

Project Title: The Interpersonal Dynamics of a Distance Education Program
Principal Investigator: Mary Jo Garcia Biggs
Department: School of Social Work

Project Summary:

The study compared the psychosocial learning environments for three graduate social work courses (face-to-face, hybrid, and online) and measured student preferences and perceptions using a standardized web-based scale. Findings of this exploratory study reveal that the same graduate course taught by the same instructor in the same semester using the same syllabus result in different perceptions of students depending upon what delivery approach is used. Student perceptions of the learning environment were similar for all three classes; however, on Instructor Support and Student Interaction and Collaboration, the online course was rated lower. That is, students in the online class reported less support offered by the instructor and fewer peer interaction opportunities than the face-to-face or the hybrid courses. What can be concluded from this study is that, while the online learning environment is not poor, there is certainly room for improvement, and instructors should consider methods that enhance the learning environment of the online distance education courses. The extent to which the results of the current study are directly related to courses in other subjects offered at the university level is limited; however, the information obtained here offers university instructors the opportunity to utilize the data and to develop and implement courses based on student feedback of the learning environment as opposed to traditional summative class evaluation and student cognitive outcomes. Such research will go far in supporting evidence-based best teaching practices that meet the needs of both professors and students for a quality learning environment in modern cyber classrooms.

Publications:

Garcia Biggs, M.J. (2006). "Comparison of student perceptions of classroom instruction: Traditional, hybrid, and distance education." *TOJDE*, 7(2) 46-51.

Garcia Biggs, M.J., Simpson, C., & Walker, S. L. (2006). "Student perceptions of learning environments" *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, 10(2)(In press).

Presentations:

Garcia Biggs, M.J. (2005) "The Interpersonal Dynamics of a Distance Education Program" Presented at the College of Health Professions Research Forum, April 29, 2005.