

## **ABSTRACT**

**DISSERTATION:** Exploring the Motivational Orientations of Graduate Students in Distance Education Programs

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This study examined the motivational orientations of 166 graduate students enrolled in distance education courses at a state university. Data were collected utilizing Boshier's Education Participation Scale A-Form and analyses were completed for overall results, by gender and age, by academic program and by preferred method of distance course delivery. Additional analyses were performed comparing responses from the distance education students and 42 traditional students. The results of the study showed that professional advancement was the overwhelming motivational orientation for participation in education by these graduate students. The second highest rated motivation was reported as cognitive interest, and the motivational orientations rated as least influential were social contact and social stimulation. There were no differences resulting from gender, but the age group 22-30 rated cognitive interest and social contact as more influential than students in the age 31-44 age group and professional advancement significantly higher than in the 45-59 age group. Also, participants in the age group 45-59 rated social stimulation significantly higher than students aged 31-44. Students from academic programs in education, nursing and business were the

principal respondents, and there were no significant differences found in their motivational orientations. However, the education students scored the motivational orientations, social contact and social stimulation, significantly lower than participants from the group, other, which consisted of students from nine different fields of study. Other findings revealed no differences in motivational orientations by students' expressed preferred method of distance education delivery. Lastly, results showed that traditional students rated social contact, communication improvement, and educational preparation as more influential than distance education students. Findings from this study suggest that graduate students in both distance and traditional graduate programs participate in education primarily for professional and cognitive reasons. In addition, analyses revealed that differences in the seven motivational orientations were impacted by age, academic program, and student type.