

## **Project Title: Information Literacy for Three Underserved Ohio Populations**

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**Study Overview:** This study examined the effectiveness of information literacy instruction delivered through distance education in ten locations in Ohio. Students targeted for the study were from three commonly underserved populations: minority students, rural/Appalachian students, and nontraditional students. The investigation focused on the participation of the three student groups in a four-week distance-learning course. The course utilized an online textbook, was self-paced and there was very little interaction with an instructor. The main communication used in the course was email and the instructor sent weekly reminders and helpful tips to help keep students on track. Participants in the study were initially asked to fill out an online survey that targeted computer use and motivational issues. Participants were then asked to complete a three-part pretest before beginning the course and a three-part posttest upon completion of all course assignments. Each part of the pre/post-tests related to the information presented during one week of the course and encompassed the following three topics: Internet Tools, Searching, and Research Techniques. The scores on the pretest are used to determine prior knowledge before the course and were then compared with posttest scores to determine knowledge gained and effectiveness of the course.

**Findings:** The data indicated learner characteristics such as, race, high school class size, locale, and tradition/non-traditional had little to no statistically significant impact on performance of students in the online course targeted in the investigation. Data analysis determined the following conditions as factors that enable effective distance learning: Enthusiasm of the teacher or influential adult for the potential student (they encouraged/supported student involvement).

Having staff that can focus on recruiting students from underserved populations.

Using the distance learning as a part of other programs that support tuition and/or recruitment efforts.

Student access to computers (either at home or a convenient local site).

Additionally, data obtained from DL faculty/staff through focus group interviews and journal analysis determined the following difficulties in offering distance education to the underserved populations targeted in this investigation:

Difficulty recruiting students from underserved populations

Course costs/tuition

Lack of computer access