, the effect size was small. Stocks and Freddolino (2000) found that students reported higher ratings of instructor encouragement and caring in course environments that utilized diverse activities and ways for students to participate. Kariuki (1995) identified significant differences in students' ideal course environment ratings, and female students rated teacher support in ideal course environments significantly higher than male students did.

Student Influence

Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) defined student influence as collaborative planning and teacher non-authoritarianism. Based on their research, the internal consistency of the student influence subscale was acceptable, .71-.89 for student ideal, student actual, and teacher actual, respectively. Further results between the student influence score and questions gauging student satisfaction and success showed a strong positive correlation, .74. The concept of student influence as it pertains to learner-centered educational environments has been a focus in K-12 systems (Aslan, &

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Reigeluth, 2015) and higher education (Ausburn, 2004; Cleveland-Innes & Emes, 2005; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Freddolino, 1996; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000; Kariuki, 1995; Kelly & Bronstein, 2003; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Miglietti & Strange, 1998; Stocks & Freddolino, 2000). Ausburn (2004) collected adult learners' rankings of course instructional goals for blended university courses, and allowing customization of learning and promoting self-directed learning options were ranked first and second, respectively. Kariuki (1995) found that instructors and students rated student influence as the least noticeable element of the actual course environment. Using Stocks and Freddolino's (2000) modified version of the ACES, Littlefield and Roberson (2005) found high levels of agreement with items related to students' views of their interaction and collaboration within the course environment, including the ability to question course requirements. Stocks and Freddolino (2000) specified higher flexibility in meeting individualized student needs in courses that incorporated many ways for students to interact and receive feedback. Kariuki (1995) identified significant differences in students' ideal course environment ratings, and female students rated student influence in ideal course environments significantly higher than male students did.

Persistence Overall and Online Course Environments

Habley et al. (2012) noted several terms, such as persistence and completion, were used interchangeably when discussing graduation metrics. Habley et al. identified shifts in understanding related to higher education retention moving from beliefs that student attrition results mainly from student deficits of preparedness, academic achievement, gender, attitudes, and other student-focused characteristics to include

influences from student support services and institutional programs and terminology changes to place the focus in a positive direction of student integration, involvement, and engagement. Several interventions logically promote retention: assessment and course placement to put students in the course sequence where they are academically prepared for success, development education initiatives and support strategies for at-risk and first-year students, and academic and career advising (Barefoot, 2004; Habley et al., 2012; Seidman, 2012). Our ways of thinking and terminology concerning student persistence have evolved over time, but many sound interventions have not substantially impacted retention and graduation rates; leading researchers to call for expanding institutional interventions that focus on just retaining students to creating an organizational culture that promotes student success as an additional piece to the student persistence puzzle (Barefoot, 2004; Habley et al., 2012; Seidman, 2012).

Researchers have examined higher education persistence based on numerous variables: demographics (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Ausburn, 2004; Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Kariuki, 1995; Levy, 2004; Müeller, 2008; Park & Choi, 2009; Wessel, Jones, Markle, & Westfall, 2009; Willging & Johnson, 2009), satisfaction (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000; Herbert, 2006; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Levy, 2007; Park & Choi, 2009; Pittenger & Doering, 2010; Reio & Crim, 2013); learning communities (Ausburn, 2004; Huett et al., 2008; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Müeller 2008; Murphy & Cifuentes, 2001; Wlodkowski, 2008; Young & Duncan, 2014), and faculty support (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Müeller, 2008) to name a few. In addition to contemplating overall higher education persistence, researchers explore academic course

persistence to compare delivery methods (Huett et al., 2008; Tanyel & Griffin, 2014), and identify predictors of student success in online courses (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Harrell & Bower, 2011; Herbert, 2006; Huett et al., 2008; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Levy, 2007; Müeller, 2008; Park & Choi, 2009; Pittenger & Doering, 2010; Reio & Crim, 2013; Willging & Johnson, 2009; Yen & Liu, 2009).

Huett et al. (2008) studied the impact of motivational e-mails in undergraduate, entry-level computer applications courses on learner retention and student motivation, as measured by the Course Interest Survey, between an online control, online treatment, and face-to-face section. They indicated the online treatment and face-to-face courses were more comparable than the online control course and displayed similar retention rates that were statistically higher than the online control course, statistically lower student failure rates than the online control course, and statistically higher overall motivation. Tanyel and Griffin (2014) compared course outcomes and persistence in 10 years of face-to-face and online undergraduate, non-nursing courses based on an archival review. They found a significantly higher number of online students withdrew from courses than face-to-face students, 17% to 10% respectively. Furthermore, they considered student success— completing the course with a grade of D or higher—as an additional measure of student persistence, and a significantly higher percentage of face-to-face students successfully completed courses than online students successfully completed the same courses, 82% to 70% respectively.

Research on predictors of online persistence have been investigated from different research methodologies: quantitative (Harrell & Bower, 2011; Herbert, 2006; Levy, 2007; Park & Choi, 2009; Willging & Johnson, 2009; Yen & Liu, 2009), mixed methods

(Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Pittenger & Doering, 2010), and qualitative (Müeller, 2008). Quantitative studies focused on online course persistence surveyed online students with particular focus on student characteristics (Harrell & Bower, 2011; Levy, 2004; Park & Choi, 2009; Yen & Liu, 2009) and institutional variables (Herbert, 2006; Park & Choi, 2009). Researchers studying online course persistence who utilized mixed methods employed a combination of archival data (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Pittenger & Doering, 2010), student surveys (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Pittenger & Doering, 2010), interviews (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Ivankova & Stick, 2007), and additional information (Ivankova & Stick, 2007). Müeller's (2008) qualitative study of online course predictors used interviews to form a case study (Müeller, 2008).

Harrell and Bower (2011) examined learning style, locus of control, technology access and expertise, and prior online course experience on persistence in online community college courses. Their data identified auditory learning style and basic computer skill as significant negative predictors of online course persistence and higher grade point average as a positive predictor of online course persistence. Similar to Harrell and Bower, Levy (2004) found academic locus of control was not a significant predictor of online course persistence. Park and Choi (2009) predicted whether a student would persist or drop, with 89.8% accuracy, based on a model of individual characteristics, followed by family and organizational support, satisfaction, and relevance. Herbert (2006) utilized the Noel-Levitz Priorities Survey for Online Learners to explore student satisfaction and importance of several institutional variables and compared results based on course completers and non-completers. Faculty

responsiveness rated as significantly most important related to student satisfaction. Time commitments and personal problems rated significantly highest among course non-completers as attributing to why they did not complete the online course. Yen and Liu (2009) found students with greater learner autonomy were more likely to complete their online courses successfully and earned higher final course grades than other students. Willging and Johnson (2009) surveyed non-completing online students to identify why they left the online program, at what point in the program they dropped out, and if there were any factors that could predict online student dropout; however, their data were inconclusive regarding predictors of online course persistence.

Aragon and Johnson (2008) explored differences between completers and non-completers in online community college classes based on demographics, enrollment characteristics, academic readiness, and self-directed learning readiness, and reasons non-completers reported for not continuing their online courses. They utilized a combination of archival demographic and course completion information from an institutional database and self-reports on a self-directed learning readiness inventory for all participants, and phone interviews with non-completing students. From data collected for their study, gender, number of online courses enrolled in, and grade point average were significant predictors of online persistence. Based on the data, significantly more female students completed their online courses than male students. They also indicated that students who completed their online courses were enrolled in significantly more online courses than non-completing students were and had higher grade point averages than non-completing students had. Ivankova and Stick (2007) examined factors contributing to current, graduated, and withdrawn online doctoral students' persistence using a mixed-

methods design employing an online questionnaire, archival transcript data, personal artifacts, phone interviews, and course information. They found the following factors were significant predictors of online program completion: degree program, online learning environment, student support services, faculty, and self-motivation. Additionally, several themes emerged from the data collected during the phone interviews: quality of academic experiences, online learning environment, support and assistance, and student self-motivation. Pittenger and Doering (2010) investigated factors contributing to high completion rate of four online, undergraduate pharmacy courses in relation to motivational design factors and its relationship to student performance using the Instructional Materials Motivation Survey and an open-ended survey based on the ARCS model components of attention, relevance, confidence, and satisfaction. They suggested that all of the courses incorporated elements of motivational course design to varying degrees and identified educational scaffolding as a prominent motivational theme reported on open-ended responses. There was not a sufficient range for the grade distribution to determine if significant differences in student performance were related to motivation.

Müeller (2008) studied why women undergraduate and graduate students in an online degree-completion program persist or not and what factors contribute to or hinder their persistence through qualitative interviews. Participant experiences were coded into facilitating factors or barriers and ranked. Facilitating factors supporting students' persistence ranked in the following order: (a) engagement in learning community, (b) schedule flexibility and convenience, (c) feeling challenged and personal growth, and (d) support from classmates and faculty. Barriers hindering student's persistence ranked as

follows: (a) balancing multiple responsibilities, (b) disappointment in faculty, (c) face-to-face learning environment preference, (d) emotional hurdles, and (e) technology problems.

<div align="center">Demographics Related to the ACES and Persistence</div>

Age

Darkenwald and Novak (1997) made a research case for studying age in higher education settings due to the potential for shifts in classroom dynamics as the number of adult learners increases and participates with traditional college aged students. Several researchers investigated higher education student performance and persistence in relation to learner's ages (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Darkenwald & Novak, 1997; Harrell & Bower, 2011; Levy 2004; Park & Choi 2009; Miglietti & Strange 1998). Darkenwald and Novak (1997) conducted their study in community college and university settings and found significant differences in final grades. Twenty-five percent of the variance in final grades at the community college setting was accounted for by age composition in courses studied. Courses comprised of over 60% of adult learners over the age of 24 had significantly higher final grades than courses with 60% or more adult learners classified as younger adults, and courses split about 50% in regard to age achieved final grades in between the other groups. Results from the university environment were similar, albeit less strong, when math was excluded, as math courses at the institution were determined to be significantly different from humanities and social science courses. Miglietti and Strange (1998) explored university students' learning styles compared to course environment preferences, instructor teaching style, and remedial course outcomes. They found significant differences between adult learners' (aged 25 and older) and traditional

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college aged students' (24 years and younger) student status and course enrollment. Significantly more traditional learners enrolled full-time as compared to adult learners, 90.5% and 65.6%, respectively. Additionally, adult learners enrolled in significantly more remedial mathematics courses, 59%, and traditional learners enrolled in significantly more remedial English courses, 63.2%.

Miglietti and Strange (1998) reported a limitation of their research was in categorizing adult student age as a dichotomous variable of traditional and nontraditional ages and recommended treating age as a continuous variable or classify ages into meaningful segments based on research. Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) organized their participants into three age groups: 25 or younger, aged 26-33, and aged 34-72. Wlodkowski (2008) provided a chronological context for classifying adults into three groups, "younger adults (18-24 years old), working-age adults (25-64 years old), and older adults (65 and older)" (Chapter 2, Section 1. para. 2), while maintaining that the term adult is culturally and historically relative. Wlodkowski noted adult learners typically refer to working-age adults, but younger adults and older adults also engage in higher education, thus including them in the term adult learners to encompass younger adults, working-age adults, and older adults. Whereas some studies resulted in statistically significant findings related to participants' ages, other researchers found no significant differences between ages of completers and non-completers (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Levy, 2004) and were not able to predict persistence based on age (Harrell & Bower, 2011; Park & Choi, 2009).

Gender

Beer and Darkenwald (1989) described that examination of the social aspect of adult course environments required exploring gender's role in classroom settings and the potential for females and males to be characteristically different in their perceptions of such environments. Many studies considered gender as a variable of interest in relation to higher education performance and persistence (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Ausburn, 2004; Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Darkenwald & Novak, 1997; Harrell & Bower, 2011; Levy, 2004; Miglietti & Strange, 1998; Park & Choi, 2009; Wessel et al., 2009; Willging & Johnson, 2009). Aragon and Johnson (2008) found a significant difference between female and male community college student online course completion with more female students successfully completing their online courses than male students, 66% and 52%, respectively. Ausburn (2004) looked at blended university courses using a combination of face-to-face and online components to identify elements of course design valued by part-time adult learners in advanced education courses. She identified significant differences in rankings of the importance of various design elements based on gender. Male students ranked opportunities to gain technology skills in class and receiving prompt and effective instructor assistance significantly higher than female students did. Female students ranked courses that provided a sense of community through belonging and involvement as significantly higher than male students did. Beer and Darkenwald (1989) explored community college students' perceptions of course environments based on ACES dimensions of affiliation and involvement and found that female students rated courses as being significantly higher on both relationship dimensions than male students did. Analyzing final grades in university courses, except math, Darkenwald and Novak

(1997) found female students over age 30 performed significantly better than male students did, overall. Wessel et al. (2009) investigated university retention and graduation rates for students with disabilities compared to students without disabilities, and found males had a higher SAT quantitative score than females did, females had higher high school grade point average than males did, and females had less risk for attrition and graduated quicker than males did. Other researchers did not find gender to be a significant predictor of online course persistence (Harrell & Johnson, 2011; Levy, 2004; Miglietti & Strange, 1998; Park & Choi, 2009; Willging & Johnson, 2009).

Race/Ethnicity

In addition to other demographic variables, researchers consider race/ethnicity when investigating persistence in higher education (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Darkenwald, 1975; Harrell & Bower, 2011; Willging & Johnson, 2009). Darkenwald (1975) found that Black students participating in adult basic education courses were more likely to persist through the program and have higher attendance rates when taught by Black teachers than by White teachers. Darkenwald indicated significantly more Black teachers included consumer information, health and coping skills, and ethnic/racial heritage topics into their teachings—beyond the standard adult basic education curriculum of reading, writing, and mathematics—than White teachers did. Alternatively, several other studies failed to identify race/ethnicity as a significant predictor of online course completion (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Harrell & Bower, 2011; Willging & Johnson, 2009). Some explanation for lack of significant differences may be due to there not being sufficient numbers of minority students participating in the above studies (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Harrell & Johnson, 2011; Willging & Johnson, 2009).

Even so, Aragon and Johnson (2008) defined their ethnicity variable as White and nonwhite, and no significant differences were identified in their research either.

Summary

Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) and Imel (1991) described recommendations for usage of the ACES that align with the purpose of this study to compare student perceptions of ideal course environments as a feedback indicator for instructors of student expectations. This study expanded on their proposed usage in the comparison of ideal face-to-face and online course environments, and there is precedent for researchers utilizing modified methods in ACES research (Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Miglietti & Strange, 1998; Stock & Freddolino, 2000). The inclusion of ACES dimensions of task orientation, teacher support, and student influence were based on Murphy and Cifuentes' (2001) research identifying the importance of such characteristics in creating and maintaining a sense of community for learners, as one predictor of persistence in higher education courses. This study assessed the comparability of students' online and face-to-face expectations of course environments for task orientation, teacher support, and student influence and provide valuable feedback to instructors about students' expectations of online and face-to-face course environments as a step towards continued persistence research:

1. Are there any significant differences between adult learners' expectations of ideal face-to-face course environments and their expectations of ideal online course environments using three subscales of the ACES: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence?

2. Are there any significant differences between adult learner demographics (age group, gender, and race/ethnicity) and their expectations of ideal online course environments using three subscales of the ACES: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence?

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

Through this study, I aimed to compare ideal course environment (online and face-to-face) expectations of adult learners' at a comprehensive university in south Georgia based on three subscales of the ACES: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence. To further aid such faculty in tailoring their online course delivery to student expectations, this study also aimed to identify if there are significant differences between student demographics (age group, gender, and race/ethnicity) and adult learners' expectations of ideal online course environments based on three subscales of the ACES: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence.

Research Questions

1. Are there any significant differences between adult learners' expectations of ideal face-to-face course environments and their expectations of ideal online course environments using three subscales of the ACES: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence?

2. Are there any significant differences between adult learner demographics (age group, gender, and race/ethnicity) and their expectations of ideal online course environments using three subscales of the ACES: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence?

Population and Sample

The population of this study was adult learners at a comprehensive university in south Georgia who have taken or are currently enrolled in at least one face-to-face or online course at the university. I limited this study to a comprehensive university in south Georgia as a way to provide direct feedback to instructors based on the expectations of their adult learners and due to my access to this population. For this study, the sample included 321 students who: are currently or recently enrolled at a comprehensive university in south Georgia; are aged 18 or over; identify as male, female, or gender neutral/no gender; and identify as White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino, or other race/ethnicity (see Table 1). The usable sample size was reduced to $n = 170$ based on 151 participants not completing either the ideal face-to-face or online course environment form of the ACES. To help ensure the sample was representative of adult learners at a comprehensive university in south Georgia, respondents were able to participate regardless of the instructional delivery modality they had taken part in thus far and were not limited by completing fully face-to-face or fully online courses.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of Sample

Demographic Variables	Participants ($n = 170$)	Percentage
Adult Learner Age Group		
Young Adults 18-24	90	52.9%
Working-age Adults 25-64	55	32.4%
Older Adults 65 or older	1	0.6%
Adult Learner Gender		
Male	34	20%
Female	134	78.8%
Gender Neutral/No Gender	2	1.2%
Adult Learner Race/Ethnicity		
White	102	60%
Black or African American	53	31.2%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1	0.6%
Asian/Pacific Islander	3	1.8%
Hispanic or Latino	4	2.4%
Other	5	2.9%
Other Grouped[a]	13	7.6%

Note. Twenty-four participants did not provide their age resulting in the reported adult learner age total equaling 85.9%. Two participants did not provide their race/ethnicity resulting in the reported adult learner race/ethnicity total equaling 98.8%.
[a]Due to the low number of participant responses for the race/ethnicity options of American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino, and Other, I combined that data to form the Other Grouped category to aid statistical comparison.

Participant Selection

For my study, I utilized a self-report online survey delivered using an online survey tool, Qualtrics. This voluntary survey was open to all current students aged 18 years and older at a comprehensive university in south Georgia, and as the survey marketing was completed using an institutional e-mail system there was a chance that previous students who recently left the university still checking their institutional e-mail address could see the marketing materials and participate as well. Additionally, Facebook posts also promoted the survey as available to students at a comprehensive university in south Georgia. The marketing materials included researcher information,

purpose of the study, details of participant rights and informed consent, including voluntary and anonymous participation, details about how to contact me, IRB exemption, information about obtaining study results after completion of the research, and details about inclusion in a raffle (Harrell & Johnson, 2011).

An initial marketing e-mail was distributed to the student listserv at a comprehensive university in south Georgia and in an attempt to increase the response rate, a reminder to participate was sent before the survey end date (Herbert, 2006; Pittenger & Doering, 2010; Willging & Johnson, 2009). Posts were made on Facebook after the initial and reminder e-mails to promote the survey as well. The inclusion of a raffle for a random chance to win one of four $25 Amazon gift cards was included in the current study as an additional method of increasing participant response rate based on previous studies (Wuensch et al., 2008; Yen & Liu, 2009). The raffle did not require survey participation and potential participants were made aware that they might complete the survey, cease participation in the survey, or not participate and still be included for a chance to win one of the four prizes via a separate survey not connected to the study survey responses.

Instrumentation

Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) developed the ACES as a measurement of social climate of adult learner course environments that includes forms for actual and ideal perceptions of instructors and students. The ACES consists of 49-items for each form covering seven dimensions: affiliation, involvement, organization and clarity, personal goal attainment, task orientation, teacher support, and student influence (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986). The instrument allows participants to rate their

agreement with seven statements for each dimension using a 4-point Likert scale of strongly disagree to strongly agree, with two reverse-coded statements for each dimension (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Imel, 1991). As this study focused on the dimensions of task orientation, teacher support, and student influence, those were the only subscales included for scoring (see Appendix C). The seven questions of the ACES that relate to task orientation relate to instructors and students maintaining focus on the subject matter of the course through the accomplishment of relevant class activities by stated deadlines. The seven questions of the ACES that relate to the teacher support subscale emphasize instructor's impact on student success, encouragement of students, caring, and respect. The seven questions of the ACES that relate to student influence focus on how collaboratively a course could be ran and how participative students can be in discussing and setting course requirements and objectives. The instrument includes three questions following the ACES items to identify participant demographics of age, gender, and race/ethnicity.

This study differed from Darkenwald and Valentine's (1986) original research in its measurement of student expectations of their ideal face-to-face course environment compared to their ideal online course environment and focus on the task orientation, teacher support, and student influence dimensions of the ACES due to their support of an active learning environment which promotes learner persistence (Murphy & Cifuentes, 2001). In line with previous research, this study relied on responses of the ideal form from students (Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990; Miglietti & Strange, 1998). Sole use of the ideal form of the ACES allowed participants who engaged in one type of course delivery method, either face-to-face or online, to reflect on their opinions of ideal course

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environments for both delivery methods (Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990; Miglietti &

Strange, 1998). This study differed from previous research in its approach of

investigating ideal expectations of online and face-to-face course environments, and

asked participants to complete the ideal form twice, once for the online course

environment and once for the face-to-face course environment.

Reliability

Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) reported high total scale reliability for the

ACES using Cronbach's alpha (student ideal α = .93, student actual α = .94, and teacher

actual α = .90), and found the subscale reliability ranged from acceptable (α = .58) for

task orientation on the teacher actual form to high (α = .89) for student influence on the

teacher actual form, demonstrating internal consistency. The reliability co-efficients for

the dimensions of interest using the student ideal form were within acceptable ranges of

internal consistency: task orientation (α = .66), teacher support (α = .74), and student

influence (α = .71).

Validity

Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) noted that a lack of a criterion variable caused

difficulties with estimating the ACES validity; however, there was support for internal

validity. This result was evidenced by low (r = -.20) to moderate (r = .55)

intercorrelations between the seven subscales (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986).

Additionally, Darkenwald and Valentine proposed that the total ACES score and

individual subscale scores should positively correlate with measures of student

satisfaction and success, demonstrating a positive course environment. This was

supported as all correlation co-efficients were significant, p < .001, with the total scale at

r = .77 and individual subscales ranging from *r* = .49 for affiliation to *r* = .74 for student influence; correlation co-efficients for the other dimensions of interest were *r* = .51 for task orientation and *r* = .70 for teacher support demonstrating a moderate to strong positive correlation between task orientation, teachers support, and student influence and student ratings of satisfaction and success (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986). Multiple types of validity—content, concurrent, and discriminant—were also supported in Darkenwald's (1987 as cited in Beer & Darkenwald, 1989, p. 36) research, meaning that the subscales measure distinct constructs.

Online Version of the Instrument

The ACES participant directions and student ideal form items were typed into an online survey tool, Qualtrics. Utilizing an online survey allowed me to potentially reach a high number of participants at a relatively low cost and minimal response burden for participants (Willging & Johnson, 2009). Whereas the survey delivery method changed from Darkenwald and Valentine's (1986) original paper distribution, the online survey distribution contained the ACES directions and student ideal form items as originally intended, with the inclusion of three demographic questions for age, gender, and race/ethnicity (see Appendix D). I received permission from Darkenwald, via e-mail and follow-up phone call, to use the ACES for the purposes of this study (see Appendix E).

<center>*Research Design*</center>

This study employed a quantitative design with a self-report survey as the research strategy (Creswell, 2014). For Question 1, I attempted to identify if there are any significant differences between adult learners' ideal course environment (online and face-to-face) expectations based on three subscales of the ACES: task orientation, teacher

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support, and student influence. Research on using the task orientation, teacher support, and student influence dimensions of the ACES are inconclusive to be able to make an informed directional hypothesis. Some studies identified significant differences between students' perceptions of course environments on the dimensions of interest (Kariuki, 1995; Rowbotham, 2010; Stocks & Freddolino, 2000) or when generally comparing online and face-to-face course environments (Young & Duncan, 2014). However, other research produced no significant differences in the areas of task orientation, teacher support, or student influence (Freddolino, 1996; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000; Kelly & Bronstein, 2003; Miglietti & Strange, 1998).

For Question 2, I attempted to identify if there are any significant differences between adult learner demographics (age group, gender, and race/ethnicity) and their expectations of ideal online course environments based on three subscales of the ACES: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence. Research on age does not support a directional hypothesis due to mixed results, with some studies producing significant findings (Darkenwald & Novak, 1997; Miglietti & Strange, 1998) and other research failing to identify statistically significant results related to age (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Harrell & Bower, 2011; Kelly & Bronstein, 2003; Levy, 2004; Park & Choi, 2009). Research on gender has also resulted in inconclusive findings with some support of significant gender differences (Ausburn, 2004; Kariuki, 1995) and other studies reporting insignificant findings based on gender (Harrell & Johnson, 2011; Kariuki, 1995; Levy, 2004; Miglietti & Strange, 1998; Park & Choi, 2009; Willging & Johnson, 2009). Research on race/ethnicity does not support a directional hypothesis due to varied findings; several studies failed to identify significant differences based on

race/ethnicity (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Harrell & Bower, 2011; Kelly & Bronstein, 2003; Willging & Johnson, 2009); however, there was some statistically relevant research as well (Darkenwald, 1975).

Variables

For Question 1, the dependent variables are mean ACES subscale scores:

1. Task orientation (Extent to which instructor and students remain focused on the subject matter of the course through the accomplishment of class activities (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990)).

2. Teacher support (Extent of an instructor's sensitivity, help, encouragement, and friendship towards students (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990)).

3. Student influence (Extent to which the course environment is learner-centered, allowing for students' collaborative impact on the class (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990)).

For Question 1, the independent variable is:

1. Type of course environment (face-to-face or online).

For Question 2, the dependent variables are mean ACES subscale scores for the ideal online course environment:

1. Task orientation (Extent to which instructor and students remain focused on the subject matter of the course through the accomplishment of class

activities (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990)).

2. Teacher support (Extent of an instructor's sensitivity, help, encouragement, and friendship towards students (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990)).

3. Student influence (Extent to which the course environment is learner-centered, allowing for students' collaborative impact on the class (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990)).

For Question 2, the independent variables are:

1. Adult learner age group (18-24, 25-64, and 65+).

2. Adult learner gender (male, female, or gender neutral/no gender).

3. Adult learner race/ethnicity (White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino, or other).

Data Collection

The online survey was created in an online survey tool, Qualtrics. Qualtrics was available free of charge through a site-wide license at a comprehensive university in south Georgia. This survey tool has features of allowing anonymity, branching questions, randomization, and security features, among other options that made it easy to create, distribute, collect, retain, and download study data. This study was submitted to the IRB as exempt from requiring review—with me listed as a co-investigator—and

received IRB exemption (see Appendix A). An initial marketing e-mail was distributed to the student listserv at a comprehensive university in south Georgia, followed by Facebook posts to promote the survey. Marketing communications included: a synopsis of the study topic, link to the online survey, information about participant rights, including anonymity and voluntary participation, age restriction (at least 18 years of age), details about the raffle, how to be entered into the drawing, and drawing date, that survey participation was not required and could not be linked to survey submission, and how to contact me and the IRB. A follow-up marketing e-mail prompt and Facebook post were sent before the study survey closed.

Much of the survey introduction was the same as the marketing e-mail, with the exception of raffle information. Participants clicked continue past the introduction and voluntary participant agreement information to proceed to the main survey content. Participants were asked to complete two versions of the ACES student ideal form, one for their ideal online course environment and one for their ideal face-to-face course environment, along with three demographic questions for age, gender, and race/ethnicity. The two ACES versions, online and face-to-face, were randomized, so some students saw the ideal online course environment questions first, followed by the ideal face-to-face course environment questions, and other students saw the versions in the reverse order. Directions instructed participants to rate how well they believed each statement described the ideal course environment in question, online or face-to-face, and were prompted that each survey version should take approximately 10 minutes to complete (Harrell & Johnson, 2011). Participants completing the study survey were brought to a thank you

page that prompted them to click on the raffle link, which was a separate survey, if they wished to participate in a drawing for a chance to win one of four $25 Amazon gift cards.

Approvals and Protection of Human Subjects

In an attempt to ensure the study upholds ethical considerations and standard research practices, the study was submitted to the IRB as exempt from review. As part of the IRB application, survey materials were provided that included the initial introduction section—overview of the study topic, voluntary and anonymous participation and informed consent via a participant agreement statement and selecting continue to proceed to the survey content, how to contact me and the IRB with questions, and how to receive results of the study—and the full survey content, thank you page, and raffle details (Harrell & Johnson, 2011). After reading the survey introduction and agreeing to participate, participants proceeded to the main study survey content, which was followed by a thank you page that included a link to a separate survey for the raffle not associated with the main survey content. The study survey was distributed for participation after receiving IRB exemption. Qualtrics aims to uphold privacy for customers and data collected via their survey tool. Their privacy statement is publicly available on the Internet, http://www.qualtrics.com/privacy-statement/, and describes how they handle data securely and within the confines of the law. Features within Qualtrics that aim to protect participants' rights included anonymization, so personal information is not associated with participant responses, and maintaining storage of survey data using Qualtrics' secure data center.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic data, and inferential statistics were utilized to examine the study questions via comparisons of continuous dependent variables and continuous and categorical independent variables (Creswell, 2014). To answer Research Question 1, three paired samples *t* tests were utilized to analyze adult learner's ratings of their ideal face-to-face course and online environments on each of the selected ACES dimensions: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence, similar to previous research studies that used Likert scale surveys with matched data for comparisons (Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Young & Duncan, 2014). Each of ACES subscales of interest—task orientation, teachers support, and student influence—had the responses of their seven questions averaged to facilitate comparison of ideal face-to-face and online course environments. Dependent variables for Question 1 were averaged ACES subscale scores of adult learner expectations of ideal course environments (based on each of the selected ACES dimensions: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence). Independent variables for Question 1 were type of course environment (online or face-to-face). The level of significance was set at .05.

To answer Research Question 2, nine one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used to compare adult learner demographics (age group, gender, and race/ethnicity) and their expectations of ideal online course environments using three subscales of the ACES: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence (Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000; Levy 2004; Pittenger & Doering, 2010; Reio & Crim, 2013; Rowbotham, 2010). Dependent variables for Question 2 were averaged ACES subscale scores of adult learner

expectations of an ideal online course environment (based on each of the selected ACES dimensions: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence). Independent variables for Question 2 were adult learner age group (18-24, 25-64, and 65+), adult learner gender (male, female, or gender neutral/no gender), and adult learner race/ethnicity (White, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latino, or other). The level of significance was set at .05. ANOVA results with statistical significance were further examined utilizing Tukey's Honest Significant Difference (HSD) to determine specific differences (Hardré, Beesley, Miller, & Pace, 2011).

Limitations and Assumptions

Possible limitations to this study focus on generalizability, lack of research to inform directional hypotheses, use of self-report data, and participant retention. Generalizability of this study was limited due to the small sample size and utilization of a single comprehensive university in south Georgia; however, results from this study can be useful in informing instructors and administrators at this institution about their adult learners' expectations of ideal course environments which can be of value in aligning teaching practices with adult learners' expectations. In addition, there was not a large sample size, and some variable categories received few responses, such as older adults and certain race/ethnicity groupings. Whereas some results—race/ethnicity effect on task orientation of ideal online course environments ($p = .064$)—were close to statistical significance, a larger sample size with additional responses for all categories would allow for true differences to appear or show more clearly no differences exist in the research sample. An additional limitation of this study was that there were not conclusive trends

to inform the use of directional hypotheses based on related research comparing course environments using the selected ACES dimensions: task orientation, teacher support, and student influences and student demographics. An assumption of this study was that participants provided truthful responses of their perceptions. However, participant reflections could be skewed based on previous experiences with face-to-face or online course environments and possible positive or negative interactions within the course environment. With each form of the instrument taking approximately 10 minutes to complete, participant fatigue could have contributed to the number of participants, 47%, who did not complete both the ideal online and face-to-face course environment forms of the ACES for this study.

Chapter IV

RESULTS

Research Question 1

Three paired samples *t* tests were performed to determine if there were any significant differences between the independent variable type of course environment (face-to-face or online) and the dependent variables of mean ACES subscale scores for each of the selected ACES dimensions: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence. As shown in Table 2, there were no significant differences between means of ideal face-to-face and online course environment ratings for the ACES dimensions of task orientation ($t(169) = -1.42$, $p = .16$, $d' = 0.07$), teacher support ($t(169) = 0.86$, $p = .39$, $d' = 0.04$), or student influence ($t(169) = 0.67$, $p = .50$, $d' = 0.04$).

Table 2

Paired Samples T Tests Comparing Ideal Course Environments

ACES Dimensions	Ideal Face-to-face Course Environment		Ideal Online Course Environment					Cohen's
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	df	*p*	*d'*
Task Orientation	3.03	0.41	3.06	0.42	-1.42	169	.157	0.07
Teacher Support	3.46	0.54	3.44	0.52	0.86	169	.392	0.04
Student Influence	2.56	0.48	2.54	0.51	0.67	169	.503	0.04

*$p < .05$.

Nine one-way ANOVAs were used to determine if there were any significant differences between the independent variables of adult learner age group, adult learner gender, and adult learner race/ethnicity and the dependent variables of mean ACES subscale scores for the ideal online course environment for each of the selected ACES dimensions: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence. As shown in Table 3, results comparing adult learner age group and ideal online course environment ratings at a comprehensive university in south Georgia indicated that the means of the three adult learner age groups were not statistically different for task orientation, $F(2,143) = 0.17$, $p = .84$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$, teacher support, $F(2,143) = 0.81$, $p = .45$, $\eta_p^2 = .01$, or student influence, $F(2,143) = 0.03$, $p = .97$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$, dimensions.

Table 3

ANOVAs for Effect of Age on Online Course Environment

ACES Dimensions	Young Adults		Working-Age Adults		Older Adults		df	F	p	η_p^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				
Task Orientation	3.06	0.41	3.04	0.45	2.86	NA	143	0.17	.843	.00
Teacher Support	3.48	0.53	3.67	0.55	3.57	NA	143	0.81	.446	.01
Student Influence	2.55	0.50	2.58	0.55	2.57	NA	143	0.03	.967	.00

Note. Standard deviation was not available for older adults as there was only one participant who responded in this category.
*$p < .05$.

As shown in Table 4, ideal online course environment ratings at a comprehensive university in south Georgia indicated that the effect of adult learner gender was

significant for task orientation, $F(2,169) = 3.46$, $p = .034$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$, and teacher support, $F(2,169) = 3.09$, $p = .048$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. Based on a Tukey HSD post-hoc analysis, female adult learners ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.40$) rated task orientation of ideal online course environments significantly higher than male adult learners ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.45$, $p = .034$). However, means for female ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.40$) and male ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 0.45$) adult learners were not significantly different from gender neutral/no gender adult learners ($M = 3.11$, $SD = 0.10$, $p \leq .05$) on task orientation. Based on a Tukey HSD post-hoc analysis, female adult learners ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.46$) rated teacher support of ideal online course environments significantly higher than male adult learners ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.69$, $p = .048$). Similar to task orientation, means female ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.46$) and male ($M = 3.24$, $SD = 0.69$) adult learners were not significantly different from gender neutral/no gender adult learners ($M = 3.50$, $SD = 0.71$, $p \leq .05$) on teacher support. Ideal online course environment ratings at a comprehensive university in south Georgia indicated that the effect of adult learner gender was not significant for student influence, $F(2,169) = 1.36$, $p = .261$, $\eta_p^2 = .02$.

Table 4

ANOVAs for Effect of Gender on Online Course Environment

ACES Dimensions	Male		Female		Gender Neutral/ No Gender		df	F	p	η_p^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				
Task Orientation	2.90	0.45	3.11	0.40	3.21	0.10	169	3.46	.034*	.04
Teacher Support	3.24	0.69	3.48	0.46	3.50	0.71	169	3.09	.048*	.04
Student Influence	2.59	0.60	2.52	0.49	3.07	0.30	169	1.36	.261	.02

*p < .05.

As shown in Table 5, ideal online course environment ratings at a comprehensive university in south Georgia indicated that the effect of adult learner race/ethnicity was significant for teacher support, $F(2,165) = 3.43$, $p = .035$, $\eta_p^2 = .04$. Based on a Tukey HSD post-hoc analysis, White adult learners ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.48$) rated teacher support of ideal online course environments significantly higher than Black or African American adult learners ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.55$, $p = .035$). However, means for White ($M = 3.52$, $SD = 0.48$) and Black or African American adult learners ($M = 3.34$, $SD = 0.55$) were not significantly different from other grouped adult learners ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.60$, $p \geq .05$) on teacher support. Ideal online course environment ratings at a comprehensive university in south Georgia indicated that the effect of adult learner race/ethnicity was not significant for task orientation, $F(2,165) = 2.80$, $p = .064$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$ or student influence, $F(2,165) = 0.05$, $p = .954$, $\eta_p^2 = .00$.

Table 5

ANOVAs for Effect of Race/Ethnicity on Online Course Environment

ACES Dimensions	White		Black or African American		Other Grouped		df	F	p	η_p^2
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD				
Task Orientation	3.13	0.39	2.97	0.45	2.99	0.43	165	2.80	.064	.03
Teacher Support	3.52	0.48	3.34	0.55	3.21	0.60	165	3.43	.035*	.04
Student Influence	2.54	0.52	2.54	0.54	2.58	0.49	165	0.05	.954	.00

*p < .05.

Chapter V

CONCLUSIONS

Overview

Colleges and universities around Georgia are implementing interventions and tracking progress towards goals—including better serving at-risk and underrepresented populations, such as adult learners—for the Complete College Georgia initiative to improve degree attainment across higher education in the state (Davis & Anderson, 2015). Online learning is one of the tracked interventions institutions can use in support of Complete College Georgia's goal of employing new pedagogies and innovative instructional strategies that promote student persistence (Davis & Anderson, 2015). Persistence in higher education is a multi-faceted issue, and to date logical interventions have not been shown to consistently improve higher education retention (Barefoot, 2004; Habley et al., 2012; Seidman, 2012). Miglietti and Strange (1998) explained that in order to serve learners well, researchers need to investigate their course environment expectations, teaching style preferences, learning styles, and how such factors influence student success and satisfaction.

Beer and Darkenwald (1989) described how adult learner persistence is influenced by their satisfaction with the learning they engage in, and these sentiments are backed up by other researcher's findings that adult learners who persist in online courses report more satisfaction with their class experiences than adult learners who withdraw (Herbert, 2006; Huett et al., 2008; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Levy, 2007; Müeller, 2008;

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Park & Choi, 2009; Pittenger & Doering, 2010; Reio & Crim, 2013; Willging & Johnson, 2009; Yen & Liu, 2009). Darkenwald and Gavin (1987) shared, "discrepancies between students' expectations of a specific classroom environment and their actual experiences in that environment promote dissatisfaction" (p. 152). Darkenwald and Valentine's (1986) ACES measures adult learner's perceptions and expectations of the social climate of educational environments. Based on student ACES ratings, instructors can adjust their course environments to align with student perceptions and expectations (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986) in an attempt to promote student satisfaction and persistence. The theoretical framework for this study is research on adult learners' social climate expectations of ideal course environments via the use of the ACES (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986). Whereas the ACES has seven subscales addressing affiliation, involvement, organization and clarity, personal goal attainment, task orientation, teacher support, and student influence (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986), the following subscales were selected for inclusion in this study: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence.

Research on adult learner persistence concludes that it is a multifaceted topic with many contributing factors (Aragon & Johnson, 2008; Ausburn, 2004; Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000; Herbert, 2006; Huett et al., 2008; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Kariuki, 1995; Levy, 2004; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Müeller, 2008; Murphy & Cifuentes, 2001; Park & Choi, 2009; Pittenger & Doering, 2010; Reio & Crim, 2013; Wessel et al., 2009; Willging & Johnson, 2009; Wlodkowski, 2008; Young & Duncan, 2014). As such, I reviewed many avenues and found a congruence between select ACES

dimensions and research on learning communities. Murphy and Cifuentes (2001) concluded adult learners engaging in courses high in task orientation, teacher support, and student influence results in a sense of community for learners within the course environment. Researchers indicated learning communities influence the social climate of the course environment (Ausburn, 2004; Huett et al., 2008; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Müeller, 2008; Murphy & Cifuentes, 2001; Wlodkowski, 2008; Young & Duncan, 2014) and promote student persistence (Huett et al., 2008; Müeller, 2008). As such, the elements of task orientation, teacher support, and student influence were selected for further investigation in this research, not to measure development of learning communities in individual courses, but as a means of identifying specific instructional strategies in adult learner online courses that may positively affect course social climate through the use of learning community elements.

Task orientation is operationally defined as the extent to which instructor and students remain focused on the subject matter of the course through the accomplishment of class activities (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990). Teacher support is operationally defined as the instructor's sensitivity, help, encouragement, and friendship towards students (Darkenwald & Gavin, 1987; Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990). Student influence is operationally defined as a learner centered course environment that allows for students' collaborative impact on the class (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Imel, 1991; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990).

The purpose of this research is identify adult learners' expectations of ideal online and face-to-face course environments at a comprehensive university in south Georgia

using the ACES and determine to what extent demographics influences adult learners' expectations of the ideal online course environment based on the selected ACES dimensions: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence.

1. Are there any significant differences between adult learners' expectations of ideal face-to-face course environments and their expectations of ideal online course environments using three subscales of the ACES: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence?

2. Are there any significant differences between adult learner demographics (age group, gender, and race/ethnicity) and their expectations of ideal online course environments using three subscales of the ACES: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence?

Research Question 1

Three paired samples *t* tests were utilized to analyze adult learner's ratings of their ideal face-to-face course and online environments on each of the selected ACES dimensions: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence. No significant differences were identified between adult learners' expectations of ideal face-to-face course environments and their expectations of ideal online course environments based on the ACES dimensions of task orientation, teacher support, and student influence.

Research Question 2

Nine one-way ANOVAs were used to compare adult learner demographics (age group, gender, and race/ethnicity) and their expectations of ideal online course environments using three subscales of the ACES: task orientation, teacher support, and student influence. No significant differences were identified between adult learner age

group and ideal online course environment ratings for task orientation, teacher support, or student influence. Female adult learners had significantly higher ratings for task orientation and teacher support in ideal online course environments than male adult learners; however, ratings for both were within the agreement range. There was not a significant difference in student influence expectations based on gender; overall, participants' ratings trended towards agreement with expecting such elements in their online courses. White adult learners reported significantly higher ratings for teacher support in ideal online course environments than Black or African American adult learners; however, ratings for both were within the agreement range. There were no significant differences for task orientation and student influence based on race/ethnicity, of which participant ratings trended towards agreement for expectations of task orientation and student influence in ideal online course environments.

Discussions and Implications

Based on this study, adult learners' at a comprehensive university in south Georgia expect similar aspects of task orientation, teacher support, and student influence regardless of type of ideal course environment (face-to-face and online). This aligns with previous research that face-to-face and video conferencing course environments were comparable (Freddolino, 1996; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000), as well as, other course environment variations (Kelly & Bronstein, 2003; Miglietti & Strange, 1998) when employing the ACES. Freddolino (1996) and Freddolino and Sutherland (2000) found adult learners have similar course environment preferences in actual face-to-face and distance video conferencing MSW course environments. Kelly and Bronstein (2003) found adult learners in face-to-face MSW course environments with one course utilizing

a folder feedback system and the other course not using such a mechanism were also similar in their course environment preferences. Miglietti and Strange (1998) found adult learners in remedial university courses (English and mathematics) reported similar actual course environment preferences as well. However, it should be noted that these studies utilized actual face-to-face course environments (Freddolino, 1996; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000; Kelly & Bronstein, 2003; Miglietti & Strange, 1998) and did not compare ideal online and face-to-face course environment expectations. Results from this study differ from Stocks and Freddolino's (2000) finding that course environments were not similar. When comparing actual online MSW sections, they found that adult learners rated online course environments with more interactivity significantly higher than traditional online course environments. Overall, results of this study lend support that adult learners at a comprehensive university in south Georgia have similar expectations for online and face-to-face course environments and that instructors who teach both face-to-face and online can confidently plan for and facilitate the social climate of their courses with aspects of task orientation, teacher support, and student influence, regardless of course delivery modality.

Whereas there were no significant differences based on age for the ACES dimensions in this study, similar to Kelly and Bronstein (2003) and Miglietti and Strange (1998), there was only a single older adult (65+) participant in the current study. The mean age of learners in Kelly and Bronstein's (2003) study was 30.78 (*SD* = 9.70); however, they provided no explanation for their lack of significant age findings. Miglietti and Strange (1998) attributed lack of significant age findings in their study to dichotomous categorization of traditional age (18-24 years old) and adult learners (25-53

years old) masking potential differences. Adult learners at a comprehensive university in

south Georgia, irrespective of age, expect aspects of task orientation, teacher support, and

student influence in their ideal online course environments. Overall, this result implies

instructors at a comprehensive university in south Georgia teaching young adults,

working-age adults, and older adults in the same course may not need to be concerned

about varied age distribution shifting the social climate of their online courses, with

respect to student expectations of task orientation, teacher support, and student influence

(Darkenwald & Novak, 1997).

Based on this study, female adult learners at a comprehensive university in south

Georgia reported expecting significantly more task orientation and teacher support than

male adult learners did in relation to ideal online course environments. Additionally,

there were no significant differences on the ACES dimension of student influence in

relation to gender. The results in this study are somewhat congruent with Kariuki's

(1995) findings. Kariuki found female students rated teacher support and student

influence in ideal course environments significantly higher than male students, but

females and males reported similar expectations of task orientation for ideal course

environments. Though task orientation and teacher support ratings in the current study

were significantly different for females and males, they both noted agreement with

expecting elements of task orientation and teacher support in their ideal online course

environments. In such programs as education and biological/life sciences, that are

majority female learner programs in USG comprehensive universities (U.S. Department

of Education, 2017), differences in adult learner expectations, based on gender, may be

more apparent. Interestingly, student influence ratings trended towards agreement,

regardless of gender, indicating similar adult learner expectations of collaborative decision-making in ideal online course environments.

Stavredes (2011) attributed some gender differences in online courses to the learner's background and upbringing in a predominantly masculine or feminine culture. Stavredes noted that masculine cultures place emphasis on a competitive educational setting where males are more dominant than females, whereas, feminine cultures emphasize a more communal, less competitive environment with overlap between male and female roles. Stavredes went on to recommend instructors take learner's culture into account when describing expectations for student participation and team involvement to anticipate and alleviate potential issues based on gender roles from learner's cultural backgrounds. With this in mind, some of the variation in female and male adult learners' expectations of task orientation and teacher support in ideal online course environments, in the current study, could be a result of the participants' cultural backgrounds. Based on this study, there were not significant differences on student influence expectations of ideal online course environments, based on gender. Given Stavredes' ideals of gender differences based on cultural background, no difference for student influence, with participants' ratings trending towards agreement could mean that there is a universal expectation, regardless of gender, for adult learners to actively participate in course decisions and engage collaboratively in their ideal online course environments or that there was not a significant number of participants from different cultures to identify a true difference.

Based on this study, White adult learners at a comprehensive university in south Georgia reported expecting significantly more teacher support than Black or African

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American adult learners did in relation to ideal online course environments. This result differs from Kelly and Bronstein's (2003) ACES research where no significant differences were identified in relation to race/ethnicity. Kelly and Bronstein did not provide an explanation for the lack of significance in regard to race, but there were few minority participants in their study. Though teacher support ratings for White adult learners and Black or African American adult learners were significantly different, they both noted agreement with expecting elements of teachers support in their online courses. Such a difference may become more important in programs and courses with higher White-Black or African American learner ratio. In such programs as education, engineering, biological/life sciences, business management and administrative services, physical sciences, and mathematics, that are majority White learner programs in USG comprehensive universities (U.S. Department of Education, 2017), differences in adult learner expectations, based on race/ethnicity, may be more apparent. Whereas there was not a significant difference in task orientation and student influence expectations based on race/ethnicity, overall, participants' ratings trended towards agreement with expecting such elements in their online courses.

In addition to cultural differences influencing learner gender interactions based on masculine-feminine cultures, Stavredes (2011) described other cultural differences that may affect online learners: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and individualism-collectivism and highlighted regions with predominant features. Cultures with different power distances may see and expect differences in teacher versus learner centered course environments and dependent versus collaborative learning (Stavredes, 2011). Cultures with different approaches to uncertainty avoidance may see and expect differences in

how learners approach wanting the correct answer versus participating in engaging

discussions, instructor as authority with right answers versus allowing instructor to share

he may not know an answer, and tolerance for expressing emotions and differences

(Stavredes, 2011). Cultures with different approaches to individualism and collectivism

may see and expect differences in the purpose of education as learning for learning's sake

versus to learning how to do perform a task/job, acceptance of learner initiative, and

expectations for learner discussion (Stavredes, 2011). This study identified significant

differences between White adult learners' and Black or African American adult learners'

expectations of teacher support in ideal online course environments; based on Stavredes'

descriptions of how different cultures approach learning, there may be additional

race/ethnicity categorizations where difference may be apparent given larger numbers of

minority participation or utilization of different race/ethnicity groupings. No significant

differences for student influence, with participants' ratings trending towards agreement,

could mean that there is a universal expectation, regardless of race/ethnicity, of adult

learners to actively participate in course decisions and engage collaboratively in their

ideal online course environments or, based on Stavredes' cultural descriptions that there

was not a significant number of participants from different cultures to identify a true

difference.

 The effect sizes of statistically significant findings for this study were small, and

other ACES research reported varied effect sizes (Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000;

Rowbotham, 2010; Stocks & Freddolino, 2000). Freddolino and Sutherland (2000)

identified moderate effect sizes when comparing face-to-face and distance video

conferencing course environments of their policy content course, small effect sizes for

ACES comparisons between face-to-face and distance course environments overall, and very small effect sizes when comparing face-to-face and separate distance sites. Rowbotham (2010) found significant results for teacher support, organization and clarity, and involvement dimensions related to teacher responsiveness with small effect sizes. Stocks and Freddolino (2000) utilized a modified version of the ACES, and their course environment comparisons were similar with very small effect sizes.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study provides an initial investigation into adult learners' expectations of ideal online and face-to-face course environments at a comprehensive university in south Georgia. Future research should work to increase the sample size by reducing potential for participant fatigue, additional marketing techniques, perhaps by excluding ACES items not of interest and offering different participant incentives that are more appealing, and consider additional methods for increasing generalizability such as adding multiple institutions. Some researchers modified the ACES resulting in reducing the scales items (Beer & Darkenwald, 1989; Freddolino, 1996; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000; Langenbach & Aagaard, 1990; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Miglietti & Strange, 1998; Stocks & Freddolino, 2000), which could be one way to reduce participant fatigue. Researchers examining similar variables to this study should consider alternate sampling methods that allow for more representation for groups underrepresented in the current study: older adults and minority students. A larger sample size with more representative participation could allow significant differences to be more apparent or provide further evidence of similarity between groups.

Researchers should consider replicating or expanding on previous research to add further evidence for directional hypotheses, specifically for the social work discipline (Freddolino, 1996; Freddolino & Sutherland, 2000; Kelly & Bronstein, 2003; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Stocks & Freddolino, 2000) or to other programs of interest. Researchers interested in course-related learning communities may benefit from utilizing the ACES to further examine the dimensions of task orientation, teacher support, and student influence (Ausburn, 2004; Huett et al., 2008; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Müeller, 2008; Murphy & Cifuentes, 2001; Wlodkowski, 2008; Young & Duncan, 2014).

Additionally, further research is needed to explore adult learner perceptions of actual face-to-face and online course environments compared to their ideal face-to-face and online course environment expectations to determine additional similarities or differences in adult learner perceptions and expectations (Darkenwald & Valentine, 1986; Kariuki, 1995). In order to expand on the connection between the social climate of course environments and potential for learning community elements (task orientation, teacher support, and student influence) to influence student satisfaction and persistence, research is needed between similar courses that use and do not incorporate formal learning communities (Ausburn, 2004; Huett et al., 2008; Ivankova & Stick, 2007; Littlefield & Roberson, 2005; Müeller, 2008; Murphy & Cifuentes, 2001; Wlodkowski, 2008; Young & Duncan, 2014). Whereas much research has focused on higher education persistence, investigators should further explore this multi-faceted subject from the lens of adult learner's social exchanges within the course environment to determine

perceptions and expectations of adult learners who persist and those who withdraw (Huett et al., 2008; Tanyel & Griffin, 2014).

Conclusion

Researchers agree that institutions are implementing logically sound interventions to address issues with higher education persistence, albeit without substantial impact to retention and graduation rates, and they call for a shift in organizational culture that expands focus on student success to further compliment strategies for increasing persistence (Barefoot, 2004; Habley et al., 2012; Seidman, 2012). Darkenwald and Valentine (1986) found moderate to strong positive correlations between adult learners' ratings of success and satisfaction with the subscales of task orientation, teacher support, and student influence. This research provides faculty and administrators at a comprehensive university in south Georgia with a glimpse of their adult learners' expectations of ideal online course environments, specifically with regard to anticipated elements of task orientation, teacher support, and student influence.

Whereas this is an initial exploration into adult learners' expectations of ideal online and face-to-face course environments at a single institution, this research is important due to its employing the ACES for use in comparing the social climate of online courses for task orientation, teacher support, and student influence. Findings identifying significant differences related to gender and race/ethnicity provide insights to instructors about learner demographic characteristics that could influence student expectations. Differentiated instruction is a teaching strategy built on the understanding that learners are characteristically different based on demographics, academic readiness, interest, and learning styles and effective instruction that allows for appropriate variation

can meet an array of student needs (Dosch & Zidon, 2014; Lightwies, 2013; Milman, 2014). Assessing adult learner perceptions and expectations for the social climate of course environments, via the ACES, could contribute to overall learner profiles and inform instructors on which variations of course content, activities, assignments, and assessments to effectively instruct students (Dosch & Zidon, 2014; Lightwies, 2013; Milman, 2014). Based on this information, instructors at the comprehensive university in south Georgia will know that female adult learners expect higher levels of task orientation and teacher support in online courses than male adult learners. Instructors can adjust their teaching strategies accordingly with focus on relevant course activities based on the course subject, keeping discussions related to course topics, establishing deadlines, encouraging students, demonstrating care for students' feelings, respecting students, and helping them to succeed. Further, instructors at the comprehensive university in south Georgia will also know that White adult learners expect higher levels of teacher support in online courses than Black or African American adult learners and can plan and implement instructional methods that align with student expectations of help and encouragement, care for students' feelings, and respect.

Participant ratings were not varied for every dimension in the present study; there were areas where participants reported similar expectations, on the selected ACES dimensions: face-to-face and online ideal course environment (task orientation, teachers support, and student influence), age (task orientation, teachers support, and student influence), gender for student influence, and race/ethnicity for task orientation and student influence. These findings support similarities between what adult learner participants are looking for in terms of ideal online course environments. These

similarities are as important as differences in informing instructors' teaching strategies. These findings provide feedback about which elements diverse adult learners at a comprehensive university in south Georgia expect in online course environments, and as such, instructors can plan to maintain consistent methods for elements where no significant differences were noted and focus attention on varying other aspects based on differing student expectations.

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APPENDIX A:

Institutional Review Board Exemption

Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

PROTOCOL NUMBER:	03394-2016	**INVESTIGATOR:**	Mr. Vincent Spezzo
		CO – INVESTIGATOR:	Ms. Amanda King
PROJECT TITLE:	*Using the ACES to Determine Developmental Focus for Online Course Instructors.*		

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **Exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under Exemption **Category 2**. You may begin your study immediately. If the nature of the research project changes such that exemption criteria may no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *Keep all research data in a secure manner for a minimum of three years following the completion of your research.*
- *You must complete and maintain the Research Participant Payment Log with research data.*

☒ *If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at irb@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.*

Elizabeth W. Olphie   09/01/2016

Elizabeth W. Olphie, IRB Administrator   Date

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.
Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.

Revised: 06.02.16

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APPENDIX B:

Participant Marketing E-mail

Attention VSU students,

We are conducting a research study on VSU student's preferences in both online and face to face courses. Students who participate will be asked to rank descriptions of their ideal online classroom and ideal face to face classroom. If you would like to participant please follow this link to learn more about the study and answer the questionnaire https://valdosta.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_d5bRgz627nQEh1j.

This survey is anonymous. No one, including the researchers, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study.

Along with the study we are also doing a drawing for 4 $25 Amazon Gift cards. Participants in the study will receive a message at the end of the survey with a link to a separate survey to collect their entry into the drawing. Individuals who participate in the study will not have their results connected in any way to their participation in the drawing. Separate surveys are used so that no information that is collected on one survey is connected to the other and study participants will receive the link regardless of whether or not they answer all or any of the questions in the study.

For questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research or if you would like to receive information about the results of this study once it has completed, please contact the researcher Vincent Spezzo at vmspezzo@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259-5045 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Thank you,

Researchers

Vincent Spezzo
vmspezzo@valdosta.edu

Amanda King
ajking@valdosta.edu

Additional information about the drawing:

The drawing will occur on Dec. 12th, 2016, at 1 pm and will be conducted by a third party individual whom is not associated with the research study titled "Using the Adult Classroom Environment Scale to Determine Developmental Focus for Online Course Instructors." All entrants will be assigned a number at random by a computer program

and then the individual conducting the drawing will randomly select 4 winning numbers. All drawing entrants will be sent a list of winner's via email within 1 week of the drawings completion. Winners will be sent individual emails with instructions on how to claim their prize. All prizes must be picked up within 3 months of the drawing or be subject to forfeit. Please note this raffle is open to any individual regardless of full, partial, or no participation in the research study titled "Using the Adult Classroom Environment Scale to Determine Developmental Focus for Online Course Instructors." with the exception of those under the age of 18, persons who reside outside of the United States, the person conducting the drawing, the researchers involved in the projected titled "Using the Adult Classroom Environment Scale to Determine Developmental Focus for Online Course Instructors.", any individuals with direct interest in the research study, and any of the aforementioned individual's direct family members.   Participation in the research study titled "Using the Adult Classroom Environment Scale to Determine Developmental Focus for Online Course Instructors." does not increase your odds of winning the drawing. If you would like to entry the drawing without participating in the research study, you may do so by following this link https://valdosta.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3O9ER2sk44PYhP7 . Only 1 entry per person will be accepted and duplicate entries will be removed prior to the drawing.

APPENDIX C:

Adult Classroom Environment Scale Scoring

Only the ACES dimensions utilized for this study are included for scoring purposes.

Reverse-coded items are denoted by (-).

Task Orientation

    The teacher seldom talks about things not related to the course

    Students regularly meet assignment deadlines

    Students often discuss things not related to course content (-)

    Activities not related to course objectives are kept to a minimum

    Students do a lot of work in the class

    Getting work done is very important in the class

    The class is more a social hour than a place to learn (-)

Teacher Support

    The teacher makes little effort to help students succeed (-)

    The teacher talks down to students (-)

    The teacher encourages students to do their best

    The teacher cares about students' feelings

    The teacher respects students as individuals

    The teacher likes the students in the class

    The teacher cares whether or not the students learn

Student Influence

    Students help to decide the topics to be covered in class

    The teacher makes all the decisions in the class (-)

    The teacher sticks to the lesson plan regardless of student interest (-)

Students participate in setting course objectives

The teacher rarely dominates classroom discussion

Students feel free to question course requirements

The teacher seldom insists that you do things his or her way

APPENDIX D:

Adult Classroom Environment Scale in this Study

You are being asked to participate in a survey research project entitled "Using the Adult Classroom Environment Scale to Determine Developmental Focus for Online Course Instructors" which is being conducted by Vincent Spezzo and Amanda King, Students at Valdosta State University. This survey is anonymous. No one, including the researchers, will be able to associate your responses with your identity. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to take the survey, to stop responding at any time, or to skip any questions that you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your completion of the survey serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project and your certification that you are 18 or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Vincent Spezzo at vmspezzo@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-259-5045 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Directions: The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out what your ideal face to face class is like. This is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers. Please give your honest opinions about your ideal face to face class. Your answers are confidential. The questionnaire will take you about 10 minutes
to complete.

We thank you in advance for taking the time to complete the questionnaire carefully.

For EACH of the statements below, go through the following steps:

- Read the statement carefully and decide how well it describes your ideal face to face class.
- Indicate your opinion by selecting one of the choices provided. Be sure to mark a choice for each and every statement; please do not leave any blanks.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students help to decide the topics to be covered in class	○	○	○	○

The class is flexible enough to meet the needs of individual students	❍	❍	❍	❍
The teacher comes to class prepared	❍	❍	❍	❍
Students are often bored in the class	❍	❍	❍	❍
The teacher seldom talks about things not related to the course	❍	❍	❍	❍
Many students think the class is not relevant to their lives	❍	❍	❍	❍
Students often ask the teacher questions	❍	❍	❍	❍
The students in the class work well together	❍	❍	❍	❍
Learning objectives were made clear at the start of the course	❍	❍	❍	❍
The teacher makes all the decisions in the class	❍	❍	❍	❍
Most students enjoy the class	❍	❍	❍	❍

The teacher expects every student to learn the exact same things	○	○	○	○
Students in the class can select assignments that are of personal interest to them	○	○	○	○
The teacher makes little effort to help students succeed	○	○	○	○
The teacher talks down to students	○	○	○	○
Students regularly meet assignment deadlines	○	○	○	○
Students often share their personal experiences during class	○	○	○	○
Students often discuss things not related to course content	○	○	○	○
Activities not related to course objectives are kept to a minimum	○	○	○	○

Most students look forward to the class	○	○	○	○
Most students in the class pay attention to what the teacher is saying	○	○	○	○
The class is well organized	○	○	○	○
The teacher encourages students to do their best	○	○	○	○
Students do a lot of work in the class	○	○	○	○
A few students dominate the discussions in class	○	○	○	○
The class lacks a clear sense of direction	○	○	○	○
The subject matter is adequately covered	○	○	○	○
The teacher sticks to the lesson plan regardless of student interest	○	○	○	○
Most students take part in class discussions	○	○	○	○

Students do not know what is expected of them	❍	❍	❍	❍
The students in the class learn little from one another	❍	❍	❍	❍
Most students in the class achieve their personal learning goals	❍	❍	❍	❍
The students in the class enjoy working together	❍	❍	❍	❍
The teacher cares about students' feelings	❍	❍	❍	❍
The teacher tries to find out what individual students want to learn	❍	❍	❍	❍
Getting work done is very important in the class	❍	❍	❍	❍
Students participate in setting course objectives	❍	❍	❍	❍
The class is more a social hour than a place to learn	❍	❍	❍	❍

The teacher rarely dominates classroom discussion	○	○	○	○
The teacher respects students as individuals	○	○	○	○
Learning activities follow a logical sequence	○	○	○	○
Students seldom interact with one another during class	○	○	○	○
Students have the opportunity to learn at their own pace	○	○	○	○
The teacher likes the students in the class	○	○	○	○
Students in the class feel free to disagree with one another	○	○	○	○
Friendships have developed in the class	○	○	○	○
Students feel free to question course requirements	○	○	○	○

The teacher cares whether or not the students learn	○	○	○	○
The teacher seldom insists that you do things his or her way	○	○	○	○

Directions: The purpose of this questionnaire is to find out what your ideal online class is like. This is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers. Please give your honest opinions about your ideal online class. Your answers are confidential. The questionnaire will take you about 10 minutes to complete.

We thank you in advance for taking the time to complete the questionnaire carefully.

For EACH of the statements below, go through the following steps:

- Read the statement carefully and decide how well it describes your ideal online class.
- Indicate your opinion by selecting one of the choices provided. Be sure to mark a choice for each and every statement; please do not leave any blanks.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
Students help to decide the topics to be covered in class	○	○	○	○
The class is flexible enough to meet the needs of individual students	○	○	○	○
The teacher comes to class prepared	○	○	○	○

Students are often bored in the class	○	○	○	○
The teacher seldom talks about things not related to the course	○	○	○	○
Many students think the class is not relevant to their lives	○	○	○	○
Students often ask the teacher questions	○	○	○	○
The students in the class work well together	○	○	○	○
Learning objectives were made clear at the start of the course	○	○	○	○
The teacher makes all the decisions in the class	○	○	○	○
Most students enjoy the class	○	○	○	○
The teacher expects every student to learn the exact same things	○	○	○	○

Students in the class can select assignments that are of personal interest to them	○	○	○	○
The teacher makes little effort to help students succeed	○	○	○	○
The teacher talks down to students	○	○	○	○
Students regularly meet assignment deadlines	○	○	○	○
Students often share their personal experiences during class	○	○	○	○
Students often discuss things not related to course content	○	○	○	○
Activities not related to course objectives are kept to a minimum	○	○	○	○
Most students look forward to the class	○	○	○	○

Most students in the class pay attention to what the teacher is saying	❍	❍	❍	❍
The class is well organized	❍	❍	❍	❍
The teacher encourages students to do their best	❍	❍	❍	❍
Students do a lot of work in the class	❍	❍	❍	❍
A few students dominate the discussions in class	❍	❍	❍	❍
The class lacks a clear sense of direction	❍	❍	❍	❍
The subject matter is adequately covered	❍	❍	❍	❍
The teacher sticks to the lesson plan regardless of student interest	❍	❍	❍	❍
Most students take part in class discussions	❍	❍	❍	❍
Students do not know what is expected of them	❍	❍	❍	❍

The students in the class learn little from one another	❍	❍	❍	❍
Most students in the class achieve their personal learning goals	❍	❍	❍	❍
The students in the class enjoy working together	❍	❍	❍	❍
The teacher cares about students' feelings	❍	❍	❍	❍
The teacher tries to find out what individual students want to learn	❍	❍	❍	❍
Getting work done is very important in the class	❍	❍	❍	❍
Students participate in setting course objectives	❍	❍	❍	❍
The class is more a social hour than a place to learn	❍	❍	❍	❍

The teacher rarely dominates classroom discussion	○	○	○	○
The teacher respects students as individuals	○	○	○	○
Learning activities follow a logical sequence	○	○	○	○
Students seldom interact with one another during class	○	○	○	○
Students have the opportunity to learn at their own pace	○	○	○	○
The teacher likes the students in the class	○	○	○	○
Students in the class feel free to disagree with one another	○	○	○	○
Friendships have developed in the class	○	○	○	○
Students feel free to question course requirements	○	○	○	○

The teacher cares whether or not the students learn	○	○	○	○
The teacher seldom insists that you do things his or her way	○	○	○	○

What is your age?
Please indicate your exact age with the slider (or type it in directly to the right).

Please indicate the gender you most identify yourself as.
○ Male
○ Female
○ Gender Neutral/No Gender

Ethnicity origin (or Race): Please specify the ethnicity you most identify yourself as.
○ White
○ Black or African American
○ American Indian or Alaska Native
○ Asian/ Pacific Islander
○ Hispanic or Latino
○ Other

Thank you for participating in our study. Please do not forget to also participate in the drawing associated with this study for your chance to win 1 of 4 $25 Amazon gift cards.

Follow this link to enter:
https://valdosta.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_3O9ER2sk44PYhP7

APPENDIX E:

Permission to Use the Adult Classroom Environment Scale

From: Joan Darkenwald [mailto:joan@thedecolas.com]
Sent: Sunday, August 04, 2013 4:46 PM
To: Amanda J King; Vincent M Spezzo
Subject: contacting Dr. Darkenwald

Amanda j. King-Spezzo,abd & Vincent m. King-Spezzo,abd:

YOU HAVE MY PEMISSION TO UE aces FIR YIUR DUSSERTATION
RESEARCHi DO NOT HAVE AN E-MAIL ACCOUNT. You can reach me by phone at
[908] 658-3755.

Gordon darkenwald

NOTE: A follow up call was conducted between the researchers and Darkenwald to
clarify the nature and extent of the permission to use the Adult Classroom Environment
Scale.