

CURA Transition Study



KILLICK CENTRE FOR E-LEARNING RESEARCH
A COMMUNITY-UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ALLIANCE



KEY FINDING:
Compared to their cohorts, a larger proportion of students in CDLI courses had plans to participate in post-secondary programs in general and university programs in particular.

Studying CDLI Students in Transition

The CURA Transition Study was designed to examine a) student transition to post-secondary education and/or the workforce after high school, and b) the impact of prior distance learning course participation on students' transition experiences.

Between 2007 and 2009, the Transition Study researchers conducted a three-phase study to assess the post-secondary transitions of high school students who took courses provided by the Centre for Distance Learning and Innovation (CDLI). Data for these analyses were collected from student surveys administered by the researchers as well as high school and university academic records.

Study I Results

Study I investigated the post-secondary plans of CDLI students in their final year of high school. The results revealed that a larger proportion of the students who completed CDLI courses planned to enrol in a post-secondary program (94.4%) compared to students who took no CDLI courses (86.2%). Similarly, more of the CDLI students planned to attend university (48.4%) as compared to other students (33.0%). There was a significant association between student enrolment in CDLI courses and plans to enrol in a post-secondary program and to undertake university studies.

Further analysis, which considered additional variables such as gender and academic performance, indicated that CDLI course participation was independent of students' post-secondary plans while academic performance was a significant factor. In comparison, both high school grades and CDLI course participation were significant in predicting plans for eventual enrolment at university.

Study II Results

Study II consisted of a follow-up survey with students who participated in Study I. This examination of student progression to post-secondary education found that high school graduates who completed CDLI courses had a slightly higher level of post-secondary participation compared to those without CDLI course experience (72.4% versus 70.9%). Individuals with CDLI course experience had a much higher level of participation (65.1%) in university programs in comparison to the other graduates (38.5%).

Study III Results

Study III compared the university retention rates of former CDLI students with other students who were not on-line learners in high school. A slightly larger proportion of the students with CDLI course experience returned for a second year of university studies (77.8% versus 72.9%). Similarly, more of the students with on-line course experience returned for a fourth year of university (62.3% versus 54.1%). However, there were no statistically significant differences between the year two and year four retention rates. Statistical analyses that factored in gender and academic performance found that CDLI course participation was not a significantly contributing variable. Academic performance in university was a significant influence on both counts.

Results Summary

Overall, these results suggest that CDLI course participation is not a significant factor in the post-secondary education transition process while student academic achievement is consistently influential.

Graduates of the New Learning Environment

In 2009, a study of high school graduates who had taken CDLI courses as well as graduates who had completed high school entirely face-to-face was conducted. These students were graduates of the Class of 2008 who had attended 1 of 35 rural schools in Newfoundland and Labrador. The purpose of this study was to examine CDLI students' participation in post-secondary education, as well as their experiences with and perceptions of on-line learning following high school graduation.

The study was conducted in two phases. In the first phase, the high school graduates completed a short telephone survey. For the second phase, a smaller sample of students who responded to the initial telephone survey were selected to participate in in-depth telephone interviews.

Students who completed CDLI courses in high school were asked if their participation in these courses prepared them for post-secondary education in any way. Most of the students

interviewed indicated that completing some of their high school courses on-line had helped them to develop skills in a number of important areas. Many of them noted that CDLI courses required them to exercise a greater level of independence, self-discipline, and responsibility – all skills they recognized as being valuable to their ability to learn in the post-secondary setting.

Some of the students believed that they were more prepared for post-secondary level studies because their

experiences in CDLI courses had helped them to become more organized and to develop effective time management skills and study habits.

While the majority of the students indicated a preference for face-to-face learning over on-line courses, it is significant that their experience with on-line learning in high school appears to have helped students who participated in this study to develop skills that facilitated their further learning.

Student Perspectives on the New Learning Environment

In 2010, the Transition Study researchers carried out a survey designed to collect information from university students regarding their expectations and perceptions of on-line distance education courses.

Each of the students in the sample signed up for and completed one or more on-line courses since entering university in 2006. Among the students surveyed, 44.1% had completed CDLI courses in high school while the remaining 55.9% had not.

Findings from this study show that students tended

to perceive themselves as self-regulated learners. Their responses indicated that they had a sense of self-efficaciousness (or competence) with regard to their participation in distance education courses.

Overall, the students strongly agreed that they tended to regulate their personal learning environments. They also agreed that they proactively set goals for their learning in their university distance courses. They were somewhat less likely to agree that they employed self-regulated learning strategies such as self-evaluation and time management.

Students tended not to agree that they would learn more or receive a higher grade in distance education courses as compared to courses delivered in the traditional face-to-face format. They also appeared to hold a slightly negative view of communications and collaboration in distance education courses. Survey responses provided by these students also indicated that they were somewhat dissatisfied with their distance education course experiences in university.

When the high school distance learners (i.e., former CDLI students) were compared to the other university

students who participated in the survey, there are no significant differences between them on any of the measures included in this study.

Overall, the results of statistical comparisons indicated that, despite their earlier exposure to virtual learning environments, the attitudes, perspectives, and expectations of students who participated in distance e-learning in high school were not significantly different from those of students who first encountered on-line learning in the university setting.

Meet the Researchers: Dr. Dennis Sharpe and Dr. Dale Kirby

Dr. Dennis Sharpe is a Professor in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland where he chairs the Post-Secondary Education Studies programs and works with adult learners from a wide variety of occupational backgrounds. His recent research projects have included the development of effective distance (internet-based) delivery approaches, the development and delivery of interprofessional health education, and youth transitions into post-secondary education and the workforce.

Dr. Dale Kirby is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland where he teaches graduate and undergraduate courses in Post-Secondary Education Studies. His research interests include the transition to post-secondary education and the labour market, with a focus on factors influencing student persistence and success. Dr. Kirby is the author of one of Canada's most widely-read blogs about trends, issues, research, practices, and problems in post-secondary education (<http://post-secondary.blogspot.com>).