

# **What Is It Like to be a Member of Cohort Ten, a Blended Technology HRD Program Serving Undergraduate Students in Rural Communities in Arkansas, U.S.A.?**

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*This research investigates the life, work, and education of students in Human Resource Development (HRD) Cohort Ten, a distance learning program for non-traditional undergraduate students in Arkansas. The study has identified commonalities in perceptions regarding accessibility, sense of achievement, and other themes related to the program. The blended technology approach included compressed interactive video (CIV); Blackboard, a web-based classroom management system; and a face-to-face weekend gathering each semester of students and faculty from current cohorts.*

**Keywords:** Distance Education, Blended Technology, Undergraduate HRD Program

Distance education is one example of separation through the imposition of technological time and space. Separation in time and space is an artifact of many emerging technologies" (Swartz & Biggs, 1999, p. 83). The term blended technology refers to the delivery of a Human Resource Development (HRD) program through compressed interactive video (CIV, sometimes referred to as ITV) via satellite transmission linking four sites in Arkansas; Blackboard, a web-based classroom management system; and face-to-face meeting of all program students once each semester. Lawless and Brown consider that technology in education "merely provides a forum for effective learning" (1997, p. 128). In the Arkansas HRD program, the important considerations were to ensure that the blend involved the strengths of each learning environment and minimized the weaknesses. Hence, "...recognition of prior work experience and learning, weekend scheduling, required internships, or articulation between 2-year and 4-year institutions, to our knowledge, this is the first HRD program which combines all of these elements" (Hinton, 1998, p. 17).

The numbers of students enrolled in distance learning courses are increasing, and the trend is expected to continue. These courses can overcome obstacles of family and career schedules, distance to campus, and specific class schedules (Kellog Commission, 1998). We believe these are also contributing factors to the longevity of the Arkansas HRD program.

## **Research Problem and Question**

Between 1996 and 2004, the undergraduate Human Resource Development program enrolled 470 students and graduated 279, which is a graduation rate of 59.4%. The 2005 and 2006 cohorts consisting of 154 students are progressing toward graduation. Cohorts have ranged in size from 36 students in the early years to a high of 83 students in later years. The question remains, Will the undergraduate HRD program continue to maintain enrollment? What circumstances are present in the life, work and education of students that make this particular program desirable?

This interpretative study investigates how Human Resource Development (HRD) Cohort Ten students perceive life, work, and education as members of a technology-intensive, distance-learning program that serves both undergraduate students in rural communities in the state of Arkansas, as well as a small group of non-traditional students on the main University campus. The off-site classrooms are in community or technical college locations, which provide reasonable access for most residents of the state. Hence, students enter a cohort in either an odd or even-numbered year, according to their home residence. Should students move during the two-year cohort period to an area not having a current program site, they might have to postpone their second year of study unless another cohort is established in their new location.

Using the web to enhance traditional classroom instruction is a trend that is growing rapidly in higher education (Ko & Rossen, 2004). Our interest is not in distance education as a whole, but in the interactions between students and a particular program. Since qualitative research is time and context bound, it is difficult to make inferences that apply across time and context to all distance education classrooms. This HRD program occurred in a specific context, with a specific group of people, in specific places, in specific situations, and at specific times within the strictures of distance education technology. The significance of this research lies in the notion of transfer (Swartz &

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Biggs, 1999). Cohort Ten has experienced distance learning with blended technology in their HRD program. What can Cohort Ten students tell us which provides feedback for programmatic change as well as insight into the blended technology environment? This study follows the protocol developed for Cohort Nine, the research results of which were presented at the Fifth Asian International HRD Conference in Malaysia in December, 2006.

## **Subjects**

Eleven Cohort Ten students volunteered to be interviewed in the spring of 2006 and again in the fall of 2006. These students had joined the HRD program in fall 2005, fulfilling enrollment requirements that included at least five years full-time employment. In addition, they had completed two years of undergraduate work, so their remaining studies corresponded to junior and senior year classes. They also were employed full-time. In their description of students in distance education courses, Tallent-Runnels, et al. (2006) found that “the majority of students using online services were older than the typical undergraduate student. These students were adults who had significant roles in the community and were highly motivated and focused on achieving specific learning outcomes” (p. 112). Graff in 2003 postulated that nontraditional students in distance education had a “large number of different learning styles,” even though they were uniformly highly motivated (as cited in Tallent-Runnels, et al., 2006, p. 112).

## **Theoretical Framework**

The approach the researchers chose for this study can be characterized as hermeneutic phenomenology. We used an interpretive approach in our examination of how students perceived their work and life experiences in the Cohort Ten context. Taylor described the object of the interpretation as “to make something clear or coherent that was previously unclear or incoherent” (cited in Bredo & Feinberg, 1982, p. 123). Bredo and Feinberg (1982) described the hermeneutic inquiry process as one that used a framework or system to generate facts which themselves were then used to test the adequacy of the framework. They describe it much like a artist attempts to paint what is seen, but every stroke changes the way the artist sees the object; therefore the painting is being constantly corrected. “...the hermeneutic process may be continued until an adequately coherent interpretation is reached” (p. 124).

## **Qualitative Methodology**

Eleven Cohort Ten students volunteered to be interviewed in the spring 2006 and fall 2006. The volunteers were drawn from different program sites, ensuring a geographic representation; no volunteers were excluded from the study. The three interviews with each student were conducted in person or by telephone. The initial interviews were conducted at the end of the first year in the program. Second interviews were conducted during the third semester of the program, and the third interview was conducted after all cohort classes were completed. “Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to made explicit” (Patton, 1990, p. 278). All interviews were taped and transcribed verbatim.

In the examination of participant texts from the first interviews, we aimed for inter-subjective reliability by not considering a theme unless at least five participants expressed a commonality in their experiences. The second interview confirmed the utility of this approach as the themes began to resonate with more of the participants. “One major feature ... of well-collected qualitative data is that they focus on naturally occurring, ordinary events in natural settings” which gives us a picture of what “real life” is like (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10).

## **Interview One: Interview Questions**

During the first interview, the 11 volunteers were asked to describe their experiences in the HRD program. The questions were non-directive and open-ended, such as: What is a typical class day like? If you could describe your experience in three words, what would they be? Is there a particular incident in class that sticks in your memory? What is it like to be a student in HRD Cohort Ten? Was there anything else (asked repeatedly)? The interviews of the first round were 60 to 110 minutes long and were conducted in person or by telephone. A thematic analysis of the transcriptions was conducted to discover commonalties among study participant experiences. As students related their experiences and perceptions of studies, work, and personal life, each response was followed with a probing question to elicit further the deepest feelings and perceptions they held. The researchers were seeking to listen, discover, and understand what it was like to be a student in Cohort Ten. Van Manen’s (1990) method of bracketing was used, where the interviewer is expected to put aside any experiences, feelings, or perceptions that might bias his or her ability to be true to the subject text conveyed during the interpretive research process.

## Interview Two: Themes and Analysis

The texts generated from the initial interviews were reviewed, searching for themes common to the life experiences shared by the participants. After notating such themes, the texts were reread, writing and rewriting what was believed to be descriptions of the themes that represented our understanding of the meaning of what it was like to be a student in HRD Cohort Nine. We looked for a response generally shared by five or more participants to represent a theme. The second interview, conducted midway through the first semester of the second year of their program asked study participants to react to summaries of preliminary findings about study themes. We then re-interviewed the participants, sharing descriptions of the themes to enable the participants to reflect once again upon the central questions, and to determine how the themes resonated with their own experience. These interviews were from 15 to 45 minutes long. Eleven themes initially emerged, from which closely-related themes were combined to generate nine major themes. From a review of the texts generated by the participant observations during the second interview sessions, the themes were collapsed into the following eight clusters, with three sub-themes:

- Accessible/Structured
- Achievement
- Cohort Group Support
- Educational/Enlightening
- Personal Interaction
- Stressful
- Technology
- Useful/Transfer to Work

### *Accessible/Structured*

Mark found that through a blended course technology, he had an opportunity otherwise unavailable to him. “I like the fact that you can take one of your courses in person,...and that you can combine that with on-line and have other courses on-line using Blackboard; I could not do it in any other fashion...because I do work full-time and that's the only way I could.” Naomi saw the HRD program providing a flexible way to complete her degree: “How do I get to a Bachelor's degree with something that is feasible and useable in my field, because I had moved more into doing community education and adult education, so it's been a really good fit.” She added “I can, at my own timeframe, log in and work issues in the course, but yet still have the structure, not only within the course, but within the program as a whole.” Alexis was faced with a different dilemma:

For a while it seemed that I was actually doing better than the students who were graduating from college, because I had the experience that they didn't have....I ended up supervising a lot of these people; I was receiving higher pay, better jobs; but at some point, it levels out and then I reached a point where I couldn't advance because I didn't have my degree. There was one job in particular--I could've had a degree in anything, it wouldn't have mattered--but without the degree, I couldn't advance to the next level.

The literature presented some caveats, particularly that success in distance learning requires that equipment function properly and “both students and faculty are well-prepared for the learning experience” (Yeaworth, et al, 1995, p. 232). Other distance education difficulty reported included adaptation of instructional materials and “faculty interest, student adjustment, scheduling, institutional support, and student-faculty contact” (Siegel, Jennings, et. al, 1998, p. 73). Swartz & Biggs (1999) recorded that the main differences between traditional and distance education “appeared to be classroom management” (p. 75). Clow (1999) found, in comparing instruction in the CIV classes to traditional classes, “the instructor did not come across as well as in person, did not seem to be as enthusiastic about the class, and was not as aware of students not grasping the material” (p. 101).

### *Achievement*

Miriam reported that she had worked fifteen years trying to get a degree, so “it gives you that sense that you have reached a goal and you've achieved something. I'm not quite there yet, but I'm getting there.” Riva commented about the special skills she was learning in the program, where she just learned how to create a PowerPoint show”

I learned how to do the [document camera] right before the presentation, so I was kind of back and forth;...I should've done a little bit better job, but I was actually really pleased that I got through it and didn't screw anything up....I was actually really pleased that I accomplished that goal.

Carmen shared how “I've achieved things that I didn't think I could...I think for other people, as well, it's something, as I've heard the testimonials of people, it's something that they've wanted for a long time, but [were] unable to obtain.” Alexis echoed that sentiment, finding that “it's rewarding...I'm finally finishing something that I started years ago, and it's done a lot for my self-esteem; it's done a lot, just as far as my future plans. I can look forward, now, to other possibilities.” Diego agreed, where “this is the first time in my academic career where I actually feel like I can do this, I can accomplish it.” He recalled sitting in his first Cohort gathering, thinking that “I just can't do this, it's just not possible, but that next semester, I'm glad I stuck with it....I can tell people now, with confidence, that I'm going to have a degree.”

As Wanstreet and Stein (2006) noted, “practitioners should be aware that Web-based learning experiences need to be deliberately structured to promote interaction, including learner-instructor dialogue and learner-learner interaction” (p. 779). Molinari (2003) cautioned that post-secondary distance programs “often suffer from limited human interaction, and when interaction does not occur, it tends to be less spontaneous than face-to-face communication” (as cited in Osguthorpe & Graham, pp. 227-228).

#### *Cohort Group Support*

The concept of a cohort was new to most students. The eight sites would meet together once a semester for classes, program information, and to allow seniors to informally guide juniors through their cohort experience. Carmen felt awkward at her first cohort meeting, where: “we really didn’t know them at all, except for what we could see on the screen.” She believed that Cohort Weekend brought students closer together, “we could actually interact with them and get to know them a little bit better.” While still physically separated, they could tie personalities to their electronic interaction, so “on-line...we can actually hear their voice [and know] what their inflection would probably be.” Diego contrasted what the HRD program provided that had been absent in his earlier school experience, becoming pleased with the Cohort model: “I’m actually starting to build relationships with the people who are in the group. In previous experiences, it was each semester it was a different group of people.” He now stays connected to people he had met through the program.

Osguthorpe and Graham (2003) observed that many working adults sought post-secondary distance education courses because of the convenience and flexibility of scheduling. Hinton (1998) found that CIV programs offered motivated adults with work experience an opportunity to acquire education during the evenings and on weekends. In addition, adult students’ work, family, community, and recreational needs often restricted or dictated participation in professional development activities or continuing education, requiring flexible approaches to programming and coursework that would preserve balance in students’ lives (Kellogg Commission, 1998; Costello, 2001).

#### *Educational/Enlightening*

Stephanie found her learning experience to be relevant, where the textbooks “cover the issues we’re facing right now.” She found the program to be up-to-date and “very useful for what we have to face here at work on a day-to-day basis.” Riva talked about her meeting different people from different backgrounds, having different opinions and ideas. She also found her assignments enlightening:

In reading some of the readings that we were assigned, I almost immediately recognized some of the characteristics, not only in myself, but other staff members, and was able to understand why people are the way they are, and how to deal with that.

Carmen discovered that HRD was different from the HR that she traditionally knew. While she liked human resources in general, “it turns out that this is the human resources I [really] like; I love the training and development side and the adult education and all of that.” Alexis agreed with Carmen, finding that “there are a lot of things that are involved in HRD that I didn’t realize were a part of HRD.” She also found relevance in that “as we were going through the classes, I would recognize and say, that happens in my office.” She noted, for example, the value of the sessions on negotiating, where “planning your strategy before you go in is something that I probably wouldn’t have thought of before.”

Sikora (2002) reported that in a study of undergraduate and graduate first-year professional students involved in distance education, about one-half of both groups were equally satisfied with their distance education and regular classroom courses. Patchner and colleagues (1998) found that ITV students performed as well in their studies as those taking regular, face-to-face instruction. In 2005, Bielawski and Metcalf found several research findings that supported the “positive effect of blending learning on teaching and learning,” at the same time meeting the diverse needs of learners’ while “improving performance” (as cited in Lim, Morris, & Kuptriz, 2006, p. 809). A later study showed that blended instruction overcame “the shortcomings of online instruction” using “various instructional sequencing and delivery strategies to enhance learner satisfaction while attaining increased learning outcomes” (Lim, et. al., 2006, p. 810).

#### *Personal Interaction*

Many students cited the close relationships they had been developing at their sites, often with the expectation that since they had established roots in their communities that life-long friendships might result. As Riva suggested,

With all of us being working adults...you get to know them on a personal level, but it's also networking, as well, because when you get back to your job you realize oh, I know so and so that works at this company, I can call them....You begin to know more people in the community who work in different types of organizations and that benefits everyone.

Maureen described how the relationships developed in the program persisted, even through the summer months. “I had one of the group email me because she was having trouble finding information...she asked me if I could help

her and I did.” She also admitted to “being more patient with other personalities than I think I was before.” Stephanie believed that “everyone would help everyone out if they needed it, as far as if they have any questions.” Melody included instructors and Cohort weekend in her appraisal of the value of personal interaction:

I think it helps for us to be around our fellow students that are in the other locations [and] around the instructors, one on one, and actually get to talk to you face-to-face, instead of on a screen. [Cohort Weekend] gives you a real person to think of and have a memory of when you're seeing them on the screen. To me, it just kind of finalizes the whole relationship, as far as that is actually a person up there and not just a figment of my imagination. [And], it gives you a sense of belonging, that that is actually the university you're attending.

The literature generally supported the importance of group interaction in distance learning. Reio and Crim (2006) noted that any learning environment requires a social presence where participants feel at ease around the instructor and other students. They observed that “lack of social presence could lead to more frustration, dissatisfaction and less participation in learning” (p. 967). Further, corporate trainers recognize that successful training focuses on an active learner-centered approach rather than the instructor-controlled model (Lim, 2001).

#### *Stressful*

The nontraditional student brings special circumstances to his or her return to school. The obligations of work, family, and community place additional challenges that accompany the commitment to continued education. As Diego explained,

It's stressful on so many levels.... you're coming back into an environment that has changed over the last decade. Technology has improved; even just the compressed videos ... that can be a challenging thing, ... you're balancing school, you're balancing family, you're balancing work; and in between, you're trying to get everything accomplished.

Riva had a similar observation: “There are times that are worse than others, depending on what’s going on in your personal life, what’s going on in the workplace, etc.” She acknowledged the commitment of being in school and wanting to follow through, noting that “it can get pretty stressful.” For others, the stress came about because of program admission requirements that called for prior completion of 40 higher education hours. For many that total meant a good start toward completing a degree, while for others it could mean real hardship. Carmen observed that the remaining coursework would be “a lot of hours to do in two years.” Because of the requirement that students have a full time job, for her it meant that “you just better get ready; it’s going to kill you. It’s just going to kill you to get that many hours in two years, and work full time.”

While Alexis felt the same pressures as other students when managing on-line courses, doing homework, working and looking after two young children, “the classes themselves, actually, to me, were sort of a stress relief.” Maureen shared that perspective on the stress of balancing school and life: “I have a stressful job. At times it can be chaotic; hectic is fine, chaotic is not. She said that she enjoyed the coursework, both reading and writing papers. In fact, she claimed that “a lot of times when the class is over, I’m sorry that it’s finished.” Hence, Maureen “was enjoying it so much” that she did not find it stressful.

The literature identifies stress from uncertainty about required coursework, unavailability of the instructor, or difficulty overcoming technology hurdles (Anderson, Banks, and Leary, 2002; Clow, 1999). Anderson, et al. (2002) reported that access to a professor is difficult for remote-site students, while “for those off campus, face-to-face contact with the professor is nearly impossible” (p. 146).

#### *Technology*

Students had different attitudes about the technology that made the program available state-wide. Some, like Jorge, enjoyed CIV: “you can actually see everybody...hear them talk and everything.” He saw few problems in transmission, “We didn't really have any kind of technical problems except for when there was real bad weather or something, “for the most part, it worked every time and it was real reliable.” Diego, though, still felt challenged by technology, “I know I can do it; I just don't know exactly what I'm doing.” Midway through his second year, he claimed that “I’m still not comfortable with it...it's better, but still, the technology is intimidating.”

Sikora (2002) reported that in a study of undergraduate and graduate first-year professional students involved in distance education, about one-half of both groups were equally satisfied with their distance education and regular classroom courses. Patchner and colleagues (1998) found that ITV students performed as well in their studies as those taking regular, face-to-face instruction.

#### *Useful/Transfer to Work*

Cohort Ten participants universally believed that the program provided rewarding skills besides direct application in their work lives. As Miriam discovered, “what we're being taught is essential, and we use it in our day-to-day lives, in our careers, it makes a difference.” Melody may have represented this theme best of all:

Everything that you deal with in this program....you could use it in any type of work environment....The nursing students use it, engineering students use it;...the things that we learn through this program, we can take

back to our work place and use it wherever we go. We can take it home and use it at home.... You won't go away from this program not learning something and being able to use it.

Cohort Ten students sought a program that could further their careers and improve their work lives. Hinton (1998) identified a need for a more flexible and better-educated workforce, observing that “in today’s economy, they need access to education and training while maintaining their full-time work schedules” (p. 16).

### **Interview Three: Perceived Outcomes Affecting Life and Work**

A third interview was conducted after most Cohort Ten members had completed course requirements. That interview explored participant perceptions related to learning outcomes for both work and personal life, and how their involvement might have personally changed them. The results of the third interview are presented below.

After Cohort Ten students completed the program, the participants were asked the following questions: What have you been able to take away from the HRD program that you’ve been able to use on the job? What have you been able to take away from the HRD program that you’ve been able to use in your personal life? How would you say the past two years have changed you? Comments from at least five participants established the following themes from the last interview.

#### *Communication*

Students cited new communication skills valuable both at work and in personal life. As Melody commented, “I’ve been able to use the communication skills that I’ve learned on a daily basis.” Stephanie found herself using some of the skills she learned in the communication course, “being able to talk to employees during situations when they may be a little frustrated, or aggravated, and just learning to listen and talk in a positive manner.”

#### *Confidence*

Cohort Ten participants became more confident in their abilities, again in both work and home settings: As Jorge related how he had changed: “Probably the biggest thing is confidence. You know, there are not a whole lot of people in my workplace that have degrees and so I guess it’s kind of intimidating; so for me, the biggest thing was to get...I kind of feel like I’m on their level now.” Mark expressed a similar result in discussing his personal life:

I have met one of my personal challenges, which was going through a career and having a degree; ... that’s a great satisfaction for me. Besides that, I have learned from the HRD program how every individual is valuable. I think it has given me more assertiveness, more security in myself

#### *Development*

Participants came to see themselves as lifelong learners as a result of their participation in the HRD program. As Riva put it, “I think [the program] has made me want to pursue my education even further....I have to say, getting to know some people in and around my community who are interested in, obviously, the same thing that I’m interested in, which is pursuing education.” Diego also focused on his personal development, where he felt “like I’m a bit more articulate,” having more information to back up his opinions. In addition, he found that he had “become more disciplined, more focused. Melody had an especially insightful observation:

[The last two years] probably have made me more aware that I need to focus more on development than just training. A lot of times that’s the answer to everything; when you start talking about where you’re deficient in different areas, whether it’s in your personal life, or it’s in your business, that’s the first answer to everything, well we need more training in that area; well, it may not possibly be training, but some development.

#### *Groups/Teams*

The teamwork, I think, is the biggest part of what I’ve been able to take back to the job, and paying attention to other people’s personalities and how they work within the group....I started paying more attention to how individual personalities mesh within a group,” Maureen observed. Naomi commented further, adding her views about how the Cohort concept and technology enhanced her learning:

I’m a team player. I work in an office where there are three of us; we all have specialties, but... it’s a very level playing field, and that’s the way I felt like Cohort 10 was... there were people that we were able to tap in from our group into the other group, where we could exchange ideas and exchange information; so that being connected via CIV, I think, was very important to Cohort 10.

#### *Networking*

Networking, both on the job as well as in personal life, was an important outcome for two-thirds of the participants. As Miriam described, “I’ve built friendships that will last a lifetime through the Cohort, and friends that I know that I can count on.” She found support and friendship from the other program sites, as well, where “we talk as friends, we e-mail as friends, and it’s not like they’re just another classmate.” At the work level, Naomi had come to rely on the contacts she made through the program to be more effective:

One of the things that I actually used just last week was the network of people, resources; and part of our local group in the Cohort were from a different town, but they're in our calling service area, so in need of some major information, make one phone call and you have what you need. That resource of people we've used quite often.

Carmen referred to Cohort Ten members in her own field, where "we're able to network; and that's how I'll maintain those [Cohort] relationships...that's given [me] a lot of contacts...it's been real good."

### **Need for Additional Research**

Anderson, et al. (2002) suggested that further research is needed to determine "whether interactive televised courses are more appropriate for undergraduate students or graduate students" (p. 153). She found that non-traditional students were becoming a larger percentage of the undergraduate population, begging the question of whether age and experience might be a better determinant of course level. Anderson, et al. (2002) also suggested that "longitudinal studies should be conducted . . . to [see] if the levels of student satisfaction with ITV courses improve" (p. 153).

Given an aging and diverse workforce, interactive television, combined with other instructional technology, may be a critical medium for maintaining and improving job skills both in the U.S. and abroad. Hence, both short-term and longitudinal studies that determine changing workplace needs can help define continuing education programs for non-traditional segments of the workforce or areas where traditional higher education is not feasible. Inasmuch as this qualitative study is not generalizable to a larger population, its results can only be reported as interesting. The next papers in this series will be studying the: (1) combined interviews from Cohort Nine and Ten to determine if there are commonalities, similar themes or sub-themes and (2) longitudinal to determine similarities or changes: Cohorts Nine and Ten and Cohorts One and Two.

### **Contribution to HRD**

This inquiry contributed to HRD theory and practice in understanding how teaching methodologies utilizing blended technology affect the personal life and work experiences that impact access to education. Blended technology methodologies may be especially important in countries where traditional, higher-education classroom infrastructure is unavailable, but where satellite and web-based cooperative instruction become viable substitutes for rural or inaccessible locations. Both instructors and trainers, as a result of this study, may learn ways to better support non-traditional students through the use of blended technology, among other new forms of distance education. HRD members of corporate training departments can examine these results, perhaps finding them useful in pursuing strategies that may take advantage of blended technology to reach scattered domestic branches as well as overseas locations. Workforce educators can examine these results to help determine how to better mold their programs to reach non-traditional students.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

Participants in this study revealed how their life and work were impacted by the blended technology distance education they experienced as members of HRD Cohort Ten. The themes that emerged from that experience fell into both process and content areas. The group site format of the program provided these typically nontraditional students with networking and support that eased their transition back into formal education. The access and convenience of distance learning technology, combined with a program framework that stressed flexibility, predictability, and availability of technical and faculty assistance, provided a more nurturing foundation than traditional programs. Participants had to balance family and work responsibilities with their studies, although the challenges and stress of their experience will ultimately be offset by the anticipated reward of completing a degree.

Participants were finding an immediate utility in some of their studies as they applied new skills in the workplace. Equally important might be the gain in confidence and personal growth they experience in their personal lives. The blended technology program for Cohort Ten ultimately provided access to higher education that many participants had believed was no longer available to them, given their life situation. They have exchanged the enthusiasm and hope they brought to the program for practical skills, confidence, and a sense of self-fulfillment.

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