

**Researching Distance Education: Penn State's Online Adult Education
M.Ed. Degree on the World Campus**

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Distance education is growing rapidly as a means of delivering instruction primarily in higher education. The growing popularity of distance education raises the issue of what is learning. Internet technology now makes possible learning in a social environment within distance education since learners can be linked in a "virtual" classroom with a professor leading to the development of higher order thinking and learning. Learning that closely resembles the real world of the participants occurs as a social process involving others.

The investigator formulated research questions related to discovering the variables that might predict student success in learning in her online graduate course. Measuring devices included a semantic differential survey, weekly time tracking charts to determine time spent on- and off-line as well on work and family obligations, student's own estimates of mastery of the materials, and so forth.

Correlational data will be presented to indicate the variables that appear to be associated with success in the course. Qualitative data will also be presented from email correspondence during the course, course evaluations, and focus groups that were held mid-course.

The research findings will provide guidance to other university instructors and professional development specialists who are teaching (or about to teach) by distance education in how to design instruction to enhance learning. Some resources will also be shared during the presentation.