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An Analysis of Obstacles Encountered by Students Who Completed Correspondence Study Courses, and Reasons for Withdrawal from Correspondence Courses at the University of North Dakota During Fiscal Year 1990

Karen A. Berthold

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AN ANALYSIS OF OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED BY STUDENTS
WHO COMPLETED CORRESPONDENCE STUDY COURSES, AND
REASONS FOR WITHDRAWAL FROM CORRESPONDENCE
COURSES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH DAKOTA
DURING FISCAL YEAR 1990

by

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Bachelor of Science, University of North Dakota, 1987

An Independent Study
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
University of North Dakota
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Public Administration

Grand Forks, North Dakota
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This independent study, submitted by Karen A. Berthold in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Public Administration from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisor under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

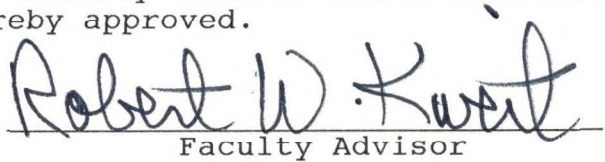

Faculty Advisor

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HISTORY OF CORRESPONDENCE STUDY IN THE UNITED STATES

Colonial Period (1600-1800)

Throughout its history the United States has recognized the importance of education. Provincial America was so invested in problems of survival that one would have expected the colonists to find little time or have minimal inclination to attend to education. However, this was not the case. Although somewhat unorganized in its attempt at "formal" education, the need for education in colonial times did not go unattended. One of the first concerns of the colonists after they established themselves in the wilderness was the provision of some kind of education for their children (Wright, 1957).

The colonists took many strides in the educational arena during this timeframe: an apprenticeship system which provided the earliest form of vocational education was developed in which poor children were indentured as apprentices so that they would learn a trade and would not be dependent upon public support; Harvard College was established in 1636, leading the way for adult education that

would follow; primitive libraries manned by volunteers began appearing; and, a recognition by the people that self-government would require an educated citizenry became apparent.

Also, of significance to this era were the Massachusetts Laws of 1642 and 1647, passed by the Colonial Legislature of Massachusetts, which established the principle of free educational opportunity. The law of 1642 directed the local town governments to hold parents and masters to their [educational] responsibilities and to impose fines on those who refused. Additionally the law ordered that all children should be taught to read. The 1747 law ordered:

1. That every town having fifty householders should at once appoint a teacher of reading and writing, and provide for his wages in such manner as the town might determine, and
2. That every town having one hundred households must provide a grammar school to fit youths for the university, under a penalty of 5 pounds for failure to do so (Cubberley, 1920).

As implied in the above laws, towns were made responsible for the education of children. This was an unusual independence from the federal government: "the absence of Federal control, though not of Federal concern" (Meyer, 1965). The Constitution did not specify a role for the federal government in education, thereby leaving the responsibility to the states. The states were slow to accept this responsibility and as a result delegated authority for educational protocol to the towns. Even into the beginning of

the nineteenth century, the educational burden primarily rested on religious or private institutions at the local level.

Educational Growth Period (1800-1900)

After the struggles of the American Revolution and the Civil War, the United States emerged as an independent, self-governing nation and the American society took on a character which set it apart from its European antecedents (Knowles, 1977). It marked the beginning of the industrial revolution, urbanization, and a leveling of the classes. Recognition of the importance of education grew as people who were used to being governed by an aristocracy found themselves responsible for governing themselves.

Contact among the people increased in importance and newspapers quickly became the primary means for delivering information. By 1810 there were 366 newspapers scattered from New Hampshire to the Louisiana Territory (Gratton, 1955). Other instruments used in educating the public came through letters of correspondence, pamphlets, editorials, books, speeches, poems, and plays which explored the issues and ideas of democracy. A good example of the type of literary information which was distributed was the flyer "Common Sense" written by Thomas Paine which assailed the King and raised a call to revolution. The flyer exceeded 100,000 copies which were sent to citizens eager to read of revolutionary progress.

Several events began exerting considerable pressure on the American educational system by 1870. The expansion westward, the escalating population, and the increasing role of women in American society placed additional demands for both general education and technical training. Additionally, the Industrial Revolution brought a new host of challenges to the educational system. Besides the need for technical skill enhancement, literacy required to manage industrialized organizations became imperative. The new factories and their demands for labor enticed immigrants to stay in the cities. The immigrants challenged the educational system further and stretched it to unthought of limits by advocating for night classes, language enhancement, and alternative delivery means in an attempt to learn about and advance in the "new land" which held promise of a better life. Finally, even though equality was attested, discrimination against noncitizens, Negroes, the poor, and a disproportionate number of women was still the norm. These individuals were still often denied public education.

In an attempt to provide a creative response to the above-mentioned educational challenges, correspondence study evolved and met the needs in three categorical areas: 1) **education** - which produced literacy, 2) **training** - which promoted technical proficiency, and 3) **general** - which introduced learning for recreational purposes.

Anna Ticknor was the founder of correspondence study in the United States. She founded the Society to Encourage Studies at Home in Boston in 1873. Monthly correspondence with guided readings and frequent tests to 1000 participants formed an essential part of the society's personalized instruction. The society functioned continuously for twenty-four years prior to its founder's death in 1897 to put an end to its activities.

Although Ms. Ticknor is the "official" founder of correspondence study, William Harper is probably the individual most responsible for the acceptance of the untraditional method of education delivery. Harper was instrumental in establishing correspondence study programs in several institutions including the Baptist Theological Seminary in Illinois, Chautauqua College of Liberal Arts, Yale Divinity School, and the University of Chicago (Goodspeed, 1928; Vincent, 1886). The early leaders in correspondence study laid the foundation for a non-traditional form of education which is now available worldwide.

Correspondence Study Solidifies (1900-Present)

By 1918, compulsory attendance through the elementary grades was extended to all states (MacKenzie, 1968). The states recognized their responsibility to collect taxes to support an elementary school system whose doors would be open to all residents. However, tax support for high schools was

slower in gaining acceptance in the states. During this time period, most colleges and universities remained private. During the early 1900s, correspondence study programs continued to flourish. After initial programs demonstrated that they could be financially viable, other universities and colleges began to include correspondence study as an alternative means to get credit while not being on the campus. At the time of World War I, more than a dozen colleges and universities were offering some form of correspondence instruction.

As popularity of correspondence study programs grew, technology became an important component of many of the programs. Lambert (1985) notes that private home study schools and university-based independent study programs pioneered in the use of alternative teaching techniques. The University of Nebraska and Pennsylvania State University had courses delivered by radio in the early 1920s. In the 1960s, computer-scored testing, audio cassette tapes, and sophisticated "hands-on" learning kits were well established in home study. WATS line telephone instruction was in place in the 1970s. Today, computer-to-computer communications, VCR tapes, and FAX machines are commonplace among correspondence study programs.

Correspondence study has not always been considered reputable. The possibilities for high profits have lured into correspondence instruction many suppliers who were looking for

a fast dollar at little effort to themselves (MacKenzie, 1968). Diploma mills offered substandard courses in everything from religion to motor repair. Finding a school which offered a diploma on the inside of a matchbook cover did not necessarily mean that the supplying institution was reputable and that the "diploma" issued was in any way legal. In these education "mills", students were often encouraged to enroll for courses with a non-refundable tuition. When student's experienced difficulty they often quit the course because there were not counselors to assist them, computer grading often took the place of actual instructors and contact with a "teacher" was not possible, and, they became discouraged. The "mill" would then keep the tuition claiming a healthy profit on each student who did not complete the course.

The public image of home study has undergone a face-lift over the past two decades. This has happened as a result of stricter accreditation standards for qualified programs, greater awareness of program credibility by program participants, and a commitment to quality adult learning by institutions.

The National University Continuing Education Association (NUCEA) is the accreditation body of continuing education programs on a national basis. Accreditation is achieved only as continuing education programs meet stringent requirements for this status. NUCEA has established a list of standards to

which member independent study programs must also adhere as a component of on-going accreditation practices. The independent study standards are applicable to correspondence study programs which are housed in continuing education programs accredited by NUCEA. As the public becomes more aware of the symbolic meaning of accreditation and more selective in choosing educational institutions, those "entrepreneurial" programs which do not necessarily reflect quality educational programs will probably be phased out.

CORRESPONDENCE STUDY AT THE UNIVERSITY
OF NORTH DAKOTA

The University of North Dakota (UND) has a long and rich history of correspondence study. Soon after the Extension Division (currently the Division of Continuing Education) was developed under the leadership of then University of North Dakota President Frank L. McVey in 1911, correspondence courses became available. The 1927-28 Extension Bulletin included an opening statement which could well have been written in 1991:

...Although the University is prepared to take care of all those who are prepared to enter its walls, follow its curriculum and conform to its regulations, yet there are many who are unable to come. Some are lured by the immediate prospect of wages but more are forced into immediate employment by the necessity of making a living...these courses, therefore, appeal to students who have been forced to drop out of high school or college; to grade and high school teachers who cannot leave their positions; to all instructors, even those in higher institutions who desire guidance in their special fields; to professional men and women who need to supplement their training; to parents who are uncertain how to deal wisely with their children and who are eager to help

them advance in their school work; and to forward looking men and women of every walk and relation of life.

Since its inception, the correspondence study program at UND has experienced growth and program changes. These changes are evident when comparing the correspondence study program bulletin (then called the Extension Division Bulletin) from 1911-1912 to the current 1991 bulletin. Although minor, they warrant mention if only to demonstrate how minimal the changes have been.

Fees: In 1911-1912 the fee for taking a full unit course of forty assignments was \$20; for a course carrying less work or less credit the fee was determined proportionately. If a student registered simultaneously for more than one course, he/she was eligible for a discount of 25% of the amount of the fees in excess of twenty dollars. In 1991, the fee for a three-credit class is \$53/credit for a total of \$159.

The change in fee structure is a result of inflation that has occurred over the past several decades. It does appear that the \$20 fee may have been a very significant monetary contribution to education in the early 1900s.

Withdrawal: The 1911-1912 bulletin indicates that no student would receive any refund of tuition for not beginning or completing a course. Today, students have a one-month period to withdraw from the course and receive a full refund less \$15 administration fee.

Profit status: In 1911-1912 the motive for correspondence study was advertised as a public service in which profit was entirely eliminated. This is consistent with the mission today as any "profits"

are used to enhance or improve the current program.

Course content: full courses in the 1911-1912 bulletin were comprised of 40 individual lessons (which was equal to 4 lecture hours on campus per week); today each course varies in the number of lessons required ranging from 7 to 24 with an average for a three-credit course being 18. It appears that the courses in 1911 were more detailed and required more individual work than the courses today require!

When considering that 80 years have elapsed since the program was established, the changes have been relatively minor. The types of courses offered now are similar to those offered in the early 1900s. Faculty are still hired to prepare the lessons as they did then and the method of lesson submission via the mail is still consistent procedure. However, there are two areas that are markedly different today. The first is the emphasis on who is responsible for the students' successful completion of a correspondence course. In the 1920 UND Extension Bulletin the following was stated: "The results [successful completion] depend entirely upon the industry and ability of the student." Today it is the opinion that both the student and the faculty are responsible for successful completion of a correspondence course. As Wedemeyer (1971) states, "The teacher is the daily monitor and motivator of the distance student. The greatest indicator of success lies in the tutorial relationship developed between the teacher and the student." At UND there is an expectation that faculty are responsible for development

of quality courses, providing appropriate feedback to the student, and interest in student achievement. Therefore, a joint relationship exists which places the opportunity for success on both the student and the faculty.

The second area that has encountered significant change over the last 80 years is the number of enrollments in correspondence study at UND. For the calendar year January 1-December 31, 1920, 235 students enrolled for credit correspondence study. Conversely, fiscal years 1988 and 1989 both boasted increases in new enrollments with 1,106 and 1,412 respectively. The program has always shown consistent growth with the exception of the 1930s when the Great Depression became a reality and economizing was the order of the day.

The Correspondence Study program at UND has made significant accomplishments over the past eight decades. Quality programming is evident by fact that the program continues to be accredited by the Division of Independent Study of the NUCEA. More courses are offered today than ever before and enrollments continue to grow at a moderate pace. The future for the program is optimistic.

BENEFITS OF CORRESPONDENCE STUDY

According to Moore (1990), correspondence study provides educational opportunity regardless of the student's geographic location or study schedule. Students can take a course anywhere...anytime. Correspondence study permits learning to be integrated with work, family, social, and community responsibilities. Formal learning does not have to be crammed into specific years of schooling; correspondence education can be provided as learning arises in the course of personal development through the adult years. It gives students a greater degree of control of the study processes so they can select approaches consistent with their own learning styles. By removing time pressures this method encourages reflective thinking. It also stimulates creativity by removing pressures of the peer group and intimidating presence of the authority figure of the teacher that inhibits many from taking intellectual risks in the classroom.

Another benefit that students have in taking correspondence study is the undivided attention of the instructor. Each student receives feedback on his/her lessons on a one-to-one basis with the instructor. They are not in

competition with other classmates. Additionally, research shows that home study schools train students better (Lambert, 1985). For over half a century, every significant comparative study of student achievement has shown that home study students do as well as, if not better than, counterpart resident students taking the same subject.

The stated benefits are certainly applicable to University of North Dakota students. As an example, students often take a course by correspondence study because they are unable to get into desired courses on campus due to full classes. This is particularly true for general education requirements such as English composition, arts and humanities selections, and math classes. Another group that benefits from taking correspondence study courses at UND is aviation students. Often flying schedules preclude getting into classes on campus and correspondence offers an opportunity to take the course and still be able to maintain other commitments.

Sometimes the benefits of correspondence study are not academic. A student currently enrolled in a writing course at UND is taking the course in order to provide physical therapy for her hand which is semi-paralyzed as the result of a multiple sclerosis. Rita McLaughlin Hawes has been a resident of Americana Healthcare Center in Minot, ND for the last 22 years. It took several years after arriving at Americana to be able to write at all, now it takes her over a day to write

one page. Ms. Hawes sums up her experience with correspondence study by saying, "I have learned that there is something I can do. I have been able to like myself better. I can do something. I am not just a nothing."¹

¹ "Home is What You Make It," Minot Daily News, October, 3, 1990, sec. 3, p. 1.

FACTORS WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO NON-COMPLETION
OF COURSES TAKEN BY CORRESPONDENCE STUDY

Benefits of correspondence study are numerous. However, although it would be ideal to say that all students complete the correspondence study course that they are enrolled, this is certainly not the case. The dropout rate is very high. Lack of completion of a correspondence course occurs as a result of 1) the student not completing the course in the time allocated and thus is "withdrawn" from the course through the enrolling institution, or 2) the student requesting a withdrawal from the course through formal procedures established by the individual program.

Research of the characteristics of those students who completed correspondence study has shown the relationship of completion to various social and psychological variables. Students who are younger, who are highly motivated, and who have more previous educational experience tend to have a better completion record (Downhower, 1968; Hughes, 1965; Spensor, 1965). Pfeiffer and Sabers (1970) suggested that once students begin to hand in their first assignments, they had a relatively good chance of completing the course. In a

similar study by Wong (1979), 91% of those who submitted four or more correspondence assignments finished the course.

Reasons hypothesized to account for low completion rates (i.e. withdrawal) are the lack of sufficient discipline to assign time for regular study, the loss of interest, delayed communication, and discouragement resulting from vague feedback on how to proceed with the course (Childs, 1971; Downshower, 1968; Spensor, 1965). Other reasons cited include unfavorable study environments, motivational factors, bad course design, family crisis, change in personal goals, illness, excessive work required for course completion, lack of classroom discussion, poor courses, and limited interaction with instructors. Sweet (1986) hypothesized that weakness in integration of the student into the social fabric of the institution was an indicator of possible drop-out.

In a study of Open University² of the United Kingdom students, Murgatroyd (1982) found more than half experienced difficulties with planning and organizing their time. Also

² Open University of the United Kingdom was created in 1969 and enrolled its first students in 1971. The University is characterized as being accessible to students at off-campus locations and being flexible in time commitments needed to complete a degree. Students have close contact with an advisor during their enrollments and often pursue courses to upgrade themselves within their professions. Degrees may be obtained without attending any classes in the traditional classroom setting.

high on the list of student problems was the tension that exists between the demands of part-time study and those of family and friends. A third source of discouragement arose from students' unrealistic expectations of the work-related rewards that might follow study, leading them to drop out when hoped-for outcomes did not result.

Various sources cite different rates of non-completion for correspondence study. For example, Strother and Klus (1982) indicated that the student non-completion rate of correspondence courses generally runs about 60-70 percent; the other 30 or 40 percent of enrolled students complete portions of the assigned coursework. Childs (1955) reported a 40% dropout rate and Anderson and Tippy (1971) reported the withdrawal rate at 60% through their respective studies.

The variance in drop-out rates among the studies cited ranged from 40-70%. Several speculations can be made as to why the range of drop-outs is so diverse. Twenty-five years elapsed between Childs' study and the Anderson and Tippy studies indicating that perhaps life-style changes could have influenced the increase in drop-outs. None of the studies revealed economic reasons for withdrawing from a course even when this could have been a factor during different time periods. Although some studies addressed the number of lessons submitted as being an indicator of success, none considered specific courses which were most successful related to completion rates (i.e. writing course vs. math courses).

No differentiation was made between withdrawal from courses in institutions which focus on university credits verses those with a more technical focus. Some institutions have computer grading instead of faculty feedback on individual lessons which may result in decreased motivation of some students causing the drop-out rates to increase. These and many other possibilities could make the percentages of non-completions vary from study to study. Much more research is needed in this topic to address underlying issues which shed more light on why students do not complete a correspondence study course.

Woodley and Parlett (1983) found based on their studies of completion rates at six correspondence study programs, and making allowances for differences in ways that institutions measured retention, that 58% of the students who submitted the first assignment completed the entire course. Lambert (1985) proposes that completion rates are increasing. For example, he indicated that nine of ten students submit their first lesson and approximately 50% of the students complete the entire course.

After reviewing the literature to determine what other researchers have discovered regarding completion and withdrawal patterns, a review of data from annual reports of Correspondence Study at UND was completed. This retrieval of information was undertaken only to determine the number of students who completed or withdrew from correspondence courses

over a period of three fiscal years. Table I provides the information found.

Since enrollments overlap from fiscal year to fiscal year, the percentage of courses completed and the percentage of course withdrawals are calculated on new enrollments only. This presents a more accurate reflection of completions/withdrawals as they include only the fiscal year indicated. The actual percentages do not total 100% as some students would still be enrolled. Based on these calculations, course completions for the three fiscal years observed were between 41.9-46.3%. Concurrently, withdrawals ranged from 45-56.8%. The percentages for completion/withdrawal at UND are average when compared to the other studies previously cited.

TABLE I
COMPLETIONS AND WITHDRAWALS FROM CORRESPONDENCE
STUDY FY'88, FY'89, AND FY'90

<u>FISCAL YEAR</u>	<u>NEW ENROLLMENTS</u>	<u>ENROLLMENTS PRIOR TO FISCAL YEAR</u>	<u>TOTAL ENROLLMENTS</u>	<u>COMPLETED COURSE</u>	<u>% COMPLETED BASED ON NEW ENROLLMENTS</u>	<u>WITHDRAWALS FROM COURSES</u>	<u>% WITHDRAWALS BASED ON NEW ENROLLMENTS</u>
7/87-6/88	1,106	1,234	2,340	505	46%	601	54%
7/88-6/89	1,412	1,259	2,671	583	46.3%	635	45%
7/89-7/90	1,186	1,480	2,666	621	41.9%	674	56.8%

Boyd, Robert H., "Annual Report of the Division of Continuing Education" for Fiscal Years 1988, 1989, and 1990.

While it may be assumed that students at UND do not complete correspondence study courses for the same reasons that other studies have revealed, this was unknown until this study was completed. The following study has been conducted to determine obstacles encountered by students who did not complete a course by correspondence, and students' reasons for not completing a correspondence course in which they had enrolled. The results of the study will be reviewed carefully to determine strategies which can be implemented to improve the Correspondence Study Program at the University of North Dakota.

THE RESEARCH STUDY

Selecting the Topic

The University of North Dakota (UND) has an established correspondence study program. Over time the program has grown, decisions and policies have been made which make the program more efficient and effective, and the goal of allowing students an alternative to the traditional classroom appears to have been met. However, like most other programs, the Correspondence Study program at UND can be improved. As a means to evaluate and improve the program, this study has been undertaken.

The topic for this independent study is to ascertain what obstacles are present for students who do finish a correspondence course, and also, what reasons are cited as preventing students from completing a correspondence study course. It is believed that the topic chosen has significance in both practical and theoretical terms.

In practical terms, the results will provide information which can be used in improving the program internally. As an example, since students have a close working relationship with the Department of Correspondence Study, it is necessary that

logistics regarding taking a course are handled completely and in a timely manner. Perceptions of students in this regard will provide valuable feedback which can serve as a basis for positive program change if needed. It is also expected that the results will be provided to independent study instructors and that insights might be gained regarding improving teaching styles, course development, and student interaction for independent study courses.

The use of student ratings to improve instruction is not new. It was the topic of works by Centra (1977) and Landers (1978) both of which agree that student evaluations assist teachers in course development.

Theoretically, it will be interesting to observe if obstacles encountered while taking a course, or reasons for not completing a course, are consistent with other studies previously completed.

Literature Search

A literature review was conducted at the Chester Fritz Library through Eric Search, manual searches, and a computerized data bank search. Unfortunately, limited current data was retrieved related to correspondence study. Additional information was obtained from the National University Continuing Education Association (NUCEA), the department library at the Division of Continuing Education,

and through personal holdings of leaders in continuing education.

Few studies have been completed on obstacles that students encounter in completing a correspondence study or reasons for not completing a correspondence study. Many of the studies are dated indicating that additional research in this area is needed.

Methodology

Subjects of the study were students enrolled in the Correspondence Study Program at the University of North Dakota who completed or withdrew from their correspondence study course during a one-year period (July 1, 1989 - June 30, 1990). An evaluation instrument (Attachment A) was developed to collect data from students who had completed the correspondence study course. It was sent to the students after completion of the final examination for the course. A total of 621 evaluation forms were sent, 230 were returned. Students were asked to write responses to questions regarding the course, obstacles encountered in taking the course, and suggestions for improving the course or the program.

A second form (Attachment B) was used to collect data from students who terminated their courses prior to completion. The termination of a course occurred when a student either withdrew from a course or allowed the course enrollment to expire prior to completing all required

assignments and the final examination. The primary purpose of this evaluation was to collect data that would indicate why students fail to complete independent study courses.

Data Gathering

Data for this analysis was collected through evaluations which were solicited by the Department of Correspondence Study at UND over a twelve-month period from July 1, 1989-June 30, 1990. The evaluation forms were sent to students either once the final examination had been completed or immediately past the withdrawal date and voluntarily returned to Correspondence Study. The forms, when returned, were three-hole punched and placed in binders. No prior systematic review of the data as a group has been performed. Individually, the evaluations were reviewed upon receipt and if an extremely poor evaluation was returned, the individual form would be shared with program staff or the faculty (if known) in an attempt to remedy the stated problem(s). For this study, two different evaluation formats were used to collect the data:

- A. Evaluations for students who did complete correspondence study: From a total of 621 evaluations sent, 230 were returned (37%). The form requests information related to the students' evaluation of the course, proposed course improvements, **obstacles** encountered in completing the course, and how the department could better facilitate the students' progress in the course.

- B. Evaluations for Students who did not complete correspondence study course: From a total of 674 evaluations sent, 91 were returned (13.5%). The form requests written comments about the course taken, service from the Department of Correspondence Study, reasons for non-completion, the student's name, and other comments.

A greater response rate may have been expected if a repeat mailing were sent to those students who did not respond. Coding of the evaluations would also have provided an opportunity to glean demographic, academic, and general information which is computer accessible if the student's name, social security number or NAID number is known.

Data Analysis

Each set of evaluations were examined individually. It is interesting to note that those students who did not complete the course also had a much lower return rate on the evaluation forms (37% completed vs. 13.5% non-completed). Those comments which indicated obstacles encountered while completing the course, or reasons for not completing the course, were listed per frequency of occurrence so potential problem areas could be identified. It should be noted that some evaluations contained multiple responses which were recorded in the analysis; others listed no obstacles encountered and therefore were not counted. It is for this reason that the number of evaluations returned does not coincide with the number of responds recorded.

Table II lists obstacles encountered in taking a correspondence course by those students who completed the course and returned the evaluation. The six reasons cited the most often as obstacles to completion include: course or text were outdated, other responsibilities interfered with completion, not enough time, not enough contact with instructor, lack of motivation, and time taken for lessons to be returned.

Table III lists reasons cited by withdrawn students for not completing a correspondence course. The reasons stated most frequently included not being motivated enough, illness prevented completion, not enough feedback by instructor, life crisis situation came up, coursework was too difficult, not enough time to complete, and other responsibilities did not allow time to complete. These responses are consistent with the studies computed by Murgatroyd (1982) at Open University of the United Kingdom in which he found that more than half of the students studies had difficulties with planning and organizing their time. Eleven percent of the students from the present study who did not complete the course noted that they did not received enough feedback from the instructor. Childs (1971) found similar results in her studies as well.

The evaluation form used for the group of students who did not complete the course included a line for the student's name. Of the 91 evaluations returned, only 11 indicated their name. Of the 11, nine were female and two were male. Limited

demographic information available from these surveys precludes identification of patterns which may occur related to gender, age, geographic area, educational level, marital status, or other factors.

TABLE II
EVALUATIONS OF STUDENTS WHO DID COMPLETE
CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

JULY 1, 1989-JUNE 30, 1990

230 RETURNED EVALUATIONS FROM
621 TOTAL EVALUATIONS SENT

<u>Obstacles encountered in taking correspondence course:</u>	<u>No. Responses</u>
Faculty inconsistent in grading and feedback.....	1
Finding a proctor.....	1
Wife kept interrupting studies to have sex.....	1
Computer Malfunction.....	1
Materials boring.....	2
Parking to take exams.....	2
Limit of lessons accepted per week.....	2
Office hours at Correspondence Study Dept.....	2
Graduation deadline.....	3
Poor textbook.....	4
Difficulty understanding faculty feedback.....	4
Clarity of desired expectations.....	5
Life crisis.....	5
Too many errors in syllabus or text.....	6
Course poorly written.....	10
Difficulty in obtaining course material/resources.....	11
Difficulty of lessons.....	12
Inconsistency in coursework requirements.....	12
Course or text were outdated.....	13
Other responsibilities interfered with completion.....	16
Not enough time.....	20
Not enough contact with instructor.....	22
Lack of motivation.....	23
Time for lessons to be returned.....	26

TABLE III
EVALUATIONS OF STUDENTS WHO DID NOT
COMPLETE CORRESPONDENCE COURSES

JULY 1, 1989-JUNE 30, 1990

91 RETURNED EVALUATIONS FROM
674 TOTAL EVALUATIONS SENT

<u>Reasons for Not Completing Course</u>	<u>No. Responses</u>
Sent in extension but it wasn't received by Correspondence Study Department so course was canceled.....	1
Quit college.....	1
Trouble putting answers on paper.....	1
Course was outdated.....	1
Took too much time.....	2
Amount of work was excessive.....	3
Could take on college campus.....	3
Needed more assistance than what was provided.....	4
Lessons weren't returned fast enough.....	4
Never started course.....	4
Didn't like course materials.....	4
Lack of self-discipline.....	5
Changed major to didn't need course any more.....	5
Needed more contact with faculty.....	5
Not motivated enough.....	6
Illness prevented completion.....	6
Not enough feedback by instructor.....	10
Life crisis situation came up.....	13
Coursework was too difficult.....	14
Not enough time to complete.....	14
Other responsibilities didn't allow time to complete.....	34

Once Tables II and III were constructed, a systematic analysis of comments was constructed to determine those issues most salient for individual students. Each comment was assigned to one of five categories (procedures, instructor, instructional materials, assignments and examinations, and personal problems). The number of comments under each category was tallied and a total for each category was determined. From the total number, percentages were derived. Tables IV and V provide the information obtained. Table IV shows the distribution of comments from Table II which is the evaluation of students who did complete a correspondence course and obstacles they encountered in completing the course. Table V shows the distribution of comments from Table III which is the evaluation of students who did not complete the correspondence course and provides reasons for non-completion.

Observations

Evaluations returned over a one-year period by both students completing independent study courses and students terminating their courses provide the data for this discussion. Quantitative and qualitative data are organized according to the categories of procedures, instruction, instructional materials, assignments and examinations, and personal problems.

TABLE IV

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMENTS ON TABLE II:
 EVALUATIONS OF STUDENTS WHO DID
 COMPLETE CORRESPONDENCE COURSE
 OBSTACLES ENCOUNTERED IN COMPLETING COURSE

Category/Subcategory	Number of Comments	% of Total Comments
<u>Procedures</u>	18	8.82%
--finding a proctor	1	
--parking to take exams	2	
--limit of lessons accepted per week	2	
--office hours at correspond- ence study department	2	
--difficulty in obtaining course materials/resources	11	
<u>Instructor</u>	53	25.98%
--faculty inconsistent in grading and feedback	1	
--difficulty understanding faculty feedback	4	
--not enough contact with instructor	22	
--time for lessons to be returned	26	
<u>Instructional Materials</u>	36	17.65%
--computer malfunction	1	
--materials boring	2	
--poor textbook	4	
--too many errors in syllabus or textbook	6	
--course poorly written	10	
--course or text were outdated	13	
<u>Assignments and Examinations</u>	29	14.22%
--clarity of desired expectations	5	
--difficulty of lessons	12	
--inconsistency in coursework requirements	12	
<u>Personal Problems</u>	68	33.33%
--wife kept interrupting studies to have sex	1	
--graduation deadline	3	
--life crisis	5	
--other responsibilities interfered with completion	16	
--not enough time	20	
--lack of motivation	23	
TOTAL RESPONSES	204	100%

TABLE V

DISTRIBUTION OF COMMENTS ON TABLE III:
EVALUATIONS OF STUDENTS WHO DID NOT
COMPLETE CORRESPONDENCE COURSE
REASONS FOR NOT COMPLETING COURSE

Category/Subcategory	Number of Comments	% of Total Comments
<u>Procedures</u>	4	2.86%
--sent in extension but it wasn't received by Corr. Study so course was canceled	1	
--could take on college campus	3	
<u>Instructor</u>	19	13.57%
--faculty didn't provide enough feedback	10	
--lessons weren't returned fast enough	4	
--needed more contact with faculty	5	
<u>Instructional Materials</u>	5	3.57%
--course was outdated	1	
--didn't like course materials	4	
<u>Assignments and Examinations</u>	17	12.14%
--Amount of work was excessive	3	
--coursework was too difficult	14	
<u>Self-Assessment</u>	95	67.86%
--quit college	1	
--trouble putting answers on paper	1	
--took too much time	2	
--needed more assistance than what was provided	4	
--never started course	4	
--lack of self-discipline	5	
--changed major so didn't need course any more	5	
--not motivated enough	6	
--illness prevented completion	6	
--life crisis situation came up	13	
--not enough time to complete	14	
--other responsibilities didn't allow time to complete	34	
TOTAL RESPONSES	140	100%

Reference to Table IV indicates that those students who completed the correspondence course did in fact face some obstacles. When reviewing the five categories, the largest percentage of obstacles (33.33%) occurred in the area of Personal Problems. Not enough time for completion and lack of motivation received the highest responses in this category. These results are consistent with those discovered by Downshower (1968) and Skinner (1965). Obstacles related to the Instructor category also rated fairly high (25.98%) Within this category the greatest concern expressed was the time that it took for lessons to be returned to the student. Often it was noted that this caused distress because students did not have the completed assignments with the instructors comments and/or feedback to review prior to proceeding to the next lesson or taking the examination. It is difficult to determine if the slowness in lesson return can be used as an "excuse" to procrastinate on future lesson preparation. Lack of contact with the instructor was also an obstacle indicated by 22 responses. Virtually all previous studies cited the latter reason as an encountered difficulty in taking a correspondence study course.

In reviewing Table V, the personal problem category also received the most responses. The "reasons" for not completing were somewhat the same as the "obstacles" listed by those who did complete; however, the former received a much higher percentage of responses (i.e. 67.86% vs. 33.33%). For

example, persons who did not complete listed lack of time, life crisis situations, and other responsibilities as the reasons for non-completion; those who did complete listed other responsibilities, not enough time, and lack of motivation as obstacles to completion. It is interesting to note that those who finished the course responded 23 times that "lack of motivation" was an obstacle to completing the course; however, those who did not complete only gave this response 6 times.

There may be several explanations for this variance. If students never started the course, they may not consider motivation a factor, where those who were in the course may have had to "push" themselves to complete each lesson. Secondly, those who never finished may not want to acknowledge their failure or the fact that they weren't motivated enough to start or complete the course. They may have projected reasons for not completing to other causes rather than admit that personal motivation was a factor. Thirdly, it is also reasonable to expect that those students who listed lack of motivation as an obstacle to completion of the course would actually have those feelings. If slow feedback, difficult coursework, and lack of time were present, it may be expected that their motivation level would also be lower.

The category of Procedures rated low in both evaluations indicating that the logistics associated with the course were, for the most part, satisfactory. Students who did complete

the course indicated in 11 instances that they had difficulty in obtaining course materials or resources needed to complete the course. It was not determinable from the surveys if the "resources" referred to were textbooks obtained from the UND bookstore, or syllabus and audio/video tapes or other materials normally distributed by Correspondence Study.

The Instructor category received moderate responses from both groups. Those who did complete the course indicated that there was not enough contact with instructors and that the time for lessons to be returned was an obstacle to course completion. Whereas, those who did not complete primarily were concerned because the faculty did not provide enough feedback. Comments quoted by Wedemeyer (1971) earlier in this paper reflect these findings: "The teacher is the daily monitor and motivator of the distant student. The greatest indicator of success lies in the tutorial relationship developed between the teacher and the student."

The Instructional Materials category provided interesting results. Students who did complete the coursework were more likely to perceive problems with instructional materials than students who did not complete their courses (17.65% vs. 3.5%). Of major concern to those who completed the course were poorly written courses and outdated courses or texts. The students who didn't complete the course stated they didn't like the course (4 responses) or the course was outdated (1 response). The latter group of student probably couldn't respond well to

the quality of the course because 1) they may never have started the course and therefore were never exposed to the materials, 2) they only participated in the course a short while before withdrawing and therefore only reviewed a small portion of the materials, and 3) until a student completes, or gets well into a course, it is difficult to ascertain if the course materials and text book are well suited to the study.

The Assignments and Examinations category was evaluated essentially the same by both groups. Difficulty of lessons was expressed by both groups as being the area causing the most difficulty.

Conclusions/Recommendations

The data obtained in this study through both quantitative and qualitative analysis of student evaluations of correspondence study suggests areas for both improvement of instruction and further research. Findings from this study are consistent with other studies cited when considering obstacles that students encounter in completion a correspondence study course and reasons for not completing a course. The withdrawal rates of student not completing are median to the studies previously cited. Unfortunately, the evaluations used for this study do not provide demographic data which could assist in formulating more specific findings. The following provides recommendations for improvements of the current program.

The Department of Correspondence Study needs to review its internal operations to determine if course materials are sent in a timely manner, if office hours should be extended to accommodate students better, and if parking is really a problem for students taking examinations.

Instructors can promote student satisfaction by providing specific feedback in a timely manner on lessons and examinations submitted. This can be accomplished without face-to-face contact which is a luxury of the traditional classroom. Teaching through correspondence study presents challenges not presented in the traditional classroom; however, it also provides a unique opportunity to guide students in becoming independent learners. As is true in any instructional situation, it is the role of the correspondence study instructor to facilitate the learning process of the student. The Correspondence Study Program needs to monitor those faculty who are consistently late in returning lessons. Discussions regarding the importance of lesson return with appropriate feedback must be conducted with those faculty who fail to meet their responsibilities in these two critical areas.

The design of the syllabus and study guide and selection of textbooks and supplemental materials are important in correspondence study. Since students are especially dependent on instructional materials for course success, it is imperative that great care be given in the course development. Courses offered through learning institutions must be current in focus; outdated materials may cause disinterest and ultimate withdrawal by students.

Consideration of comments pertaining to personal problems gives further insight into the kinds of support that may be

needed by some students in correspondence study. Perhaps reminder letters and encouragement on a more frequent basis from the Department of Correspondence Study would provide the stimulus to continue the course. A brochure on study habits which would promote success for correspondence study students could be included with each course enrollment.

The increasing use of technology to provide alternative delivery systems should enhance the capacity to achieve a greater variety of learning outcomes and to accommodate a wider variety of learning styles. New technology could include videotapes, audiotapes, computers, telecommunications geared at independent study, and Fax to promote expedited lesson return.

For those students needing a more structured approach to independent learning, the University of Mid-America (UMA) courses may be more appropriate. The UMA courses, which are shown on Saturday mornings throughout the semester, are an excellent example of modern teaching technology. If students cannot be available for the televised lecture, they can videotape it for later viewing. Lessons are submitted on a weekly basis by the correspondence study method. Efforts to maintain the motivational level by having more structured classes may benefit some students who otherwise may "put off" the course until a later time.

The evaluation forms used for this research lacked the depth and specific focus needed for a broad study of the

problems. The evaluation forms will be revised for future use so that data can be obtained which will be more helpful in programmatic decision making. Demographic information needs to be incorporated into the revised evaluation so trends, patterns, and variables can be observed and analyzed.

Further research is needed in the area of correspondence study. Relatively few studies have been published regarding this important and timely topic. Through a continued effort to link research with practice, educators and administrators will become better able to implement changes in independent study instruction which will promote the long term goal of creating successful independent learners.

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EVALUATION OF CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

In order for us to better serve the needs of all students taking correspondence courses, it is important for us to know your responses to the questions below, including your concerns and your frustrations. Just as soon as you have completed the course, please complete the questions below and send to:

Department of Correspondence Study
PO Box 8277
Grand Forks, ND 58202-8277

Thank you for your assistance.

TITLE OF COURSE _____

INSTRUCTOR _____

What is your overall evaluation of this course? _____

How do you think this course could be improved? _____

What obstacles did you face in completing your course work? _____

How could have the Department of Correspondence Study better facilitated your progress in this course? _____



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EXTENSION & WEEKEND COLLEGE (701) 777-4225
UND GRADUATE CENTER AT BISMARCK (701) 224-5437

Correspondence Course Evaluation

Would you help us please? Your course was cancelled because your time ran out. We would like to do our job better and so would like to know what you thought about the correspondence course you were enrolled in. If you would fill this out and return it to us, we would appreciate it.

Name _____

Course you were enrolled in _____

Comments about the course:

Comments about the service from the Department of Correspondence Study:

I didn't complete the course because _____

I found out about your program through _____

Any other comments? _____

Thank you.

Please use the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope and mail to:

Department of Correspondence Study
Box 8277
University Station
Grand Forks, ND 58202