



# VCU

VIRGINIA COMMONWEALTH UNIVERSITY

## School of Education

Student Engagement in an Online Master's  
Program

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# VCU

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## Purpose of the Study

To measure student engagement in our newly minted online special education master's program (M.Ed SE)

- **Student Engagement...**

- Used to measure student's involvement in learning
- Factor for predicting online dropout rates
- Implications for strengthening teaching practices
- Informative to teacher preparation program leaders



### ***Special Education, Master of Education (M.Ed.) with a concentration in general education- Department of Counseling and Special Education***

- Entirely online, 40 credit hours (14 courses)
- Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework used
- Monthly seminars

## Question and Method

1. To what extent are candidates enrolled in the online M.EdSE program engaged in their courses/program?
2. What factors/activities contribute to students' engagement in the online courses/program?
3. To what extent do candidates enrolled in the online M.EdSE program perceive engagement as a factor for success and retention in the program?

- Descriptive Survey Study

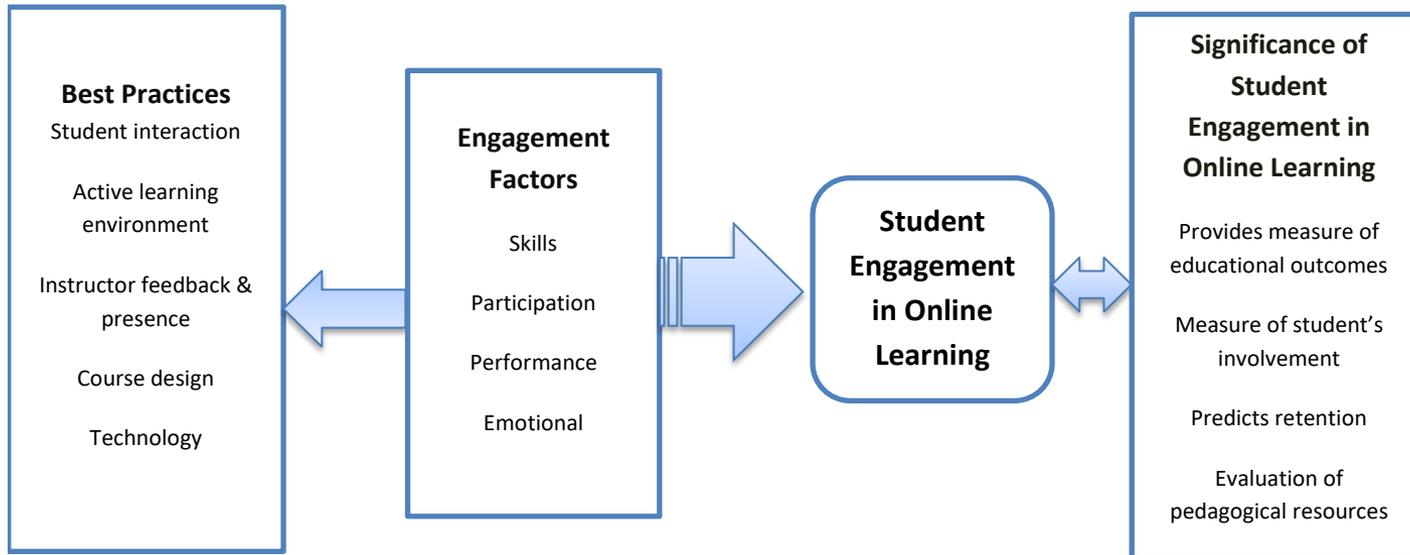


### Data and Instrument

- N = 31
- Online Engagement Scale (Dixson, 2015)
- Semi-structured focus group- 5 participants



# Student Engagement in Online Learning



*Based on Handelsman et al., 2005; Dixon, 2015*

# Results

Online Engagement Perceptions of Participants ( $N=31$ )

Engagement Skills	Mean	Standard Deviation
<b>Skills engagement factor</b>		
1. Making sure to study on a regular basis	3.39	.989
2. Staying up on the readings	3.23	.920
3. Looking over class notes between getting online to make sure I understand the materials	3.52	1.12
4. Being organized	3.84	1.00
5. Taking good notes over readings, Powerpoints, or video lecture	3.84	1.13
6. Listening/reading carefully	3.94	1.09
<b>Emotional engagement factor</b>		
1. Putting for effort	4.03	.983
2. Finding ways to make the course material relevant to my life	3.97	1.08
3. Applying course material to my life	4.06	.963
4. Finding ways to make the course interesting to me	3.57	1.10
5. Really desiring to learn the material	3.77	1.04
<b>Participation/Interaction engagement factor</b>		
1. Having fun in online chats, discussions or via email with the instructor or other students	3.23	1.15
2. Participating actively in small-group discussion forums	3.68	1.05
3. Helping fellow students	3.97	.983
4. Engaging in conversations online	3.65	.854
5. Posting in the discussion forum regularly	3.94	.854
6. Getting to know other students in the class	3.19	1.14
<b>Performance engagement</b>		
1. Getting a good grade	4.39	.919
2. Doing well on the tests/quizzes	3.97	.983



## ***Focus group factors contributing to active engagement in online courses***

### **Themes**

**Course Design-** “the structure of the courses and program allowed me to be engaged and created a positive and meaningful experience”

**Applicability of material to current careers-** “the fact that we do not have traditional assessments, instead we have many project-based activities and are assessed in multiple ways was necessary for me to show my knowledge and I can apply it to my current setting.”

“as an existing teacher anytime I got to apply it to my current role, open ended things, where we got to assess, or tutor, or an actual case study of a student we are working with of an IEP, things that we are actually doing the work rather than reading about doing it was quite engaging.”

**Interaction in the discussion board-** “the discussions being online, were we needed to talk through what we were learning, that got me engaged. I wanted to hear what other people had in mind, their perspectives, also because there was no other way of doing really, no face to face contact, so doing online and discussion, and get to know people was exciting.”