

Despite Popularity, Researcher Finds Not Everyone Can Successfully Learn Through Online Courses

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Since the 1990s, online courses have provided an opportunity for busy adults to continue their education by completing courses in the comfort of their own homes. However, this may not be the best solution for everyone. A researcher at the University of Missouri has found some students may find success in these types of courses more easily than others.

Shawna L. Strickland, clinical assistant professor in the MU School of Health Professions, studied the demographics and personality types of distance learners.

“Correlations between learning styles and success in distance education have shown to be inconclusive,” Strickland said. “However, one common theme reappears: the successful traits of a distance learner are similar to the successful traits of an adult learner in traditional educational settings.”

With a mere 30 percent of distance learners actually completing their courses, learning more about the characteristics of these students would help educators structure online courses to be as beneficial as possible. Considering the lack of institutional support and isolation involved in the nature of online courses, success in these courses requires a person that is determined and responsible, Strickland said.

“The success of distance learning is dependent on communication among the learner, his or her peers and the instructor,” Strickland said. “To encourage success in distance learning, it is necessary to evaluate each individual’s needs on a case-by-case basis.”

One trait that aids in distance learning is related to personality type. Strickland found those with quiet, introverted personalities are more likely to feel comfortable with online learning courses. Shy individuals have a tendency to be uninvolved in the typical classroom setting. Online courses allow them to complete work on their own with a degree of anonymity.

“Distance learning allows the learner to overcome traditional barriers to learning such as location, disabilities, time constraints and familial obligations,” Strickland said. “However, not every learner will be successful in a distance learning environment.”

The study – “Understanding Successful Characteristics of Adult Learners” – was published in the most recent edition of *Respiratory Care Education Annual*.

Source: University of Missouri

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