

An Evaluation of Instructional Design Issues of the Microsoft Windows

Course Packets for Northeast Wisconsin

Technical College Learners

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michael Galloy PhD", written over a horizontal line.

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Abstract

The primary goal of instructional material is to enable to learner to navigate through the course by identifying the course competencies, course goals, grading criteria, and assignments. Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) has offered self-paced/independent learning courses since 1993. The overall enrollment for the 103 courses averages approximately 300 learners per semester. Upon purchasing the course textbook, the learner receives the applicable course packet and they progress through the course at his or her own pace. It is important that NWTC provide a course packet for students enrolled in the software courses (103 course designation) Microsoft Windows course that the learner can easily navigate and locate pertinent information. It is of interest to determine the perception of the students pertaining to the design of the course packet relating to the placement, structure and format of the course packet. The research on the Microsoft Windows course packet will serve as a basis for potentially improving other course packets in order to support students in successfully completion of the course.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Background

We live in a hectic society where virtually everything runs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Our schedules have no resemblance to those of a generation ago. Educational institutions are offering courses anytime and anywhere to meet the varied needs of their learners. How educational institutions are accomplishing this demand is through alternative course delivery. Alternative delivery methods have been around for more than a decade originating with correspondence courses being the first generation of alternative delivery in education (Moore & Kearsley, 1996).

Two of the basic alternative delivery methods currently being offered by academic institutions that allow for independent learning are online and self-paced courses. In these course modes, learners have the freedom of working independently that is typically based upon a schedule that is conducive to their timetable. The learner is in control of the path and pace—autonomous learning. A main component in the success in an open learning program is the quality of the materials—since the instructor and learner are separate (Hashim, 1999).

Regardless of the delivery method, the principles and guides governing effective teaching and learning environments apply to both the traditional mode of instruction as well as to distance education models (Belland, J., Conceicao-Runlee, S., Hains, A., Rothenberg, D., Santos, R., 2000). According to Hashim (1999), the instructional material needs to be systematically designed to facilitate learning without the constant need of the instructor. Thus it is important for the course packet to be structured in an appropriate and easy to follow manner to guide the learner through the process. The primary goal of instructional material is to enable to learner to navigate through the course by identifying the course competencies, course goals,

grading criteria, and assignments. The student wants to know how to allocate their efforts in successfully completing the assignments (Mehrotra, C., Hollister, C., & McGahey, L., 2001).

When developing instructional material, the designer needs to factor in the aspects of the process and product (Smaldino S., & Zhen, L., 2003). According to Smaldino & Zheng (2003), a basic principle is to plan the content based upon the needs of the learner. The learners also factors in the quality of the design of the instructional material when judging the educational institution. If the learner views the material of being of quality and pertinence, it positively influences the retention (Morgan & O'Reilly, 1999).

Alternative delivery methods are common amongst institutions of higher learning. This is no exception at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College (NWTC) in the Business and Technology Department. NWTC has offered self-paced/independent learning courses since 1993. Virtually every software course under the 103 course designation is offered in a 1-credit, instructor-led, self-paced or online mode. These courses are offered at the three campus locations (Green Bay, Marinette, and Sturgeon Bay) and seven outreach sites. The overall enrollment for the 103 courses averages approximately 300 learners per semester. Upon purchasing the course textbook, the learner receives the applicable course packet and they progress through the course at his or her own pace.

Due to increasing popularity of the courses, based upon course enrollments, and in view of the fact that these courses are typically an entry point for new learners, the course packets (also known as syllabi) need to systematically guide the learner through the process and direct them to the appropriate resources. Based upon comments from the students, there is a degree of confusion regarding locating ancillary resources, what assignments need to be completed, and what information needs to be submitted for the course.

Statement of Problem

NWTC needs to provide a course packet for students enrolled in the software courses (103 course designation) Microsoft Windows course that the learner can easily navigate and locate pertinent information. Typically, the Microsoft Windows course (10-103-105) is the initial computer software course that students will enroll in as part of their program and is a recommended pre-requisite for other computer software courses.

Questions often arise from the students relating to the activities and assignments that they need to complete, exactly what needs to be submitted, and where to locate various components (i.e. on-line resources that include comparison keys and student data files.) The confusion that potentially stems from the inability to readily locate the pertinent information can equate to frustration and anxiety for the student. It is of interest to determine the opinion of the students pertaining to the design of the course packet relating to the placement, structure and format of the course packet. The research on the Microsoft Windows course packet will serve as a basis for improving other course packets in order to support students in successfully completion of the course.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to determine the student's perception of the course packet relating to the overall ease of use, the sequence of information contained in the packet, the overall page layout, identifying the tools and aids available to the learners, and requirements. It is of interest to determine what areas that the students find acceptable or unacceptable. The results of the study will provide a foundation in determining future revisions in the course packet. It is surmised that improvements will minimize confusion, frustration and anxiety in locating pertinent information and potentially impact course completion rates in a positive manner.

The results will be determined by feedback through a survey. The survey will list several statements that pertain to various components of the course packet.

Research Questions

The following questions will be addressed by this research:

1. Was the course packet easy to understand as measured by the survey?
2. Was the sequence of the information in an acceptable manner?
3. What is the perception of the students relating to the page layout?
4. Did the students feel they were able to quickly locate how to access ancillary resources based upon the information in the course packet as measured by the survey?
5. Were the specific requirements easily identifiable?

Significance of the Problem

This research is significant for the following reasons:

1. Application of the results may be applied to course packets for other NWTC classes.
2. The results of the research will be evaluated and utilized for potential modification of the packets.
3. At the start of a course, the student is enthusiastic and has a high degree of interest at the start of the course which it is important to tap into and to maintain. There is nothing more frustrating than not being in a state of confusion when one is unable to locate the course information--particularly when one is new to the process. Majority of the learners do not have direct access to an instructor or support staff via a lab or classroom environment so it is crucial to create documentation that leads them through the criteria. In addition, concerns and frustration have been expressed by students that are unable to locate information.

4. Other WTCS colleges may benefit from the research in identify factors that are influential to the learner.

Limitations

The survey instrument was designed by the researcher.

1. Outside influences may contribute to attitude about packet but not be related to the content or layout of the packet.
2. The degree of familiarity to the course packets and process varies amongst the learners as some learners may have already utilized the course packets in comparable courses that are offered in the same manner.
3. The study is limited to the physical characteristics of the course packet. It will not examine the appropriateness or accuracy of content included.
4. The study is limited to the course packet for the Microsoft Windows course. Application of the results may not be applied to course packets for other NWTC classes.
5. Two semesters of learners enrolled at Northeast Wisconsin Technical College.

Definition of Terms

1. Course packet – a paper document that contains the applicable information for learners to progress through the course activities at their own pace. Also referred to as the course syllabus.
2. Independent learning – an alternative delivery to traditional face-to-face instructional methods where the learning is provided flexibility in scheduling their time. (Belland, 2000).
3. Instructional systems design – process of designing course material that provides the learner what is to be learned, the process to follow, documenting the process, producing the instructional materials, and evaluating (Belland, 2000).

4. Layout – the general appearance of the document relating to the page structure which is the positioning of text, tables, and illustrations, the type and size of font used. (Haydon, 1995)

Chapter II

Review of Literature

This chapter will include a discussion of the various instructional modes, which will explore a brief review of the various modes and retention data from Northeast Wisconsin Technical College based upon the mode of delivery. This will be followed by a discussion and insight into the aspects of student's educational experiences. This will explore the student's role in the learning process and the influences of different deliver modes. The next discussion will be the function and reliance of the course packet (syllabus). The final discussion of the chapter will investigate the instructional design factors with a focus on the structure and formatting issues relating to in compiling a syllabus.

Instructional Modes

Academia has the versatility of offering courses in a number of different modes. The predominant mode of deliver is the traditional instructor of instructor-led courses. As infrastructures have developed so have alternative modes of instruction through distance learning. The onset of a mail courier system opened the avenue of correspondence courses. The introduction of television led to delivering courses on the airwaves. The introduction of computers and the Internet provides us with mode of online courses.

The alternative modes provide substantial flexibility to the learner. Enrolling in an online or self-directed course enables the learner to determine when and where they desire to learn—independent learning, as opposed to the conventional mode. It also limits any face-to-face contact with the instructor.

Student Experience

Decision time! Whether it is the student's first semester or last semester, decisions need to be made in regards to which class(es) to enroll in. The student identifies which courses

he or she need to take based upon program requirements and pre-requisites. The student compares his or her needs to the courses being offered according to the semester timetable. Methodically the students contemplates the various options, modes, and combinations to ultimately determine his or her schedule for the upcoming the semester.

Upon the onset of the semester, the student pays for the textbooks and through some method, obtains the course packet/syllabi for each class. With the syllabus in hand, the next issue is how much work is involved and what does it take to pass the course—for the industrious student, it answers the looming question of “what does it take to get an ‘A.’” The syllabus is typically a source for vast amounts of information for the student, and is pivotal in formulating his or her first impression of the course, the instructor, and even the college. The syllabus serves as the primary means of communication regarding the course requirements. Thus it is imperative that the syllabus is affective, functional, and attractive.

For the college student, courses, curriculum, and classrooms can be designed to affirm students in their adulthood, empowering them to draw on their experiences, interest, and self-motivation to learn. The view of the students in the classroom shifts the responsibility onto the student with the instructor becoming the facilitator (Leith, 2002). The real purpose of education is to facilitate the learning journey and become fully autonomous in one’s ability to sustain and endure regardless of the medium (Aragon, 2003)

Role of the Syllabus

The syllabus is responsible for communicating the purpose, direction, expectations, and grading criteria for the course. For the student, the syllabus acts as a road map of how to successful navigate through the course in order to obtain that proverbial reward of a grade. According to Slattery & Carlson (2005), the syllabus sets the tone for the course, motivates students to set goals, serves as a tool for planning, and serves as a contract between faculty

and students about what students can expect from faculty and vice versa. It is often the first impression of the faculty member. For students, the syllabus provides critical information for making decisions on issues like whether to remain in a course, how to prioritize the workload and how to be successful in the class. Both traditional and non-traditional students learn more effectively when they understand faculty expectations for course (Lowther, et al., 1989).

For students who are taking the course in an alternative mode of delivery (i.e. online or self-paced), they cannot readily rely on classmates or the teacher for immediate answers to questions. One of the barriers to learning in some alternate delivery modes is the availability of materials (Reisetter and Boris, 2004). Thus the course packet becomes instrumental and needs to direct learners to the appropriate resources.

According to Smith (1993), designing of material should be a process of organizing events in some logical order as determined either by the instructor or designer with the final product being a highly structured. Based upon the researcher's experience, an infraction than commonly transpires, particularly when the author and designer are one in the same, is the assumption of "common knowledge." Meaning the author assumes the student is familiar with certain terms and processes.

Instructional Design

"Instructional design is the process of specifying conditions for learning and involves four areas: instructional systems design, message design, instructional strategies design, and learner characteristics analysis" (Seels & Richey, 1994).

According to Hashim (1999), the information contained in the course packet needs to be designed to facilitate the student's learning as the instructor is not readily overseeing his or her activities. The Dick and Carey model (as cited in Hashim, 1999) proposes seven elements that contribute to the overall design of the learning material:

- Rationale
- Instructional Objectives
- Entry test
- Multimedia materials
- Learning activities
- Self-test
- Post test

All elements need to be structured in an organized manner as structuring the material contributes to learner satisfaction. According to Zheng & Smaldino, "Where students have a choice, they will judge institutions by the quality of the design product they produce." (p. 160). The majority of students want to know what is required and the evaluation material. If a student is not readily able to identify the course requirements, assignments, or grading scale, it causes frustration and dissatisfaction.

Instructional materials that have the ability to promote learner-regulated learning must have the following elements: continuing orientation on teaching goals, clear structuring of the content, tasks for diagnosing the state of knowledge, learning guidance with questions, advance and post organizers, and a variety of exercise with solutions and solution paths, learning and motivation promoting text design (e.g., personally addressing the learner or highlight important sections). (Astleitner, Brunker, Luetner, 2003 p 7.)

The instructional design should follow a logical and systematic manner. The process, according to Gillespie (1998) consists of five distinct stages: analysis, design, development, implementation and evaluation. However, the intent of this research is not intended to determine the content of the course packets as this is addressed through a methodical process utilizing the Worldwide Instructional Design System (WIDS). The researcher having utilized

WIDS finds it provides a systematic approach to the instructional design process and its use is required by the educational institution.

Document Design

Though the contents of the course packets are based upon WIDS, it does not necessarily equate to the information being easily accessible. Based upon questions and feedback from the students, an area of confusion evolves around the Assignment Guide—in other words, what do they need to submit in order to pass the course. The source of the confusion may stem from the lack of understanding the terminology or in the design of the course packet.

According to Alber and Mazur (2003), one needs to consider the user's goal which includes the physical design of the information in order to physically locate the information. The physical level of document design include: page layout, placement of information, white space, headings, and graphical devises. A document is found to be effective when the material allows the student to easily answer questions in an easy-to-find location. They include five dimensions to information design otherwise referred to as the 5 E's:

- Effective – the completeness and accuracy with which the user achieves his or her goal.
- Efficient – how directly and quickly those goals can be met, or the accuracy with which the user can complete their task.
- Engaging – the degree to which the tone and style of the interface makes the product pleasant, satisfying or enticing to use.
- Error tolerate – how well the design prevents errors, or helps with recovery from those that do occur.
- Easy to learn – how well the product supports both initial orientation and deepening understanding of its capabilities.

Alber and Mazur stress that in order for the information to be efficient, that the most important information be placed in front so it minimizes the action required by the user to locate it.

The design of the document becomes a factor according to Zeleznik (1999) since if the reader is confronted with text that is unorganized or presents its message illogically, he or she tend to dismiss the document. Thus, readers react favorably to documents that are well organized and exhibit a logical structure. It is important to understand and focus on the goals of the user.

Another facet of the design of the document is its readability. According to Haydon (1995), there are seven factors that contribute to the readability: typeface; size of the typeface; line-to-line spacing; length of lines of text; page layout; contrast of type and paper; and texture of paper.

Typeface. Though there is no steadfast guide to the type and size of typeface, several sources recommend the standard typeface that includes Times New Roman, Arial, or Helvetica that is 10 to 11 points. Though one has to factor in who the user is and whether a larger typeface will improve readability causing less strain on the eyes.

Line length and spacing. The general recommendation was a range of 50 to 70 characters per line (not justified) with white space between the lines.

Page layout. The layout of the page in relation to the margin width is determined based upon the method of binding. There was consistency in the readings to place the page numbers in the lower-left-hand corner of the page.

Contrast of type and paper. The focus in the readings was geared to the professional printing of documents. In consider cost-effectiveness, the traditional black type on white paper is the most prevalent.

Texture of paper. This relates to the weight of the paper in the document and the method of designating sections either through tabs or some other form of dividers.

Other recommendations suggested placing text or visual aids inside a box as a means to add emphasis and to distinguish the information (Zelevnik, 1999). Other visual cues to act as signals are reminders or performance aids such as checklists (Harrison, 1999).

Chapter III

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine the student's perception of the course packets in relation to the design of the document. Specifically, the objectives of this research were:

1. Was the course packet easy to understand;
2. Was the sequence of the information in an acceptable manner;
3. What is the perception of the students relating to the page layout;
4. Did the students feel they were able to quickly locate how to access ancillary resources;
5. Were the specific requirements easily identifiable?

The information obtained will be used to assist in assessing future modifications to the course packets. The results would allow the researcher to further investigate potential modifications and determine specific criteria for enhancements in similar course packets.

The specific objectives of the study were structured to gauge the perception of the student to locate pertinent information in the course packets for the various modes of instruction. The course packets were presented in the standard format that is currently in use.

Subject Selection and Description

A cluster sampling technique was used to select intact groups that were enrolled in the Microsoft Windows class. The students in each section were not randomly select but were determined at the time of registration based on the order of enrollment—ex post facto.

The selection of the Microsoft Windows course was based on the premise that it is traditionally an entry level course for students in a spectrum of programs. Based upon the researcher's experience, enrolled students have minimal exposure to basic computer and networking terminology. Thus, the course packet is relied upon substantial for accessing

information, navigating through the network, completing unfamiliar functions, and course requirements. Additionally, the probability that subjects had prior exposure to course packet was minimized. By minimizing the facet of subjects being familiar with content or layout, it potentially eliminates any advantage which might skew the results.

Instrumentation

The instrument utilized in the research was one 15-item Likert Scale Rating Survey (Appendix A – page 36). The instrument was specifically developed by the researcher for use in this study. The survey was designed for the purpose of obtaining information from students regarding their perceptions of the course packet. The questions on the survey were presented to the student on a scale consisting of five options and a free-form area to provide personal comments or feedback.

Data Collection

Permission and approval was gained from the University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Where doable, the researcher introduced herself, provided the basis and rationale of the survey, and relayed participation was completely voluntary and confidential. The survey instrument was then distributed and students were allowed to complete it at their own leisure. Once completed, participants returned the survey to a folder. Where the researcher was not able to introduce the survey, the instrument was placed in the student's class folder and requested to direct the instrument to the researcher.

Data Analysis

The responses were not separated by any manner. Tracking of all survey results has been recorded into a tracking spreadsheet. The results of the survey were completed in March of 2007. The research results were analyzed and recorded through a specifically designed Microsoft Office Excel spreadsheet.

Limitations

The researcher has identified the following limitations:

1. The instrument to collect the data is limited because the researcher developed the research instrument. Reliability and validity were not fully established.
2. The sample group is limited to one semester of Microsoft Windows course offering. The sample group is not a limited representation of the population of the college.
3. The subjects having varying degrees of computer literacy and comfort.
4. The subjects have varying degrees of exposure to course syllabi and/or course packets.
5. The tracking and recording of time to complete the test is supplied by the student.

Chapter IV

Results and Discussion

Introduction

The study was conducted in an attempt to gain the student's perception of the Microsoft Windows course packets--as all elements need to be structured in an organized manner as structuring of the material contributes to learner satisfaction as identified by Hashim (1999). Specifically, the objectives of this research were the overall ease in locating information; sequencing of information; page layout; tools and aids; and requirements.

The one-page survey was distributed to 43 students on March 1st , 2007 who were or presently enrolled in the Microsoft Windows course. Due to the nature of the study, a deadline of March 9th, 2007 was set for receiving the completed surveys. Any additional surveys received after March 9th of 2007 were not incorporated in the results. Of the 43 surveys distributed, 31 surveys being returned within the timeframe equating to a response rate of 72% which provides an adequate sample study group.

Item Analysis

The survey consisted of 15 questions with specific questions relating to the various objectives of the study. The following is the correlation between objective and survey question:

1. Was the course packet easy to understand.
 - a. #1 - Overall, I felt the course packet was easy to use.
 - b. #2 - The information regarding the chapter assignments was clear.
 - c. #7 - I could easily find information in the course packet.
2. Was the sequence of the information in an acceptable manner.
 - a. #3 - The information regarding the projects was clear.
 - b. #9 - The sequence of information in the course packet was easy to follow.

3. What is the perception of the students relating to the page layout.
 - a. #10 – The headings and subheadings were clear.
 - b. #11 – The font size was large enough.
 - c. #12 – The font style was easy to read.
 - d. #13 – There was adequate white space between the information.
4. Did the students feel they were able to quickly locate how to access ancillary resources.
 - a. #6 – I could easily locate how to access on-line resources.
 - b. #8 – I used the Table of Contents to locate information in the course packet.
 - c. #15 – The record sheet helped me keep track of my scores.
5. Were the specific requirements easily identifiable.
 - a. #4 – I knew what printouts needed to be submitted.
 - b. #5 – It was easy to understand what was required for each learning plan.
 - c. #14 – I knew what was expected of me.

Table 1 represents the rating key of the Likert scale used in the survey for all 15 questions.

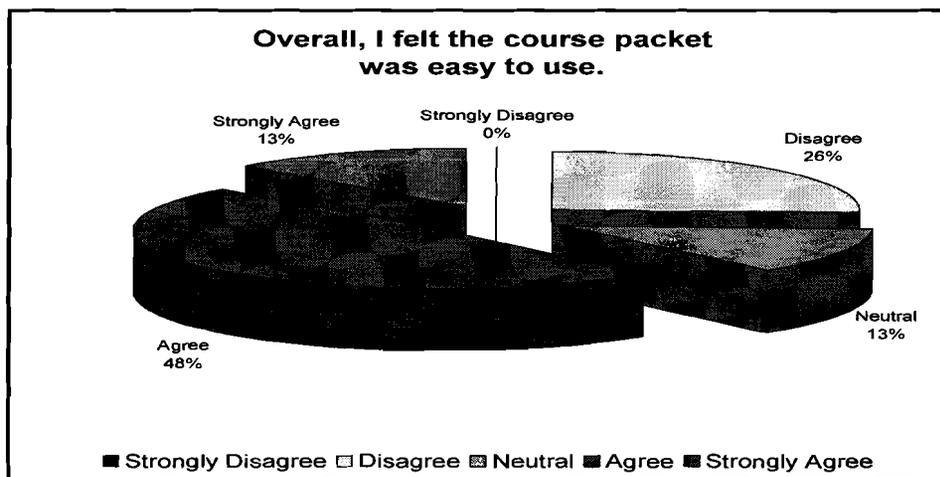
Table 1. Likert Scale Rating Key

Likert Scale Rating	Likert Scale Rating Key
1	Strongly Disagree
2	Disagree
3	Neutral
4	Agree
5	Strongly Agree

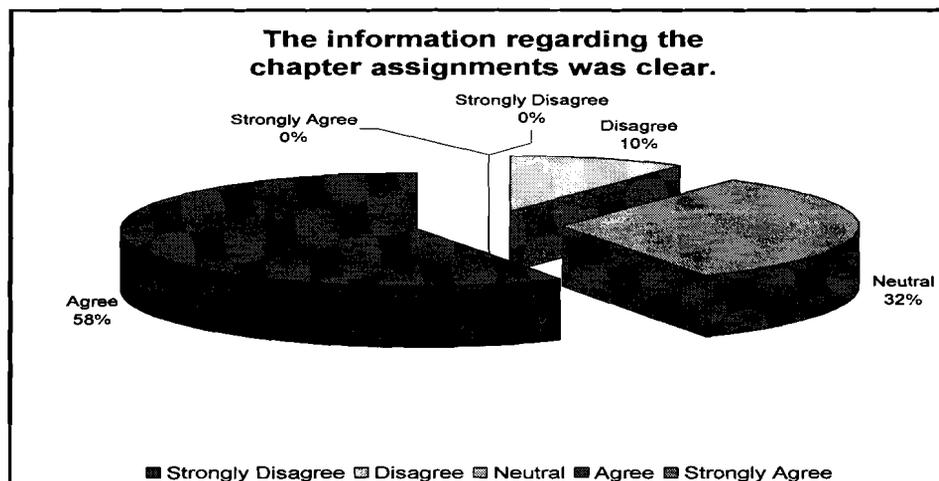
Table 2. Was the Course Packet Easy to Understand

Question	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation
#1 - Overall, I felt the course packet was easy to use.	31	3.48	1.03
#2 - The information regarding the chapter assignments was clear.	31	3.48	0.68
#7 - I could easily find information in the course packet.	31	3.48	0.93

The following are the graphs for the items outlined in Table 2. The graphs depict the participant's responses in percentages according to the Likert Scale.

Graph 1. Question 1

Graph 2. Question 2



Graph 3. Question 7

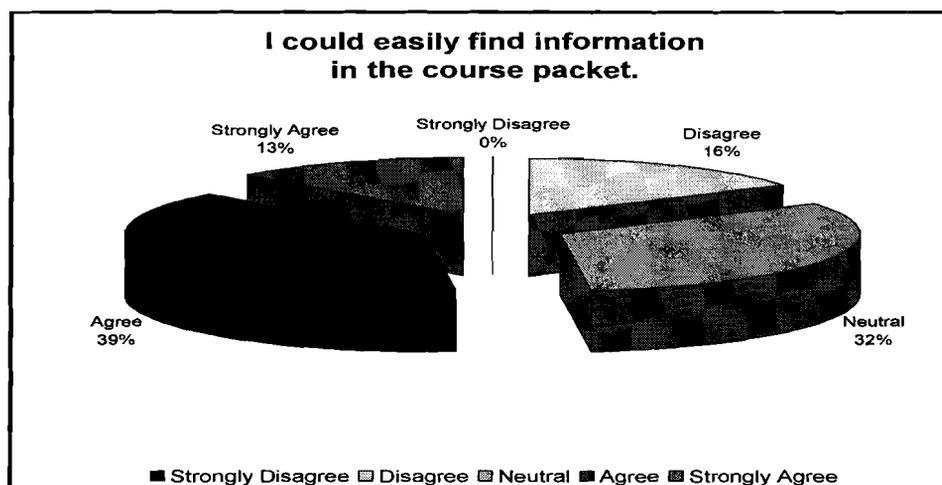
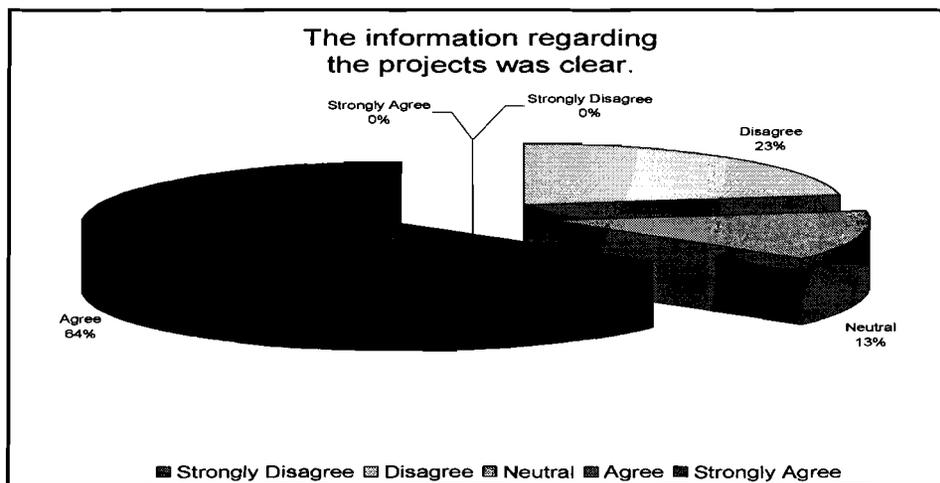


Table 3. Was the Sequence of the Information in an Acceptable Manner

Question	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation
#3 – The information regarding the projects was clear.	31	3.42	0.85
#9 – The sequence of information in the course packet was easy to follow	31	3.61	0.88

The following are the graphs for the items outlined in Table 3. The graphs depict the participant's responses in percentages according to the Likert Scale.

Graph 4. Question 3



Graph 5. Question 9

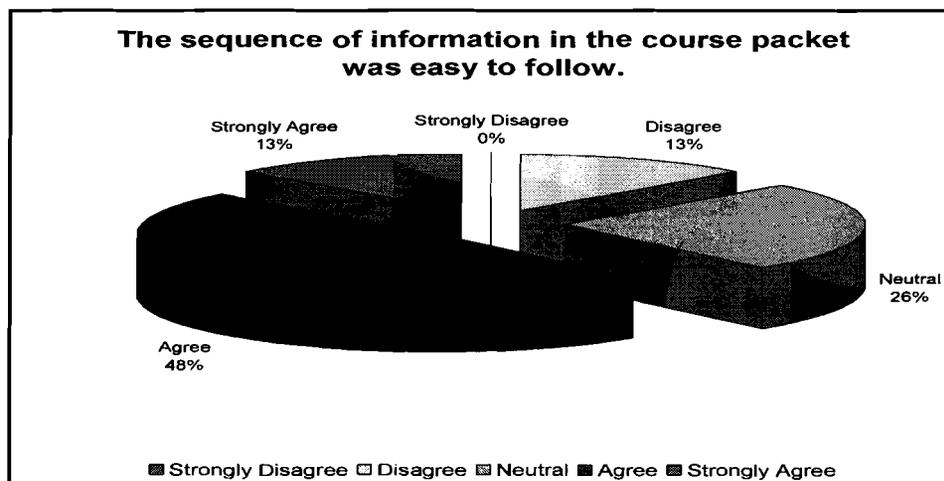
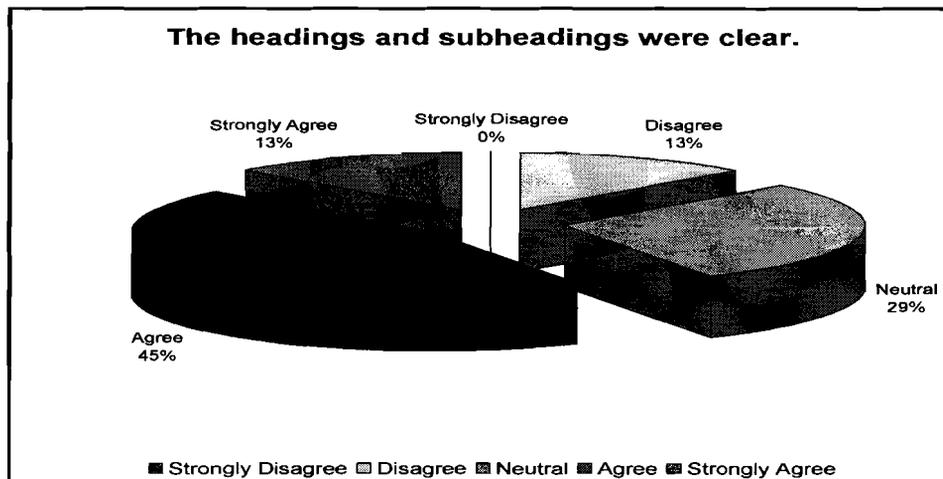


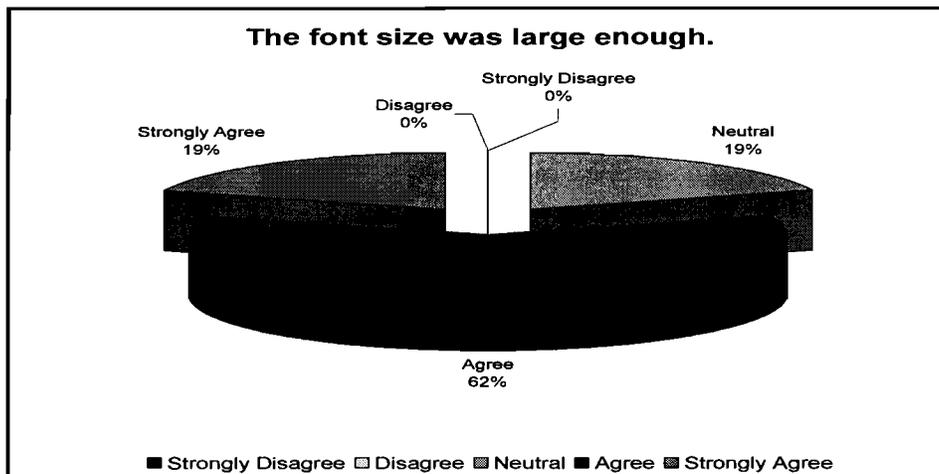
Table 4. What is the Perception of the Students Relating to the Page Layout

Question	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation
#10 – The headings and subheadings were clear.	31	3.58	0.89
#11 – The font size was large enough.	31	4.00	0.63
#12 – The font style was easy to read.	31	3.97	0.66
#13 – There was adequate white space between the information.	31	4.00	0.63

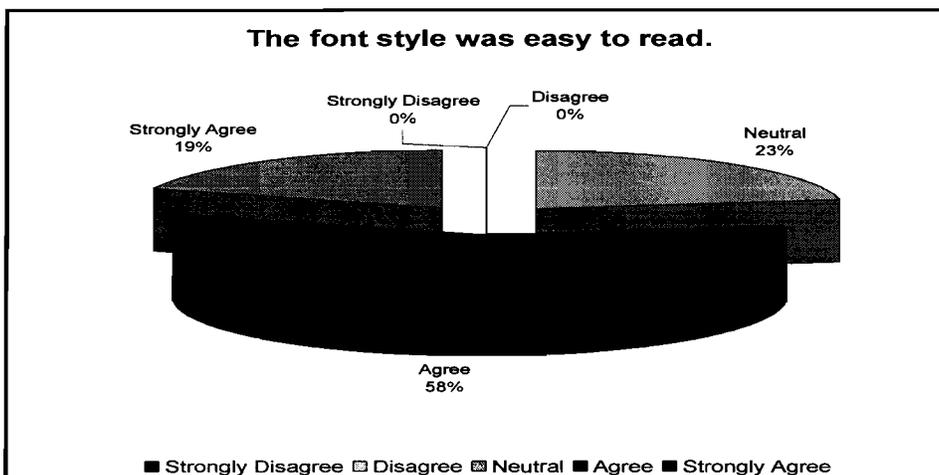
Items #11 and #13 pertaining to the font size and amount of white space respectively had the lowest standard deviation amongst the survey questions. The following are the graphs for the items outlined in Table 4. The graphs depict the participant's responses in percentages according to the Likert Scale.

Graph 6. Question 10

Graph 7. Question 11



Graph 8. Question 12



Graph 9. Question 13

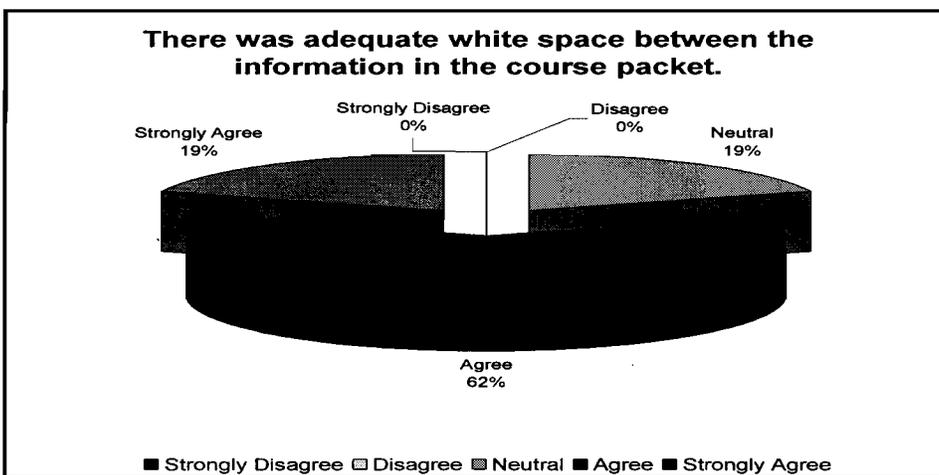


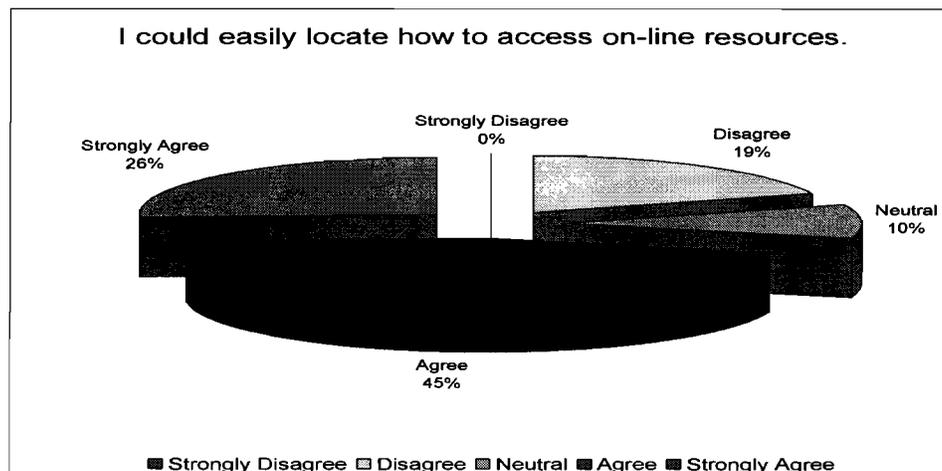
Table 5. Did the Students Feel They Were Able to Quickly Locate How to Access Ancillary Resources

Question	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation
#6 - I could easily locate how to access on-line resources.	31	3.77	1.06
#8 – I used the Table of Contents to locate information in the course packet.	31	3.13	0.88
#15 – The record sheet helped me keep track of my scores.	31	4.42	0.72

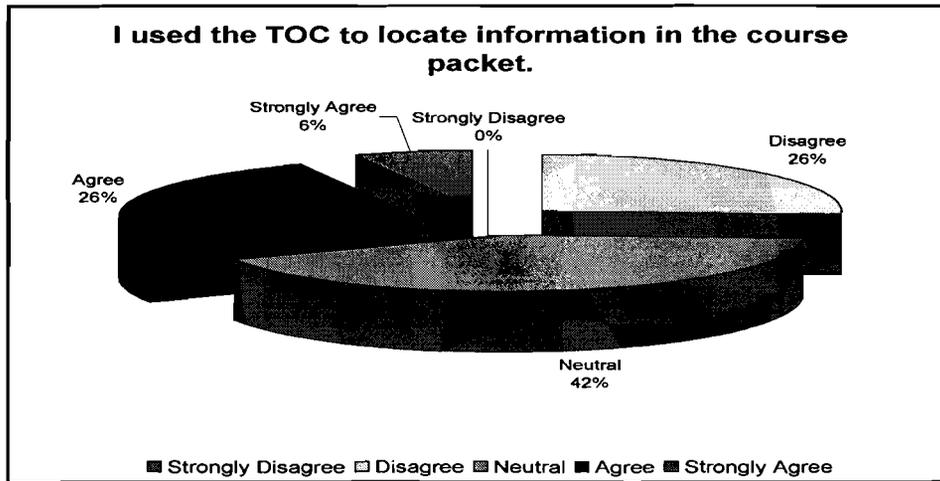
Item #6 relating to locating the resources on-line had the great standard deviation amongst the participants. Item #8 pertaining to the use of the table of contents page had the lowest mean out of all of the survey results. Whereas Item #15 regarding utilizing the record sheet to keep track of the scores had the high mean.

The following are the graphs for the items outlined in Table 5. The graphs depict the participant's responses in percentages according to the Likert Scale.

Graph 10. Question 6



Graph 11. Question 8



Graph 12. Question 15

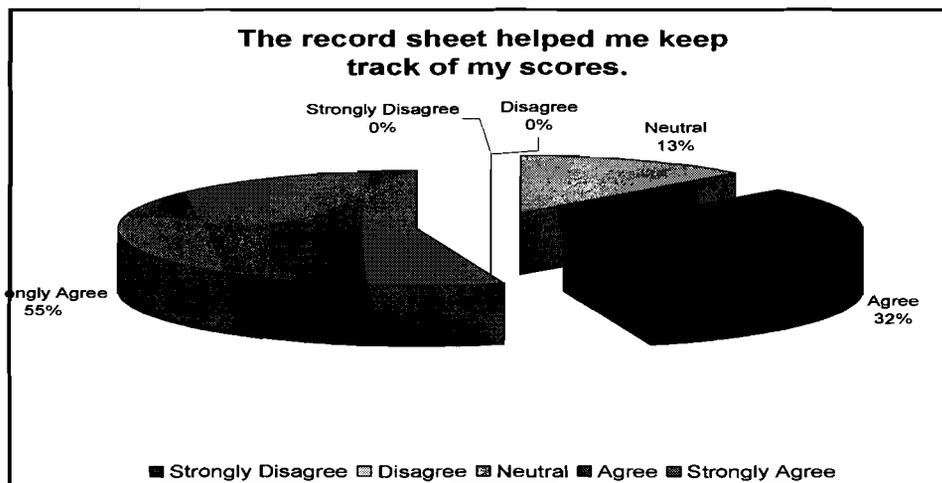
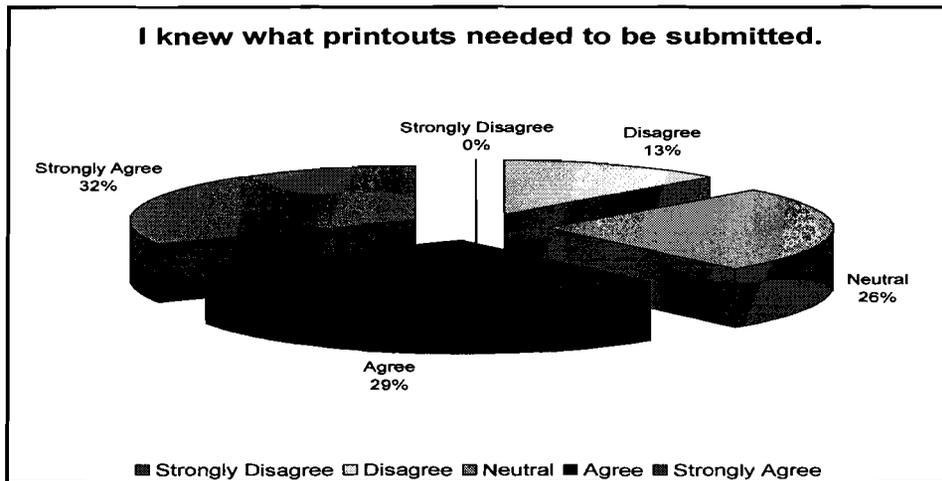


Table 6. Were the Specific Requirements Easily Identifiable

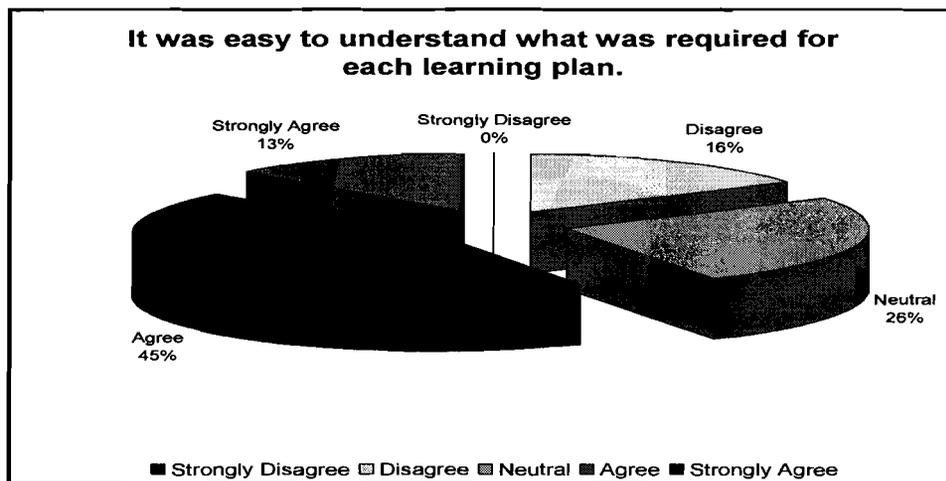
Question	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation
#4 – I knew what printouts needed to be submitted.	31	3.81	1.05
#5 – It was easy to understand what was required for each learning plan.	31	3.55	0.93
#14 – I knew what was expected of me.	31	3.90	0.70

The following are the graphs for the items outlined in Table 6. The graphs depict the participant's responses in percentages according to the Likert Scale.

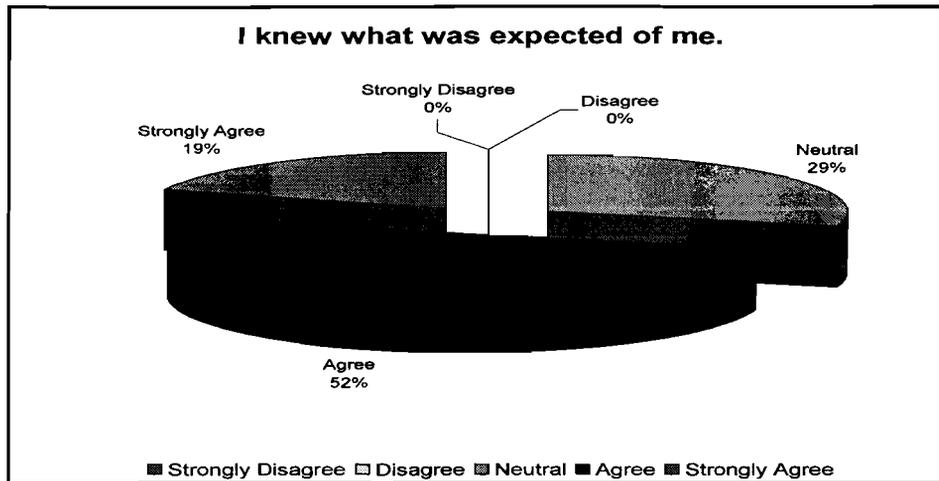
Graph 13. Question 4



Graph 14. Question 5



Graph 15. Question 14



Chapter V

Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to determine the study was to determine the student's perception of the course packet relating to the overall ease of use, the sequence of information contained in the packet, the overall page layout, identifying the tools and aids available to the learners, and requirements. It is of interest to determine what areas that the students find acceptable or unacceptable. The results of the study were to provide a foundation in considering future revisions in the course packet. It is surmised that improvements will minimize confusion, frustration and anxiety in locating pertinent information and potentially impact course completion rates in a positive manner.

The objectives of the study were to determine the student's perception regarding:

1. Was the course packet easy to understand as measured by the survey?
2. Was the sequence of the information in an acceptable manner?
3. What is the perception of the students relating to the page layout?
4. Did the students feel they were able to quickly locate how to access ancillary resources based upon the information in the course packet as measured by the survey?
5. Were the specific requirements easily identifiable?

Conclusions

The conclusion will be broken down into five sections—each section corresponding to the objectives of the survey instrument.

Was the course packet easy to understand as measured by the survey?

Overall, the responses were favorable with the mean for all three questions being 3.48. In reviewing the percentages based upon the Likert scale, 26% disagreed that the course

packet was easy to use which was the highest 'disagree' percentage in the survey. Thirty-two percent (32%) were neutral in response to whether the information regarding the chapter assignments were clear (Question #2) and that they could easily find information in the course packet (Question #7). Based upon the percentages, this is an area that should be further investigated.

Was the sequence of the information in an acceptable manner?

The responses were favorable in this category with 61% to 65% responding that they agreed or strongly disagreed. However, the second highest percentage in disagreement came in for the question regarding whether the information regarding the project was clear (Question #9). Additional investigation into the matter is recommended.

What is the perception of the students relating to the page layout?

Very favorable response with 58% to 81% of respondents either agree or strongly agree. Other than for the question regarding whether the headings and subheadings were clear (Question #10), there was no disagreement to the statement and the standard deviation was on the lower end of the scale with a range .63 to .89. The question pertaining to the headings and subheadings did elicit a 13% disagreeing.

Did the students feel they were able to quickly locate how to access ancillary resources based upon the information in the course packet as measured by the survey?

In this category, we have extremes in relation to the means. The highest mean was 4.42 corresponding to the question if the record sheet helped them keep track of their scores. It also received the highest percentage (55%) of the respondents replying that they strongly agreed to the question and 87% either agreeing or strongly agreeing. However, on the opposite side, the lowest mean of 3.13 went to the question of if they used the table of

contents to locate information in the course packet (Question #8). Twenty-six percent (26%) disagreed with the question. Further investigation into the item is strongly recommended.

Were the specific requirements easily identifiable?

In the last category, 58% to 71% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed to the questions and the mean for the questions ranged from 3.55 to 3.90. The question pertaining to whether they knew what printouts needed to be submitted had the second highest standard deviation of 1.05 with 13% disagreeing with the statement and a mean of 3.81.

Recommendations

This section contains recommendations based upon the findings and additional research.

Recommendations based on the findings

Based upon the findings, the course packets received an overall favorable rating in that the students view the course packets in a favorable manner. It is particularly evident that the respondents favorable viewed the record sheet. This reiterates the findings by Slattery & Carlson (2005) that the syllabus acts as a road map of how to successful navigate through the course in order to obtain that proverbial reward of a grade. In addition, the document design relating to the readability and typography of the course packet rated very favorably and recommend that font size, amount of white space, and font type does not need to be altered.

Further refinement of the course packet relating to the chapter assignments, sequencing of information, ability to locate information, and the table of contents should be considered in future revisions. In order to accurately assess the student needs, additional investigation would be prudent.

Recommendations for further research

Though the findings overall were favorable, the research questions whether the timing of the survey instrument would impact the responses. It is recommended that the survey

instrument be further developed to focus on specific areas of the course packet as identified in the Conclusion section and be administered both in the early phase of the course and during the mid-point to determine: (a) if students become more familiar with the packets through the progression of the course; and (b) their initial perception.

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Appendix A

Course Packet/Syllabus Evaluation

Please complete the following questionnaire and return it to the instructor. Your feedback is very important and will be used together with other student responses to make improvements. Thank you!

Using the response key below, please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements by circling the appropriate number after each question. Below is the scale being used in responding to the statements:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neutral
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

		1 Strongly Disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly Agree
1	Overall, I felt the course packet was easy to use	1	2	3	4	5
2	The information regarding the chapter assignments was clear	1	2	3	4	5
3	The information regarding the projects was clear	1	2	3	4	5
4	I knew what printouts needed to be submitted	1	2	3	4	5
5	It was easy to understand what was required for each learning plan	1	2	3	4	5
6	I could easily locate how to access on-line resources	1	2	3	4	5
7	I could easily find information in the course packet.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I used the Table of Contents to locate information in the course packet	1	2	3	4	5
9	The sequence of information in the course packet was easy to follow	1	2	3	4	5
10	The headings and subheadings were clear	1	2	3	4	5
11	The font size was large enough	1	2	3	4	5
12	The font style was easy to read	1	2	3	4	5
13	There was adequate white space between the information in the course packet	1	2	3	4	5
14	I knew what was expected of me	1	2	3	4	5
15	The record sheet help me keep track of my scores	1	2	3	4	5

Comments and recommendations that you would like to share:

Thank you for your valuable feedback!
Gail M Schroeder

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN UW-STOUT APPROVED RESEARCH

An Evaluation of Instructional Design Issues of the Microsoft Windows Course Packet for Northeast Wisconsin Technical College Learners

Investigator:

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Research Sponsor:

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Description: The purpose of the survey is to obtain learner feedback regarding the design and layout of the course packet. The results of the research will be evaluated and utilized for potential modifications to the packet.

Risks and Benefits: The application of the findings from the research is intended to be utilized to improve the design and layout of the course packet to aid in a favorable learning experience.

Time Commitment: Approximately 5 to 10 minutes to complete the survey.

Confidentiality: Your responses are confidential. Your name will not be included on any documents. To the best of our knowledge, we do not believe that you can be identified from any of this information.

Right to Withdraw: You may choose not to participate without any adverse consequences to you. However, should you choose to participate and later wish to withdraw from the study, there is no way to identify your anonymous document after it has been turned into the investigator.

IRB Approval: This study has been reviewed and approved by The University of Wisconsin-Stout's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB has determined that this study meets the ethical obligations required by federal law and University policies. If you have questions or concerns regarding this study please contact the Investigator or Advisor. If you have any questions, concerns, or reports regarding your rights as a research subject, please contact the IRB Administrator.

IRB Administrator

Sue Foxwell, Director, Research Services
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Statement of Consent: By completing the following survey you agree to participate in the research project entitled: "An Evaluation of Instructional Design Issues of the Microsoft Windows Course Packet for Northeast Wisconsin Technical College Learners"