

Summer 2002 Newsletter

June 2002

Introduction

Welcome to our third issue of our Off-Campus Programs (OCP) newsletter. Our focus in this issue is on research and related support services for our distance education students. We begin with an excerpt from the on-line doctoral program evaluation survey, developed and conducted in the fall of 2000 by Morgen Alwell, an on-campus doctoral student. These findings have been helpful in examining the efficacy of our program and we are pleased to share them with you. Immediately following this report is a view of one of our doctoral programs from the lens of one of our advanced distance education doctoral students, Olga Macy. This is a first of what we hope to be a series of sharing student views about our various OCP. We conclude with announcements of a new research support unit established for our graduate students, and the on-campus summer work of one of our distance cohorts from Chicago. Enjoy and have a good summer!

Co-editors: Deena Koessl, Ph.D., Student & Program Assistant, OCP
Leonard Albright, Ph.D., Professor & Coordinator, OCP

Selected Findings: Ph.D. Program Evaluation Survey

During the 2000-2001 academic year, Morgen Alwell, a doctoral student in the School of Education, developed and utilized an electronic survey to collect information regarding student perceptions of the doctoral program in general, and the distance education format in particular, offered by the SOE. Her survey was adapted from Lauri Herrmann's (1997) Student Socialization Survey, and the results were included in a larger paper presented at the 2001 American Educational Research Association meeting by Gloeckner, Herrmann-Ginsberg, and Ginsberg (2001). Using student responses to this electronic survey, a study comparing program satisfaction between and among traditional (on-campus) students and their peers in parallel distance programs was conducted. Also examined were student perceptions of different components of their Ph.D. level coursework in the School of Education at Colorado State University. All currently enrolled doctoral students in the School of Education at the time were invited to respond. This included on-campus students enrolled in Educational Leadership, Community College Leadership, Human Resource Development and Interdisciplinary Studies programs, and distance education students enrolled in Educational Leadership cohorts in Grand Junction, Atlanta, and Chicago as well as several Community College Leadership cohorts. 124 students in all responded.

The survey went through several revisions based upon selected student and faculty input, and an electronic version was developed. A few of the responses were open-ended; most required the student to select from 1-4 responses for each item in a 1-4 Likert-type response range, e.g., 1 = not satisfied, 2 = somewhat satisfied, 3 = satisfied, 4 = very satisfied; 1 = not important, 2 = important, 3 = somewhat important, 4 = very important. Reliability, using Cronbach's Alpha, was obtained on the original survey using an internal consistency method for items not scored as right and wrong. The reliability coefficient was .89. (This was not recalculated for the revised instrument). Validity was addressed through having fellow students and faculty read through various drafts of the questionnaire to determine breadth and depth of coverage of items and revisions were made based on input received.

Doctoral students Morgen Alwell and Deena Koessl conducted an analysis of responses to the open-ended questions contained in the instrument. What follows is a summary of the most relevant findings to the open-ended questions:

The three distance education components which are the most important.



Clearly, the 3 components students indicated were most important to the success of their distance education programs were face-face contact with faculty, use of WebCT and the strength of the cohort model. Other uses of technology were also important: audio-video or audio only connection to classes, electronic access to library, email, and use of listservs. The importance of advising was also mentioned frequently, as was the importance of occasional travel to the CSU campus, meeting as a whole class, and the ability to use interlibrary loan.

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Other activities/interactions that were/are part of your program and indicate their level of importance to you.

The most common response to this question dealt with the cohort and sub/cohorts and how the relationships formed with people in their groups was very important to students' success in the program. Also mentioned was face-to-face interaction, technology, relevance of coursework to work environment, and course content.

What would you change, if you could, to make your Ph.D. program more effective?

The biggest change mentioned was the need for regular advising, particularly related to dissertation issues and committee makeup. Also mentioned was changing the content of classes in some respects, changing the structure of the classes, requests for more face-to-face interaction with faculty, better technology, and better scheduling and layout of classes.

Please describe what you consider to be the greatest strengths of your program.

Forty-seven percent mentioned the quality of the faculty at CSU as a strength. This was by far the most often cited response for both distance and on-campus students. The distance students specifically mentioned the cohort model, the availability of the program, the convenience of the program, and the use of technology as strengths. The on-campus students cited developing relationships with peers and frequent contact with professors most often.

Please describe what you consider to be the greatest weaknesses of your program.

Two major categories were listed as a weakness: Limited contact/communication [with faculty and/or students] and the structure of the classes and/or program. Specifically, 10 participants felt that the face-to-face contact with faculty and other students was too limited. The remainder cited a basic lack of communication, e.g., regarding program details, as a problem. The other weaknesses cited most often related to the structure of the program, student makeup of cohort [personality conflicts], staffing issues, lack of advising, and technological difficulties [in the distance "hookups"].

Summary

Since this research was conducted with a large group of students, and all responses were anonymous, the next logical step would be to interview selected individuals more in-depth regarding their views about the distance education programs. In particular, issues related to program changes would be most pertinent since the SOE is continually striving to improve their curriculum, methodologies, and general program procedures. Also of interest would be the improvements current students have seen since starting the program.

References

Gloeckner, G.W., Herrmann-Ginsberg, L., Ginsberg, R. (April 2001). Distance and Traditional Ph.D. Students: Performance and Perspectives Comparing. Paper presented at Division J session, American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.

Herrmann, L. (1997). Student's perceptions of socialization to the profession in a program that includes both on-campus and distance education options. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of South Carolina. *Dissertation Abstracts International*, 46, AAC850579.

A Student View

Inspired by the Ph.D. program evaluation survey, and in order to get a more detailed idea as to how our distance education students perceive our programs, we have decided to offer a series of interviews with students. One of our students from the Atlanta DeVry cohort, Olga Macy, has graciously agreed to inaugurate this important part of our newsletter. Thanks, Olga, for sharing your thoughtful responses with us.

Student: Olga Macy	Program: Ph.D. in Educational Leadership	Location: Atlanta
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► About Me

I began my career with DeVry University in 1980 and progressed through various administrative positions to the Dean of Student Services in 1994. In January 1999, I enrolled in the Ph.D. program at CSU, and in August 2001, I accepted the challenge to enter the teaching arena at the university. This transition from student services into academics was partly due to my participation in the doctoral program. All of my cohorts had taught at some point in their career, and I had the unique position of being the only cohort who had not stepped into the teaching arena. Their stories and experience in the classroom inspired me to experience what they had shared. Currently, I am teaching both freshman and senior level courses. I am participating in the newly implemented Learning Community program in which selected freshman faculty who teach also function as academic advisors to those students. I serve in this capacity and also provide personal counseling to all students. This opportunity has been very rewarding, and many of the cohorts are mentoring me through this exciting learning process. Teaching has been one of the most rewarding experiences in my career.

Upon completion of my master's degree, it was my ultimate goal to pursue and earn a doctoral degree. I had already begun the process of making applications for the degree. It was both fortuitous and coincidental when in October, 1998, I learned that DeVry University was actually going to sponsor a Ph.D. Educational Leadership Program in conjunction with CSU. Professors from CSU visited the campus the following month to give us an overview of the program, answer all questions and have those who were interested to complete pertinent paperwork for enrollment. Actually two days after I made the decision to attend CSU, I received acceptance to a doctoral program at Georgia State University, where I had completed my master's degree. Regardless, the program at CSU seemed a better fit for me.

Features that were particularly appealing to me were:

- 1) convenience of faculty coming to us
- 2) convenience of classes being held on campus
- 3) convenience of classes being held on Friday and Saturday
- 4) comfort of attending classes with those you know (although, initially, I was somewhat apprehensive about this – too much of work involvement, but this was dispelled very quickly once the program began)
- 5) availability of on-line classes
- 6) structure and organization of the program – it was completely mapped out
- 7) support from DeVry University to pursue the program
- 8) and...it would be better to step away from Georgia State University as I had received both undergraduate and master's degrees from this university.

➤ **What's it like to be in a doctoral program from a distance?**

This is an interesting question. My first thought is – you are right, I am in a doc program from a distance. Quite frankly, I don't think of it in that way. The camaraderie of the cohort group is promoted from the first day of the first class and is fostered and nurtured by the entire CSU faculty throughout the entirety of the program. Also, the faculty entered into our arena and wanted to get to know each of us - establish a mentor/student relationship. It was obvious that these individuals had a vested interest in our individual development and success as doctoral students and were very willing to share our peaks and valleys throughout the course. And we have had many!

What was unique to me was that I did have reservations about attending this program with individuals that you work with all day long. In addition you are attending classes in an environment that you work in all day long. These thoughts were dispelled very quickly. Another point is..... I cannot think of one time when I needed feedback or questions answered that I did not receive a timely response. Actually, I feel that the communication was by far better than when I attended a local university to earn my other degrees.

➤ **Has the program felt like a set of individual courses or a total "program"?**

From the onset, there was an attitude and an atmosphere that tied each individual course into the bigger picture – the dissertation. Now that I look back, I can see that the timing of the courses was well thought out for successful progression through the program. I can remember, especially during the first year, there seemed to be a proverbial statement that was delivered – "I know that it might not make sense to you now why you are taking this course, and why it is important, but believe me, it will later on." Poor Dr. Cobb had to say this at least four times every hour while teaching the quantitative research courses to our cohort group!! None of us believed him then, but now!

➤ **Identify three distance ed components which are most important to the success of the program.**

This is easy:

- 1) The support generated by the cohesiveness of the cohort group, and the faculty/student mentor relationships that you establish with the faculty.
- 2) The visit to the CSU campus sponsored by both DeVry/ CSU..... and the tremendous reception given by CSU across the campus were truly wonderful experiences! You felt that you were part of the campus.
- 3) You are treated no differently than if you were participating in a doc program right on campus...you really feel that the faculty have a personal interest in your personal growth and development and are there for you when you need them.

➤ **What do you see as the one area for improvement in the program?**

There is one thing that comes to mind. I would have really liked to take all the needed electives from CSU. Even though we were advised early on to think about electives, it was just not in my thought process to take advantage of some of the on-line classes that were available during that first year or coordinate with CSU to have elective courses delivered to us. Even if I had been, I may not have seized the opportunity to do so from just being overwhelmed with the core

coursework. For example, I know that Dr. Safarik is teaching a qualitative research class this summer, and we might have planned to coordinate to have her come deliver the class to us in Atlanta. At the onset, it might be advantageous to map out strategies for electives and have some faculty from CSU fill those needs. I think there were several of us that talked about classes that we would all have been interested in but just never followed through with talking with anyone from CSU about our needs. It seems we were always focusing on our coursework, comps or prelims!

➤ **Additional Observations**

DeVry University and CSU are to be commended for establishing and supporting this doctoral program. The CSU faculty all have a good balance in understanding both life issues and work demands that confront their students and have facilitated this process with the greatest of ease and diplomacy. I think that Dr. Albright summed this up quite nicely when he said to me, "Olga, all of you will be different people when you complete this process." It seems that for many of us that self-esteem is based on what you know, not what you can learn, and this doctoral program has certainly moved us to a different plateau. It is not only about what you can learn, but rather "how will you use what you learn?" It's really about you, who you are, what's important to you, and how will you make a difference with this learning. This is my interpretation of what Dr. Albright was trying to convey. Thus far, this journey has been an interesting one, and I can almost feel what it might be like to cross that finish line. Thus far, I can honestly say this has been a real experience – wonderful and rewarding, but at the same time stressful and soul-searching!!! But I think that's what it is all about, isn't it???

New Programs and Services

There is a new unit established within our School of Education this past year that we are pleased to announce. The *Research Support Office* has been organized by Drs. George Morgan and James Banning. With the assistance of quantitative and qualitative methodologists, this office will provide help to SOE Ph.D. students, especially those in the distance education programs. This support will focus on methods and analysis of data and the writing of these parts of dissertations. The office will also provide help as students prepare for the research preliminary comprehensive exam. For further information contact Dr. George Morgan at 970/491-0608.

Welcome Chicago DeVry!

We are pleased to announce the arrival of the Chicago cohort this summer. This group of Ph.D. students, participating in the DeVry/CSU partnership, is in the Educational Leadership program and will be fulfilling some of the course requirements on campus in June. They will be on campus for one week, from June 24 through June 28. In addition to taking these courses, we will be hosting a picnic on Wednesday, June 26th at Rolland Moore Park at 5:30pm. Please stop by and welcome these folks to campus! Colorado State University is an equal opportunity/affirmative action institution and complies with all Federal and Colorado State laws, regulations, and executive orders regarding affirmative action requirements in all programs.

The Office of Equal Opportunity is located in 101 Student Services. In order to assist Colorado State University in meeting its affirmative action responsibilities, ethnic minorities, women, and other protected class members are encouraged to apply and to so identify themselves.



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