



Teaching Health Online for HBCU Freshmen

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Abstract

Online coursework, taught by certified online instructors, is a significant issue in education. This study examined eight sections of a required general education class in personal health taught to first and second semester freshmen. Four sections were held live on campus and four were offered online, all taught by the same instructor. In both delivery methods, class notes were placed on Blackboard for student reference. The purpose of the study was to examine whether sections taught online were equally effective as those taught in a classroom format. The sample consisted of 260 freshmen, 169 women and 91 men, at an HBCU in the southeastern United States, with on campus classes accounting for 61% of the participants due to slightly larger class sizes. **There were no significant differences in final exam grades ($p = .538$) or in the final course grades ($p = .269$) due to method of delivery and there was no method by gender interaction ($p = .699$). There was no significant interaction of completion rate by method ($p = .062$). Students in the online sections reported significantly higher levels of satisfaction with the course ($p = .02$).** Qualitative comments from students in online courses reported higher satisfaction with the ability to arrange their study time more effectively around their schedule, saving commuting time and expense to get to campus, and the ability to read and digest the information at their own pace. Online courses can provide students with an equal opportunity for academic success with higher satisfaction ratings.

Sample

The sample consisted of 260 freshmen, 169 women and 91 men, at an HBCU in the southeastern United States, with on campus classes accounting for 63% of the participants due to larger class sizes.

In the online classes, women outnumbered men, with women (N=75) accounting for 45% of the total women and men (N=25) accounting for only 23% of the total men in the study.

Methods

Four sections of freshman general education personal health courses meeting on campus for the entire semester and four sections meeting 100% online were examined. All eight of these sections were taught by the same instructor, who is qualified to teach Health Education courses and is also nationally certified as an online instructor. The coursework and organization of the sections were similar and included the same modules and topics, with similar assignments and exams. The data was examined for significant differences using descriptive statistics and ANOVA. Both main effects and interactions were considered.

Quantitative Results

There were no significant differences in final exam grades ($p = .538$) due to method of instruction (on campus vs. online delivery).

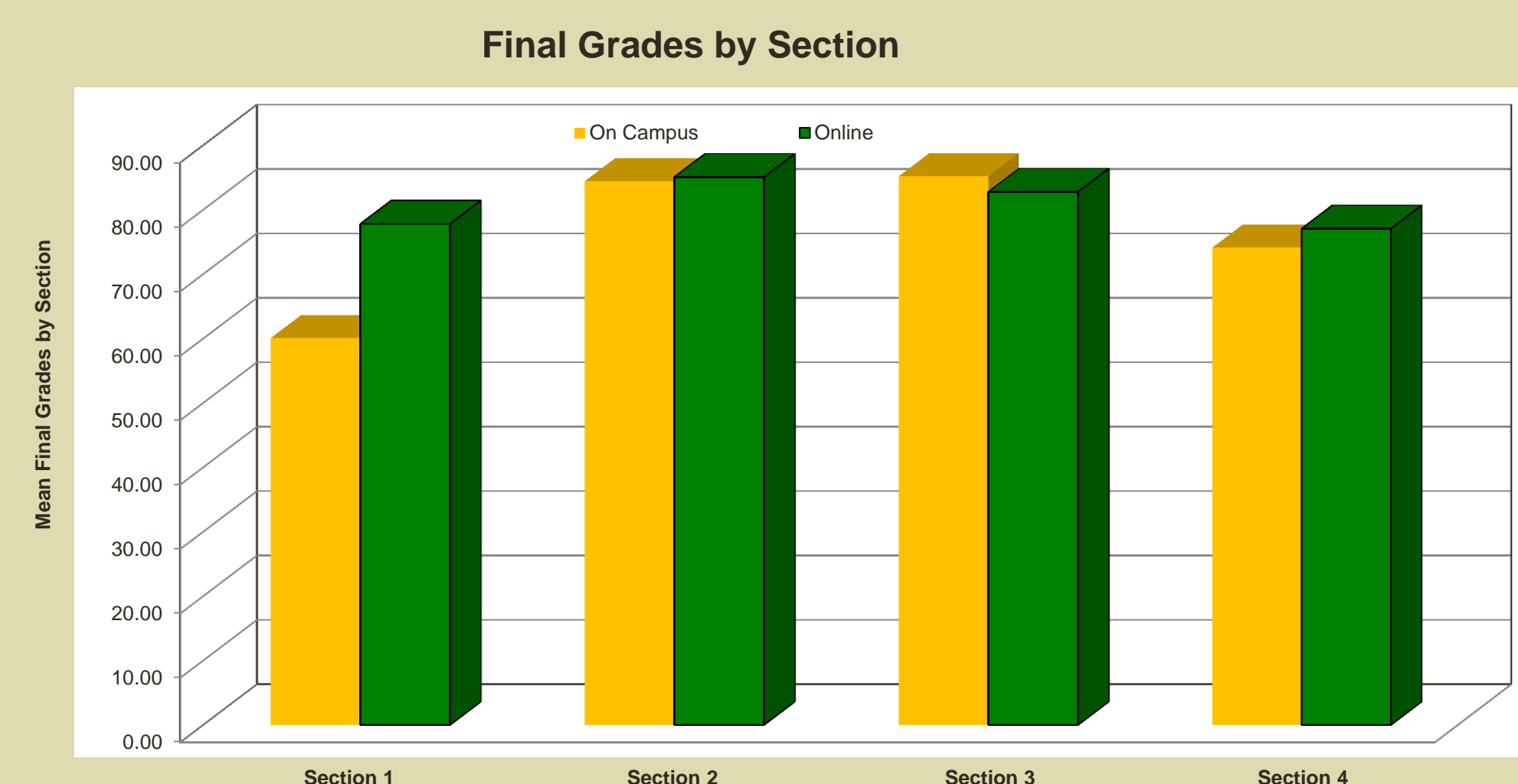
There were no significant differences in final course grades ($p = .269$) due to method of instruction (on campus vs. online delivery).

There was no method of instruction by gender interaction ($p = .699$). Men and women were equally successful in both on campus and online courses.

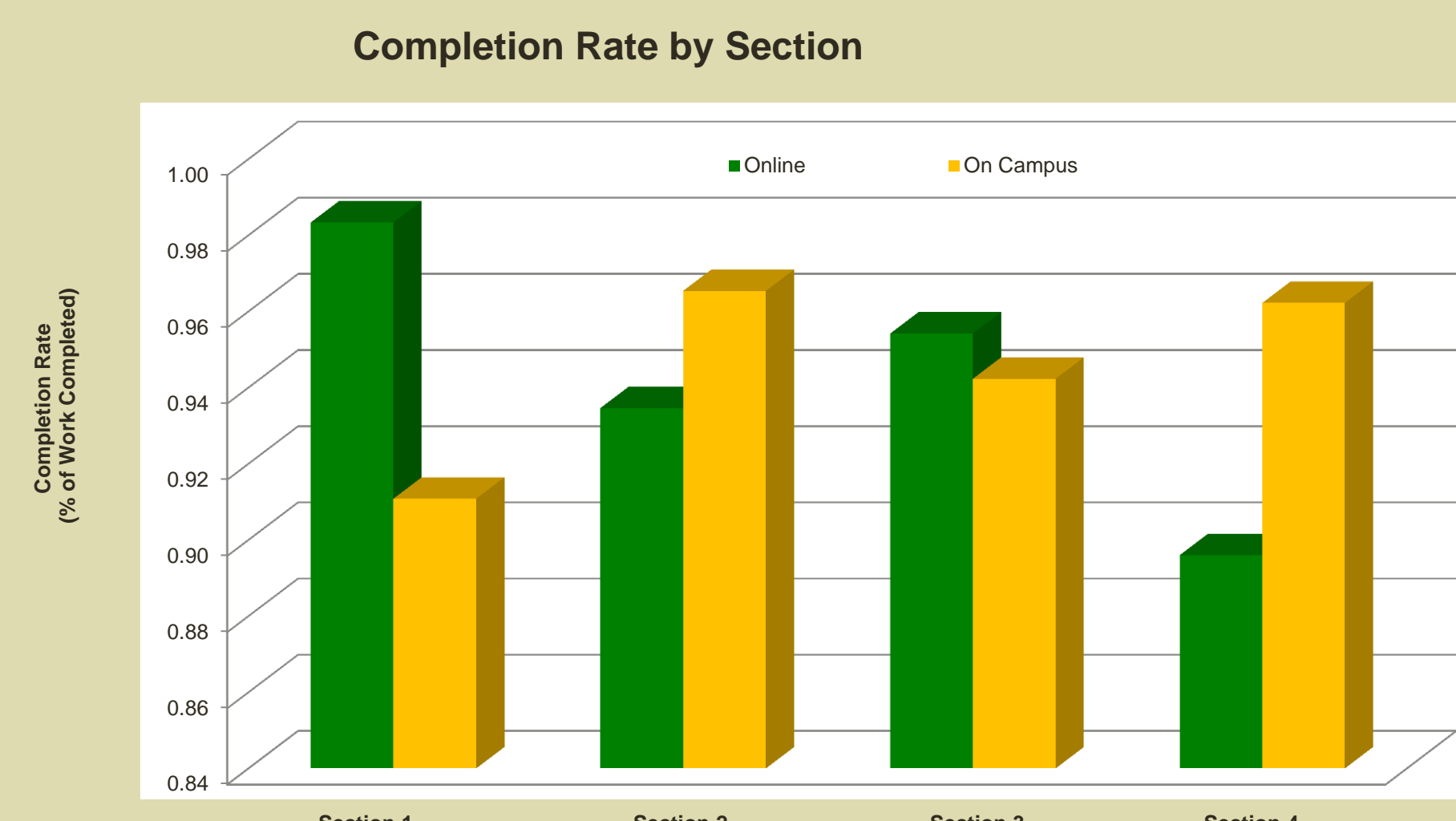
There was no significant interaction of completion rate by method ($p = .062$). The completion rate and drop out rate was similar for on campus classes as for those courses offered online.

Students in the online sections reported significantly higher levels of satisfaction with the online courses than the on campus course sections ($p = .02$).

Mean Final Grade and Completion Percentage by Sections



Mean final grades for students by sections do not vary significantly from on campus sections to online sections.



The completion rate is defined as the number of weeks on campus students attended classes and completed the assignment and the number of weeks online students logged onto the weekly readings and completed the assignment. The percentage of completion of the coursework does not vary significantly from on campus classes to online classes.

Qualitative Results

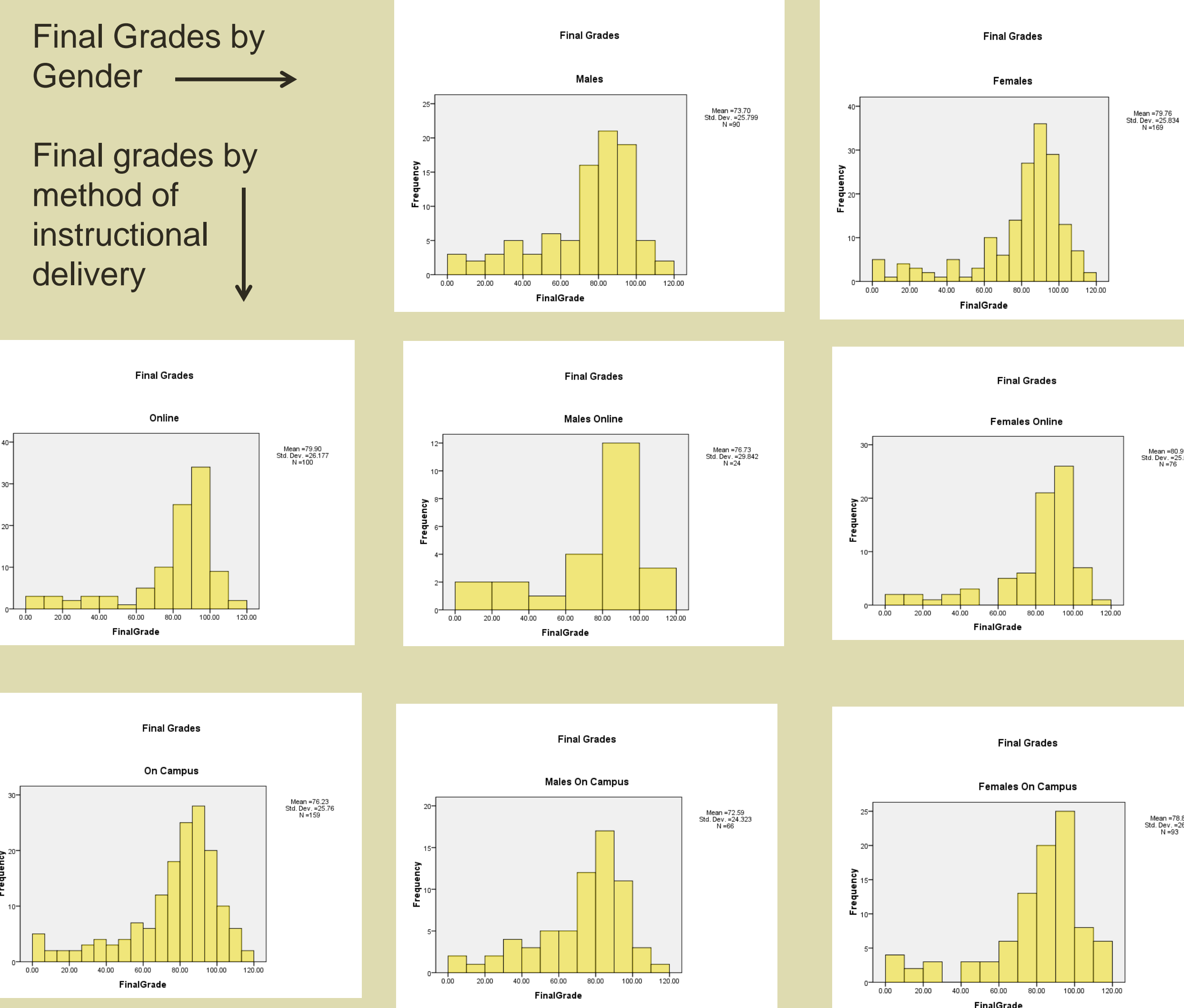
Qualitative comments from students in online courses reported:

- A higher level of satisfaction with the ability to arrange their study time more effectively around their home and work schedules, which was more important to women than men.
- Significant savings in commuting time and expense to come to campus for instruction.
- The ability to read and digest the information at their own pace, rereading as needed and taking notes on the reading at their own pace

Qualitative comments from students in on-campus courses reported preferences for face to face delivery because of:

- A strong preference for on campus classes because they did not have the personal discipline to self-monitor online studies
- A strong preference for the availability of an on-site teacher to be able to ask questions directly
- A preference for participating in live discussion with other students.
- Doubt about their computer proficiency to handle the demands of an online class.

Gender by Method of Instruction



These data, which represent final grades, are separated by gender and by method of instructional delivery. They are normal and similar, showing no differences between genders or method of instructional delivery, or the interaction of those variables.

Discussion

At this time, Norfolk State University is the only HBCU nationally and the only public university in Virginia to be certified by the USDLA. NSU has made a commitment to have certified instructors for online courses and has provided a series of on-campus staff development and opportunities for faculty to access national certification programs to further this commitment. Continued discussion about freshmen students' retention and success rates involve whether freshmen courses should be held face to face on campus as a matter of course or whether online instruction can be a viable option.

The differences in achievement and completion rates of freshmen students involved in similar courses delivered on campus and online were not significant. No differences were noted between method of delivery of the instruction for either men or women. All students achieved similar results in both methods of delivery.

Differences were noted in the satisfaction rate of students in qualitative comments. Students who were able or willing to manage the format of online coursework were more satisfied with the flexibility of the medium, allowing them to balance other time commitments of work or parenting with the workload of study.

Conclusion

Online courses can provide students with an equal opportunity for academic success with higher student satisfaction ratings. Technology can help to provide experiences that are equally effective in delivering course materials allowing students flexibility for time management. However, both methods of delivery are not equally successful for each, individual student.

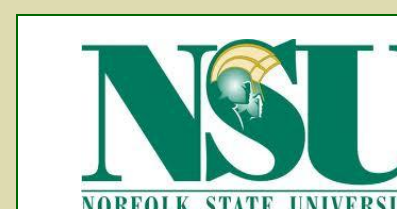
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