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Awareness and Perceptions of Old Dominion University's Teletechnet Program by Lord Fairfax Community College Students

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AWARENESS AND PERCEPTIONS OF OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY'S
TELETECHNET PROGRAM BY LORD FAIRFAX COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

A Research Study Presented to the Graduate Faculty of the
Department of Occupational and Technical Studies
at Old Dominion University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Master of Science

By

Rita Rowand

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This research paper was prepared by Rita Rowand under the direction of Dr. John

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was submitted to the Graduate Program Director as partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Occupational and Technical Studies.

APPROVAL BY: _____   8-2-04
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Old Dominion University's (ODU) distance learning program, TELETECHNET,

(TTN) has been in operation since 1993. It was first introduced at the Fauquier Campus

of Lord Fairfax Community College (LFCC) in the fall semester of 1999. Advertised as

"no Virginian is more than 50 miles from a TELETECHNET site" (Old Dominion

University TELETECHNET Brochure, 2002), there was some doubt as to whether the

students attending the host institution, LFCC, were aware of the TTN program and the

degrees and courses it offered.

The ODU Distance Learning Program's best form of advertising, as listed in their

2002-2003 annual report is word of mouth. Yet TTN students who spoke with LFCC

students reported to ODU staff how uninformed the LFCC students were of what was

available on their own campus, an opportunity to complete a four-year degree and even a

masters degree at the same location they already attended. This was most surprising since

the format of the distance learning program was conducted through live satellite

television to an actual classroom setting, and not a web-based format, which is less

obvious to the student body.

This kind of feedback established a need to inform the local students of the

opportunities available to them, regarding the TTN program. Thus, it led to a study of

actual awareness, knowledge and perceptions of the TTN program by students and

faculty of Lord Fairfax Community College.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problem of this study was to determine the awareness, perceptions and misperceptions of Lord Fairfax Community College's students regarding Old Dominion University's distance learning TELETECHNET program.

RESEARCH GOALS

To find answers to this problem, the following research goals were established:

1. Determine Lord Fairfax student awareness and perception of Old Dominion University's distance learning TELETECHNET system and its programs.

2. Determine student's attitudes toward distance learning for higher education degrees.

3. Present recommendations for improving Lord Fairfax Community College's staff and faculty knowledge of TELETECHNET in order to advise their students in a more comprehensive way.

4. Present recommendations to Old Dominion University Distance Learning administrators for ways of improving the overall knowledge of the Old Dominion University Distance Learning Program at community colleges throughout Virginia and other locations where TELETECHNET is offered.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

In 2000, information was gathered throughout the Florida Community College system about courses available to students through distance technologies. Information from both faculty members' and students' perceptions of teaching and learning through distance learning was analyzed. The study focused on two-way interactive teleclasses as well as on-line courses. The overall goal of the study was to learn more about how many students participated in the distance learning medium, and how their instructors regarded their students' learning experiences. The results of this study indicated that community

college students appreciated the accessibility and convenience of distance learning courses and were willing to adapt to and accommodate themselves to the technology. (Florida State Board of Community Colleges, 2000)

This type of study had not been performed in Virginia regarding the ODU TELETECHNET program. Therefore, it was a topic of interest to the ODU administration and the LFCC instructional services staff. Vice-President of TELETECHNET, Edith Barnett, stated that this type of study would be very useful in designing a plan to inform community college students of the ODU distance learning program at other sites which offered TELETECHNET. (Barnett, 2003)

"From the moment a perspective student learns of your program, there will be decision points for him or her at each one of which you win or lose an enrollment." (Granger & Benke, 1998, p. 131) The importance of this juncture, described in *Distance Learners in Higher Education*, states how initial interaction with potential students is critical from the moment they learn of a choice in their education options. "The time and resources invested at the outset to respond to and engage inquiries effectively can serve not only to improve enrollments, but to provide an important information base for the continuing success and retention of enrolled students. This is true for individual students, and especially for targeted populations of students with shared characteristics or experiences. (Granger & Benke, 1998, p. 131) The students at LFCC are such a targeted population. Introducing them to the TELETECHNET program from their earliest contact is an important way to secure future enrollments and long-term retention.

The broad characteristics that determine this specific population, their attitudes, knowledge and beliefs, was identified through a survey of current students at LFCC. This

helped in understanding the learner's needs and how the TELETECHNET program can meet them.

LIMITATIONS

TELETECHNET is represented at 23 community colleges and additional locations in the state of Virginia such as 13 Virginia Military institutions. This study was limited to a random sampling of students at the Fauquier Campus of Lord Fairfax Community College. The study was conducted with a survey during the 2003-04 academic calendar year.

ASSUMPTIONS

This study was based on the following assumptions:

1. Students will consider distance learning options as one means for completing coursework and degrees.

2. Faculty who became better informed of ODU's distance learning opportunities on behalf of their students, would more adequately describe them once their knowledge of the TELETECHNET program increased.

3. Distance learning is a viable option for students to complete their B.S. and M.S. degrees.

4. Forms of distance education are being used for learning and earning degrees throughout the world.

PROCEDURES

For this study, the researcher conducted a review of literature specifically related to community college students and distance learning programs conducted at distance sites. The researcher then developed a survey which was administered to students at the

Fauquier Campus of LFCC. The survey questioned a sample of the student population about their knowledge and awareness of the TTN program, degrees and courses offered at the LFCC campus. Surveys were distributed to students at LFCC from various disciplines including English, Math, Science and Nursing.

The information was compiled to create a model for informing students at other community colleges in Virginia, where TTN is offered. This included ways to transfer general information about the program and what degrees and courses were available at that locality. After the surveys were collected, the researcher compiled this information in order to provide an analysis of students' awareness of TTN's existence and what, if any, detailed information they knew about such degrees and courses offered.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The terms used in this study are defined as follows:

LFCC-Lord Fairfax Community College

ODU-Old Dominion University

TELETECHNET-Old Dominion University's distance learning program

TTN-TELETECHNET

VCCS-Virginia Community College System

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

Chapter I, Introduction, described the need to study LFCC students' perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes for use in future marketing and to increase enrollments and applications. The need to inform other community colleges about the TTN program was also established. The limitations, definitions of terms, assumptions and procedures were

included in the Introduction along with research overview.

Chapter II is a Review of Literature. It describes information about distance learning programs at other community colleges and how they are viewed. Also the concepts of collaboration among institutions and decision making factors for distance learning usage were described.

Chapter III includes a description of the population, the methods of how the survey was conducted, the resulting data collected and how they were statistically analyzed. Chapter IV includes findings and results of the data from the survey. Finally, in Chapter V, a summary of the findings are stated as well as conclusions and recommendations on how to utilize the material and make it transferable to other community college populations.

CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter provides information on distance learning and how it is perceived by community college students and faculty. It includes data on students' past experiences in distance learning and how they make decisions regarding its inclusion in their learning. Additionally, partnerships between Virginia community colleges such as LFCC and the ODU distance learning program, TTN, were examined to determine how they contribute to enhancing distance opportunities for students.

A review of information regarding distance learning's growth, perception, and collaboration in higher education is presented in this chapter. It is important background material for conducting this study of one community college's students and faculty in regard to the perception of the TTN distance learning program. This information assists in determining ODU's long-range planning of communication strategies with future students and the marketing of distance programs at other TTN host institutions.

Growth of Distance Learning Opportunities

Distance learning options have grown significantly in recent years. Technological advancements have become an important factor in the use of distance learning by increasing the options available to students. New delivery modes of classes make time and location no longer issues to overcome when completing a class in distance learning. This is important because the needs of the learner have changed. The majority of distance learners are adults with busy lifestyles, jobs and many responsibilities. These learners require flexibility regarding their education.

Institutions of higher learning have responded to these needs by increasing the number of distance learning courses each year. Of all degree-granting institutions surveyed by the U.S. Department of Education, 56 percent offered distance learning in the 2000-2001 academic year. An additional twelve percent of universities intended to add distance learning courses in the next three years. (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2002) These percentages are based on the estimated 4,130 2-year and 4-year Title IV-eligible, degree-granting institutions in the nation. (Tabs, 2003)

More specific to this study, ninety percent of public two-year colleges offered some form of distance education program in 2000 and an additional five percent planned to offer it in the next three years. Public 2-year institutions had the greatest number of enrollments in distance education courses with 48 percent of the total enrollments being in distance education courses. (U.S. Department of Education, 2002)

In the Virginia Community College System (VCCS), distance learning has been described by rapid, continual growth of more than 20 percent each year. In the academic year 2000-2001, over 34,000 students took at least one class via a distance medium. Over 96 percent of students stated they would take another distance learning class. (Schultz, 2001)

Overall Satisfaction or Dissatisfaction of Distance Learning

Several states' community college systems have surveyed how well their students viewed distance learning opportunities. In California, a state with the largest community college system, the Chancellor's Office of Distance Education conducts a survey, each fall and spring semester, of students who participate in distance classes. Of 4,441 students

responding to a five-point Likert scale, approximately 82 percent of those completing the survey indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with their quality of instruction in distance learning. The overall course quality rating was almost 84 percent satisfaction. When asked whether they would take another distance course, nearly 87 percent agreed or strongly agreed that they would. (Chancellor's Office CCCCO, 2003).

The VCCS conducted a survey of distance learning in the spring of 2001 due to the increasing demand and participation of students in distance learning courses. The instruments utilized were two on-line questionnaires. Faculty members teaching distance learning were also asked about their distance teaching experiences. Questions were open-ended and categorized for analysis. (Schultz, 2001)

Students in the VCCS study commented that due to work schedules and family obligations, distance learning was the only way they could further their education. The traits they liked most about distance education were convenience and flexibility, and the trait they liked least was lack of interaction. Of those asked whether they would take another distance course, 96 percent responded affirmatively. (Schultz, 2001)

Fifty-eight faculty members provided a narrative summary of trends, concerns and commonalities in the VCCS study. One issue of concern was their experience with too steep a learning curve in order to deliver distance learning classes. This factor was also stated in the Florida Community College distance survey. (Florida State Board of Community Colleges, 2000) Faculty members reported concern about a lack of vision in the VCCS, for future distance learning plans.

It was summarized that students want the opportunities distance learning offers and they will continue to participate in distance education. (Schultz, 2001) This also confirms

the need for further study to evaluate awareness and perception of specific distance learning programs like TTN.

Collaboration and Partnerships

In 1999, forty-six percent of 2- and 4-year institutions of higher education had special arrangements with institutions, or other colleges to provide distance learning services specific to that organization. (Primary Research Group, 1999) These partnerships allowed distance learning to occur where it might ordinarily not be available. For example, TTN allows students to pursue advanced degrees by attending televised courses broadcast at local community colleges. This form of distance learning medium affords the many community colleges and military bases throughout Virginia and other localities, to offer more classes and degrees to students in their own community. In this case, it is the LFCC/ODU partnership that allows this distance learning opportunity to occur. This partnership is essential to the success of the distance program, TTN, because ODU offers a communication medium and the actual main-campus teachers, while LFCC offers the facility in a convenient location to the local students.

One element of this partnership is communication. In 1999, institutions of higher learning offering distance education programs were surveyed. One conclusion was that communication was cited as being crucial to technology-mediated forms of education, both inside and outside the classroom. (Primary Research Group, 1999) Both institutional partners must interact with students to accommodate them in enrolling, participating and completing their goals in education within the confines of the organization.

Dr. John Sygielski, the President of Lord Fairfax Community College, commented that the only way students in Virginia's community colleges are going to benefit from the

partnership between the VCCS and ODU's TTN program is by having community college administrators, staff and faculty know more about the programs of study and particular classes being offered on VCCS campuses. (Sygielski, 2003)

At LFCC there were 483 full-time enrolled students in the spring semester of 2003. An additional 356 students were part-time or non-degree seeking. (Office of Student Services, 2004) These students were all commuters. Communication has been difficult since there is no common forum for delivering information and news to all students. A new e-mail system called People-soft was implemented but is not fully operational in sending general communications to students.

The student body has approximately 250 courses to choose from in a typical semester at the Fauquier campus, with 44 of those being distance courses, web-based or video-based. (LFCC catalog, 2002) Students can find these courses on the LFCC website or through a semester-based publication.

In a typical semester, ODU offers approximately 50 different courses which are part of thirteen different degree programs available at the Fauquier campus of LFCC. These courses are included in the LFCC semester publication of available courses offered. ODU publishes its own semester brochure which is available to LFCC students in the TTN classrooms, hallways and at the ODU site office. Whether this is an adequate communication medium to enroll new students is yet to be determined

Determination of Participation

It is important to understand enough about the learner's circumstances and learning needs so that some element of the specific program does not become a barrier

to engagement and eventual learning. (Granger & Benke 1998) The problems sometimes associated with successful implementation in a distance learning program can detract from the educational experience if not addressed early on. For example, if the learner is not comfortable with the delivery method, then the student may spend less time on learning. Or, if the learner is not well-informed about degree programs and how to access them, they will not progress on this journey of higher learning.

Models in existence, which were originally designed to study computer use and satisfaction, may also be able to predict participation with on-line and distance education courses which rely on the computer. The TAM or Technology Acceptance Model, originally used to study primary factors that predict computer use, was generalized in a study by Miller, Rainer and Corley (2001). They hypothesized that if these models could predict general computer use and satisfaction, they might also be able to predict and explain participation and engagement with online and distance learning courses. They explored how the TAM study could relate computer use to distance coursework (see Figure 1.)
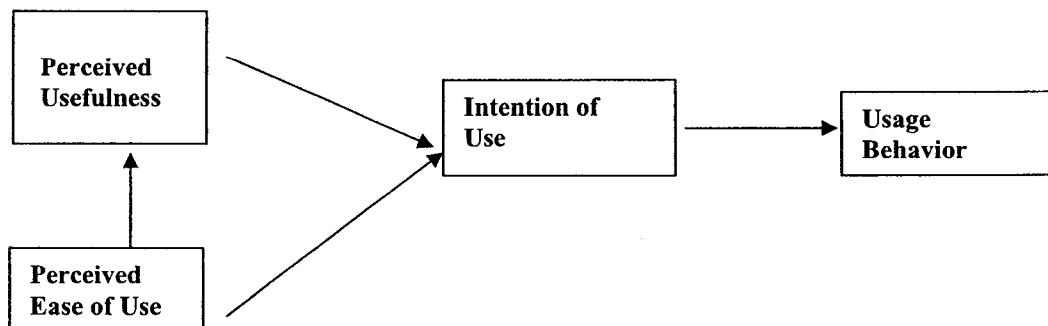

Figure 1. Technology Acceptance Model (Davis, Bagozzi, & Warshaw, 1989)

Perceived Usefulness refers to the individuals' perceptions that the technology or computer application will help them perform their jobs better. (Davis, 1989) That is, the application results in a positive use-performance relationship. In the context of distance learning, this definition can be interpreted as whether or not actively participating in the course would help the student achieve job or school related outcomes. (Miller, Rainer, & Corley, 2001)

Perceived Ease of Use refers to the degree to which a person believes that using a particular system would be free of effort. That is, can the application be easily used for the intended purpose. (Davis, 1989) In the context of learning, this could be interpreted as whether or not the learning tools are easy to work with in order for the student to participate and engage in the course.

The constructs of *usefulness* and *ease of use* predict the component called **Intention of Use**. Intention of a specific behavior has been shown to be an effective predictor of the actual behavior itself. In the context of on-line and distance education, intention translates directly to intention to engage in an online or distance course.

The data collected in this study supported the propositions centered on the TAM model. Perceived Ease of Use and Usefulness both had a significant, positive relationship on distance coursework. If the student perceived the delivery mechanism to be Easy to Use and also Useful, then they were more likely to become engaged. (Miller, Rainer, & Corley 2001) While this study centered more closely on on-line distance learning, it also can be viewed for other distance learning programs in that the key indicators of Ease of Use and Usefulness are important areas which help students decide whether to take a distance course or not.

From another perspective, administrators and marketers of distance education can hone in on these indicators and highlight them to potential students to increase participation and engagement. The TTN program at LFCC must adequately purvey these aspects to potential students to increase their participation in distance education, increasing enrollments.

The TTN distance program at LFCC cannot be assumed to be obvious to all students present. Most importantly, it may not be perceived as being useful or easy to use if misperceptions occur regarding the delivery methods and usefulness of the classes. This information must be available in greater detail to increase Ease of Use and Usefulness perception factors to LFCC students.

Summary

In Chapter II, information has been provided about the growth of distance education opportunities in the last few years, especially in community colleges. This chapter also examined how distance learning is viewed by students and faculty, whether they find it convenient, useful and would choose to repeat distance learning experiences.

The concept of collaboration among institutions in order to offer more distance education options was explored also. This was reflected in a description of the ODU/LFCC relationship for TTN distance learning. Finally, past studies were examined to better understand how students choose distance learning and what factors prevail in their decision making processes.

Creating a plan for future enrollments at the distance sites of the TTN program, administrators must take into account many of the aforementioned concepts in order to

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engage students more readily. As budgets must cover more activities, a more informed approach to acquiring higher enrollments in TTN classes will affect the entire program in a positive way.

In Chapter III, Methods and Procedures, greater detail about the population in this study will be explained. Also, the instrument design will be described and methods used to collect the data. An overview will be given of the type of statistical analysis determined to present data in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER III
METHODS AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this study was to determine the awareness and perceptions of

LFCC students about Old Dominion University's distance learning TELETECHNET

program. The information in this chapter describes the methods and procedures initiated

in order to reach the goals of this study. The population of the study and the instrument

design are described and the methods for gathering data and analysis are presented. A

summary is included.

POPULATION

The population used in this study was a random sampling of the LFCC student body.

Some students were part-time and some were full-time. There were 483 full-time enrolled

students for the Spring semester of 2004 and 356 part-time students. Students who

received the survey were randomly selected from LFCC classes, including English,

Science, Math and Nursing, offered during the Spring semester of the 2003-04 academic

year. The distribution of this survey was conducted with the cooperation of the LFCC

faculty of these classes. This was based upon the recommendation of the Student Services

Office which concluded that this would be one way to reach a large enough number of

LFCC students to make the study significantly represented. One hundred eighty-five

surveys were distributed.

INSTRUMENT DESIGN

In this descriptive research study, the survey was designed to reflect perceptions and misperceptions of the student body about TELETECHNET by first allowing them to respond to open-ended questions. The questionnaire included both open-ended and closed-ended questions. The closed-ended questions were based on a 5-point Likert scale designed to elicit responses which would reflect degree of knowledge and awareness of the current ODU distance learning program including types of degrees awarded. Additional questions were based upon the study's research goals (see Appendix A).

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

A cover letter was included with the survey, which explained the purpose of the study (see Appendix B). The first questionnaire was distributed during key class times in January, 2004, and distributed to other classes in February and March of 2004. Instructions were provided so those that had already completed the questionnaire should not participate a second time. Students were asked to list the last five digits of their social security number to allow the researcher to check for duplication. The subjects were assured in the cover letter that the survey was anonymous and the findings would be reported as aggregate data.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

After the completed questionnaires were returned, the data were tabulated and a mean value was calculated for each closed-form response. The remaining open-ended responses were reviewed and assessed using frequencies.

SUMMARY

The research methods and procedures outlined in this chapter have included the population, instrument design and methods for collecting data and determining statistical relationships from information gathered. In this descriptive study a single survey instrument was utilized and statistical data were drawn. It was analyzed to reach the research goals of the study. The results and statistical analysis will be described in Chapter IV, Findings.

CHAPTER IV
FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to determine the attitudes and perceptions, as well as

misperceptions, of LFCC students regarding the TELETECHNET distance learning

program of Old Dominion University. Chapter IV presents the survey results in the form

of descriptive information and a table gathered from open-form and closed-form

questions.

RESPONSE TO THE SURVEY

There were 839 students attending Lord Fairfax Community College in the Spring

Semester of 2004. The survey was distributed to 185 students and 100 were returned for a

54 percent response rate or twelve percent of the students attending during the semester.

SURVEY RESULTS, PART I

The Survey of Old Dominion University's TELETECHNET Program was a two-part

questionnaire. The first five questions were open-ended. The open-ended questions

allowed for perceptions to be revealed. Results yielded the following information.

Question 1. Do you know what TELETECHNET is, if so please describe.

Of one-hundred students who responded to this question, 60 students, or 60 percent,

said that they did not know what TELETECHNET was. Forty students, or 40 percent,

responded that they did know what it was but, of that group, eight students responded

incorrectly. The students who knew what TELETECHNET was, described observing the

television, which can be seen from the foyer of LFCC through the large windows in the

classroom. Those that incorrectly described it thought classes were only web-based. The name TELETECHNET seemed confusing to some students who described it as use of a telephone for learning.

Question 2. Are you aware of the types of degrees that are offered at LFCC beyond an Associate Degree? If so, please list:

Of one-hundred students who completed the survey, 70 students, or 70 percent, responded that they did not know of other degrees offered. Thirty students, or 30 percent, answered that they thought there were other degrees and listed Bachelors and Masters degrees as a response. Eighteen students of this group responded incorrectly by listing Continuing Education and career certificate programs such as dental hygiene, LPN and paramedic as degrees to be obtained through TELETECHNET. Four individuals, or four percent of the 30 that responded, said they were aware that other degrees were offered but they did not know what they were.

Question 3. Where would you go to find more information about TELETECHNET?

One hundred students responded to this question, but some students gave more than one answer. Fifty-two students, or 49 percent of responses, indicated the internet or ODU website as their source of information. Eighteen students, or 17 percent, listed the Student Services Office of LFCC as a source for seeking information. Fourteen students, or 13 percent, responded they would seek information at the ODU site office. Eleven students, or 10 percent, had no idea where to obtain information. Six students or six percent listed the library as a place to find information about TELETECHNET. Five students or four percent listed the LFCC semester brochure as a source. One student or one percent would ask a friend.

Question 4. Have you participated in any kind of distance learning experience and if so, describe:

Of one-hundred students who responded, 53 students, or 53 percent, responded that they had not participated in any kind of distance learning experience. Forty-seven students, or 47 percent, responded affirmatively, that they had participated in distance learning. Of those who had participated, the majority had taken an on-line web course of some kind.

Question 5. Do you plan to take future courses by a distance learning medium, if so, why?

Of one-hundred students who were surveyed, 54 students, or 54 percent, responded that they had no plans to take a course by distance learning. Thirty students, or 30 percent, were undecided. Sixteen students, or 16 percent, responded that they would take a distance learning class. The reason most cited for this was convenience.

<center>SURVEY RESULTS, PART II</center>

The second part of the survey was a series of eight close-ended statements to which students responded how strongly they agreed or disagreed on a five-point Likert Scale. Answers ranged from Strongly Agree, which was assigned 5 points to Strongly Disagree which was assigned 1 point. The mean was determined for each question from 100 responses.

Question 1, Part II. I am aware of the TELETECHNET program.

The first question was asked to determine overall awareness of whether the LFCC students knew that the TELETECHNET program existed at their community college. The results of the survey reflect that half of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed that they were aware of TELETECHNET. An additional sixteen percent of students were

uncertain, while only thirty-four percent agreed they were even aware the program existed. The mean of 2.64 showed that on the average, students surveyed were uncertain about being aware of TELETECHNET. See Table 1.

TABLE 1.

Part II Aggregate Responses

Questions:	Strongly Agree No. / Pct.	Agree No./ Pct.	Uncertain No./ Pct.	Disagree No./ Pct.	Strongly Disagree No./Pct.	Mean
1. I am aware of the TELETECHNET Program.	8 / 8%	26/26%	16/16 %	17/17%	33/33%	2.64=uncertain
2. I have a clear perception of what TELETECHNET is.	3/3%	12/12%	23/23%	24/24%	38/38%	2.17 =disagree
3. I am knowledgeable of the degrees ODU's TELETECHNET offers.	1/1%	4/4%	19/19%	32/32%	43/43%	1.89 = disagree
4. I know where TELETECHNET classes are held.	7/7%	13/13%	19/19%	20/20%	41/41%	2.3=disagree
5. It is clear to me where I must go to seek more information on TELETECHNET.	8/8%	25/25%	27/27%	12/12%	28/28%	2.69=uncertain
6. I have read a TELETECHNET brochure.	3/3%	5/5%	10/10%	31/31%	51/51%	1.79=disagree
7. I have future plans to consider ODU's TELETECHNET program for continuing my education.	4/4%	10/10%	30/30%	22/22%	34/34%	2.27=disagree
8. I am aware I can take TELETECHNET classes at community colleges in Virginia other than LFCC.	10/10%	29/29%	21/21%	15/15%	25/25%	2.83=uncertain

Question 2, Part II. I have a clear perception of what TELETECHNET is.

This question was formulated to determine what degree of understanding the students

had about TELETECHNET. The data from this question show that only 15 percent of

100 students surveyed agreed they had a clear perception of TELETECHNET. Sixty-two

percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with having a clear perception, with an additional

23 percent uncertain. The mean of 2.17 supported that the students disagreed that they

had a clear perception of TELETECHNET. See Table 1.

Question 3, Part II. I am knowledgeable of the degrees ODU's TELETECHNET offers.

Only five percent of students agreed they were knowledgeable about the degrees

available through TELETECHNET. Seventy-seven percent disagreed or strongly

disagreed that they were knowledgeable of the degrees available. As reflected in the

open-ended question in Part I about degrees, even those who thought they were

knowledgeable about degrees had misperceptions about the degrees offered. They

described Continuing Education and various certificate programs as being part of

TELETECHNET. The mean of 1.89 supported that the students disagreed with having

any knowledge about degrees offered by TELETECHNET. See Table 1.

Question 4, Part II. I know where TELETECHNET classes are held.

Most students, or 61 percent, did not agree that they knew where TELETECHNET

classes were held. An additional 19 percent were uncertain as to the location of classes

held. The mean determined was 2.3 which supported that students disagreed that they

knew where classes were held. See Table 1.

Question 5, Part II. It is clear to me where I must go to seek more information on TELETECHNET.

Seeking information about TELETECHNET was not clear to 40 percent of the students. Also, 27 percent of students were uncertain. The open-ended question about where to obtain information in Part I correspondingly reflected that students would try the internet first, even if they were unclear about where to go. The mean for this question was 2.69 which determined that students were uncertain about where to seek information. Many of the responses from Question 3, Part I described a wide variety of sources from which students would attempt to seek more information. These data support the students' uncertainty about a sure source of information. See Table 1.

Question 6, Part II. I have read a TELETECHNET brochure.

Most students in the survey, 82 percent, had not read a TELETECHNET brochure. A mean of 1.79, the lowest mean of all questions surveyed, strongly reflects that students disagree that they have read a TELETECHNET brochure. Only eight students, or eight percent, agreed they had ever read a brochure. These data were significant when determining whether to rely on written brochures for informing students of TELETECHNET. See Table 1.

Question 7, Part II. I have future plans to consider ODU's TELETECHNET program for continuing my education.

While 56 percent disagreed with any future plans to consider ODU's TELETECHNET program, it is significant that a full 30 percent were uncertain and could become a prime target market for future students. The mean of 2.27 determined that students disagreed they had future plans to consider TELETECHNET, yet it should not

be overlooked that nearly one-third of students surveyed were still unsure about their future plans to include TELETECHNET. See Table 1.

Question 8, Part II. I am aware I can take TELETECHNET classes at community colleges in Virginia other than at LFCC.

The number of students who agreed with this statement virtually equaled the number that disagreed about awareness of TELETECHNET at other community colleges. An additional 21 percent were uncertain about classes at other locations. The mean of 2.83 supported that students were uncertain about whether they could take classes at other community colleges in Virginia using TELETECHNET. See Table 1.

SUMMARY

Of one-hundred eighty-five surveys distributed, one-hundred students responded to this study. This was a 54 percent response rate. In each question of both Parts I and II of the survey, the majority of students disagreed with statements about having knowledge, awareness, or clear perception of what TELETECHNET is. The most common source they listed for seeking information was the internet. Only eight percent had ever read a brochure. The data support that the students are uninformed about the presence of TELETECHNET and do not have a clear understanding of what it is at Lord Fairfax Community College. Currently, the majority of those surveyed do not have intentions to participate in TELETECHNET, due in part, because they are uninformed and unaware of its existence.

CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V presents a summary of this study. This chapter includes an analysis of the data presented and conclusions drawn. Finally, recommendations are made and areas for further research are proposed.

SUMMARY

The problem of this study was to determine the awareness and perceptions, as well as any misperceptions, of the students at Lord Fairfax Community College regarding Old Dominion University's distance learning program, TELETECHNET. Goals included in this study were:

1. Determine Lord Fairfax Community College student awareness and perception of the distance learning program, TELETECHNET.

2. Determine students' attitudes toward distance learning for higher education degrees.

3. Present recommendations for improving Lord Fairfax Community College staff's and faculty's knowledge of TELETECHET in order to advise their students in a more comprehensive way.

4. Present recommendations to Old Dominion University's Distance Learning administrators for ways of improving the overall knowledge of the distance learning program at community colleges and other locations where TELETECHNET is offered.

This study was limited to a random sample of 100 current Lord Fairfax Community College students who were taking classes during the spring semester of 2004, either on a full-time or part-time basis. A qualitative study of the perceptions of the LFCC students was undertaken. The study used a two-part questionnaire. Part I consisted of five open-ended questions about the students' degree of awareness about

TELETECHNET and the types of degrees offered. There were also questions about the degrees of experience students had with distance learning and their anticipated plans to engage in a distance learning class. Part II was comprised of eight closed-form statements regarding their knowledge and perception of TELETECHNET. The students rated the degree to which they agreed or disagreed on a five-point Likert scale. After collecting the data, an analysis was performed. The conclusions and recommendations based on this analysis are discussed.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the data collected, the following conclusions were drawn.

Goal 1. Determine Lord Fairfax student awareness and perception of Old Dominion University's distance learning TELETECHNET system and its programs.

Students were asked in three different ways whether they knew and were aware or had a clear perception of the TELETECHNET program as reflected in Question 1 of Part I: "Do you know what TELETECHNET is," and Question 1 and 2 of Part II: "I am aware of the TELETECHNET Program" and "I have a clear perception of what TELETECHNET is." The responses consistently reflected that a majority of the students did not know or understand what TELETECHNET was. Their perception was uncertain as reflected in the mean of 2.64 by the responses in Question 1, Part II and 50 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed to any awareness at all. In Question 1 of Part I, 60 percent of students responded to the open-ended question that they did not know what TELETECHNET was. Of the 40 students who claimed they did know about TELETECHNET, eight described it incorrectly by listing misperceptions such as classes

over the telephone, exclusively web-based classes, and video conferencing. Question 2, of Part II, with a mean of 2.17, showed that students, on the average, disagreed with the statement that they had a clear perception of TELETECHNET. Only 15 students of 100 agreed they had a clear perception of the program. This collective data in three different queries gives considerable weight to the findings of this study and supports that students have little or no awareness of the TELETECHNET program at Lord Fairfax Community College.

Goal 2. Determine Students' Attitudes toward distance learning for higher education degrees.

While 54 percent of students in open-ended Question 5 of Part I, "Do you plan to take future courses by a distance learning medium" and 56 percent of students in Question 7 of Part II, "I have future plans to consider ODU's TELETECHNET program for continuing my education," stated they had no plans to consider distance learning or TELETECHNET for future classes. The literature describes that if the student does not understand the usefulness of the program and its related convenience of delivery method, the intention of use will not be there. (Miller, Rainer & Corley, 2001)

The most revealing part of both these questions is that a full thirty percent were uncertain. This thirty percent becomes a target market for future enrollments and degree seekers. Therefore, with proper marketing and providing the students with more information, those that are uncertain can become better informed and make decisions that may include distance learning to fulfill their needs.

Related to this goal is also Question 4, Part I, which asks whether students have had previous experience with distance courses. Fifty-three percent had no experience with

prior distance learning classes. Due to this lack of experience, the students may have responded more negatively to taking future classes with distance learning since they have not tried it. This corresponds with the information cited by the VCCS survey which revealed that of those students who had already taken a form of distance learning class, ninety-six percent responded they would take another class by this method. (Schultz, 2001) Experience is clearly a factor.

In response to Question 2 of Part I, seventy percent of the students could not list any other degrees they could obtain through TELETECHNET. Additionally, of the thirty percent that did agree they knew of other degrees available, 18 individuals were misinformed and described continuing education and vocational certificates in the medical fields as obtainable through the Old Dominion University TELETECHNET program. This reflected that they were confusing TELECHNET with theWorkforce and Continuing Education Department at Lord Fairfax Community College.

In Question 3 of Part II, the data showed that with a mean of 1.89, students disagreed that they were knowledgeable of the higher degrees they could obtain through TELETECHNET. Only five percent described themselves as knowledgeable about the degrees available to them through TELETECHNET. This would influence their decision to take distance learning for higher education degrees since they did not know what these degrees were.

The data from all the aforementioned questions support that Lord Fairfax Community College students' attitudes are negative about taking distance learning TELETECHNET classes for higher education degrees due in part to being uninformed or misinformed. A group of thirty percent sampled was uncertain about engaging in future

distance learning experiences. This is a fertile area of the Lord Fairfax Community

College student body to target for providing more information through various methods

in order to better inform them about the possibilities of utilizing distance learning to

obtain a higher degree.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The third and fourth research goals were to present recommendations and were thus

listed under this section.

Goal 3. Present recommendations for improving Lord Fairfax Community College

staff and faculty knowledge of TELETECHNET in order to advise their students in

a more comprehensive way.

Question 3 in Part I asks "where students would go for more information about

TELETECHNET." Eighteen of one-hundred students listed staff of the Student Services

Office of Lord Fairfax Community College as being a source of finding this information.

These data support that it is important to supply both faculty and Student Services

counselors with comprehensive information about TELETECHNET classes and degrees

offered. It is recommended that a portfolio of each degree program with its corresponding

curriculum sheet be supplied to the counselors in the Student Services Office of Lord

Fairfax Community College and be updated every two years with the newest catalog

requirements from Old Dominion University. This portfolio should also be provided to

the faculty that meet and advise with students. A comprehensive "Page-at-a Glance"

information sheet could be provided of the TELETECHNET web address and the contact

information of the site office. Additionally, Old Dominion University site staff should

meet with faculty and staff of Lord Fairfax Community College at least once per year to inform them of new degrees and program changes.

Question 6 of Part II, which states that "the student has read a TELETECHNET brochure," had a mean of 1.79, determining that the students disagreed with this. The data support the recommendation to provide program information on TELETECHNET to counselors and advising faculty since the students will probably not read a brochure on their own. Only 15 of one-hundred students had agreed they had read a TELETECHNET brochure. This is obviously not an effective medium for conveying information to the general student even though it may be useful for more specific inquiries.

Goal 4. Present recommendations to ODU distance learning administrators for ways of improving overall knowledge of the ODU distance learning program at community colleges and other locations where TELETECHNET is offered.

The first recommendation is based upon Question 4 of Part II, "I know where TELETECHNET classes are held." Sixty-one of one-hundred students disagreed that they knew where classes were held, with a mean of 2.3 which indicates disagree. Therefore, it is recommended that better signage be provided for both Old Dominion University TELETECHNET classrooms and site offices. The signage would be best if provided by the marketing department of Old Dominion University's main campus, so that signs could be standardized for all TELETECHNET locations. Currently at Lord Fairfax Community College there is very little signage and this need has been discussed with the President, Dr. Sygielski.

The present signs are not of professional quality. There is no signage on the dedicated classroom and only a small brochure rack nearby. Therefore, standardized visibility aids

should be increased including standard signs with the Old Dominion University TELETECHNET logo.

Another recommendation would be for TELETECHNET staff to make a brief presentation during the 1-credit orientation class, sometime during the first semester which all community college students are required to complete. A brief 15-minute presentation on the presence of Old Dominion University TELETECHNET and what it offers would give students an awareness of their future possibilities for a higher degree in their local community. This forum can be coordinated with the Student Services Office by the site director. It would afford direct contact with the students in a brief, concise yet informative manner.

When reviewing all the information revealed by the data collected, it was supported that there was a great need to provide better presence, contact and general information to both staff and students of the host institution in order to increase students' awareness and clarify their perceptions of TELETECHNET. Data supported by the high degree of uncertainty about future plans to take distance classes or utilize Old Dominion University's TELETECHNET reflects that there is an opportunity to inform a population as to their opportunities with distance learning. This can lead to increased enrollments and applications into higher degree programs at Old Dominion University.

Recommendation for future research would be to study how effective sites are in informing community college students of TELETECHNET, once the above listed recommendations have been met. All recommendations are simple, realistic and not overly time-consuming.

To summarize recommendations to provide better information for the community college students at TELETECHNET sites, the researcher recommends:

1. Increase visibility of the ODU presence with better, standardized signage.

2. Increase direct contact with community college students by making a presentation at their orientation or new student workshops.

3. Inform those who have contact with the students at Lord Fairfax Community College regarding the TELETECHNET degrees and curriculum by giving the staff of Student Services and the faculty who advise with students a comprehensive portfolio of degree programs and their corresponding curriculum, to be updated every year.

4. Meet with faculty and staff by requesting time on the agenda of the annual college staff and faculty meeting before each academic year begins. Provide information to those who inform and advise so this information will eventually be passed on to the students.

Each recommendation is viable, without large amounts of cost or time involved. They can only help to improve the flow of information about TELETECHNET and hopefully increase the number of students and subsequent enrollments.

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Survey of Old Dominion University's TELETECHNET Program

1. Do you know what TELETECHNET is, if so please describe:

_____

_____

_____

2. Are you aware of other types of degrees that are offered at LFCC beyond an Associate Degree? If so, please list:

_____

3. Where would you go to find more information about Old Dominion University and TELETECHNET?

_____

4. Have you participated in any kind of distance learning experience and if so, please describe:

_____

_____

5. Do you plan to take future courses by a distance learning medium, if so, why?

_____

PART II. Please rate the following statements with an X in the box that reflects your best answer.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. I am aware of the TELETECHNET Program.					
2. I have a clear perception of what TELETECHNET is.					
3. I am knowledgeable of the degrees ODU's TELETECHNET offers.					
4. I know where TELETECHNET classes are held.					
5. It is clear to me where I must go to seek more information on TELETECHNET.					
6. I have read a TELETECHNET brochure.					
7. I have future plans to consider ODU's TELETECHNET program for continuing my education.					
8. I am aware I can take TELETECHNET classes at community colleges in Virginia other than LFCC.					
Last 5 digits of Soc. Security					

Dear LFCC Students:

I am currently working on a research project as part of my Masters Degree in Occupational and Technical Education at Old Dominion University. This research project entails surveying LFCC's students' knowledge of the university's TELETECHNET program.

Would you kindly take a few minutes to complete this one-page questionnaire to assist me with my research? Your answers will be held confidential. Data will be reported as aggregate information only. It will assist Old Dominion University administrators in developing better communication with students like you.

The questionnaires will be collected in class when you have completed them. If you have already completed this survey in another class please do not fill out another one.

Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

Rita Rowand