My name is Shane Southwick, I am the Distance Education Services Operations Manager at the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA). I am completing the requirements for a Master’s degree in Adult Education and I am expected to graduate in the fall of 2006 under the direction of professor G. Andrew Page. The paper that I am proposing is part of my masters thesis project entitled *An Adult Student’s Guide to Online Learning*. The purpose of this paper is to create a support network that will result in lowering student attrition rates among adult learners enrolled in online classes.

The concept of online learning is exploding on higher education campuses across the world. A 2001 international survey showed, “. . . 95 percent of large and mid-size higher education institutions employed e-learning systems, and most of the remaining five percent expected to do so within twelve months” (Andrews & Demps, 2003, p. 427). At the University of Alaska Anchorage the enrollments have jumped from 935 students in the fall of 1999 to 2107 in the spring of 2004. (Educational Media Services [eMedia], 2005).

The problem addressed by this study is the rates of attrition with students enrolled in online courses. If these courses are in such high demand and every year more and more institutions are offering online courses why then are the attrition rates so high? A recent report in the Chronicle for Higher Education found that institutions report dropout rates ranging from 20 to 50 percent for distance learners. Administrators of online courses concur that dropout rates are often 10 to 20 percent higher than their face-to-face counterparts (Frankola 2004, ¶ 2). When a student fails to complete a course nobody wins. Any institution of higher learning, business, or corporation is negatively affected because of the loss of revenue, time, and credit hours. A seat that could have been filled by another learner is now left vacant and the unsuccessful learner suffers a setback in their educational or professional goals. I felt something needed to be done to help learners find success in online education.

Data collected from a study done by Herbert Muse of Montgomery College in Maryland gave a list of characteristics of students that have been successful in an online environment. The results of his study showed that successful online learners carried a high grade point average (GPA) into their web course. Study environment, age, time since they last enrolled in a college course and background preparations were all significant factors of successful learners (Muse 2003).

Often times we at teachers, trainers or facilitators of learning fail to see things from the student perspective. Online teaching is new to us and we concentrate so hard on what we need to do be successful teachers that we fail to understand that this is a new way for students to learn as well. The pedagogy for online teaching and learning is constantly evolving. We look at the use of advance organizers to improve student e-learning completion rates. It is also important for potential online students to understand that this may not be for them. If a student is not a self motivated, self-directed learner the chance for them to succeed online is minimal (Citation). My paper provides resources students can use to help them determine their respective levels of self motivation, their learning style and if they are the type of learner that will succeed with e-learning.
entire objective of this project is to educate students so that they are prepared when taking online courses. The unknown will no longer be illusive and the unexpected will no longer catch students by surprise. Students will be prepared and because of their preparations they will have a much greater chance at success.

References
University of Alaska Anchorage, Educational Media Services Program Review, (2005)