

# AN EXAMINATION OF DISTANCE LEARNING FACULTY SATISFACTION LEVELS AND SELF-PERCEIVED BARRIERS

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## ABSTRACT

*This action research project examined satisfaction levels and self-perceived barriers of distance learning faculty. It included methods of providing professional development opportunities for educators who teach online and hybrid courses. This solution-oriented investigation included problem identification, systematic data collection, reflection, analysis, data-driven action, and problem redefinition. The study focused on the factors that influence faculty satisfaction and dissatisfaction with distance learning. The research examined self-perceived barriers to faculty satisfaction and how distance learning could be improved. Various professional development options were offered for the participants as well as a discussion about the effects of these interventions. Selected key findings of the study indicated that there is a need for future research in the area of measuring and analyzing online faculty satisfaction levels and self-perceived barriers. Also, the findings demonstrated that there are distance learning faculty members who want more professional development options as well as clear guidelines for teaching distance learning courses. Furthermore, the findings suggested that higher education institutions may need to change their attitudes towards providing incentives for faculty who design and develop distance learning courses.*

*Keywords: online learning, faculty, satisfaction, distance learning, professional development*

## INTRODUCTION

Distance learning is rapidly evolving into a permanent fixture in mainstream higher education (Allen, Seaman, Poulin, & Straut, 2016; Mercer, 2014). Online teaching methods are gaining popularity, and distance learning is becoming widely acknowledged as a growing and lucrative field. In recent years, the field of distance learning has continued its pattern of growth in higher education with 29.7% of all graduate and undergraduate students taking at least one distance education course (Allen & Seaman, 2017). To meet this demand, higher education institutions are offering undergraduate and graduate students more distance learning opportunities as a prerequisite for meeting higher enrollment demands.

Due to this shift in educational needs, many institutions of higher education are experiencing significant pedagogical and technological changes, which are forcing faculty to adapt and modify their instruction (Amirault, 2012). Amirault claims that “the numerous and varied technological changes being experienced today all stem from two original innovations: the development of the digital computer, and the creation of networked telecommunications technology” (p. 254). The integration of these two technological innovations creates a learning environment that uses entirely new methods of educational delivery. However, as is often the trend across many types of industries, new and innovative educational ideas often take time to become standardized and accepted.

The growing number of distance learning programs promise a truly “borderless” (Amirault, 2012, p. 255) educational experience in which a full body of students are essentially free to attend any institution of their choice. Students can take classes from anywhere at any time. Moreover, 71.4% of academic leaders rate the learning outcomes in distance education courses as the same or superior to those in traditional, face-to-face courses (Allen et al., 2016). As Amirault explains, “growth and proliferation of online programs certainly signals that a major structural change may be in the offering for higher education institutions” (p. 261).

The need for this study at Carson University arose when current distance learning educators informally expressed discontent with teaching online. The researcher therefore began examining faculty satisfaction levels and self-perceived barriers to distance learning while simultaneously attempting to provide faculty members with professional development opportunities. Above all, the study aims at improving faculty satisfaction levels for those involved in distance learning at the university.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In their 2016 national report, Allen et al. offers formal definitions of distance learning terms and stresses that these definitions have remained consistent for the thirteen years these national reports have been conducted. “An online course is defined as one in which at least 80% of the course content is delivered online. Face-to-face instruction includes courses in which zero to 29% of the content is delivered online; this category includes both traditional and web-facilitated courses. The remaining alternative, blended (or hybrid) instruction, has between 30% and 80% of course content delivered online” (Allen et al., 2016, p. 11).

Current estimates suggest that between one-third and one-quarter of all faculty members are engaged in some form of distance learning teaching (Lloyd, Byrne, & McCoy, 2012). Are these faculty members truly ready for this change? Have they been adequately prepared? Are they satisfied with their positions and do they see any barriers to teaching at a distance? Faculty who had the least experience with online education perceived various barriers as greater than those who had the most experience with online education. There is a

general perception that any form of online teaching experience leads to a reduction in perceived barriers when compared to those faculty who have no online experience.

Even though the trends indicate that distance learning is growing in popularity and validity, only 29.1% of academic leaders report that their faculty accept the value and legitimacy of distance learning (Allen et al., 2016). One of the issues may be that despite the “high rate of faculty involvement in online education and a growth in the demand for online courses and online course offerings, faculty and institutional perceptions of the value, legitimacy, and learning outcomes of online education has not changed significantly in the past decade” (Lloyd, et al. 2012, p. 2). Despite the remarkable growth in the number of schools with distance offerings and the number of students taking distance learning courses, the level of skepticism among faculty remains high (Wingo, Ivankova, & Moss, 2017). Allen et al. asserts that one ongoing failure of distance learning advocates is their inability to convince higher education faculty members of its worth.

In his seminal study, Ely (1999) suggests that there are certain conditions that affect faculty buy-in towards any form of educational technology. These conditions facilitate the adoption, implementation, and institutionalization of any educational technology innovation. Currently, distance learning is one of these innovations. Wiesenberg and Stacey emphasize that educators, “who are at the center of this increasing demand and pressure to teach online, are being challenged to rethink their underlying assumptions about teaching and learning, and the roles they take as educators” (as cited in Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011, p. 421). If Ely’s suggested conditions that facilitate change are present, the faculty can move into the phase of implementing the new form of using educational technology in a variety of education-related contexts. Conversely, if the conditions that facilitate change are not present, faculty members may not be able to successfully engage in the world of distance learning.

There are various documented faculty-perceived barriers to teaching distance learning courses (Bailey, 2016; Berge & Mullenburg, 2001; Chen, Voorhees, & Rein, 2006; Lloyd et al., 2012; Mercer, 2014; Reid, 2014; Singh & Hardaker, 2014;

Wingo et al., 2017). These obstacles include a lack of compensation for time and class sizes, added responsibilities, inadequate training and resources, increased workload, clear promotion and tenure guidelines, a lack of administrative and technical support, and a lack of experience with online teaching. Other barriers can include administrative structure and organizational change.

Higher education institutions traditionally emphasize extrinsic factors to motivate faculty (Lonsdale, as cited in Wolcott & Betts, 1999). These means include monetary support for participation, credit toward tenure and promotion, or course release time. In fact, “tenure in respect to the external motivation of recognition among peers continues to be an area of interest” (Bailey, 2016, p. 11). Are these factors enough, and are they consistent over time and between institutions? Research shows that these extrinsic motivators were not the main factors for motivated faculty members.

Time is another major motivational factor that many faculty members desire when designing or developing an online course (Bailey, 2016; Chen et al., 2006; Reid, 2014). Time should be considered as a distinct condition that must be made available for implementation of any innovation to occur (Verspoor, as cited in Ely, 1999). Teachers need time for in-service training, to revise existing teaching plans, to practice with new materials, and to try out and evaluate new teaching procedures. In essence, time is a vital element in the process of educational change.

Disincentives can also be a factor in faculty motivation, or lack thereof (Wolcott & Betts, 1999). Some of these disincentives include lack of administrative support, concern about the lack of face-to-face interaction found in the traditional classroom, and lack of technical skills needed to become involved in distance learning. Computer self-efficacy, or a person’s beliefs about his or her competence using computers, can be a barrier in distance learning teaching. In fact, Wingo, Ivankova, and Moss (2017) stress that self-efficacy in using online course management applications is the single most important factor affecting instructors’ decision to adopt an application for online teaching. Furthermore, Wolcott and Betts discuss that most faculty members who had been asked to teach a distance learning course, but

had chosen not to, offer these excuses as the main reasons for declining.

One of the biggest deterrents to teaching distance learning courses is the perceived lack of institutional and departmental support (Chen, 2009; Singh & Hardaker, 2014; Wingo et al., 2017). Faculty members who do not feel supported by administration may not want to design or teach an online course for fear of going into uncharted territory. This new way of teaching and learning can cause a rift between distance learning faculty and their supervisors. In order to avoid this rift, faculty may decline or avoid teaching distance learning courses. Singh and Hurley (2017) suggest that higher education institutions plan and improve curricula for all distance learning courses by focusing on the development and teaching of all courses rather than just focusing on those courses and faculty who volunteer to teach online. This is why it is critical that faculty see the overall institution’s support for distance learning through incentives, facilitation of organizational change, effective professional development, and instructional support (Mercer, 2014).

Lack of training is another deterrent in teaching at a distance (Chen, 2009). Often, formal training in online course design and development is not a part of the institutional infrastructure (Mercer, 2014). A faculty member who designs and teaches a distance learning course must possess sufficient knowledge and skills to perform the job (Bailey, 2016). Research has shown that professional development opportunities that are optimized to ensure that all distance learning faculty members are trained to use the appropriate technologies can help ease these fears (Merillat & Scheibmeier, 2016). “The prospect of having to learn to teach new courses in an online environment can be intimidating and stressful for faculty who are new to higher education” (Cole and Kritzer, 2009, p. 36). These faculty members would be required to become experts in both the content and delivery method. Baran, Correia, and Thompson (2011) explained that distance learning instructors often feel uncertain, uneasy, and unprepared for the challenges of teaching online. These educators also lack many of the essential skills they need to teach in a new environment.

Professional development programs are critical in helping new and veteran online teachers engage in the process of connecting content, online

technologies, and pedagogical methods (Baran et al., 2011; Reilly, Vandenhouten, Gallagher-Lepak, & Ralston-Berg, 2012). Distance learning teachers need to be able to explore and transform their existing pedagogies to the online environment. They should be involved in a process whereby they can think about the limitations of the online technologies for their pedagogical purposes. Furthermore, Reilly et al. (2012) stress that faculty professional development programs should build on previous activities, offer opportunities to discuss online teaching experiences with others, be aligned with state and national standards, and encourage ongoing professional communication of instructors with similar concerns. Effective higher education distance learning professional development experiences provide participants with opportunities for “active learning, continuous participation and the application of knowledge” (Gosselin et al., 2016, p. 179). Some methods of faculty development include seminar series, short-courses, workshops, and webinars.

Additionally, institutions need to be aware that there will be a significant time needed to plan and execute professional development programs (Reilly et al., 2012; Singh & Hardaker, 2014). A key goal for professional development is the provision of authentic and relevant training for a specific and directed purpose. Moreover, online instructors should be encouraged to pursue pedagogical inquiry and creativity (Baran et al., 2011). They need to be guided in finding ways to support their students’ independence and autonomy in a distance learning environment. Professional development activities can be designed to engage online teachers in learner-centered teaching approaches.

## METHOD

The primary focus of the study was to examine distance learning faculty satisfaction levels and self-perceived barriers of distance learning faculty members at Carson University. The main questions in this study included:

1. What factors influence faculty satisfaction with distance learning?
2. What factors influence faculty dissatisfaction with distance learning?
3. What faculty-perceived barriers are present?

4. How we can improve faculty satisfaction in distance learning?

This solution-oriented investigation was an action research project that included problem identification, systematic data collection, reflection, analysis, data-driven action taken, and problem redefinition. The study used an adaptation of the Online Faculty Satisfaction Survey (OFSS) developed by Bollinger & Wasilik (2009). This instrument was used to measure perceived faculty satisfaction in the context of the online learning environment. The original survey was altered by the researcher to create a web-based Google Form survey. The OFSS contained questions based on faculty satisfaction while teaching online. The OFSS questions focused on issues that directly impact teaching in the online environment. Items focused on three main areas: (a) student-related issues, (b) instructor-related issues, and (c) institutional-related issues. This survey was administered at the beginning of the study and at the end of the study.

The data were analyzed to see if there was a change in satisfaction levels as interventions were put into place.

The target population for this study was full-time and part-time faculty members who taught distance learning (online and hybrid) courses at the university. The participants were determined by searching the school’s online system for all distance learning (online and hybrid) instructors for the related semesters. The distance learning instructors were contacted via email and invited to participate in the study. They were provided with information about the study and a link to the OFSS Google Form. All responses were maintained anonymously and confidentially.

The data collected from the OFSS was reviewed in two phases. Phase One occurred at the beginning of the academic year; Phase Two occurred at the end of the academic year. In Phase One, 102 distance learning instructors were contacted via email to participate in the study. Although 27 instructors initially volunteered and signed the Informed Consent Form, 17 instructors participated and completed the “An Analysis of Online Faculty Satisfaction Levels and Self-Perceived Barriers” online survey. Phase Two occurred at the end of the year-long study. The researcher contacted the 17 initial participants via email. During Phase Two, eight individuals volunteered, signed the Informed

**18. I am more satisfied with teaching online as compared to other delivery methods.**

17 responses

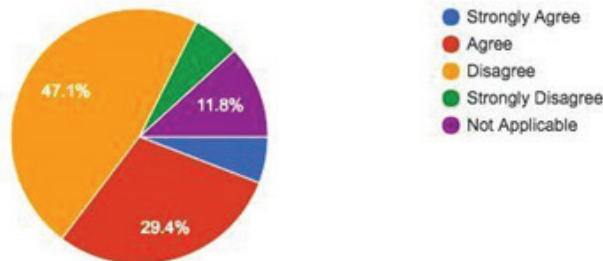


Figure 1. This Figure Discusses Overall Faculty Satisfaction As Compared To Other Delivery Methods

**6. I have a higher workload when teaching an online course as compared to the traditional one.**

16 responses

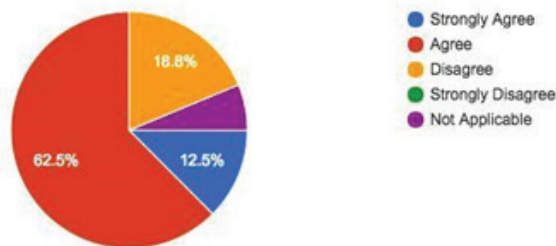


Figure 2. This Figure Discusses Workload Of Faculty Teaching Online Courses

Consent Form, and participated.

## RESULTS

The results of this study include varied faculty perceptions about factors that influence satisfaction and dissatisfaction with distance learning; the results also reveal desired faculty development options. Returning to the literature review, many of the results of this study correlate with previously documented faculty self-perceived barriers to teaching online such as lack of compensation, added responsibilities, inadequate training and resources, increased workload, the value toward promotion and tenure, a lack of administrative and technical support, and a lack of experience with online teaching.

### *Phase One Results*

Phase One of the study was conducted at the start of the Carson University academic year. The data that were collected from the Phase One

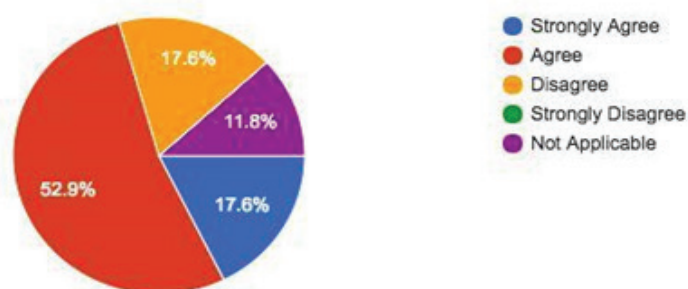
participants indicated that 42% of the participants were aged 50–59, 52.9% were male, and 47.1% were female. Of the faculty members, 65% of the respondents were full-time faculty, and 41% have taught distance learning classes for approximately two to four years.

During Phase One of the study, the instructors described low interaction between students, overall weak communication, higher workload for professors, and a lack of technical advances. There was an overall dissatisfaction with teaching online as compared to other delivery methods. In fact, 50% of the respondents claimed to be dissatisfied with teaching online (See Figure 1).

However, the participants did show their gratitude towards the flexibility that distance learning classes provide and the influence instructors can have on students. In addition, 75% of the participants felt that they have a higher workload when they are teaching an online course compared to a traditional one (See Figure 2).

## 7. I miss face-to face contact with students when teaching online.

17 responses



*Figure 3.* This Figure Discusses Faculty's Perceptions Of Missing Face-To-Face Contact With Students

The instructors mentioned that the flexibility of distance learning was a positive factor in their satisfaction levels. Of the professors, 100% agreed with this statement: "I appreciate that I can access my online course any time it is convenient to me." One professor explained enjoying "the flexibility with our weekly schedules. We can teach from anywhere in the world." Another commented, "the ability to allow students access to higher education courses that due to work and family obligations may have prevented them from signing up is rewarding." Furthermore, 76.4% agreed with this thought: "Online teaching is gratifying because it provides me with an opportunity to reach students who otherwise would not be able to take courses."

Another major finding in the initial data set was that these distance educators felt these online and hybrid courses promoted higher order thinking and writing skills. One participant claimed, "It makes each and every student use their 'voice.' Every student must participate in order each week, as there is no room for any student to 'hide' in the back row. All students must be heard!" Additionally, 76.4% of the educators felt that they were able to provide better feedback to online students on their performance in the courses. One professor enjoyed "that students and I engage in extended 'written' conversations about readings." Additionally, 64.7% of the instructors indicated that their online students use a wider range of resources in the online setting than in the traditional one.

Conversely, there were some generalizations in self-perceived barriers in distance learning among

the faculty members. Some instructors complained about the lack of face-to-face interactions and uncertainty of the online environment. In fact, 70.5% of the 17 respondents claimed to miss face-to-face contact with students when teaching online (See Figure 3)

One participant explained, "Since we don't see our students face-to-face, it is easy for students to submit assignments late. This happens even after numerous reminder emails. Not being able to get immediate responses from students." Many of the respondents worried that "not meeting my online students face-to-face prevents me from knowing them as well as my on-site students." These issues need to be addressed when constructing the professional development opportunities.

Others explained how a lack of training can negatively impact distance learning. There were many comments regarding the lack of technical training and how they struggled to put the courses together and teach them. Also, 76.4% of the participants agreed that they have to be more creative in terms of the resources used for the online course and 64.7% of the participants explained that not meeting the class in person caused frustration and confusion. A faculty member explained, "Using an asynchronous platform minimizes student interactions with each other and me." One instructor even stated, "I have a hard time telling where the class is."

Furthermore, the distance learning instructors explained that many students have different expectations of distance education professors and

courses than of traditional, face-to-face professors and courses. For example, one instructor claimed “that students expect 24/7 access to professor,” while another stated that “students sometimes expect the class to be pre-packaged, like it won’t evolve as the term progresses. They want it pre-programmed, not dynamic, though some on-ground students respond the same way. Effective communication is so important, and the slightest accidental ambiguity gets blown out of proportion.” Another individual explained that technological and administrative problems occurred too often and caused additional work, which negatively impacted student learning.

### *Interventions*

After the initial survey data were analyzed, the researcher developed a plan of action with interventions on how to meet the needs of the distance educators. Based on Ely’s (1999) research, various interventions and incentives were examined and implemented. The researcher focused on the following conditions: (a) dissatisfaction with the status quo, (b) knowledge and skills exist, (c) resources are available, (d) time is available, (e) rewards or incentives exist for participants, (f) participation is expected and encouraged, (g) commitment by those who are involved, and (h) leadership is evident. Some of these interventions include face-to-face and online professional development workshops, Quality Matters (QM) trainings, online professional development workshops, training in the course delivery system, and observation of other distance courses. Since research (Cook, Ley, Crawford, & Warner, 2009) has shown that extrinsic motivators can encourage online faculty members, various types of incentives were investigated. Incentives were examined for different activities such as designing an online course, teaching an online course, and completing a faculty development program for online instruction. Effective incentives would include recognition in tenure and promotion, financial remuneration, course releases or other time incentives, technology rewards, and retention of intellectual property rights for an online course (Herman, 2013).

In response to the faculty surveys and the instructors’ needs, Carson University’s Distance Learning Committee offered several workshops for all faculty. One of the findings was that the study participants desired new technological

and pedagogical skills to be effective distance educators (Merillat & Scheibmeier, 2016). Some of the workshops focused on using the technology that is needed to be successful when teaching a distance learning course. There were workshops focusing on using the Learning Management System (Blackboard) and Google applications such as Google Docs, Google Hangout, and Google Drive maintenance. Others were more pedagogical in nature. There was a workshop about preparing to teach online as well as how to design online and hybrid courses. Also, there were professional development classes on how to avoid plagiarism by using certain tools as well as how to design assessments to align with student learning objectives. These workshops were facilitated by skilled educators, administrators, and instructional designers.

The workshops were offered at various times during the academic year. All faculty (full time and part time) were invited to attend the workshops. The workshops were offered in both online and face-to-face formats. The researcher felt that an online instruction aspect was necessary given the fact that many of the participants were teaching online. Research has shown that professional development needs to emphasize the effective use of technology in the teaching environment and not simply the use of technology (Merillat & Scheibmeier, 2016). All the workshops were recorded and the recordings were posted on a faculty technology page.

As part of incentivization considerations, all full-time distance educators at the university were offered funding to take the “Applying the Quality Matters Rubric” (APPQMR) workshop. This workshop is considered the main course of professional development offered by QM (Mercer, 2014). The workshop was mainly designed for faculty, instructional designers, and other distance learning professionals. During the workshop, which can be taken online or in person, participants examine the QM peer review process and the QM Rubric. Part-time educators were not offered the QM training. During the academic year, 22 faculty members completed this training.

### *Phase Two Results*

Phase Two of the study was conducted at the end of the academic year. The data that were collected from the Phase Two participants indicated that 50% were aged 30–39, 25% of the participants

## 25. Not meeting my online students face-to-face prevents me from knowing them as well as my on-site students.

8 responses

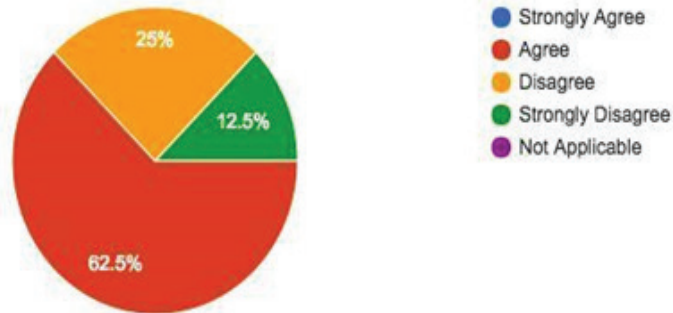


Figure 4. This Figure Compares Meeting Students Face-To-Face To Not Meeting Them (Online)

were aged 50–59, 25% were male, and 75% were female. Of the faculty members, 62.5% of the respondents were full-time faculty and 75% have taught distance learning classes for approximately two to four years.

After being offered the various interventions, such as the faculty development workshops and the APPQMR workshop, the same 17 distance learning educators from Phase One were contacted via email and invited to participate in Phase Two of the study. Again, these individuals were provided with information about the study and a link to the OFSS. All responses were maintained anonymously and confidentially. There were eight participants who responded to Phase Two of the survey.

The results showed that there were similar faculty satisfaction levels and self-perceived barriers during Phase Two of the study. Many of the comments and data results showed that dissatisfaction was still an issue after attending the faculty development workshops and completing the Quality Matters APPQMR workshop and 62.5% of the instructors agreed with this statement: “Not meeting my online students face-to-face prevents me from knowing them as well as my on-site students.”

Many of the professors continued to struggle with the interpersonal connections. Of the professors who replied to the survey, 70% missed face-to-face contact with students when teaching online. One respondent explained: “I do not like

teaching online. The courses are not structured properly, there is not adequate technical support, the students have no instruction in online learning prior to taking the course, there is no assessment of computer requirements.” Others complained of “short time frames” and the marketing of the online courses. One instructor explained that it is “harder to personally connect with students and it’s hard to keep up with questions and feedback.” Another participant stressed that “human emotion/body language are lost in an online environment. This can sometimes lead to misinterpretations by both the students and faculty member.”

However, other responses took a positive tone. Of the Phase Two participants, 75% agreed with the statement: “Online teaching is gratifying because it provides me with an opportunity to reach students who otherwise would not be able to take courses.” One qualitative comment that illustrates this sentiment was, “Teaching online is a great delivery method for our curriculum that offers many benefits when it comes to flexibility and convenience. More importantly, it gives some students the comfort to express themselves when they would otherwise would not in a face-to-face setting. Also, I find that because every student is required to write every week for every assignment in multiple forums, I am better able to assess and track progress of all the students than face-to-face, where I don’t have as many tangible constant engagements.”

Furthermore, the flexibility of online courses continued to be a positive aspect of teaching



## 2. The flexibility provided by the online environment is important to me.

8 responses

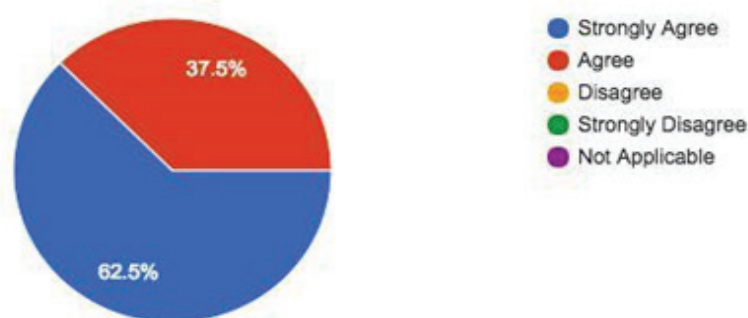


Figure 5. This figure shows how Phase Two instructors felt about the flexibility of teaching online.

online. All the respondents agreed that flexibility is an important facet of online teaching and learning (See Figure 5).

All the participants appreciated the ability they and the students had to access the online course at any time from any place in the world. A professor explained, "I like the flexibility, and with a different LMS and a truly dedicated online environment, one that has a synchronous component, is ideal." Another participant stated, "Each person has equal opportunity for discussion contributions, vs in a regular class, some students tend to lead the discussions."

### DISCUSSION

The findings of this study include the factors that influence faculty satisfaction with distance learning, the factors that influence faculty dissatisfaction with distance learning, and what faculty-perceived barriers are present with the current distance learning educators at Carson University. The findings also indicate how the university can improve faculty satisfaction in distance learning instruction.

The findings suggest that distance learning faculty members do experience many of the self-perceived barriers that were discussed in the literature review. Mainly, the researcher finds that the instructors struggle with a lack of compensation for time, inadequate training, increased workload, unclear promotion and tenure guidelines, and inconsistent administrative and technical support.

The workshops that were provided during the academic year did not seem to have a significant effect on the online faculty satisfaction levels and self-perceived barriers of the participants. The researcher feels there were several reasons for this phenomenon. First, this study was conducted over a short time period, which lasted only one academic year. If the study had lasted longer, a change may have taken place. Another issue has to do with availability of the workshops. Some professors are not on campus every day; other professors who teach fully online may not be there at all. The researcher suggests looking into more virtual trainings for distance learning educators. These virtual trainings could be offered to individuals at any time, from anywhere. More time and research should be given to developing workshops that can enhance online faculty satisfaction levels as well as reduce self-perceived barriers.

Many of the instructors feel that a key element for succeeding in teaching at a distance was feeling worthy and wanted by the students and the administration. Therefore, the qualitative comments illustrate how the instructors feel that the university can improve faculty satisfaction in distance learning by focusing on providing motivation and support for faculty members in developing and teaching online courses. It seems as if the participants in this study want to teach distance learning courses, but there are factors (monetary, motivational, fear) that hold them back. This institution and others like it can increase the

value, recognition, and acceptance of teaching distance learning courses by making it a priority in future institutional endeavors and missions. Universities and colleges that are seeking to expand their online learning programs will benefit from continued research in the field of online faculty satisfaction levels and self-perceived barriers as well as from examining future professional development options for faculty members who want to teach online.

There were various limitations to this study. First, it was conducted in one location and the sample size was small and restricted. Since the university is in the first stages of developing distance learning courses, the initial pool of subjects was limited. If the sample size is too small, results obtained may not be representative of the whole group of distance educators. The results of this small-scale study may not be an indication of what the group as a whole would have said.

Moreover, the subjects volunteered to complete the online web-based OFSS survey with no compensation. The researcher may want to figure out a way to compensate subjects in future studies. Also, the researcher suggests extending the study to multiple institutions with a larger pool of distance learning instructors. The researcher would also like to extend the study to include nondistance educators as well as distance educators to see if the barriers exist in both environments.

The OFSS instrument was also subject to certain limitations. As with any instrument, the results are subject to the known reliability and validity of that instrument. This instrument was modified for the needs of this study and may have had limitations in measuring what it was intended to measure. Only subsequent research with other subjects and with other instruments will help further the understanding of the concepts being measured in the study. Since this instrument was administered online, an additional limitation was the low response rate. In future studies, it may help to send repeat reminder emails to nonrespondents or provide incentives in the form of prizes for respondents awarded through a lottery. In future studies, the researcher could try could try these techniques to increase participant response.

Likewise, the overall low response rate (especially in Phase Two of the study) was a limitation of the study. Since Phase Two of the

study occurred during the end of the spring semester, faculty may be less geared toward professional development and may be busy with other educational tasks. Also, some of the initial responders may have been on a sabbatical leave or off-campus. These external issues could have affected the response rate of the survey data.

Another limitation of this study related to the workshops that were provided for the faculty members. Since professional development at the university is not mandated, these workshops were completely voluntary. Therefore, enrollment in the workshops was lower than if it had been a requirement for teaching distance-learning courses. Also, there is no data to indicate that the eight individuals that participated in Phase Two of the study attended any or all the workshops that were presented to the faculty.

The researcher has various recommendations for future studies. Primarily, the study should be conducted for a longer period with a larger body of subjects. A future study could focus entirely on full-time faculty or part-time faculty. It would be interesting to see if there is a different perspective from full-time faculty members than that held by part-time faculty members.

Another recommendation is to extend the study to nonwilling participants. Since this study focused on willing participants, the researcher is unsure if the study was fair. There should be a way to measure the input from faculty who may be unwilling to participate due to fear or apathy. The researcher may be able to design a study that seeks out these individuals for interviews or one-on-one discussions instead of using survey research.

Additionally, future studies should include educators who once taught at a distance, but no longer do. What happened? Why did the educator decide to stop teaching at a distance? What were the factors involved? This examination could help a see why teachers leave the field of distance learning.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study indicate that there is a need for future research in the area of measuring and analyzing online faculty satisfaction levels and self-perceived barriers. As the field of distance learning continues its pattern of growth in higher education, the findings are important and timely. This study proves that there are faculty

members who are dedicated and interested in this new, innovative way of teaching, but they often end up discouraged or frustrated for various reasons. The findings indicate that these individuals desire more professional development options as well as clear guidelines for teaching distance learning courses.

This study shows that certain factors influence faculty satisfaction and dissatisfaction with distance learning. The results of this examination can inform and be used by distance learning administrators to encourage faculty to take advantage of various professional development opportunities that are provided by their institutions as well as external organizations. Additionally, the findings of the study suggest that higher education institutions may need to change their attitudes towards providing incentives for faculty who design, develop, and teach distance learning courses. They may also need to find ways to acquire highly-trained and motivated new faculty to teach distance learning courses.

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