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## Online Divorce Education: Learning from Participants Who Want More

Joshua J. Turner

*Utah State University, [joshua.turner@usu.edu](mailto:joshua.turner@usu.edu)*

Kay Bradford

*Utah State University, [k.bradford@usu.edu](mailto:k.bradford@usu.edu)*

David G. Schramm

*Utah State University, [david.schramm@usu.edu](mailto:david.schramm@usu.edu)*

Brian J. Higginbotham

*Utah State University, [brian.h@usu.edu](mailto:brian.h@usu.edu)*

Olena Kopystynska

*Utah State University, [olena.kopystynska@usu.edu](mailto:olena.kopystynska@usu.edu)*

*See next page for additional authors*

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### Authors

Joshua J. Turner, Kay Bradford, David G. Schramm, Brian J. Higginbotham, Olena Kopystynska, and  
Melissa M. Ferguson

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Joshua J. Turner

Kay Bradford

David G. Schramm

Brian J. Higginbotham

Olena Kopystynska

Melissa M. Ferguson

Utah State University

*Divorce education is designed for divorcing parents with minor children, and in a growing number of states, participation has become court-mandated to finalize a divorce. To increase accessibility, some states have adopted brief, online formats for divorce education programming. Evaluations are encouraging; however, less is known about how opinions on course length relate to participants' views on the benefits of their participation. This study analyzed qualitative data from parents ( $n = 41$ ) who thought their mandated divorce education course was too short. Results indicate that participants thought the course increased their knowledge of divorce-related matters. They also suggested improvements related to course content priorities. These findings may inform Extension specialists, family life practitioners, and program planners working to improve the delivery of online divorce education programs.*

*Keywords:* content, course length, divorce, divorce education, online divorce education

### Introduction

Divorce education has been offered in various forms since the mid-1970s. Currently, nearly every state offers some form of divorce education programming (Braver et al., 1996; Mulroy et al., 2013). In a growing number of states, these programs have become court-mandated for divorcing couples with dependent children (Cronin et al., 2017), a trend that started to gain momentum in the 1990s (Fackrell et al., 2011). To make courses more accessible, states adopted online formats for divorce education programming in the early 2000s (Bowers et al., 2011), integrating online programs into their court-mandated divorce education programming (Becher et al., 2015; Choi et al., 2017; Hardman et al., 2019). With these shifts in program delivery, opportunities abound in terms of the different approaches that can be taken to evaluate the effectiveness of divorce education programs.

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Direct correspondence to Joshua Turner at [joshua.turner@usu.edu](mailto:joshua.turner@usu.edu)

In general, online divorce education programs have shown positive outcomes in promoting effective coparenting skills and increasing parental understanding of divorce-related matters (Choi et al., 2017; Schramm & McCaulley, 2012). Despite encouraging evidence, a growing concern surrounding online divorce education programs revolves around the tendency of these programs to offer brief, less intense versions of divorce education curricula (Becher et al., 2015). The brief nature of these programs has created some skepticism related to their ability to sufficiently educate parents on divorce-related matters, such as the impact of divorce on children (Salem et al., 2013). The main critique of these brief divorce education programs is that participation in these programs has largely failed to demonstrate long-term benefits for the well-being of parents or their children (Mayhew, 2016). The trend toward more time-sensitive programs has also prompted researchers to evaluate the field to establish course content priorities to ensure the coverage of the most relevant and useful divorce-related topics (Schramm et al., 2018).

Relative to the debate over appropriate course length and establishing content priorities for divorce education, fewer attempts have been made to learn about how participants' views on the length of online divorce education programs relate to their experiences and program outcomes. With the continued growth of divorce education programming, it has been proposed that gathering more feedback from participants of divorce education programs can help family life practitioners identify the most effective approaches to program delivery and improvement (Ferraro et al., 2018). To improve program delivery, determine appropriate dosage levels, and establish content priorities for online divorce education programs, the literature may benefit from a better understanding of the experiences and perspectives of participants who express concern with course length. This may be especially true in light of recent research findings that link participants' views on course length with short-term outcomes, most notably in terms of increased knowledge of divorce-related matters. For example, in a recent study, Turner et al. (2019) noted that participants who were satisfied with course length reported significantly higher increases in their knowledge of divorce-related matters when compared to participants who expressed dissatisfaction with course length. These findings suggest that lessons may be learned from participants who express concern with the length of their divorce education course. Indeed, learning more about participant experiences and viewpoints has been used as one approach to evaluating divorce education programming (Choi et al., 2018).

The research reported here explored the feedback of participants who indicated that the divorce education course in which they participated was too short in length. This approach was taken for two reasons. First, multiple studies have demonstrated that course length can be substantially reduced with the adoption of online formats (Becher et al., 2015; Schramm et al., 2012). The reduction in course length is by design, as divorce education programs have become more sensitive to the schedules of working parents with children (Sigal et al., 2011). However, with reductions in course length, it is important to determine whether brief courses are effective in meeting their objectives. With this in mind, we elected to concentrate on participants who

thought the course was too short (as opposed to those who thought the course was too long) in an attempt to examine the “less is more” approach that is common in divorce education. Second, we argue that gaining a better understanding of participant experience and becoming more familiar with the benefits participants believe they derive from participation in divorce education programs may help practitioners establish course content priorities, which has become a growing concern with the increased development of brief divorce education programs (Douglas, 2004; Schramm et al., 2018).

The study was concerned with two main issues related to the experiences of divorcing parents who thought the length of Utah’s one-hour online divorce education course was too short. First, we sought to examine what aspects of the course participants believed were most beneficial to their situation. Second, we aimed to explore the nature of the overall feedback from participants regarding the course, paying particular attention to comparisons between positive and negative feedback. In exploring these issues, the overarching goal of the study was to provide evidence regarding the ways in which qualitative data related to participants’ experiences may be used to inform online divorce education programming, especially in the way of establishing course content priorities.

## **Literature Review**

### **Online Divorce Education Programs**

Several states have designed online formats for divorce education programs with the goal of making participation more convenient and less time-consuming (Choi et al., 2018). These online programs, some of which have been designed at the request of state legislatures (Becher et al., 2015; Choi et al., 2017), take into consideration the challenges that many parents encounter, such as geographical challenges related to living in remote areas, financial or transportation hardships, and conflicting child care and work schedules (Dennis & Ebata, 2005; Schramm & McCaulley, 2012; Sigal et al., 2011). Online programs have also been found to decrease feelings of social stigma for parents who would otherwise be required to participate in traditional, face-to-face divorce education programs that often take place in public forums (Ferraro et al., 2018).

Several studies have evaluated the effectiveness of online divorce education programs (Becher et al., 2015; Bowers et al., 2014; Choi et al., 2017; Cronin et al., 2017; Schramm & McCaulley, 2012). In their comparison of an online divorce education program with its face-to-face equivalent, Schramm and McCaulley (2012) found minimal differences between the two delivery methods, as both groups of participants considered their respective program to be worthwhile and effective in demonstrating the importance of developing positive coparenting skills. In other studies where researchers have evaluated the effectiveness of online divorce education programs, the findings have shown that participants have increased their knowledge of divorce-related matters, including how divorce affects children (Choi et al., 2017), as well as financial and legal matters related to child support and custody arrangements (Bowers et al., 2014).

Additional evaluations of online divorce education programs have provided evidence that after completion, participants reported greater confidence in their ability to cope with divorce-related matters (Becher et al., 2015). With research pointing to the positive effects of divorce education programs, scholars are focusing more attention on issues related to program dosage levels and content priorities (Schramm et al., 2018).

### **Program Dosage and Content Priorities for Divorce Education Programs**

In developing their Divorce Education Intervention Model, Blaisure and Geasler (2000) established a three-level model, categorizing divorce education programs based on their goals and objectives, teaching methods, content priorities, and dosage levels. Level 1 programs were shorter in length and required more passive involvement from participants. Level 2 programs were longer and more intensive in terms of skill-building activities. Level 3 programs were more specialized and primarily targeted families with special needs children (Blaisure & Geasler, 2000).

In light of the categories established by Blaisure and Geasler (2000), opinions vary on the most appropriate dosage levels, especially in terms of how much course time should be required to deliver effective divorce education programs (Becher et al., 2015; Brandon, 2006; Fackrell et al., 2011; Salem et al., 2013). The design of brief, low dosage programs may be viewed as a way to reduce the demands on parents who are already feeling the strain of divorce (Blaisure & Geasler, 2000). Some evidence suggests no significant difference between brief and longer divorce education programs in terms of short-term knowledge gain; however, little work has been done to gauge the long-term outcomes of divorce education programs based on course length, and more research is needed to compare brief, low dosage programs with moderate and high dosage programs (Fackrell et al., 2011). Perhaps the most important development related to program dosage levels is that brief programs have gained favor with many courts that mandate divorce education for divorcing couples with children, which could lead to the wider implementation of brief divorce education programs (Brotherson et al., 2010; Douglas, 2004).

In contrast, educators who implement longer divorce education programs have expressed the need for more extensive comparative analyses between longer and brief divorce education programs based on the argument that longer programs can offer more detailed content that brief programs may not be able to address due to time constraints (Becher et al., 2015). Considering this limitation, advocates of longer divorce education programs have voiced concerns over the ability of brief programs to equip parents with the necessary skills to effectively coparent and assist children in adjusting to the divorce process (Salem et al., 2013). Further, despite arguments for the benefits and convenience of brief divorce education programs, some research has documented that participants of brief divorce education programs tend to express dissatisfaction with course length (Brandon, 2006; Stone et al., 2001).

As divorce education programs continue their transition toward shorter and more time-sensitive, online formats, one of the most important matters to address related to appropriate dosage levels is establishing content priorities to ensure that the most relevant and useful divorce-related topics are being addressed within shortened time-frames. Some of the most recent work on establishing content priorities in divorce education has been conducted by Schramm and colleagues (2018), who utilized the divorce-stress-adjustment model (Amato, 2000) to establish three tiers of priority for content selection in divorce education programming. In establishing these tiers, top priority was given to child-centered topics, followed by adult-centered topics, and then supplemental and special topics (Schramm, 2018). The order of priority given to these content areas is consistent with the original intent of divorce education programming, which centers around sensitizing parents to the impact of divorce on children and the positive role that cooperative coparenting can play in the family reorganization process (Brotherson et al., 2010; Geasler & Blaisure, 1999).

### **Context of the Study**

As online divorce education courses become more common, researchers continue to evaluate their effectiveness. Although evaluations generally display an increased understanding among participants of divorce-related matters, especially in the short-term, they generally do not include participant feedback. The research reported here is one of the first studies to evaluate this line of inquiry, with the aim of exploring how participant opinion on dosage levels is related to their overall feedback and general opinions of divorce education. Gaining a better understanding of participant experiences may help family life practitioners and program developers determine whether brief, online curricula cover the most relevant topics and whether these programs leave participants feeling satisfied with their experience and confident that their participation has increased their knowledge of divorce-related matters. For this study, we used qualitative data from Utah's one-hour online divorce education course, focusing specifically on the views of participants who thought the course was too short. Although these participants may not represent the opinions of the majority, like the other participants, they were mandated to take the course. Through qualitative analysis, we report on lessons learned from listening to the voices of the minority (Creswell, 2013).

### **Purpose of the Study**

In this study, we performed a content analysis of open-ended survey items to report on the experiences of parents who took part in a court-mandated, online divorce education course who were concerned that the course was too short in length. To gain a better perspective on participant experiences, we posed two primary research questions:

- 1) What did participants who thought their course was too short find most beneficial about the course?

- 2) What was the nature of the overall feedback from participants who thought their course was too short?

In exploring these questions, the study aims to provide evidence of the ways in which participants' experiences may inform family life practitioners as they work to improve online divorce education programming.

## Method

### Program Description

Utah's online divorce education course was designed to be a one-hour, state-mandated course for divorcing parents with minor children. The course was developed by Extension Specialists at Utah State University through a contract with the Utah Administrative Office of the Courts. The course was available on demand through software linked to the Court's website.

Per state legislation, divorce education in Utah was signed into law with the goal of sensitizing divorcing parents to the needs of their children both during and after the divorce process. Course curricula consisted of narrated PowerPoint® slides, videos, vignettes, and checkpoint questions to ensure active participation and learning. Failure to respond to the checkpoint questions within 60 seconds triggered the software to restart at the last completed section. Participants were not allowed to skip sections. Participants were allowed to complete the entire course in one sitting, or they could start and resume later. Once all sections and checkpoints were completed, participants could take a survey related to the course. In compliance with legislative requirements, mandated topics covered by the course and the survey included the impact of divorce on child and family relationships, financial responsibilities, domestic violence, coparenting skills, and ways to decrease child exposure to harmful interparental conflict (Utah State Legislature, 2018). Responses were anonymous and demographic data were not collected. Upon satisfactory completion of the course, certificates of completion were generated, which participants submitted to the Court.

### Participants

Utah's online divorce education course was launched in May of 2017. Current analyses are based on surveys collected between May 2017 and October 2018. During this time, a total of 10,715 individuals participated in the online course, and 4,954 individuals completed the program's associated survey, resulting in a survey completion rate of 46%. Participants were not required to complete the survey to receive a certificate of completion. For purposes of this study, we analyzed qualitative data collected from participants who believed the course was too short ( $n = 41$ ) and who provided usable qualitative responses. These participants were selected based on their response to a closed-ended survey item presented at the beginning of the survey that assessed participant opinion on course length. In assessing course length, participants were



presented with three options, of which they could only select one: (a) too long, (b) just right, or (c) too short.

### **Procedural Measures**

Once all course modules were completed, an online survey was administered. In addition to closed-ended items that assessed participant opinion on course length, perceived improvements in the understanding of divorce-related matters, and participants' future coparenting plans, the survey also provided participants with the opportunity to respond to two open-ended items. The first item asked participants to describe the most beneficial aspects of the course. The second item provided participants the opportunity to provide overall feedback related to the course. Content analysis of the text was performed to identify common themes and patterns in the open-ended survey items. This approach was applied due to its flexibility (Bengtsson, 2016) and its documented usefulness in analyzing open-ended survey items (Donath et al., 2011).

### **Data Analysis**

Through written responses, we explored the perceptions of participants who indicated that the one-hour course they were mandated to participate in was too short in length. Throughout the content analysis of the qualitative data, an emphasis was placed on describing the perceptions and experiences of participants (Creswell, 2013; Sargeant, 2012). We believe that an improved understanding of participant perception and experiences through content analysis may help inform online divorce education programming.

Data were primarily analyzed by two of the contributing authors with NVivo®, a widely-used qualitative data analysis software program. One author was a postdoctoral fellow with extensive training in qualitative data analysis in both applied, policy-based research and basic-academic research, while the other author was a graduate student with a moderate amount of experience in qualitative data analysis, who was involved in this project as part of a directed individual study. Throughout the analysis, the researchers also consulted with the other contributing authors who served as senior faculty in their respective departments and have a record of publishing qualitative research.

A crucial element of qualitative data analysis is interrater reliability (Gisev et al., 2013). To achieve interrater reliability, the two primary researchers referred to above analyzed data separately to identify statements that provided a description of participant experience, a process known as horizontalization (Creswell, 2013). After the horizontalization process, the researchers grouped statements into categories to determine what themes emerged from the data. The researchers consulted with one another to come to an agreement on the major themes. Each researcher then coded the data separately. Researchers also attempted to identify any occurrences of overlap between major themes. This was considered especially critical to the analysis, considering the freedom participants were given in their responses to the open-ended items.

Interrater reliability was calculated by rating the level of agreement between the two researchers through Cohen's kappa statistic (Viera & Garrett, 2005).

Data were analyzed by using the two research questions as the major categories. For the first question (benefits of participation), Cohen's kappa was calculated at 0.86. This process was repeated for the second question (overall feedback), which produced a Cohen's kappa statistic of 0.96. Both Cohen's kappa statistics indicated strong levels of interrater reliability (Viera & Garrett, 2005). All discrepancies were discussed until a consensus was reached.

## Results

The results from the open-ended survey items are presented in two major categories: (a) benefits of participation and (b) overall feedback. These categories were then broken down further into themes. As stated previously, this study's purpose was to focus intentionally on a subset of parents who, when asked in a post-course survey to provide their assessment of the length of the court-mandated divorce education course, expressed concern that the course was too short ( $n = 41$ ). Thus, the themes presented in the results section represent the most prominent findings from the analysis of participants who fit this criterion. This allows for the expansion of research in this field by giving voice to a minority of participants whose feedback might shed light on crucial aspects of divorce education related to dosage and content priorities.

Themes mentioned by one or a few participants were not included in the final analysis. In general, the themes that emerged were consistent among the program participants. This consistency suggests that content analysis of open-ended survey items is an effective method in finding ways to improve divorce education programs by identifying what areas of the course participants found most beneficial and what areas of the course participants believed were most in need of improvement

### Benefits of Participation

Of the 41 participants who believed the course was too short, a total of 30 participants (73%) offered usable qualitative responses related to the benefits they derived from participating in the course. From these responses, three major themes emerged: (a) impact of divorce on children, (b) increased awareness of divorce-related matters, and (c) coparenting.

**Impact of Divorce on Children.** Half ( $n = 15$ ) of the participants discussed how the course helped them to better understand the impact that divorce can have on children. Related to this theme, multiple participants found the course helpful in describing how children of different ages typically respond to divorce, especially as it related to the different stages of grief that children might go through and the coping mechanisms that children use to deal with this grief. An example of the course's helpfulness in educating parents on this topic was found in the statement of one parent who said: "Learning that kids go through different stages of grief and to watch for

those in order to help my kids.” The course also seemed to inform participants that some children may try to take on excessive, adult-level responsibility during the divorce process and that parents need to take the proper measures to prevent this from occurring due to the negative outcomes that can result for the child. An example of how the course helped parents understand how to recognize and address this type of situation was intimated by one participant who stated:

I found the topics of how to ensure children do not become counselors as much as they want to try most helpful. My eldest child was trying to do just that and did end up with some levels of distress because of it.

**Increased Awareness of Divorce-related Matters.** Eleven participants discussed how the course helped increase their awareness of divorce-related matters. In discussing their increased awareness, participants often cited the benefit of being introduced to the breadth of issues related to the divorce process and how the course touched on items they were not aware of before attending the course. Some of the topics that participants were pleased to receive new information on were related to legal matters and coping mechanisms for handling specific situations during the divorce process. In discussing the comprehensive nature of the course, one participant expressed approval by describing the following as being a benefit of the course:

The information provided on all aspects of going through a divorce. There are so many things that need to be done, and trial and error is not the way to figure them out. It is really good to get perspective from research and experience to help guide decisions made.

**Coparenting.** Ten participants discussed how the course helped them to better understand the importance of coparenting. In discussing coparenting, participants consistently noted how the course effectively explained the cooperation and sharing of responsibilities involved in successful coparenting. An example of the course’s helpfulness in educating parents on the topic of coparenting was found in the statement of one parent who said: “I enjoyed the information about roles and relationships when children are involved. I felt there was suitable time spent on various age groups of affected children.” Some participants expressed hope for improvement as a result of their spouse’s participation in the course, knowing their spouse would be exposed to this content. In learning about the importance of sharing responsibility in coparenting situations, one participant expressed the following:

That my husband has to take this. Hopefully, he will understand that I am not the only one who thinks this way about divorce and children. I’m hoping this will help him realize more regarding schedules, keeping promises, financial responsibility, and safety of our child.

Other important lessons participants learned about coparenting were related to the dangers of interparental conflict in terms of putting children in the middle of disputes and the negative consequences that can result from speaking unfavorably about the other parent in front of

children. In describing the benefits of the lessons, the course offered on coparenting skills, one participant stated:

The coparenting module was most helpful. Trying to get along with one another is difficult when ill feelings are present. You can make every attempt to be calm and cooperative, but you will at one time find yourself frustrated. Good tips in this module.

### **Overall Feedback**

Of the 41 participants who believed the course was too short, a total of 21 participants (51%) offered usable qualitative responses related to their overall feedback about the course. To address the freedom participants were given in responding to this item, and to construct a more useful analysis, responses were grouped into two major themes: (a) positive feedback and constructive criticism and (b) negative feedback. To distinguish between constructive criticism and negative feedback, researchers separated participant statements based on the perceived nature of their criticism. Statements of constructive criticism were those in which participants discussed the benefits of the course (i.e., positive feedback) while offering solutions related to how the course could be improved (i.e., constructive criticism). Conversely, statements of negative feedback focused more on the course's shortcomings without offering much in the way of viable solutions for program improvement.

**Positive Feedback and Constructive Criticism.** Seven participants offered generally positive feedback for the course, which was often followed by constructive criticism that included suggestions on course improvement. These participants were satisfied with how informative they perceived the course to be, especially on topics related to coparenting and the importance of keeping the best interests of children in mind during the divorce process. Multiple participants stated that they planned to apply what they had learned in the course to their situation. For instance, one participant stated: "The co-parent information was extremely helpful. I will apply tips to what we are already doing."

Despite the generally positive nature of their feedback, some participants offered constructive criticism that might be used to improve course delivery and help establish course content priorities. For instance, one participant, who was interested in learning more about the effects of domestic abuse related to divorce stated: "Very informative, although more info on abusive relationships and how that is affected by divorce would be helpful." Another participant also noted that the course was very informative but expressed concern that the course was too neutral in its discussion about the implications of divorce. In a statement that summarizes the nature of the positive feedback and constructive criticism offered by participants, one individual offered the following: "Great course. Could be more in depth, but what it did relay was great knowledge which I will apply to my situation. Must always do what's best for the kids."

**Negative Feedback.** Fourteen participants who were concerned with the brief nature of the divorce education course offered negative feedback. The majority of these participants believed the major area of improvement was related to course content issues. In this case, participants expressed concern over what they believed the course failed to cover. Some specific examples of omitted topics included infidelity and ways in which parents can help children adjust to the divorce process. With regard to dealing with matters of infidelity, one participant stated:

The course does not mention infidelity much, and I think that is a very common cause of divorce. Some more info on coping with the jealousy and anger that is inevitable when you find out about your spouse's unfaithfulness is warranted.

In discussing ways in which the course could be improved to aid parents in assisting their children with adjusting to the divorce process, another participant offered the following suggestion:

I wish there was more information about whether or not there are benefits to having children go to therapy. I feel like sometimes therapy shifts the responsibility of helping kids with their problems from parent to therapist. I believe that takes away an important part of parenting and interferes with the relationship between parent and child. Of course, there are cases where the parent is ill-equipped to help the child, but more information on this subject would be helpful.

In addition to the feedback related to course improvement and course content issues, participants also questioned if some of the information was current, while others expressed a desire for more personal and "real world" divorce-related examples to be offered throughout the course. It should be noted that of all the participants who thought the course was too short, only one participant expressed genuine dissatisfaction with the length of the course. This participant stated:

It is insulting to have just an hour to cover about divorce. This is a crucial matter; an hour cannot inform in detail. This course should be done in person, but there is (*sic*) not enough classes, and it should be much, much longer than an hour.

### **Discussion and Implications**

Through a content analysis of qualitative data collected from Utah's one-hour online divorce education program, this study examined the views of program participants who thought the course they participated in was too short in length. Specifically, this study was concerned with two main issues related to the experiences of these participants: (a) gain a better understanding of what aspects of the course participants found most beneficial and (b) explore the nature of participants' overall feedback regarding the course, paying particular attention to both positive and negative feedback. The following sections discuss the study's major findings and their implications related to these two issues.

## Benefits of Participation

Although this study focused on participants who thought the course was too short, when asked about the most beneficial aspects of the course, participants reported that the course helped them better understand the impact that divorce had on children and the benefits of positive coparenting, which is one of the primary goals of divorce education (Braver et al., 1996; Whitworth et al., 2002). This evidence further underscores the importance of including these two topics in divorce education programming (Brotherson et al., 2010; Ferraro et al., 2016). Further, the fact that such a small number of participants believed the course was too short, but still reported benefits, bodes well for the state of online divorce education programming, which is starting to move toward more time-sensitive formats (Schramm et al., 2018). Such findings also provide research-based evidence on the importance of placing a strong emphasis on these topics when establishing content priorities for divorce education.

## Overall Feedback

When participants were given the opportunity to provide overall feedback about the course, their responses tended to be less positive, centering on divorce-related matters they believed were missing from the course or not covered in sufficient detail. This is to be anticipated as this study purposefully focused on participants who believed the course was too short. The issues related to the concerns raised by participants over the lack of detail on certain topics is reminiscent of the concerns of family life practitioners who have questioned whether brief divorce education courses can provide the content-rich curriculum that is offered through longer divorce education courses (Becher et al., 2015; Brandon, 2006; Salem et al., 2013).

The concerns of participants over the lack of detail on certain topics may serve as a latent function of the brief nature of the course in which they participated. Alternatively, it could indicate that individuals are looking for more information on topics more relevant to their specific situation. Participants' concerns over uncovered or abridged topics illustrate the importance of establishing content priorities for divorce education programs.

Based on the results of this study, there is support for a greater priority to be placed on adult-centered and special topics (e.g., domestic abuse and infidelity), in addition to child-centered topics (e.g., when to provide children with therapy) to ensure a more comprehensive approach to divorce education (Schramm et al., 2018). Participants' desire to learn more about certain topics may present an opportunity for follow-up efforts and initiatives to provide supplemental content on certain topics. Indeed, past evaluations of online divorce education programs have stressed the utility of technological benefits and tools of online divorce education through follow-up efforts to provide parents with additional services and information (possibly through interactive links) to aid families in divorce-related transition processes (Bowers et al., 2011; Dennis & Ebata, 2005). Such efforts may have programmatic and pragmatic implications that policymakers would be well-served to take under consideration, especially in light of research that has shown

that divorce education programs that incorporate follow-up efforts have reported improvements in post-divorce familial well-being (Becher et al., 2015; Cronin et al., 2017).

It is recognized, however, that covering additional material and adding other interactive features to an online program could pose some challenges, especially in terms of ensuring that the current program, which was designed to be brief in nature and more convenient for divorcing parents, is kept at a satisfactory length for participants. The results of this study also stress the importance of ensuring that courses provide the most current information possible as it relates to matters of divorce, something else that might be addressed by taking advantage of the interactive capabilities of online education programs. Finally, this study's findings identify the need for attention to detail among those designing brief divorce education courses, especially as it relates to addressing key topics in comprehensive ways within time-sensitive formats.

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

When interpreting the findings of this study, several limitations should be considered. First, in selecting participants who thought the course was too short, the sample did not represent most participant experiences. This was by design, as we intentionally concentrated on the minority of participants who indicated the course was too short in an attempt to examine the "less is more" approach that is becoming common in divorce education. Rather than further commenting on course length, the participants were more inclined to comment on course content, paying particular attention to topics they thought were not sufficiently covered in the curriculum.

Another limitation of this study was the lack of demographic data, which could not be collected due to the restrictions placed on implementing the study's survey instrument. We acknowledge that the lack of demographic data limits the generalizability of the findings. The inclusion of demographic data would open up many possibilities for future research that might help practitioners better understand which individuals could benefit from further intervention after program completion.

In future research efforts, researchers could use demographic data, such as gender, age, and relational factors (e.g., number of marriages), to compare participants' reactions to course length. Understanding the reasons behind the divorce (e.g., domestic violence or infidelity) and whether the quality of spousal relationships is associated with how participants view the program's effectiveness would also be informative to future research. Further, from an applied perspective, expansion of the survey instrument could provide an option for participants who believed their course was too short to seek more information or professional services after program completion. Increased interaction with participants could be mutually beneficial, as it might allow practitioners to gain a better understanding of the role that certain issues played in the decision to file for divorce, thus, helping them tailor future programs to the specific needs of participants, while providing participants with additional treatment that might be helpful as they move through the divorce process.

To explore these and other research and programmatic possibilities, programs like Utah's online divorce education program would need to collaborate with state officials who mandate this course for divorcing parents to collect demographic data and other data related to the situation of participants. Indeed, if such collaboration were to take place, the proposed future research and supplemental resources could be expanded to more effectively serve divorcing parents.

### Conclusion

Although divorce rates remain fairly steady (Anderson, 2016), they are still relatively high for first marriages and continue to increase for higher order-marriages (DeLongis & Zwicker, 2017). Given these trends and the unfavorable impacts of divorce on children and families, coupled with the increase of mandatory divorce education programs, evaluations of the effectiveness of such programs will continue to be important. Some have proposed that gathering feedback from participants of divorce education programs can help family life practitioners identify the most effective approaches to program delivery and improvement (Choi et al., 2018; Ferraro et al., 2018).

In this study, we have argued that valuable knowledge can be gained from participants who believed their divorce education course was not long enough. Data revealed that brief, online divorce education could inform participants of the effects of divorce on children and increase their awareness of legal matters, coping strategies, and positive coparenting. Perhaps the most important findings from this study were derived from participants' feedback on content areas they believed were lacking in detail or not addressed during the course. With courts and state legislatures approving (and in some cases requesting the design and implementation of) brief divorce education programs, it is possible that online divorce education courses will become more common. To prepare for this possibility, it will be important to understand participant experiences, and use their voices to refine effective and relevant, research-based divorce education programming that will help families as they adjust to changes associated with the divorce process.

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*Joshua J. Turner* is a postdoctoral fellow at Utah State University. He received his Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Sciences from Mississippi State University. His research interests include relationship education, remarriage and stepfamily issues, and health and aging.

*Kay Bradford* is a Professor at Utah State University. His research focuses on relationship education for youth, adult singles, couples, and fathers. His funded projects include interventions in community and high-risk contexts.

*David G. Schramm* is an Associate Professor and Extension Specialist in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Utah State University. He has a Master’s degree in Family, Consumer, and Human Development from Utah State University and a Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Studies from Auburn University.

*Brian J. Higginbotham* is a Professor and Extension Specialist in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Utah State University. He has a Master’s degree in Marriage and Family Therapy and a Ph.D. in Human Development and Family Studies from Auburn University.

*Olena Kopystynska* is a postdoctoral fellow at Utah State University. She received her Ph.D. in Family Studies and Human Development from the University of Arizona. Her research interests focus on examining the role of marital conflict in relation to parenting and the quality of coparental relationships across different family structures (e.g., married parents, cohabiting parents).

*Melissa M. Ferguson* is a graduate student in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Utah State University. Her research interests are parent-child relationships, sex education, sex communication, and abuse prevention.