



# The Effectiveness of an Online MEd Degree: Perceptions of Recent Graduates

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## ABSTRACT

There has been a recent trend for Universities to deliver more instruction in a fully online format both for convenience and cost-effectiveness. Many graduate students in music education are full-time teachers and do not have the time in their schedule to attend classes on campus, so this form of instruction is attractive to many in our profession. Illinois State University has recently instituted a fully online option for the Master of Music Education degree. This poster summarizes the changes made to the curriculum and course delivery to become fully online and shares survey results of those who have participated in the program.

All the MEd majors who had registered for graduate courses in the MEd degree between Fall 2011 and Fall 2016 (N=40) were contacted and asked to complete an online survey. Questions that address content delivery, student interaction, professor/student interaction, sense of community and overall satisfaction were asked using simple Likert scales.

Twenty-one students responded to the survey and mean scores showed that students did find the online format appropriate for the courses taught and that building community was the greatest struggle in taking these courses.

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## PROGRAM CHANGES MADE TO BECOME FULLY ONLINE

1. Required MEd courses were converted one at a time starting in 2011 using the open source course management system Sakai. This process took 4 years to complete.
2. Professors teaching these courses agreed to participate in "quality matters" workshops aimed at preparing them to teach in an on-line environment.
3. Online versions of the music education courses continued using textbooks and scholarly research articles, but supplemented instruction with online readings, narrated *powerpoints*, video lectures, monitored discussion forums, and collaborative projects.
4. In 2015, four regularly offered online graduate courses through the department of education were added as elective options to the MEd degree. In addition, the graduate coordinator created two new elective courses through the School of Music to complete the fully online degree plan.
3. So far, there have been 40 graduate students who have taken at least one of the online offerings offered by the School of Music. The first student to complete all course work in a fully online setting is scheduled to graduate in the Spring of 2018.

## KEY RESULTS

Surveys were sent out to all students who had participated in an online course through the School of Music (N=40), and 21 students responded.

Overall, do you believe these courses were appropriate to be taught in an online format? **Mean score: 4.04**  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 absolutely not most definitely

Overall, do you believe the work you handed in for your on-line classes was more thorough than the work handed in for your face to face classes? (write N/A if this doesn't apply to you) **Mean score: 3.17**  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 absolutely not about the same most definitely

Did completing the quizzes, projects and readings for your online course take more of your time, less of your time, or about the same as your face to face classes? **Mean score: 1.72 (supported by the literature)**  
 1 more time 2 same amount of time 3 less time not applicable

Overall, did you feel isolated when taking your online courses for the MEd? **Mean score: 2.86**  
 1 2 3 4 5  
 absolutely not most definitely

What aspect of your online class do you believe you have struggled with the most? (please rank 1-6, 1 being the greatest struggle)

- Accessing the course materials **5**
- Managing your time **4**
- Keeping up with course deadlines **3**
- Writing meaningful entries on class forums **2**
- Following written directions **6**
- Building community **1 (this matches what is found in the literature)**

Which form of communication do you believe was most effective in building relationships/community with your online class? (please rank 1-5, 1 being most effective)

- Regular emails from instructor to entire class **4**
- Forum posts and discussion starters from your instructor **2**
- Regular emails to you from instructor **5**
- Forum posts from other students **1 (this matches what is found in the literature)**
- Comments on assignments from instructor **2**

## FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE

Research indicates that the number of adult learners enrolled in higher education will either remain stable or increase in the current decade. Adult learners are defined as over twenty-five (Hussar and Bailey, 2009).

Hussar, W., and Bailey, T. M. (2009). Projections of Education Statistics to 2018. Table 3: Actual and Middle Alternative Projected Numbers for College Enrollment Rates by Sex, Attendance, Status and Age: Fall 2007, 2013, and 2018. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.gov/programs/projections/projections2018/>

...students struggle with the enormous level of autonomy and time management required to complete an online course (Brophy, 2010).

Brophy, N. (2010, August). The Impact of E-Learning on Student Engagement. *Bright Hub Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.brighthub.com/education/online>

The online education literature has many references that support the learning community as a means of creating an effective instructional environment. If students in an online course experience a sense of isolation, they will not benefit from the course. They must acquire a sense of community. It enhances the learning process (Rovai and Baker, 2005).

Rovai, A. P. and Baker, J. D. (2005). Gender Differences in Online Learning. *The Quarterly Review of Distance Education*, Vol. 6(1): 31-44.

There is substantial research to support the fact that students become more involved in courses when they perceive the other students to be so involved as well (DiRamio and Wolverton, 2006).

DiRamio, D. and Wolverton, Mi. (2006). Integrating Learning Communities and Distance Education: Possibility or Pipedream? *Innovative Higher Education*, Vol. 31 (2): 99-113.

Generally speaking, online courses are harder than face-to-face ones, not easier. Online courses require a tremendous amount of self-discipline and no small amount of academic ability and technical competence (Jenkins, 2011).

Jenkins, R. (2011). Why are so Many Students Still Failing Online? *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Why-Are-So-Many-Students-Still/127584/>.