

# **SEARCH III Midpoint Evaluation Assessing Immediate Impact and Soliciting Participant Feedback on Program Delivery**

**SEARCH III Participant Focus Group and Survey Results**

**Revised July 2003**

**Submitted to:**



**Submitted by:**



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# Executive Summary

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## Purpose

The purpose of the current evaluation project was to formally assess the immediate impact of the SEARCH program on individual SEARCH III participants as well as to solicit feedback from participants regarding course content and delivery.

## Methods

Two key primary data collection methods included:

- Participant focus groups, and
- Participant survey.

Two focus group discussions were conducted in April 2002. Survey questions were prepared following analysis of the focus group discussions. Issues identified during these discussions were further explored through the participant survey. Comments were solicited from SEARCH faculty members during the May 2002 retreat and recommended changes incorporated into the survey. Questions were also pilot tested to ensure clarity and accuracy of interpretation. Current SIII participants (N=26) were invited to respond to the mid-point evaluation survey via the SEARCH Desktop. An anonymous, electronic participant reminder was issued one month following the initial request to participate.

The current evaluation further built on learnings identified through the long term evaluation of the first two iterations of the SEARCH program (i.e., SEARCH I and II). The SEARCH I and II evaluation<sup>1</sup> included a document review, literature review, logic model development, and participant survey.

## Participant Response Rate

Thirteen SEARCH III participants (**50%**) participated in one of two focus group discussions.

Twenty-five SEARCH III participants (**96%**) responded to the electronic participant survey.

## Focus Group Findings

### Perceived Short-Term Impact

Participants were asked to comment about the ways in which the SEARCH program has made a difference to them personally and professionally. For the purpose of the focus group, “short-

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<sup>1</sup> Long Term Evaluation of the SEARCH Program: Assessing Impact at the Individual Participant Level (McCaffrey Consulting, revised 2003).

term” was defined as one year since the beginning of the SEARCH III program. Participants were also asked to consider their initial goals, motivations, and expectations for the SEARCH program and to assess the degree to which they were at the point they expected to be 12 months into the program. Based on these discussions, two areas of perceived individual-level impact emerged – perceived areas of impact and perceived gaps.

Perceived areas of impact included:

- improved professional and personal networks,
- improved access to information and resources, and
- improved skills with respect to accessing and using existing research.

Perceived gaps included:

- degree of quantitative research skill development, and
- progress on individual and group research projects.

### Contextual Variables: Time and Guilt

Two key contextual variables (at the individual participant level) emerged through the discussion regarding perceived impact and gaps. Participants often expressed a lack of time as a key reason for not being as far along as they may have hoped, and an accompanying sense of guilt for not meeting their own expectations.

### Program Content, Curriculum, and Course Delivery

Overall, participants liked the three main program themes: choosing, using, and creating evidence. Other components of the program content, curriculum, and course delivery discussed during the focus groups included:

- length of residential component and frequency of evening classes,
- course time allocated to group projects,
- focus on practical versus theoretical approaches,
- collegial learning environment, and
- technical support.

### Appreciation for the SEARCH experience

Overall, participants expressed appreciation and sense of privilege for the opportunity to participate in the SEARCH program. Participants agreed there had been excellent feedback based on session evaluations (e.g., *they are incredibly good at listening to us and respond the next day – or add in workshops on the side*), and felt that SEARCH provided valuable research skills, training, resources, and networking opportunities.

## Participant Survey Findings

### Demographic Information

Survey respondents were affiliated with organizations from rural (44%), large urban (i.e., Calgary and Edmonton, 32%), and regional centres (i.e., Red Deer and Lethbridge, 20%). The most common roles fulfilled by SEARCH III participants within their organizations included “Information/Research” (44%), “Clinical/Front Line” (28%), and “Management” (20%).

### Direction for Participation

Sixty percent of respondents reported they had requested to participate in the program, either as part of an existing position or had applied for a new position that included SEARCH responsibilities. The remaining 40% had been directed to participate by their employer, either as part of their existing position or were transferred to a new role that included SEARCH participation.

### Experience with Online or Web-based Learning

Participation in the SEARCH program represented the first time that more than half of the participants had engaged in online or web-based learning (i.e., 60% of participants reported that they did not have experience with online or web-based learning prior to participation in SEARCH).

### Networks Established Through SEARCH

SEARCH III survey respondents further confirmed that the “SEARCH network” is well utilized and valued. The use and value of the personal and professional networks established through SEARCH has consistently emerged from various sources, including previous evaluation studies, as one of the key outcomes of the SEARCH program. The SEARCH network was defined as “connections between health care professionals, researchers, policy-makers, and decision-makers” established through the SEARCH program.

Ninety-six percent of respondents reported that they “currently use the personal and/or professional networks established through SEARCH”. Participants provided feedback regarding their frequency of contact with various members of the SEARCH network as well as the reasons for contact in between the residential modules, including both professional and personal reasons for using the network.

The most common reasons for contacting **SEARCH faculty members** in between the residential modules included: discussions regarding the individual and group projects; requests for general advice and information sharing; requests for research methods assistance; and discussions regarding inter-module materials and assignments. **Non-SEARCH university professors/faculty members** were contacted to discuss individual and group projects and to discuss research ideas. **Fellow SEARCH III** participants were contacted for a variety of reasons, including to collaborate on group projects, discuss individual projects, clarify assignments, request information, share expertise, and to discuss non-SEARCH projects or other work-related issues. SEARCH III participants also reported contact with each other outside of the residential modules for social support and encouragement. **Previous SEARCH**

**participants** were contacted to discuss their experience with the SEARCH program, to request information, and to discuss projects.

### SEARCH Projects

The majority of respondents reported that they had initially anticipated being further along in their progress for both the individual and group projects at this point (14 months) into the SEARCH program.

Sixty percent (n=15) of participants anticipated to have initiated or completed data collection for their **group projects** by this point of the program. However, only one<sup>2</sup> participant reported having initiated data collection for his/her group project at the time of the midpoint survey. The highest levels of current progress reported for group projects included “literature review completed” (32%) and “project proposal developed” (52%).

Fifty-two percent (n=13) of respondents anticipated having data collection underway or completed for their **individual projects** by this point of the program. A broader range of progress was reported for individual projects than for group projects (e.g., 12% had initiated data collection and 16% had initiated data analysis); however, current progress was less than anticipated progress for all but 2 participants.

The majority of respondents recommended that the SEARCH program include **one group project** (recommended by 85% of participants) and **one individual project** (recommended by 76% of participants).

Participants also provided detailed suggestions regarding the format, structure, and process for participation in the SEARCH group and individual projects. Recommendations were provided in the following categories:

- topic selection,
- group size,
- group member commitment,
- organizational commitment,
- scope of work,
- time and competing priorities,
- faculty/advisor support,
- sample proposal request, and
- prerequisite learning/skills.

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<sup>2</sup> It is unclear why more than one participant did not report “data collection underway” given that each member of the group should have responded the same way to the group project questions. It is possible that the individual responded based on his/her individual contributions to the group and other members may not have yet collected data from their region/organization.

## Work Time Allocated to SEARCH

Previous evidence suggested that the recommended 40% of allocated work time to participate in the SEARCH program was not occurring in practice. Survey respondents estimated that they had allocated, on average, **18% of their work time** to SEARCH over the past 14 months. The minimum and maximum average estimates were 1% and 50% respectively. Participants were further asked to identify what percentage of work time should ideally be protected for SEARCH activities. The minimum recommended percentage of protected work time was 20%; maximum 50%. The mean recommendation was 40% protected time.

In addition to time spent during the work day, respondents reported an average allocation of **5 hours per week of personal time** for SEARCH-related activities.

## Residential Training

Respondents recommended that the residential training modules should range between **3 and 7 days in length** (average recommendation = 5 days) and that **5 to 10 modules** should be included as part of the SEARCH curriculum (average recommendation = 7.8 modules).

## Inter-Module Activities

In addition to the residential training component, the SEARCH program offers activities in between modules such as readings and assignments (i.e., inter-module activities). The majority of respondents (88%) reported that the inter-module activities had been either somewhat or very helpful to them. Fifty-six percent of respondents reported that the number of inter-module activities was sufficient; however, an additional 28% would have preferred more inter-module activities.

## Skill Acquisition

Respondents reported a variety of skills that they had acquired through participation in the SEARCH program thus far. Commonly cited skills included:

- literature and information searching skills,
- critical appraisal skills,
- proposal writing skills,
- qualitative research methods,
- group work skills,
- computer skills,
- networking skills,
- understanding of organizational analysis and development,
- understanding of the research process, and
- instrument/questionnaire design.

Seventy-two percent of respondents would have preferred greater emphasis on specific skills development earlier in the program. The most commonly cited skills not yet acquired, that

participants had hoped to acquire by this point of the program, related to quantitative data analysis and statistics.

### Choosing, Using, and Creating Evidence

The majority of respondents reported the application of skills related to choosing evidence on a daily (52%) or weekly (20%) basis. In addition, respondents also reported the application of skills related to using and creating evidence, however slightly less frequently than the choosing theme 14 months into the program.

### Virtual Learning Community

**One hundred percent** of respondents considered the SEARCH virtual learning community a very important (84%) or somewhat important (16%) contributor to their success in the program, an interesting finding given that 60% of the participants had no previous experience with web-based or online learning prior to the SEARCH program.

### Technical Support

Participants were asked to estimate the amount of technical support they had received from their organizations as well as from the Centre for Health Evidence. On average, respondents reported that 65% of the technical support they have needed has been provided by the Centre for Health Evidence, and 39% of required technical support provided by organizations. Overall, respondents reported satisfaction with the level of technical support available to them.

### Software Compatibility

Participants were asked to identify the quantitative and qualitative data analysis software programs for which they anticipated requiring familiarity with in the next two years. Sixty-eight percent of respondents (n=17) reported an anticipated need for familiarity with SPSS within the next two years (see Figure 18). Furthermore, almost half of respondents (48%, n=12) reported an anticipated need for familiarity with Nud\*ist or N5 (see Figure 19) within the next two years.

## **Next Steps**

The results from this survey were used to assess progress of the SEARCH III program and to guide the development of the SEARCH IV program. More detailed follow-up with SEARCH III participants will be conducted upon formal completion of the 24 month period.

# 1.0 Participant Focus Group Report: Introduction

The Swift Efficient Application of Research in Community Health (SEARCH) Program is a health research and professional development program for community-based health professionals. The SEARCH program provides education, training, mentoring and research collaboration through a virtual learning community of managers and health professionals in partnership with university-based researchers and teachers. A third intake to the program is underway, with 28 participants sponsored by Alberta’s health authorities and physician groups.

The SEARCH Program emphasizes ongoing evaluation of its activities and knowledge generation about capacity building in applied health research. After five years, several formal evaluation processes have been undertaken, as well as quality assurance activities related to the instructional element of the program.

A “Blueprint” for SEARCH Program design, evaluation and research was developed in September 2001. It outlined the potential range of program outcomes for assessment, and identified priority evaluation questions from stakeholders in the program. From this Blueprint, seven evaluation projects will be undertaken, in a coordinated and integrated fashion.

The Blueprint outlined the following areas of inquiry:

<b>Level of Change</b>	<b>Service Delivery (e.g., RHAs, MDs)</b>	<b>Academic (e.g., Universities)</b>	<b>Funding (e.g., AHFMR)</b>	<b>Citizens, Consumers</b>
<b>Locus of Change</b>				
<i>Individual</i>	*****			
<i>Individual in Organization/Group</i>	*****			
<i>Organization/Group</i>				
<i>System (e.g. Group of RHAs)</i>				
<i>Trans-sectoral System</i>				

<b>SEARCH Governance and Management</b>	
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The current project focuses on the short term outcomes for SEARCH III participants from the individual and individual in organization/group perspectives (the service delivery level of change).

## 1.1 Goals

The overall goals of the current project are to:

- formally assess the immediate impact of the SEARCH program on individual SEARCH III participants;

- solicit feedback from SEARCH III participants regarding curriculum content and design; and
- develop and refine processes for the ongoing evaluation of the impact of SEARCH at the individual participant level.

## **1.2 Methods**

### 1.2.1 Document and literature review

A previous review of SEARCH documents and relevant academic literature<sup>3</sup> provided context for the current project.

### 1.2.2 Focus group with SEARCH participants (n=13)

Two focus groups were conducted with SEARCH III participants in April 2002. To maximize participation rates, the focus groups were scheduled to coincide with each of two SEARCH-affiliated qualitative interviewing seminars.

- Calgary, Alberta (April 19, 2002, 11:30-1:00 PM)
- Edmonton, Alberta (April 25, 2002, 11:30-1:00 PM)

The following three key areas were explored during the focus groups:

- Perceived short-term impact
- Goals, expectations, and motivation
- Program content and curriculum. (See Appendix A for focus group guide.)

The focus groups were facilitated by the independent evaluator; notes and observations were provided by the AHFMR Impact Analysis Coordinator. Sessions were audio-taped and transcribed for analysis.

### 1.2.3 Survey of SEARCH participants

Based on the initial focus group findings, a draft survey instrument is in development to assess the short-term impact of the SEARCH program as well as to gather additional feedback regarding the course design, content, and curriculum. Pending input from the SEARCH faculty (May 2002 retreat) the survey will be administered electronically to each SEARCH III participant.

## **1.3 Results**

Participants were asked to comment about the ways in which the SEARCH program has made a difference to them personally and professionally. For the purpose of the focus group, “short-term” was defined as one year since the beginning of the SEARCH III program. Participants

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<sup>3</sup> Long Term Evaluation of the SEARCH Program: Assessing Impact at the Individual Participant Level (McCaffrey Consulting, revised 2003).

were also asked to consider their initial goals, motivations, and expectations for the SEARCH program and to assess the degree to which they were at the point they expected to be 12 months into the program. Based on these discussions, two areas of perceived individual-level impact emerged – perceived areas of impact and perceived gaps.

### 1.3.1 Perceived Areas of Impact

Perceived areas of impact included:

- improved professional and personal networks,
- improved access to information and resources, and
- improved skills with respect to accessing and using existing research.

### 1.3.2 Perceived Gaps

Perceived gaps included:

- degree of quantitative research skill development, and
- progress on individual and group research projects.

Each of the above areas is described in the next section.

## 2.0 Perceived Short-Term Impact: Success

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### 2.1 Improved Professional and Personal Networks

Participants reported improved professional and personal networks as a result of participation in SEARCH. Overall, participants from both rural and urban regions supported comments regarding the increased network, and value of the network, as a result of participation in SEARCH. Several participants reported that the network was “better than expected”, and were pleased with the collegial atmosphere and respect that had developed between faculty and participants.

Several types of networks emerged including improved connections with SEARCH faculty members, peers, and past SEARCH participants, as well as an “extended SEARCH network” with other health regions. Each of these are described in more detail below.

#### 2.1.1 Networks with SEARCH faculty members

SEARCH participants reported benefits from the development of a network with faculty members and academics. This network was perceived as beneficial to SEARCH participants because it provided access to research expertise that might otherwise have been unavailable to them. Participants felt comfortable contacting faculty members for advice and assistance, and noted that faculty often knew the participants by name.

#### 2.1.2 Networks with Peers and Extended SEARCH Network with Other Health Regions

The networks established with peers, particularly with those in other health regions, were perceived as an immediate benefit of SEARCH. Participants described an “extended” SEARCH network that went beyond the individuals they had met through SEARCH. Participants felt comfortable contacting members within their initial network to request additional contact names/information for specific research areas. For example:

*For me, it was having a personal contact there. Having met someone face-to-face. I wouldn't have known who to contact or how to approach someone and now I find I can...call U of Calgary and I can state my case and then it's easy to say, “well, who else can I call?...do you know anybody who's working in this area?”*

#### 2.1.3 Networks with Past-Search Participants

Participants discussed the value of connecting with past-SEARCH participants. For example, some individuals found it useful to discuss concerns regarding the design and development of SEARCH research projects with past-SEARCH participants. Their experiences helped “put things in perspective”. However, a few participants perceived that more could be done to enhance the network, particularly with respect to improved connections with previous SEARCH participants. For example, one participant suggested a “buddy system” whereby previous SEARCH participants are matched with current participants.

## **2.2 Improved Access to Information and Resources**

Participants also experienced improved access to information and resources as a result of participation in SEARCH. Some participants previously had no access to specific electronic resources and appreciated the benefits of SEARCH such as remote access to the University library systems. Tools provided via the desktop (e.g., search engines, Health Knowledge Network) were perceived as valuable and many participants reported using these tools regularly in their current positions. Furthermore, the publication "SEARCH Light" was considered useful, and is reportedly often distributed to others within organizations (including senior management). Participants perceived SEARCH Light as a valuable source of information. One participant commented that it was effective as a "tool of influence" for senior management who might otherwise not seek out current research evidence.

## **2.3 Improved Skills for Using and Accessing Research**

Finally, participants reported improved skills for accessing and using existing research as a result of participation in SEARCH (over the short-term). Common examples included literature search and critical appraisal skills. For example:

*"The most I've learned has probably been in the Choosing Theme... where to go, how to critically appraise them."*

## 3.0 Perceived Short-Term Impact: Identified Gaps

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Participants were asked to consider what they had initially hoped to achieve through participation in SEARCH. Areas of success were described in the previous section. Perceived gaps included degree of quantitative research skill development and progress on individual and group research projects.

### 3.1 Improve Quantitative Research Skills

Overall, many participants had expected to improve their quantitative research skills through participation in SEARCH. However, at this point of the program, participants reported not being as far along as they had hoped. For example, participants would have liked to acquire more practical, community-based quantitative data analysis knowledge and skills by this point of the program. Some participants have found that the quantitative data component focused more on clinical and medical issues rather than population health (which would have been more relevant to their individual work environments).

Participants suggested that perhaps two separate streams could be offered, one focusing on more in-depth quantitative issues and another on more in-depth qualitative issues to accommodate preferences for developing qualitative and/or quantitative skills.

### 3.2 Progress on Research Projects

Many participants thought they would be further along with respect to the research projects by this stage of the SEARCH program. Although participants noted faculty were supportive with respect to progress on research projects, and were told “it’s okay”, they still felt a sense of wanting to be further ahead. As one participant commented, *“It’s your own expectations that are the problem.”* In addition to support from faculty, advice from previous SEARCH participants was appreciated (e.g., *“It helps put things in perspective”*). The scope of research projects was considered comparable to a masters’ thesis. Compounding the issue of time constraints participants agreed: *“it’s like doing two masters theses at the same time.”* Participants in both focus groups agreed that the scope of the research projects was equivalent if not beyond that of a masters’ research thesis.

## 4.0 Contextual Variables: Time and “Guilt”

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Two key contextual variables (at the individual participant level) emerged through the discussion regarding perceived impact and gaps. Participants often expressed a lack of time as a key reason for not being as far along as they may have hoped, and an accompanying sense of guilt for not meeting their own expectations.

### 4.1 Time

The issue of “time” was a recurring theme in both focus group discussions. “Time” was cited as a key barrier to the application of learning from SEARCH into participants’ day-to-day work (i.e., lack of time in the work day). While organizations may formally commit to allocate 40% work time to SEARCH, many participants felt this was unrealistic and did not happen in practice.

*“I think we’re probably lucky if we get 10%.”*

Although the agreement may be in writing, some participants felt that it was difficult to sustain such commitment from organizations. In addition, positions, supervisors, and the health care environment itself may change, resulting in changes to the level of support and time available for SEARCH activity. One participant noted that 0% work time was allocated to SEARCH. One hundred percent of SEARCH activity was completed during the participant’s own time during evenings and weekends. Overall, the consensus among participants was that some SEARCH activity had to be done on one’s own time; although this expectation was not always made clear at the beginning thus leading to frustrations and unrealistic goals.

The issue of time was mediated by the scope of one’s position. That is, those with a responsibility for research in their existing jobs may have slightly less time conflict than SEARCH participants with front-line responsibilities. For example:

*“I think it depends on whether your current position has some research affiliation but if it doesn’t, you have to make that extra effort which sometimes isn’t always there.”*

Furthermore, SEARCH activity was often perceived as an “add-on” to participants’ existing roles and responsibilities within their organizations.

*“You have a commitment to your real job, and if you don’t do it, it just backs up.”*

*“SEARCH is the first thing to go when there’s other time pressures that come along.”*

Overall, participation in SEARCH was considered to have increased existing time pressures. For example, “it’s probably made us all...a lot more busy”. Some participants were reluctant to share their experience and knowledge in SEARCH within their organizations (e.g., “I can’t advertise too widely or I’d be swamped.”)

One suggestion to alleviate the time pressures associated with participation in SEARCH was to offer increased flexibility regarding the selection of projects. For example, allow participants to

select either one group project or one individual project, or conduct an individual project with some components of group work.

## 4.2 Guilt

A recurring theme in both focus groups was a personal sense of guilt, which was closely associated with lack of time and competing demands at work. Many participants felt guilty, for example, for working on SEARCH projects during work hours (i.e., “*for working on SEARCH and not doing work at work*”). Others reported feeling guilty for not having completed all assigned reading, for not having time to fully utilize the resources available on the desktop, or for not being as far along on individual or group projects as they had hoped.

For example:

*“I feel guilty when I am not able to get all out of the program that I otherwise might if I was able to get to all this stuff.”*

*“I almost feel guilty with the desktop when we’re talking about what’s on it because there’s so much there and it’s just really hard to find the time to be able to use all the information that’s there.”*

It appeared that the sense of guilt was mediated by the amount of material provided by the program. Participants expressed a sense of obligation given the large amount of information available to them -- a feeling of reciprocity for the amount of work that others had done on their behalf. Guilt, for the most part, was induced by one’s personal sense of obligation despite reassurances from the faculty with respect to progress.

## 5.0 Program Content, Curriculum, and Course Delivery

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Overall, participants liked the three main program themes: choosing, using, and creating evidence. (*“It also makes it easy to find things.”*) Other components of the program content, curriculum, and course delivery discussed during the focus groups included:

- length of residential component and frequency of evening classes,
- course time allocated to group projects,
- focus on practical versus theoretical approaches,
- collegial learning environment,
- technical support, and
- appreciation for the SEARCH experience.

Each of these components is described in more detail below.

### 5.1 Length of Residential Component and Frequency of Evening Classes

Most participants reported enjoying the residential component and felt it was beneficial in terms of network development. However, some participants commented that a full seven days with evening classes was difficult, and would prefer some evenings free with another module during the year to compensate for the lost time.

Comments included, for example:

- *Getting home Sunday, back to work Monday is really tough.*
- *I could not do a 2 week module with family commitments*

Alternatively, however, some participants would have preferred more in-depth, intensive training at the beginning (similar to SEARCH I) including 3 to 4 weeks of the residential component. For example:

*“The way I would have learned best, I think, is to be immersed in it for a dedicated period of time up front and so to be completely saturated even for three or four weeks or perhaps longer if you could manage that, and then you have all those tools to start with and then you’re going to be utilizing them through the next two years.”*

### 5.2 Course Time Allocated to Group Projects

There was lack of consensus regarding the use of course time for group project work. For example, *“there was a lot of information that they need to get out to us during modules; it would have been more helpful if evening sessions/class sessions were totally focused on the projects.”* That is, teach course content during the day and allow for group work during the evening. Another participant commented, however, *“but we needed to build the network, which is slow, before deciding on projects...”* With respect to the upcoming module (scheduled for Slave Lake), some participants would prefer increased focus on course content (concrete skills

development) rather than group projects. However, other participants preferred the time for projects.

### 5.3 Practical, Concrete Skills Development versus Theoretical Approaches

The majority of focus group participants would prefer increased emphasis on practical, concrete skills development versus theoretical approaches. Practical, concrete skills development was most frequently requested in the following areas:

- quantitative and qualitative data analysis,
- literature search techniques,
- proposal writing and development, and
- practicality/relevance of organizational analysis curriculum.

As previously described under the “Quantitative Research” section, several participants would have preferred more practical examples to accompany the course delivery. In addition, participants in both focus groups expressed dissatisfaction with the selected quantitative data analysis software program (STATA). Participants expressed an overwhelming preference for SPSS which was considered “industry-standard”.

Sample comments about STATA included:

- “Stata is not very user friendly.”
- “I know I’ll never use Stata in my workplace.”
- “I’ve...resigned myself to thinking I’m just going to learn SPSS on my own and use that product.”

Furthermore, participants suggested the quantitative data training should focus on concepts rather than software. For example, *“take us through a sample survey, entering the data, cleaning the data, manipulating... learning in a logical context.”* Participants further agreed that the quantitative data component was too complex for those who don’t know statistics, and too basic for those that do: *“It’s a waste of time for those of us that know (stats) and it’s a waste of time for those of us that don’t”.*

It was further suggested that while the current program offers an overview of both qualitative and quantitative research, it would be more beneficial to include more in-depth and practical learning (i.e., not just “what is qualitative research”, but more detail regarding what tools are available and how to use them, including qualitative software packages such as Nud\*ist.) For example, how do you actually do qualitative research?

*“You don’t just get on a donkey and get down to Peru”.*

*“What is qualitative research? What are the kinds of tools you could use? So they’d describe them, but then let’s spend the next day going through them...in detail. Right now, we get bits and snippets of it and you have to remember back -- your trail and that’s okay for the instructor because that’s all they’ve done for you but, in the interim, you’ve had a whole bunch of other things happen to you, so it would just make sense (to be more) in-depth on something -- beat it to death and then leave it.”*

Similarly, participants reported that a more detailed explanation of the “steps between steps” would have been a helpful component of the literature search training. In addition participants expressed interest in detailed examples of past SEARCH proposals and projects. Such examples, according to many participants, should be included sooner in the SEARCH training. For example:

*“We only learned how to structure a research proposal in the last module. That would have been useful much sooner...I’ve tried to look for them (examples of past SEARCH proposals on the desktop) and all you get is just a short summary and sometimes you get a Power Point presentation.”*

A few focus group participants enjoyed the theoretical content (particularly the organizational analysis material and business faculty presentations) and indicated that it was a valuable, useful component of the SEARCH curriculum. Most participants, however, thought this was a very “fuzzy” area and didn’t perceive a practical link between organizational analysis and learning to do research (i.e., they would have preferred more concrete skills development). One participant offered the following suggestions for linking the theoretical and practical components of SEARCH:

*I would agree with you that the (organizational analysis) exercises tend to be a little fuzzy for me in a take home message situation. I have found them helpful, though, to understand things at a broader policy level...I do think it is helpful to understand where the policy stuff interacts with the research piece and the reason I say that is because our management is trying to use research more in their decision-making process, so maybe it’s having some concrete examples of where research and policy (interact)...research from what we understand it and the policy setting in our regions actually do inter-twine, interact. Maybe that means having someone from Alberta Health illustrate that point. Maybe it requires something along the lines of senior management people talking about where research actually has made a difference to their policy decision-making because I know that it does, but we don’t always hear from those individuals, so maybe it is engaging individuals at that level to give us those examples.*

#### **5.4 Collegial Learning Environment**

Overall, participants agreed that the SEARCH learning environment was collegial and respectful. The learning environment was considered different than a traditional academic setting; participants felt valued as colleagues rather than students and expressed satisfaction with the collaborative approach to teaching and learning.

*“Access to faculty is...better than access as a student...I think the faculty looks at us as colleagues to a certain extent. I think that a lot of the work that the faculty does impacts our work and vice versa, so I just think that there’s a lot of mutual respect.”*

*“The environment between faculty and participants is one of sharing and learning together and that’s created almost at the beginning.”*

*“One of the things I’ve really appreciated is having faculty actually in the class with us.”*

## 5.5 Technical Support

Overall, participants felt that the technical support provided through SEARCH was excellent. However, a common concern was lack of technical support from individual regions. For example, I.T. may perceive SEARCH as “beyond their mandate”, particularly when the SEARCH participant is not using regional standard hardware and software components. The issue of centralized AHFMR technical support (as in previous iterations of the SEARCH program) versus regional support was discussed, although no clear consensus on the most appropriate way to proceed emerged.

In addition, there were a few brief comments about the use of the SEARCH desktop, its ability to track usage, and compatibility with regional systems. For example, *“I do go through the desktop, although my region also has some trouble – they think it’s an enemy invader so they don’t like me to plug into it too often from work.”* Also, *“I go through the desktop ‘cause they can’t track what you’re doing”* (comment made in relation to providing one’s family members with access to Internet resources).

## 5.6 Appreciation for the SEARCH experience

Overall, participants expressed appreciation and sense of privilege for the opportunity to participate in the SEARCH program. Participants agreed there had been excellent feedback based on session evaluations (e.g., *they are incredibly good at listening to us and respond the next day – or add in workshops on the side*), and felt that SEARCH provided valuable research skills, training, resources, and networking opportunities.

For example:

*“I almost feel like royalty...I know that we’re the first ones that get the newest (technology) from the Centre for Health Evidence”*

*“We’re very spoiled.”*

*“I really am grateful that I’ve had this opportunity.”*

## 6.0 Participant Survey Report: Introduction

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### 6.1 Purpose and Rationale

The purpose of the SEARCH III Midpoint Participant Survey was to formally assess the immediate impact of the SEARCH program on individual participants as well as to solicit participant feedback regarding curriculum content and design. Survey questions were prepared following analysis of two focus group discussions conducted with SEARCH participants in May 2002. Issues identified during these discussions were further explored through the participant survey.

### 6.2 Survey Response Rate

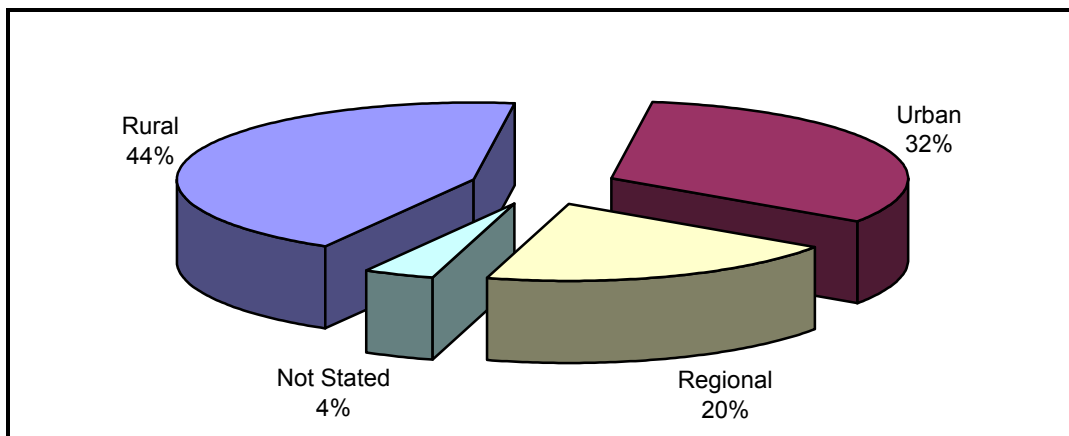
Current SEARCH III participants were invited to respond to a mid-point evaluation survey via the SEARCH Desktop between August 15 and September 20, 2002. An anonymous, electronic participant reminder was issued September 19, 2002. The final survey response rate was 96% (n=25 of 26).

### 6.3 Demographic and Background Information

#### 6.3.1. Geographical Location

Participants were asked to identify the location of the organization within which they were employed (see Figure 1). Forty-four percent of respondents (n=11) worked within organizations located in a rural area. Thirty-two percent (n=8) worked within organizations located in a large urban centre (i.e., Edmonton or Calgary) and 20% (n=5) within a regional centre (i.e., Mistahia, Northern Lights, Chinook, Palliser, or David Thompson). (1 participant did not respond to this question.)

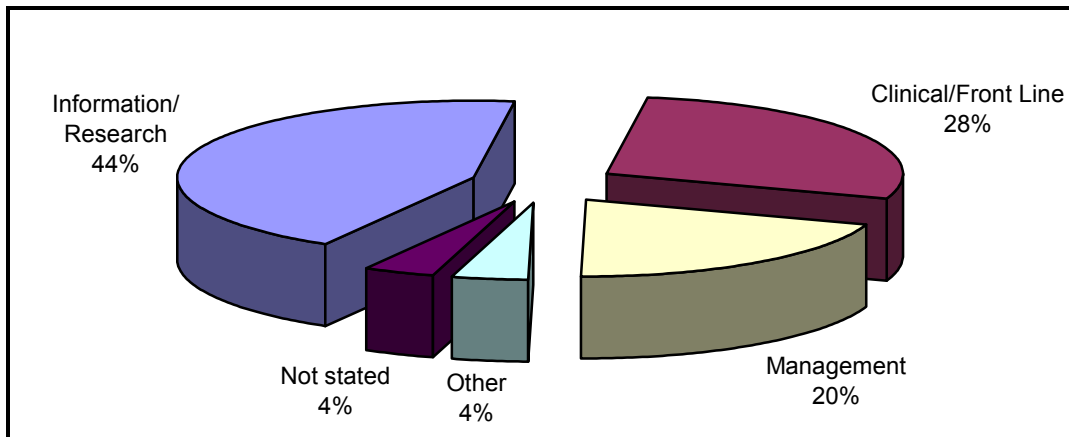
**Figure 1. Geographic Location of Participants' Organizations**



### 6.3.2 Primary Function of Current Position

Almost half (n=11, 44%) of the respondents reported the primary function of their current position was “Information/Research” (see Figure 2). Remaining respondents reported the following roles: “Clinical/Front-Line” (n=7, 28%), Management (n=5, 20%), and “Other” (n=1, 4%).<sup>4</sup> (1 participant did not respond to this question.)

**Figure 2. Primary Function of Current SEARCH Participant Positions**



### 6.3.3 Initial Direction to Participate in SEARCH

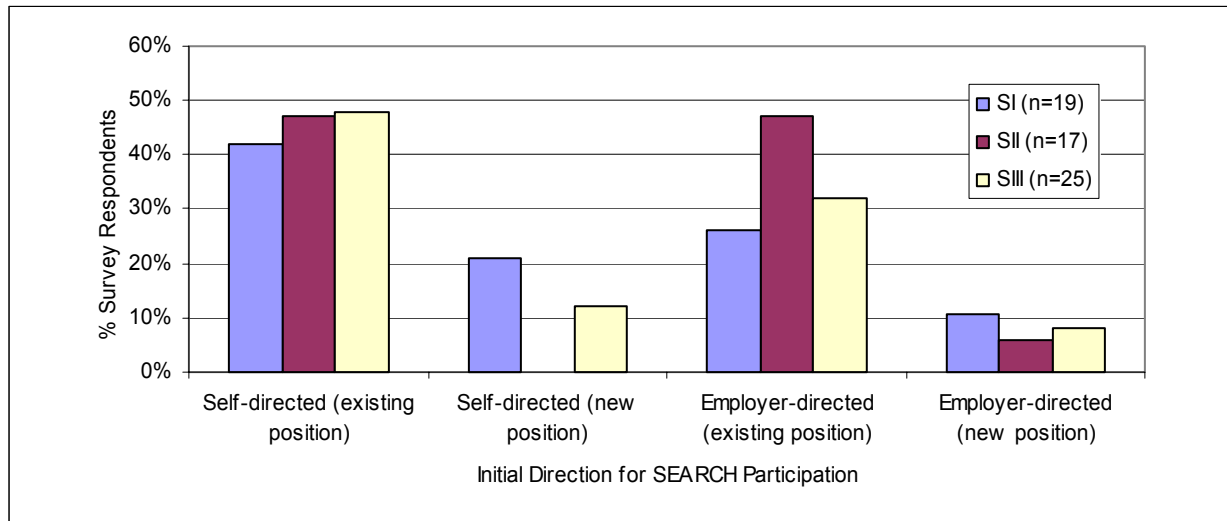
SEARCH participants were asked to identify their initial direction for enrolment in SEARCH. That is, had they requested to participate or been instructed to participate by their organizations? Individual motivation to participate in adult education programs was identified (through a review of the literature<sup>5</sup>) as a key variable linking participation and long-term outcomes. Sixty percent of respondents (n=15, 60%) reported they had requested to participate in the program, either as part of an existing position (n=12) or had applied for a new position that included SEARCH responsibilities (n=3). The remaining 40% (n=10) had been directed to participate by their employer, either as part of their existing position (n=8) or were transferred to a new role that included SEARCH (n=2).

A related reason for asking SEARCH participants about initial direction for participation was to document the increase in “SEARCH-specific” roles over time (comparing SEARCH I, II, and III, as well as future iterations of SEARCH). However, at this stage, the survey data do not demonstrate a measurable increase in SEARCH specific positions (see Figure 3 for a comparison of responses regarding initial direction for participation among SEARCH I, II and III participants.) Conversely, during focus group discussions, participants indicated that some organizations were beginning to create new positions based on SEARCH, suggesting organizational support for the program and the individual SEARCH participant’s role within the organization. It is possible that this direction may, in the long-term, help to sustain the SEARCH role and to protect the individual time commitment required for successful completion of the SEARCH curriculum.

<sup>4</sup> Community Development and Health Promotion

<sup>5</sup> Long Term Evaluation of the SEARCH Program: Assessing Impact at the Individual Participant Level (McCaffrey Consulting, Revised 2003).

**Figure 3. Initial Direction for Participation Among SEARCH Participants**



**Note:** Three SEARCH III participants had initially selected the response category “other” regarding their direction for participation. However, a review of open-ended comments associated with these questions revealed a match within the assigned categories.

*“Self-directed in that I asked to have the region support me to participate in SEARCH even though I wasn’t an employee. It gradually evolved that the research position was reinstated, with SEARCH participation as an expectation, the position advertised, and then I was hired into that position.” (self-directed, new position)*

*“I was a front line worker, needing to learn something new. My employer knew I needed a new challenge and gave me an opportunity to participate in SEARCH.” (employer-directed, current position)*

*“I applied to participate in SEARCH within my existing position - a competition was held across the region which included people in various types of positions.” (self-directed, existing position)*

#### 6.3.4 Experience with Online or Web-based Learning

Sixty-percent of respondents (n=15) did not have experience with online or web-based learning prior to participation in SEARCH. Overall, participation in the SEARCH program represented the first time that more than half of the participants had engaged in online or web-based learning. It was hypothesized that previous experience with online learning may be associated with perceived usefulness of the Desktop as well as issues related to technical support. This was collected as an independent variable and may be further explored in relation to specific questions regarding the importance of the Desktop, availability of technical support, and use of the professional and personal networks established through SEARCH.

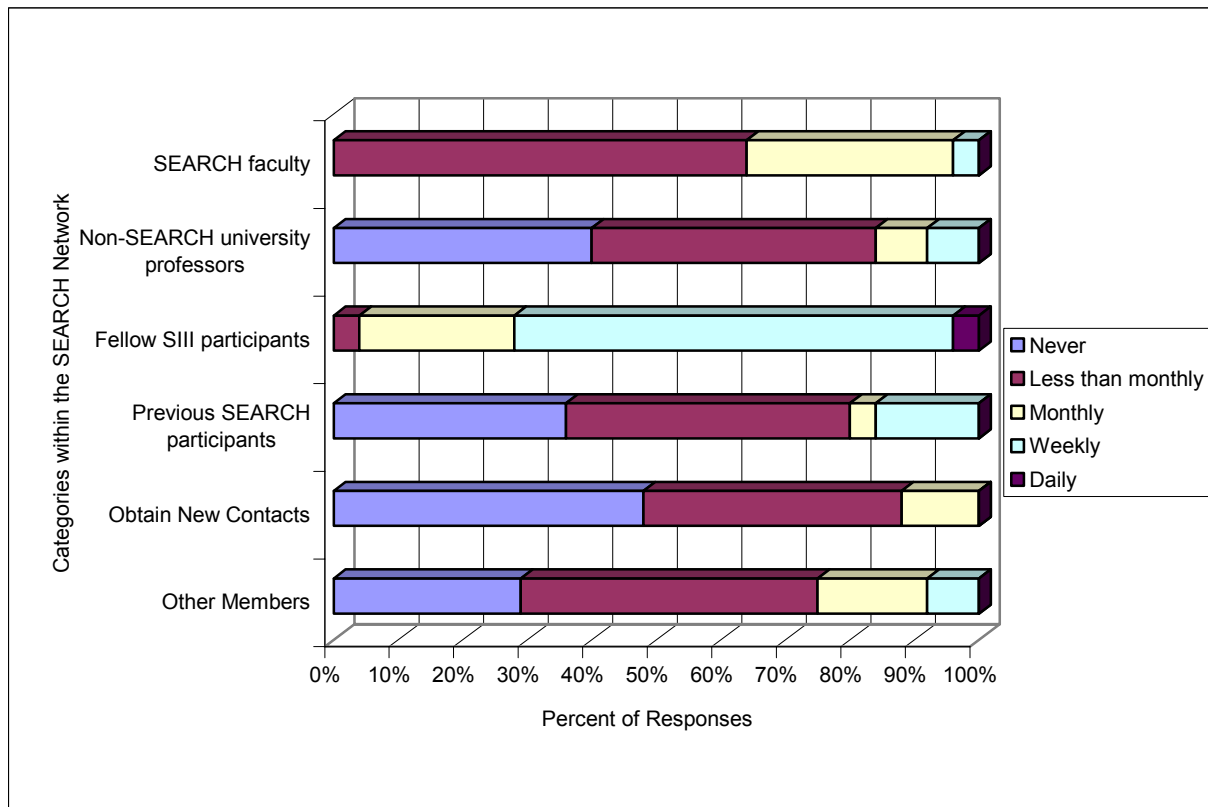
## 7.0 Networks Established through SEARCH

Developing connections between health care professionals, researchers, policy-makers, and decision-makers is one of the SEARCH mandates. It is these connections that constitute the “SEARCH network”. During focus group discussions held in May 2002, SEARCH participants described “improved professional and personal networks” as an immediate impact of the SEARCH program. Survey respondents further confirmed that the SEARCH network is indeed well utilized. Ninety-six percent of respondents (n=24) reported that they “currently use the personal and/or professional networks established through SEARCH”.

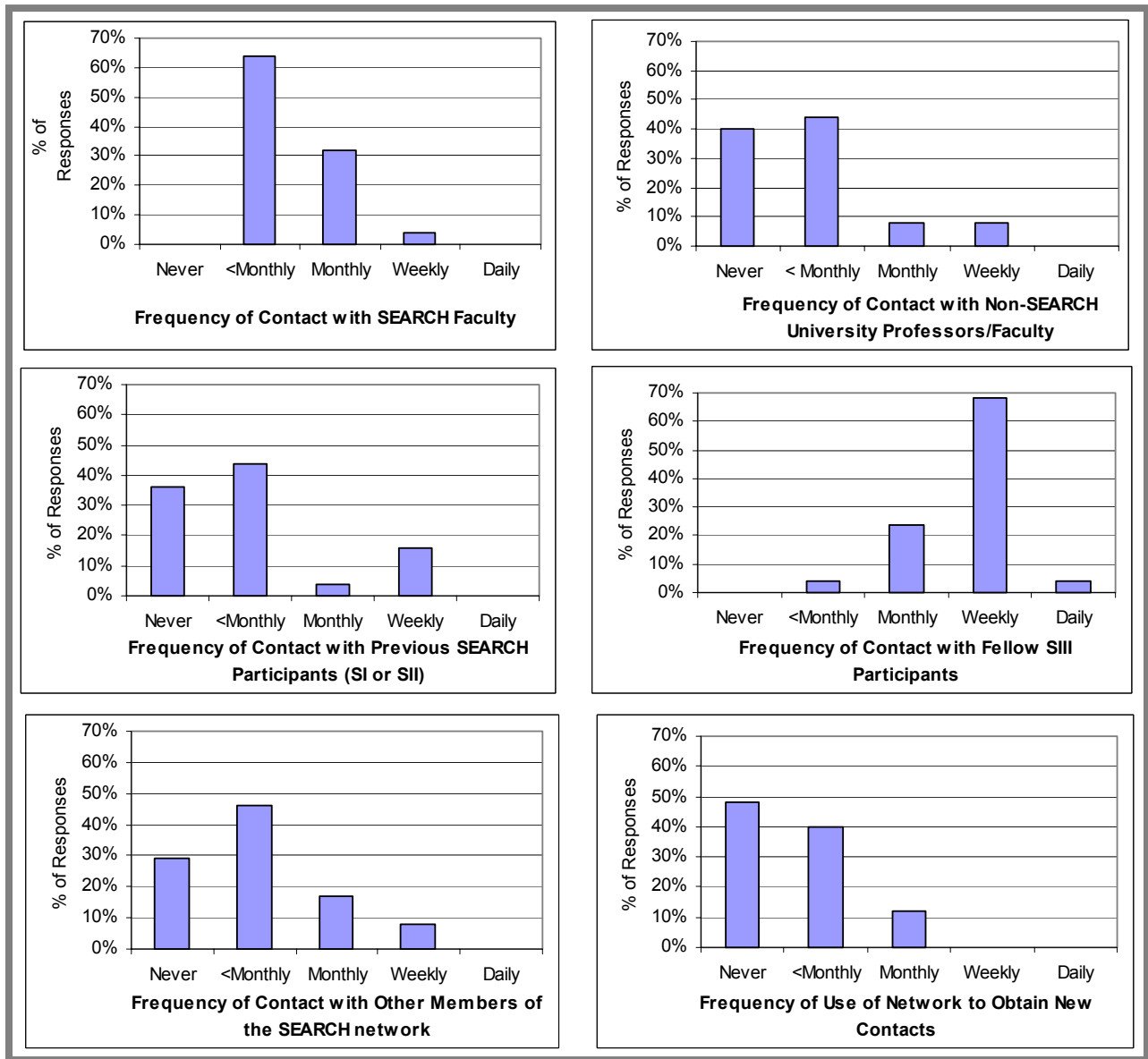
### 7.1 Frequency of SEARCH Network Contacts

SEARCH participants were further asked to identify how often they contact individuals through the SEARCH network *in between the residential modules* and for what purpose. The most frequently contacted members were fellow SEARCH III participants (see Figure 4). Sixty-eight percent of respondents (n=17) reported contacting fellow SEARCH III participants on a weekly basis in between the residential modules. Identified reasons for contacting individuals through the SEARCH network (open-ended responses) have been coded for further analysis and are presented in the next section. Figure 5 further illustrates the frequency of contacts by key stakeholder group.

Figure 4. SEARCH Network: Overall Frequency of Contacts



**Figure 5. SEARCH Network: Frequency of Contacts by Stakeholder Group**



## 7.2 Purpose of SEARCH Network Contacts

In addition to the frequency of network contacts, SEARCH participants were asked to specify “for what reasons” they contacted each of the above categories of network members. Identified reasons for contacting individuals through the SEARCH network are presented below.

### 7.2.3 SEARCH Faculty

The most commonly cited reason for contacting SEARCH faculty in between the residential modules related to questions and concerns about the **individual and group projects**. More specifically, SIII participants reported contact with faculty regarding clarification, guidance, and advice regarding how to proceed with projects as well as assistance with project proposal and project development phases. A few SIII participants contacted SEARCH faculty to “check in” or provide updates, as a mechanism for assessing individual progress.

SIII participants also reported contact with SEARCH faculty members for **general advice and information sharing** (i.e., not necessarily related to SEARCH projects). For example, contact with SEARCH faculty in between the residential modules was reported “*to discuss issues and obtain further information*” and “*to share documents and receive feedback*”.

In addition, SEARCH III participants reported contact with faculty for **research methods** assistance, including assistance with projects beyond the SEARCH mandate. For example: “*(I) have also contacted other faculty for help with other projects, (and) questions about research methods*”.

Two SIII participants reported contacting SEARCH faculty in between the residential modules regarding **inter-module material and assignments**. (One of these participants further commented, however, that he/she “rarely” contacted faculty for this purpose.)

Other reasons for contacting SEARCH faculty included “*site problems*”, “*computer questions*”, “*consulting issues*”, “*health services planning*”, “*STATA tutorial*”, and “*help with something else regarding my work outside of SEARCH*”.

### 7.2.4 Non-SEARCH University Professors/Faculty

The most commonly cited reasons for contacting non-SEARCH university professors or faculty members related to issues regarding the **individual and group projects**. For example, SIII participants reported contact with non-SEARCH university faculty regarding “*project direction and resources*”, and “*the selection of data collection tools and analysis of data*”. One participant reported contact with a professor who had initially tested the data collection tool that had been selected for his/her group project.

SEARCH III participants reported contact with non-SEARCH university faculty members to **discuss research ideas** and to identify possible projects. Contact was made with others interested in the same areas of research to generate ideas and support the development of group and individual projects. Other participants reported that non-SEARCH professors were **directly involved** in group and individual projects. For example, “a non-SEARCH university professor is participating in my individual project”.

Other identified reasons for contacting non-SEARCH university faculty included “(questions) related to specific clinical practice items”, “information sharing”, “technical questions”, “to keep in touch”, “with respect to the (graduate) courses”, “searching for a thesis advisor”, and “as part of my work with students that come to our program, non-SEARCH related”.

### 7.2.5 Fellow SIII Participants

Survey respondents reported multiple reasons for contacting fellow SEARCH participants in between the residential modules. The most commonly cited reason was to **collaborate on SEARCH group projects**. A few respondents also reported contact with fellow SEARCH III participants to solicit advice on their **individual project** or to clarify **SEARCH assignments**.

SEARCH III participants also contacted each other for various types of **information** in between the residential modules. Participants requested and responded to requests for information from their peers. Comments related to information sharing included, for example:

- *To respond to requests SEARCHers have had from myself or related to my organization.”*
- *I have shared information with them, when I know that someone is working on a particular project and I come across an article that I think might be of interest, I send it or make sure that they are aware of it.*

Survey respondents also referred to tapping the **expertise** of their peers. For example, fellow SEARCH participants were contacted to “tap various sets of expertise”, “gather information from their area of expertise”, and “ask questions about their fields of expertise”. Specific areas of inquiry included, for example, “questions about home care data”, and “assistance in finding a survey tool”.

Given the knowledge of their peers, SEARCH participants reported contact with each other to discuss **non-SEARCH projects** or **other work-related issues**. For example, one respondent reported contact with fellow SEARCH participants “as resources for non-SEARCH projects that I am involved in at work”. Another respondent indicated contact with fellow SEARCH participants to “get help with work-related issues”.

**Social support** was identified as a key reason for contact among SEARCH participants in between the residential modules. For example:

- *To share support of like-minded individuals experiencing similar work-load and other issues.*
- *There has been a fair amount of contact that is just for the encouragement or maintaining the social contact between each other.*
- *Sharing congratulations or support for life situations of other participants.*
- *To keep in touch on a personal level with the people that I have established friendships with.*

Finally, SEARCH participants reported contact with each other to **investigate policies, programs, and procedures within other health regions**. For example:

- *To ask them how their region does “this” or “that”.*
- *To get copies of their region’s policies or documents on several issues (e.g., to get a copy of research policy).*

- *To find out what their region was doing with respect to different things (like the business plan, annual report, 10-year continuing care plan), etc.*
- *I frequently call SEARCH colleagues in the course of my regular work to get information on contacts, programs, and other issues (e.g., poverty) in other health regions.*

#### 7.2.6 Previous (SI/II) Participants

Survey respondents reported contact with previous SEARCH participants (i.e., SEARCH I and II) to obtain feedback regarding **their experience with the SEARCH program**. For example, “*to get feedback from how they enjoyed the SEARCH process and some of the challenges I was likely to face*”, and “*to share experiences*”.

Contact with previous SEARCH participants was also established for **information-seeking** purposes. Information requests ranged from general issues such as “*information seeking about the SEARCH program*”, or specific content-related questions such as “*questions about health system data*”. One previous SEARCH participant was contacted for “*expert knowledge in many areas*”.

Respondents also reported contact with previous SEARCH participants for input or discussion regarding **SEARCH projects**. For example, “*to discuss with them what they had completed for individual and group projects*”, or “*to question them about previous projects that they have worked on*”.

One participant reported contact with previous SEARCH participants for input into **inter-module assignments**.

**Accessibility** to previous SEARCH participants may affect reasons and frequency of contact by current participants. Some survey respondents reported frequent contact with previous SEARCH participants as a result of sharing office space and/or working within the same organization. One current SEARCH III participant reported a positive experience working closely with previous SEARCH I and II participants. For example:

- *SEARCH bonded us together...They wanted to hear all about my inter-module assignments and how the research projects were going, and also how every module went. We also participated in some research activities together in the region that weren't directly related to SEARCH.*

Conversely, two survey respondents reported difficulty establishing meaningful contact with previous SEARCH participants. Reasons for this included a failed attempt at a regional level to bring together a discussion group of SEARCH participants and a lack of time and energy to connect with other SEARCH cohorts. For example:

- *It is very difficult to make the connection across the groups. We are all well "bonded" within the current groups-which was clearly intentional. There just isn't enough time or energy to extend to using these groups unless you already have previous connections with the individuals and a purpose for contact. It isn't that they haven't been willing--I'm sure they are (and I'm sure we will be too in the future).*

### 7.2.7 Obtain New Contacts

During the focus group discussions, participants expressed that one of the ways the SEARCH network is used is to “obtain other regional or provincial contacts”. For example, a SEARCH III participant in David Thompson may contact a SEARCH participant from East Central to find out “who” in East Central specializes in a given content area. Survey respondents were asked to specify how often and for what reasons they have used the SEARCH network in this way.

As previously illustrated (see Figure 5), 52% respondents reported using the network in this way either monthly (12%) or less than monthly (40%). The remaining 48% reported “never” using the network for this reason.

Explanations regarding “for what reasons” participants had used the SEARCH network to locate persons not involved in SEARCH included:

- *“(to) get information; to get data; ask questions”*
- *Most recently I have talked to fellow SEARCHERS to communicate with people who are working on home visitation programs.*
- *Our project group has also used the network to find research contacts in each region.*
- *Who was doing business planning; contacted someone about (a specific individual), who had done a utilization study in another region and was coming to do one in ours.*
- *For assistance in obtaining questionnaires, policy and procedure sharing.*
- *Have required specialized input for central PDD sub-committee.*
- *To contact injury prevention coordinators.*
- *I have contacted some SEARCH participants when looking for other contacts in their regions but only 3 or 4 times.*
- *Identify others working on similar projects.*
- *The SEARCH network has been very helpful with connecting me with others in their regions who have similar interests to me, and others who have worked on projects related to the ones I'm involved in.*
- *To find individuals with expertise relevant to particular work-projects not related to SEARCH. To find a professor (originator of a research tool) whose contact information was no longer current and couldn't be found through conventional means.*
- *To seek work related contacts in other health regions - project specific.*

One of the respondents that had reported “never” using the SEARCH network for this purpose further commented, however, *“but I have been used this way extensively by other SEARCHERS, likely due to the size and nature of my organization.”*

### 7.2.8 Other Members of SEARCH Network

Survey respondents were asked to specify reasons for contacting “other” members of the SEARCH network in between the residential modules. This question was intended as an additional opportunity for respondents to specify unanticipated categories of network members. However, there was some confusion and overlap between this question and previously posed questions specifying other categories of members. Respondents in some instances provided individual names and in other instances described reasons for establishing contact. The two most commonly cited general categories and reasons for establishing contact included “Administration” and “Technical Support”.

## 8.0 SEARCH Projects

Participant feedback regarding the format, structure, and process for participation in SEARCH is presented in this section.

Comments regarding progress on SEARCH projects expressed during focus group discussions were further explored in the participant survey. For example, during the focus group discussions, many participants expressed that they were not as far along with respect to the SEARCH projects as they had initially anticipated by this point of the program. Additional survey questions were designed to further explore the extent to which initial expectations and current progress may differ among SEARCH participants, with a focus on both individual and group projects.

In the past, SEARCH participants have sometimes completed more than one individual and/or group project. SEARCH III survey respondents were asked to comment on the optimal number of individual and group projects, as well as to provide recommendations regarding the format, structure, and process for participation in SEARCH projects.

### 8.1 Initial Expectations and Current Progress

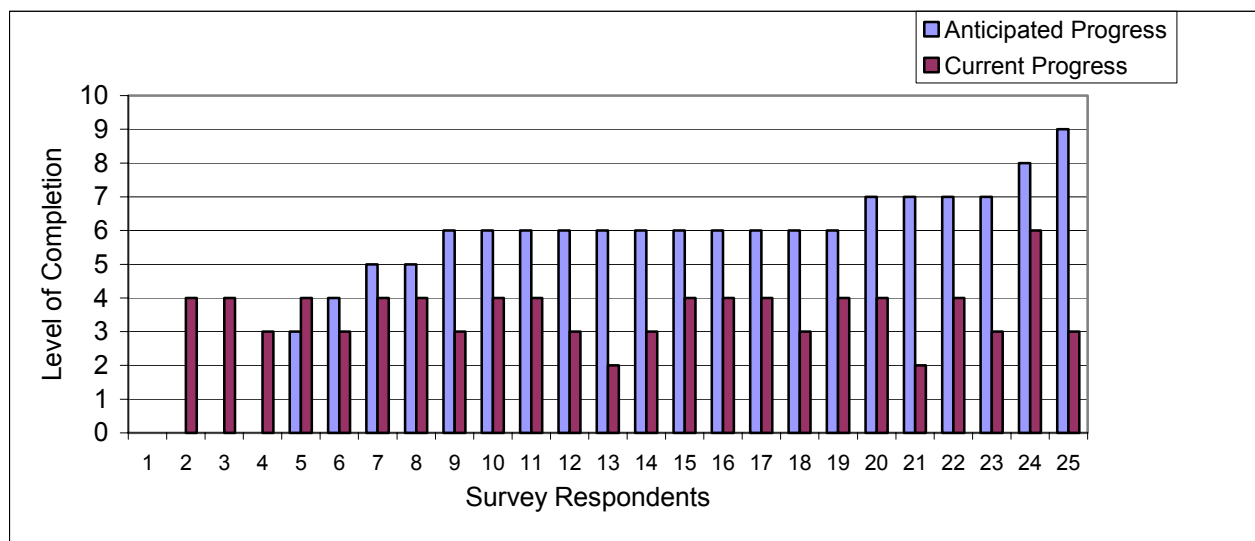
#### 8.1.1 Group Projects

The majority of participants reported that they had anticipated to have initiated (n=11, 44%) or completed (n=4, 16%) data collection by this point of the SEARCH program. Of the remaining participants, 4 reported “did not know or did not have prior expectations”, 2 participants expected to have completed the ethics review process. As illustrated in Table 1 and Figure 6, reported current progress (for group projects) was lower than anticipated progress for most participants. This finding is consistent with perceptions expressed during the focus group discussions regarding associated guilt for not being as far along as one had hoped.

**Table 1. Group Projects: Anticipated and Current Progress**

Category of Completion/Progress	Highest Level of Anticipated Progress Reported		Highest Level of Current Progress Reported	
	n	%	n	%
1. Topic Identified	--	--	--	--
2. Research Question Determined	--	--	2	8%
3. Literature Review Completed	1	4%	<b>8</b>	<b>32%</b>
4. Project Proposal Developed	1	4%	<b>13</b>	<b>52%</b>
5. Ethics Review Completed	2	8%	--	--
6. Data Collection Underway	<b>11</b>	<b>44%</b>	1	4%
7. Data Collection Completed	<b>4</b>	<b>16%</b>	--	--
8. Data Analysis Underway	1	4%	--	--
9. Data Analysis Completed	1	4%	--	--
10. Draft Report Prepared	--	--	--	--
11. Final Project Report Submitted	--	--	--	--
Missing/not stated/don't know/did not have current expectations/other	4	16%	1	4%
	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Figure 6. Group Projects: Anticipated and Current Progress**



Note: Missing data not displayed in figure.

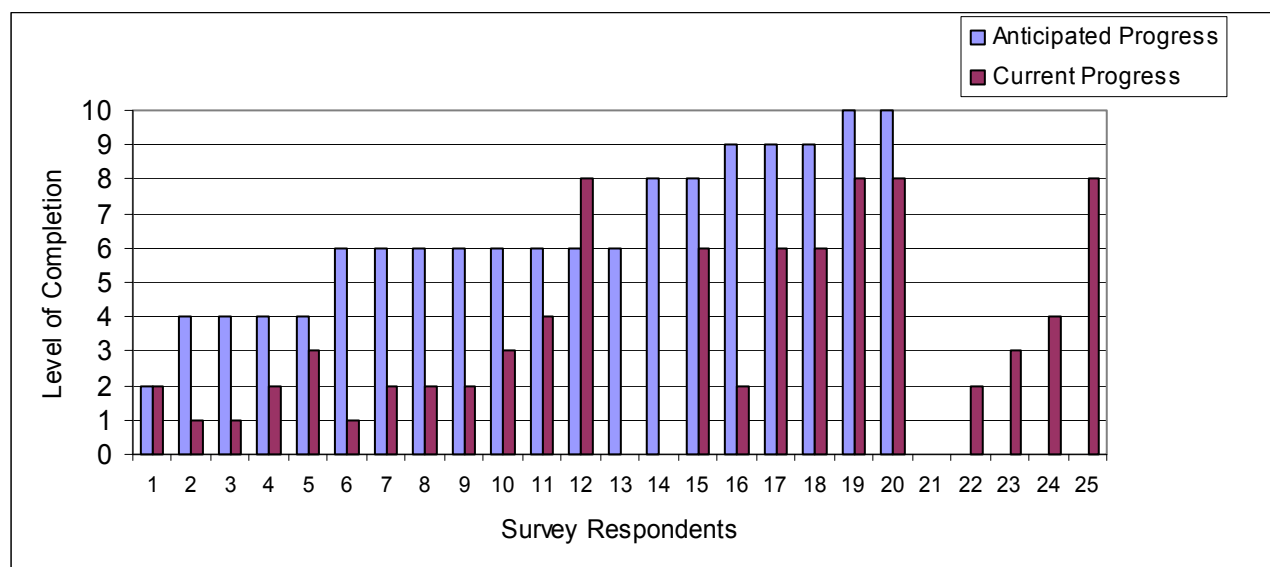
### 8.1.2 Individual Projects

Similarly, reported current progress for individual projects was lower than anticipated progress. As illustrated in Table 2 and Figure 7, the majority of respondents anticipated being further ahead with their individual projects at this point in the program.

**Table 2. Individual Projects: Anticipated and Current Progress**

Category of Completion/Progress	Highest Level of Anticipated Progress Reported		Highest Level of Current Progress Reported	
	n	%	n	%
1. Topic Identified	--	--	<b>3</b>	<b>12%</b>
2. Research Question Determined	1	4%	<b>7</b>	<b>28%</b>
3. Literature Review Completed	--	--	3	12%
4. Project Proposal Developed	<b>4</b>	<b>16%</b>	2	8%
5. Ethics Review Completed	--	--	--	--
6. Data Collection Underway	<b>8</b>	<b>32%</b>	3	12%
7. Data Collection Completed	--	--	--	--
8. Data Analysis Underway	2	8%	4	16%
9. Data Analysis Completed	3	12%	--	--
10. Draft Report Prepared	2	8%	--	--
11. Final Project Report Submitted	--	--	--	--
Missing/not stated/don't know/did not have current expectations/other	5	20%	3	12%
	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Figure 7. Individual Projects: Anticipated and Current Progress**



Note: Missing data not displayed in figure.

## 8.2 Number of SEARCH Projects: Recommended Requirements

Eighty-four percent of respondents (n=21) suggested that one group project be required by the SEARCH program. Three respondents suggested no group project requirement; the remaining two respondents recommended a requirement of two group projects. Similarly, seventy-six percent of respondents (n=19) recommended a requirement of one individual project. However, nearly one quarter (n=6, 24%) of respondents suggested that no individual projects be required by the SEARCH program.

It is interesting that 12% and 24% of respondents recommended that neither group nor individual projects, respectively, be required by the SEARCH program<sup>6</sup>. This finding may warrant further exploration. Participants recommending the elimination of required projects may face unique barriers to successful project participation. Once these issues are further understood, issues may be addressed to alleviate concerns and/or increase the perceived value of project participation.

Comments made by participants (n=3) recommending no group project requirement include:

- *One of the problems I see with the group project is the level of commitment which partly can be explained by how people were selected to participate in SEARCH (e.g., being selected and told you were attending to having to compete for attendance). This becomes a definite obstacle as far as group work goes. In addition, I feel that the level of compromise has been too great just to get the group project moving forward and in the end may not meet the needs of my organization as much as I had initially hoped. I would suggest that group work*

<sup>6</sup> The three individuals recommending the elimination of group projects were supportive of the individual project. Similarly, most of the six individuals recommending the elimination of individual projects expressed satisfaction with the group project process.

*not include a research project. If intra-regional collaboration is one of the goals of SEARCH that happens and has happened with SEARCH III just by bringing us all together.*

- I think that you have done more than enough to facilitate our interactions. The real problem is time and energy to complete the project. We are all busy in our regular jobs. Not many of us have been able to negotiate real time off to work on either project. In fact, I'm not sure if it is realistic to expect this total devotion to SEARCH in these times in Health Care. Many of us are worried about keeping our jobs. If a region was able to free you up for the 2 years needed for SEARCH it might become apparent that they could do without you forever. Group work is always difficult. I find that by the time that your group agrees on a project it is so watered down that no one in the group feels any passion for the topic. Most end up being exercises in compromise and are not given high value by others in your region. Combine this with distance and heavy workloads and more often than not group project work is going to be the highest priority for anyone. I think that the individual projects have much more merit and can more realistically be completed. Topics are more closely linked to individual or regional interests which provides motivation and passion required to get things done. It is much easier to steal a few minutes to work on an individual project than to spend a lot of time and energy organizing a conference call and liaising with other group members.*
- It is really hard to choose a topic that is of relevance to all regions that are represented by the group members. Also, it is difficult to carry the project out over such great distances. Most group members are so busy with their work that the Search group project keeps sliding to the bottom of the priority list. Coming up with the topics is difficult. Maybe SEARCH could identify a few topics with the regions management and then put this forward to groups and say, here is the list of topics, choose one and go.... Personally, I like the individual project but the group project is a real stretch.*

Comments made by participants (n=6) recommending no individual project requirement include:

- Individual projects should not be a requirement, but should be an option, and progress should definitely not be as rigid as the group process as individual projects are something that can be completed easily after the initial 18 months of SEARCH involvement since collaboration with other group members is not as important. Also, I find it difficult to choose a single topic that other SEARCHers would find interesting or relate to.*
- A group project should almost be completed in advance of individual to transfer the learnings.*
- The learning curve to do an individual project is huge, especially for anyone who has never done any research before or taken a research methods course. I wonder if there shouldn't perhaps be a generic type of course (covering both basic quantitative and qualitative methods) offered online for anyone without one prior to the first module. That way everyone would be at a similar level once the modules start. I found the methods session very disjointed and not grounded enough in the real "how do you do it" issues. Many of us are without mentors in our own regions and trying to learn enough to do a research project can be overwhelming and isolating.*

### 8.3 Participant Recommendations Regarding the Format, Structure, or Process for Participation in the Group Projects

Participants provided detailed suggestions regarding the format, structure, and process for participation in the SEARCH group projects. Key suggestions were provided in the following categories:

#### 8.3.1 Topic Selection

- Some participants recommended clearer direction from regions/organizations regarding the group project topic selection, including a process for soliciting research needs from the regions. For example: *“There should be a process for soliciting research needs more clearly from our RHAs; having a prioritized list of possible projects. Then the information on negotiation and relationships within the organization would be very relevant.”*
- Participants also recommended more assistance with the topic selection and project development phase. For example: *“Initially more assistance for the group with development of the project so that we don't flounder for long.”*
- Similarly, other participants suggested that the SEARCH program introduce pre-defined topics at the beginning of the module, possibly recommended by or approved by participating regions, which participants may select. This would ensure that the group projects met a predefined need within the health system, and may alleviate some of the conflict experienced by participants whose SEARCH projects may not fit with organizational priorities. For example: *“I think it might be a good idea to have a variety of topics already identified when the next module starts, and then ask people to sign up for them. A lot of energy went into trying to find a topic and then find a group, when the energy might have been better used to get a good research question within a broader area that is important to the health care system.”*

#### 8.3.2 Group Size

- Some participants expressed a preference for smaller group sizes, particularly those in larger groups (i.e., with over 7 participants). These participants indicated that it is difficult to make progress and/or meet the needs of each individual within such a large group. For example, *“Too much work goes into managing the group that could otherwise be put toward the project. Also it is difficult logistically to get 7 people to coordinate their schedules.”*

#### 8.3.3 Group Member and Organizational Commitment

- Some participants expressed concern that the group project workload was not always shared equally between group members. To address potentially varying levels of commitment among group members, it was recommended that individual group members be evaluated on his or her contributions. For example: *“There should be an individual assessment of performance in the group project so it becomes apparent how certain individuals are contributing to the group project.”*

- However, it was recognized that group members may not have control over their level of participation and contribution to the group. It was further suggested that regions adhere to their commitment after sending someone to SEARCH given the impact that reduced availability of one participant may have on the group process once it has been initiated. For example: *“It is somewhat frustrating to have member’s participation scaled down part way through a project.”*

#### 8.3.4 Scope of Work

- Clear communication among group members regarding the scope of work involved with the group project was recommended. For example, *“are these projects full fledged studies that will need to be funded and go on way past the SEARCH program period? This can cause friction in a group setting. Some may have great aspirations of publishing, while others are just wanting to enjoy the experience of putting a study together.”*

#### 8.3.5 Time and Competing Priorities

- Time constraints, workloads, and competing priorities were described by several participants. For example:
- *“I think what we all need is more TIME. If more time was spent during the actual modules when we are together, I think the process may move along a little better and we would feel some sense of accomplishment in our groups.”*
- *“I think the process format would work very well if I just had the time to devote to it.”*
- *“I think that you have done more than enough to facilitate our interactions. The real problem is time and energy to complete the project. We are all busy in our regular jobs. Not many of us have been able to negotiate real time off to work on either project. In fact, I’m not sure if it is realistic to expect this total devotion to SEARCH in these times in Health Care. Many of us are worried about keeping our jobs. If a region was able to free you up for the 2 years needed for SEARCH it might become apparent that they could do without you forever.”*

### **8.4 Participant Recommendations Regarding the Format, Structure, or Process for Participation in the Individual Projects**

Similarly, participants provided detailed suggestions regarding the format, structure, and process for participation in the SEARCH individual projects. Key suggestions were provided in the following categories:

#### 8.4.1 Faculty Advisor Support

Participants provided feedback regarding the level of support available from faculty members with respect to their individual projects. Comments included:

- *“I was lucky enough to have found a faculty advisor who was very helpful at checking up on how I was doing and keeping me on track, as well as being very available for providing help*

*and feedback on short notice. My topic selection took me awhile for reasons outside of the SEARCH program that reflected issues within my own region.”*

- *“Advisor support has been critical”.*
- *“My experience of faculty support is very limited. Any connections with faculty were initiated by myself. Part of the difficulty may have been lack of experience with the post graduate work and therefore not having an idea of what the roles of myself or the faculty person was to be in this situation.”*
- *“I have not found faculty extremely supportive/available for individual projects. I am not sure how this can be alleviated.”*
- *“I think the support provided is good in principle. In practice, I think that faculty members are as busy as we are and we don't always get feedback and other support that they promise us at the modules. I think that we need to be realistic about what can be accomplished given everyone's really busy work and home lives.”*
- *“I have not found SEARCH faculty as responsive in regards to the individual project as with the group one.”*
- *“More assistance with development and decisions regarding project topics. I know faculty are available to discuss this but they are in great demand at the modules, thus hard to contact. They have made an effort but it is hard to take much time. For those of us with little experience in research it is hard to get started. Once we leave the module and return to work it is hard to get back into that frame of mind.”*
- *“(My advisor) has been quite available at the times I have asked to meet with him.”*

#### 8.4.2 Topic Selection

Participants provided the following comments regarding the process for topic selection:

- *“I think the region should be much more involved with the direction and selection of the research project they would like SEARCH participants to undertake. I think that these decisions should be made BEFORE the participant begins the program. I feel that considerable time was taken both at residential modules and in between modules discussing topic selection where this time could be better spent actually doing some of the research work”.*
- *“Perhaps a prerequisite could be to have 2 or 3 ideas at the start of SEARCH. Important issues identified by RHA that they will support with time, replacement, resources, other research support etc.”*
- *“I believe that the individual project should be something that the researcher is keen to do (is passionate about) and if that also happens to fit with an organizational requirement, that's an extra bonus. I am awaiting direction/approval on my individual project from the CEO.”*
- *“Individual projects should not be a requirement, but should be an option, and progress should definitely not be as rigid as the group process as individual projects are something*

*that can be completed easily after the initial 18 months of SEARCH involvement since collaboration with other group members is not as important. Also, I find it difficult to choose a single topic that other SEARCHers would find interesting or relate to.”*

#### 8.4.3 Time and Competing Priorities

Participants provided the following comments regarding time and competing priorities:

- *“My personal challenge was in trying to link my own workload to a personal project. It is difficult to meld the requests from the region and the need to walk through a research process that meets SEARCH standards. The region is interested in the final results or analysis which they would like to see today and the research process on its own takes more time. In addition my project involved data analysis and I needed from SEARCH more of an overview of the entire process in working with and analyzing databases.”*
- *“I really enjoy doing both a group and individual project but finding the time required to do both is really difficult. I find that I use most of my time working on the group project so as not to hold the others in the group back and then I have virtually no time left for my own project.”*
- *“Work has prohibited any time to work on my individual project. It was unrealistic to think 40% of my work time could be devoted to SEARCH in the current climate.”*
- *“It seems that all of my energy has been devoted to the group project, however good my intentions have been to work away at the individual one. The lack of progress has been related to some unexpected changes in my job”.*
- *“Personally, I would have preferred to do only my individual project - mainly due to time limitations and preference of one topic over another. Also, I am not a big fan of group work although it is helpful to get many different perspectives when working on a project. I think my individual project has been seriously shortchanged because of time constraints and the focus on the group project. When you have to make a choice about your time you put it where others are counting on you”.*
- *“I feel that the individual project could have been incorporated into the learning process of SEARCH (possibly completion of areas with modules/ establishing timelines). This may have helped to expedite the process for me anyway.”*

#### 8.4.4 Proposal Example

Some participants requested inclusion of a completed study proposal within the SEARCH curriculum. Comments included:

- *“This has been a stretching exercise and no, I can not think of any better way to learn than to have opportunity to walk through it. I did not find the project tool helpful though. For visual learners, we need to see a completed study proposal (quantitative and qualitative) instead of just words and word descriptions to explain what the different sections mean”.*

- *“What constitutes a proposal should be presented during the very first module, i.e. a 3 hour overview presentation on the steps of doing a research project and on the section included in a written proposal.”*

#### 8.4.5 Prerequisite Learning/Skills

One SEARCH participant provided the following comments regarding previous learning by SEARCH participants and recommended prerequisite skills:

- *“The learning curve to do an individual project is huge, especially for anyone who has never done any research before or taken a research methods course. I wonder if there shouldn't perhaps be a generic type of course (covering both basic quantitative and qualitative methods) offered online for anyone without one prior to the first module. That way everyone would be at a similar level once the modules start. I found the methods session very disjointed and not grounded enough in the real “how do you do it” issues. Many of us are without mentors in our own regions and trying to learn enough to do a research project can be overwhelming and isolating.”*

## 9.0 Participant Time Allocation for SEARCH

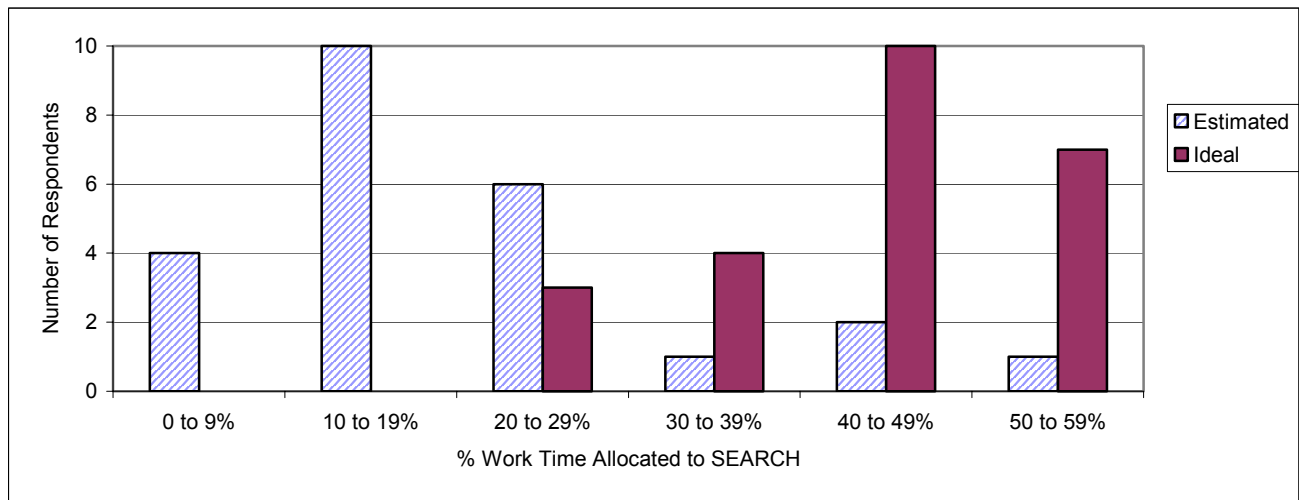
During focus group discussions, participants identified “lack of time” as a key barrier to fulfilling their own expectations within the SEARCH program. Participants had further expressed that the recommended 40% time allocation was not occurring in practice, and that it was not always possible to review all of the available material through SEARCH given competing demands and time constraints. Given the pervasiveness of time constraints (identified through the focus group discussions as well as previous SEARCH evaluations), survey questions were designed to further explore the actual and ideal time allocations for SEARCH. These questions were designed to assist in the planning and delivery of SEARCH IV.

### 9.1 Work Time Allocated to SEARCH

Participants were asked to *estimate* the average percentage of work time they had allocated to the overall SEARCH program over the past 14 months. As expected, very few participants (n=3) reported time allocations of 40% or greater. The average estimate was 18%, with a minimum of 1% to a maximum of 50% of participant work time allocated to the SEARCH program. (1 participant did not respond to this question.)

Participants were further asked to identify what percentage of work time should *ideally* be protected for SEARCH activities. The minimum recommended percentage of protected work time was 20%; maximum 50%. The mean recommendation was 40% protected time (see Figure 8).

Figure 8. Estimated and Ideal % Work Time Allocated to SEARCH

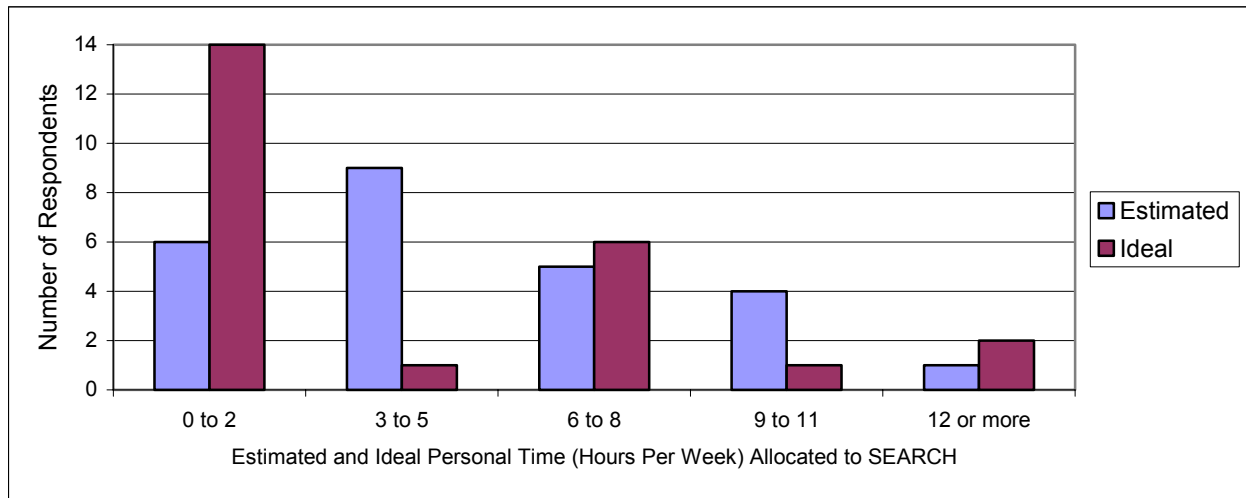


### 9.2 Personal Time Allocated to SEARCH

In addition to work time, participants were asked to *estimate* the average number of hours per week of personal time they had allocated to SEARCH over the past 14 months. Respondents reported an average allocation of 5 hours per week of personal time (range 0 to 12 hours). Participants were also asked to recommend how many hours of personal time represented a

reasonable commitment by participants. Respondents tended to recommend slightly lower personal time allocations (on average, it was recommended that participants commit 4 hours of personal time per week to SEARCH, rather than estimated 5 hours per week reported in practice). See Figure 9 for distributions.

**Figure 9. Estimated and Ideal Personal Time Allocated to SEARCH (hours per week).**



## 10.0 Residential Training and Inter-Module Activities

### 10.1 Recommended Length of Residential Training

Respondents were asked to identify the ideal length of time for each residential training module (number of days). Responses ranged from a minimum of three to a maximum of seven days (mean 5 days). Furthermore, SEARCH participants were asked to recommend how many residential training modules should be included in the overall SEARCH program. Responses ranged from a minimum of 5 modules to a maximum of 10. The average recommended number of modules was 7.8, which suggests participants value the residential training component and would not like to see the overall number reduced. Participants were further asked to specify how many residential training modules should be included in each 6-month time period throughout the 2-year SEARCH program. The average number of recommended modules per 6-month time period decreased slightly for each subsequent period (see Figure 10). These data are also presented by category (see Figure 11) which illustrates two slightly different preferences among participants.

Figure 10. Recommended Number of Modules Per Six-Month Increment (Average)

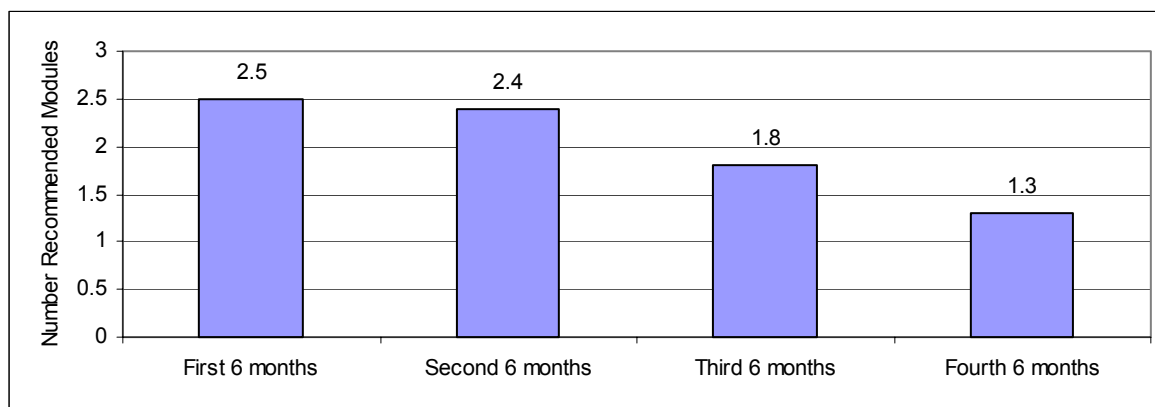
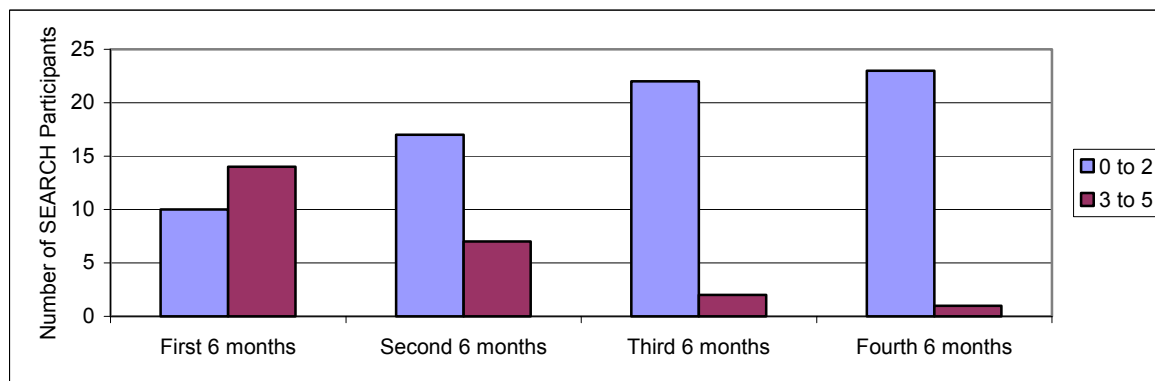


Figure 11. Recommended Number of Modules Per Six-Month Increment (Category)



## 10.2 Recommended Number of Inter-module Activities

In addition to the residential training component, the SEARCH program offers activities in between modules such as readings and assignments (i.e., inter-module activities). The majority of respondents (88%) reported that the inter-module activities had been either somewhat (n=15) or very helpful (n=7) to them.

Participants that considered the inter-module activities “very helpful” offered the following additional comments:

- *For the ones I had time to do, I found very helpful.*
- *I found the initial inter-module work most helpful (i.e., working on the web, and (the) critical appraisal information and readings around methodology/research design).*
- *I learned a lot from the projects, and was very glad for the time that I put into the projects. They helped me learn more in the modules following the assignments, so that was helpful too.*
- *Some have been very helpful. Others have had less impact on my learning experience. Just depends.*
- *They have been, for the most part, extremely helpful--allowing me to focus on things that I would not normally do within my work life, especially. They also ensure some basic skill development that has been useful in the more complex requirements of the project work. Personally, I think that SEARCH should not just be about 'getting the projects done' no matter how important that might be. I appreciate the broader learning focus--with time to learn some things that are practical but perhaps not useful in any immediate sense related to either work or SEARCH but have the potential to be useful later or just to inform and broaden our understanding and way of thinking about issues. Very valuable.*

Additional comments among participants that rated the inter-module activities “somewhat helpful” included:

- *I am disappointed not to have had more inter-module work involving Stata. I feel that I am not particularly proficient using this program with the few hours spent with it (both in inter-module activities and at residential modules) and, since my region does not support this program, there are relatively few people familiar with it when I try to use it and have questions or problems. I had expected more assignments/activities geared toward learning this program since it was the statistical package supplied by SEARCH and frankly, I feel it is a more challenging program to learn and use than either EPI Info or SPSS. Other inter-module work was helpful in support of learning the tools necessary to facilitate the research process or as an introduction to topics that would be covered in upcoming residential modules.*
- *I completed all of the assignments as I felt that it was my responsibility as a participant. I found some of the initial assignments helpful, but the continual focus on organizational culture was a bit much. The last assignment prior to, and en route to Slave Lake was totally a waste of time which I frankly resented given the more pressing nature of the project work.*

- *I don't always have time to do as much as I would like to.*
- *I find it difficult to take the time to do these but appreciate the opportunity .These are great resources, just wish I could spend more time on them.*
- *I think it depends on how related the activities are to project or job activities.*
- *I think some WebCT coursework between modules, particularly for research methods, would have been very helpful. Without any work in between modules, particularly before the project work gets going, it's very hard to keep SEARCH on a front burner.*
- *Tutorials and literature searching assignments were the most useful.*
- *More assignments on using data and data analysis would have been helpful, especially for those not familiar with this area.*
- *Assignments on corporate mapping and such were not very useful to me although I did not mind and did see the point of them.*
- *When the activities were clearly outlined with firm deadlines and an understandable and relevant outcome to where we were on the learning curve they were helpful. Not helpful when we were not at that stage of learning yet.*

Two of the three participants who rated the inter-module activities “not at all helpful” provided the following comments:

- *I found them to be a complete waste of time. I did complete all inter-module assignments and found the majority to be pretty wishy-washy. We seldom followed up on the assignments in a meaningful way and they seldom related to core learning objectives. If I'm going to spend time working on "homework" I would like it to be meaningful. Having said that, I do believe that we should have inter-module assignments to maintain continuity. More appropriate inter-module work could have supplemented our residential learning quite effectively.*
- *I found these to be of limited value because they weren't really used. I get the sense most people did not do them so they were not referred to in class etc. Where the info was used, e.g. in the Leonard Barr exercise, it was helpful.*

Participants were further asked to specify whether or not the quantity (number) of inter-module activities was sufficient to meet individual learning objectives. Fifty-six percent of respondents (n=14) reported that the number of inter-module activities was sufficient (i.e., the “right amount”). However, an additional 28% (n=7) would have preferred more inter-module activities.

Among those that reported the number of inter-module activities was sufficient, additional comments included:

- *In the early months there was more to do during the inter module time. As the course went on less was asked of the participants and that worked well because people were busy with their projects.*

- *More would not be completed by myself. I can choose to complete or not, so I guess it doesn't really matter*
- *I feel it was the right amount, but the content of these assignments needs some serious review.*
- *I might say a few more early on in the program would have been good (if they were purposeful, useful projects), but in the middle it was about right, and now near the end, I'm glad we don't have many, because the project work is taking a lot of my work and personal time.*

Among those that would have preferred more inter-module activities, comments included:

- *I would have liked to learn more about searching data bases for information. It seemed that we only had (the librarian) for one afternoon of instruction and I would have like to spend more time doing this.*
- *Would like more, optional assignments, for general interest and information more than any thing.*
- *More shorter, structured (task specific) assignments would be appreciated especially in reference to learning the Stata program, writing research proposals, abstracts and research reports (different contexts: presentations, study reports, journal publication).*
- *I'd prefer more assignments but they would need to be relevant to developing research skills. For example, tutorials on specific research skills (i.e. questionnaire design, etc.) rather than focusing on organizational behaviour. We wasted time and energy gathering information about KLRHA (smelling the air, touching the ground, entering our thoughts on the desktop) and we never even discussed the assignment.*
- *I would like to have more optional assignments that we would also submit to faculty. Then at the following module an opportunity to review the assignment with the others who completed it. It in a way establishes subgroups of participants with similar interests or similar learning needs.*
- *In certain areas i.e., learning computer programs etc at the beginning. Stats was hard to learn on our own More simple activities for us that are ""slow"" in this area.*

## 11.0 Skill Acquisition

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During focus group discussions, some participants expressed they would have preferred more specific skills development earlier in the program. Similarly, seventy-two percent of survey respondents (n=18) agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: "I would have preferred greater emphasis on specific skills development earlier in the program".

### 11.1 Skills Not Yet Acquired

Participants were asked to specify the skills, if any, not yet acquired from the program that they had hoped to acquire. Nineteen participants responded to this question (although not all participants listed specific skills in their response). The most commonly cited skills not yet acquired related to "quantitative data analysis" or "statistics" (n=14, 56%). For example:

- *Statistical analysis – this is a real disappointment for me. My weakness is an inability to work with the data that I collect. I wanted to learn to analyze and manipulate my own data rather than having to continue to rely on someone else to do it for me.*

Other skills not yet acquired included:

- improved literature search skills (n=2),
- Reference Manager (n=1),
- project planning and proposal writing (n=1),
- research dissemination (n=1), and
- critical appraisal of research methods (n=1).

### 11.2 Reported Most Useful Skills

Participants were also asked to identify the three most useful skills they had acquired through participation in SEARCH thus far.

Commonly cited skills included:

- literature and information searching skills (n=18),
- critical appraisal skills (n=12),
- proposal writing skills (n=7),
- qualitative research methods (n=5),
- group work skills (n=5),
- computer skills (n=4),
- networking skills (n=4),
- understanding of organizational analysis and development (n=4),
- understanding of the research process (n=4), and
- instrument/questionnaire design (n=3).

## 12.0 Choosing, Using, and Creating Evidence

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The current SEARCH curriculum is based on three overlapping themes: Choosing, Using, and Creating Evidence. The following examples for each theme were provided in the participant survey:

### 12.1 Choosing Evidence

- information searching and retrieval
- critical appraisal
- research syntheses

### 12.2 Using Evidence

- managing the interface of research and practice
- organizational change
- change management

### 12.3 Creating Evidence

- research design
- data analysis
- developing research projects

Participants were asked to rate the frequency with which they applied skills related to “Choosing, Using, and Creating Evidence” in their current work environments (daily, weekly, monthly, less than monthly, or never). Participants were also asked to rate the extent to which responsibilities for choosing, using, and creating evidence had changed since enrolling in the SEARCH program.

As illustrated in Figure 12, the majority of participants reported the application of skills related to “Choosing Evidence” on a daily (52%) or weekly (20%) basis. The least frequently applied skills related to “Creating Evidence”.

Estimated changes in participants’ responsibility for choosing, using, and creating evidence are illustrated in Figures 13 and 14 for SEARCH III and SI/II participants<sup>7</sup>, respectively.

A visual comparison between self-reported changes in choosing, using, and creating evidence is presented in Figures 15 through 17.

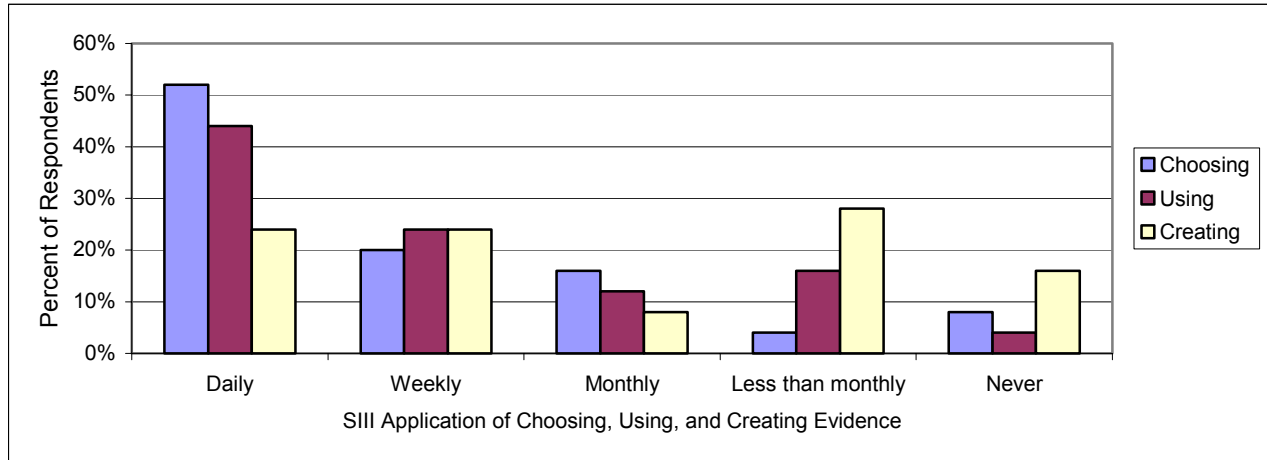
Results are presented according to percentage of survey respondents. The total N in each group was as follows:

- SI/II = 36 survey respondents
- SIII = 25 survey respondents

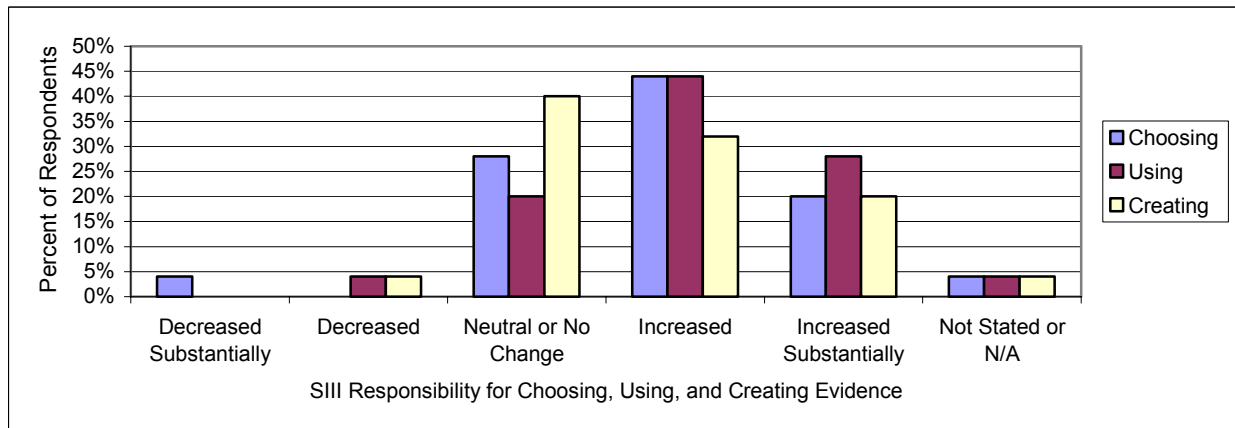
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<sup>7</sup> Data from SEARCH I and II survey used for comparison purposes. Source: Long Term Evaluation of the SEARCH Program: Assessing Impact at the Individual Participant Level (McCaffrey Consulting, Revised 2003).

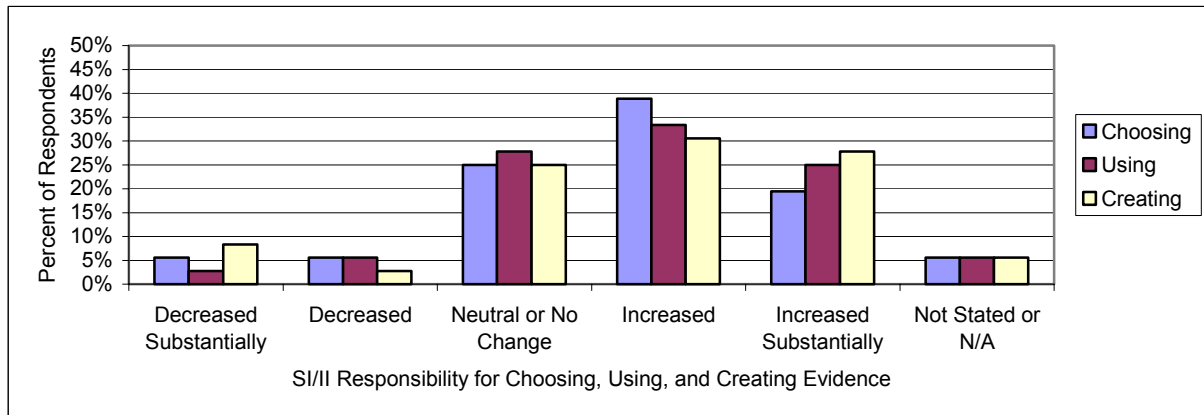
**Figure 12. Frequency of Skills Application Related to Choosing, Using, & Creating Evidence**



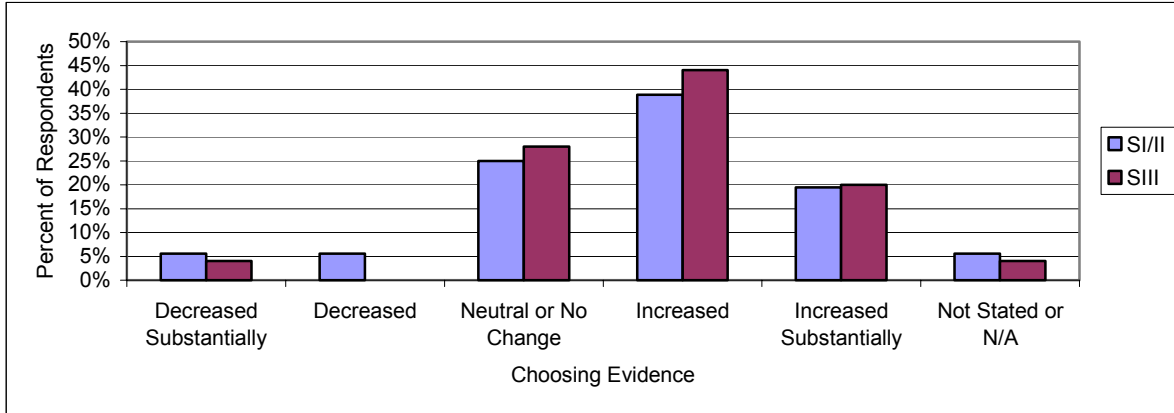
**Figure 13. SIII Responsibility for Choosing, Using, and Creating Evidence**



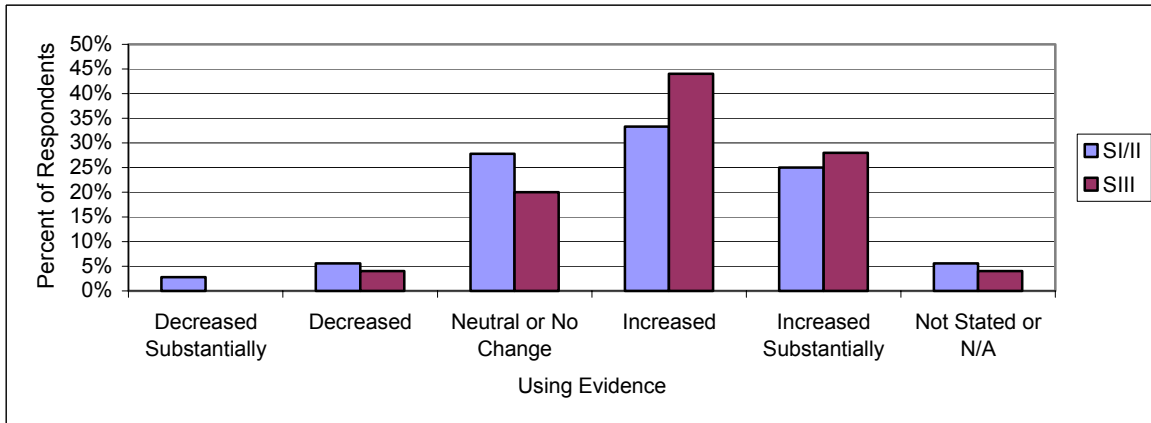
**Figure 14. SI/II Responsibility for Choosing, Using, and Creating Evidence**



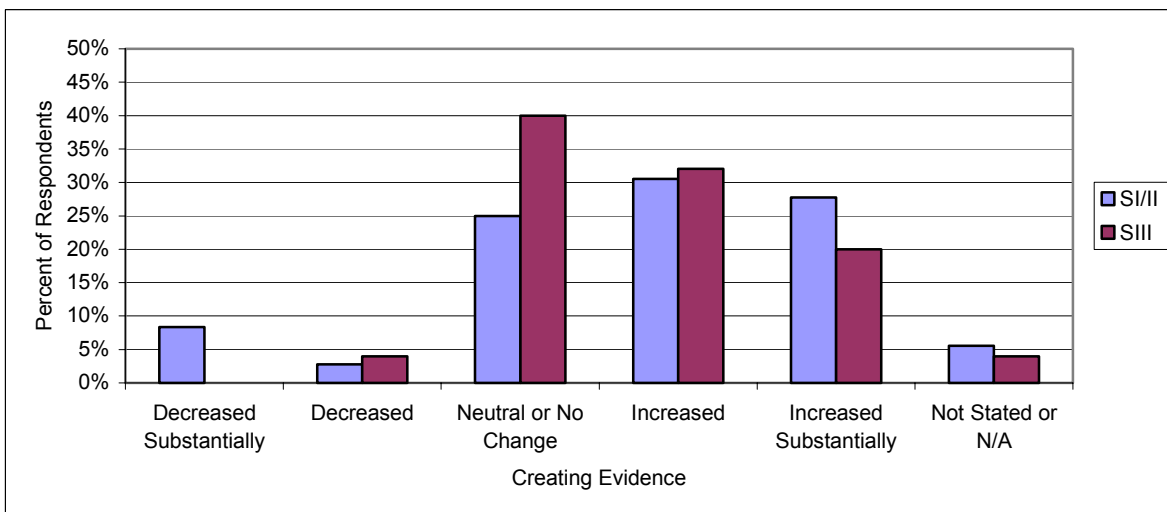
**Figure 15. Comparison of "Choosing" Evidence (SI/II-SIII)**



**Figure 16. Comparison of "Using" Evidence (SI/II-SIII)**



**Figure 17. Comparison of "Creating" Evidence (SI/II-SIII)**



## 13.0 Virtual Learning Community, Technical Support, and Software Compatibility

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### 13.1 Virtual Learning Community

Survey respondents considered the virtual learning community an important contributor to their success in the program. The majority of respondents (n=21) rated the virtual learning community as “very important” while the remaining 4 respondents considered it “somewhat important” to their success in SEARCH.

### 13.2 Technical Support

Participants were asked to estimate the overall percentage of technical support they had received from the CHE as well as their individual organizations. That is, participants were asked: (1) “Since participation in SEARCH, what percentage of the technical support you have needed have you received from the Centre for Health Evidence (CHE)?”, and (2) “Since participation in SEARCH, what percentage of the technical support you have needed have you received from your organization?”

On average, respondents reported that 65% of the technical support they have needed has been provided by CHE, with 39% required technical support provided by organizations.

Participants were asked to identify any unmet technical support needs. Participant comments included:

- *Cannot use wireless technology*
- *I initially had only access to telephone modem line and I found it extremely difficult and slow and frustrating to work with the desktop until I got high speed access...which I had to pay for myself.*
- *Would like access to extra software*
- *Strictly from the standpoint of my RHA. Their unfamiliarity with my laptop issues*
- *The "missing" 10% came from my own technical support troubleshooting adventures. I have recently been upgraded to a Windows 2000-based environment and have since found no additional need for technical support at this time.*
- *Still waiting for region to locate and return original set up disks (Microsoft Officesuite etc.) that were supposed to be included with the laptop. [Regional contact] is aware of the problem.*
- *I still cannot use my desktop e-mail. My region has a firewall and will not allow remote access to e-mail from outside the region. That means that I cannot retrieve my e-mail when I am at a residential module.*

- *Having the regions be responsible for the computers has been an unmitigated disaster. I have given up trying to use my laptop to its full potential, and do most of my work on my home computer.*
- *Being unable to access high speed internet on the laptop. IS does not want us to use our own computer for SEARCH*
- *The IT group within SEARCH has been very helpful and responsive. Our Regional IT group, however falls short on both accounts. I have struggled to get simple issues resolved - a time frame of months rather than a week or so appears to be the norm. This has not improved over time, but in fact has worsened. Those of us in SEARCH in the [specific health region] feel very frustrated by this lack of continuity.*

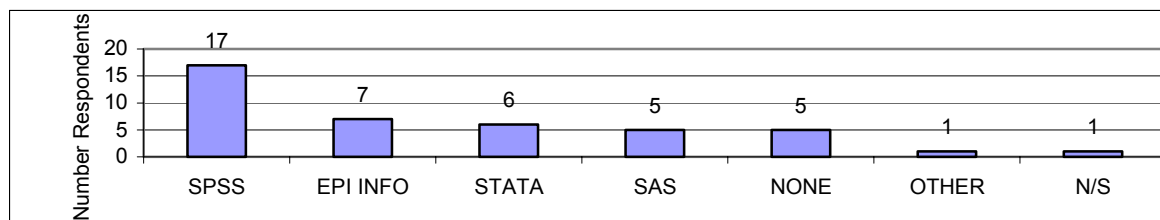
Several participants expressed satisfaction with the level of technical support, and indicated that no technical needs had been unmet. For example:

- *The support has been outstanding--and the low level of support from my organization is due to the expertise and availability of the CHE/SEARCH technical staff and not due to a lack of willingness on the part of our organization's technical support team--there has simply been no need for them to be involved much.*
- *Have been fortunate to have an excellent IT group who were always ready to assist. They report receiving excellent support and direction from (CHE) when requested.*

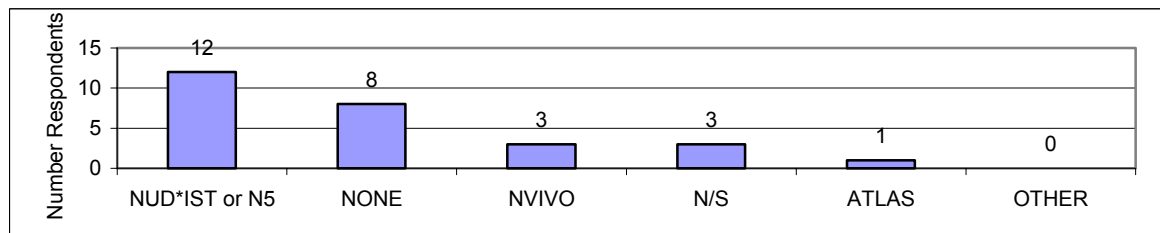
### 13.3 Software Compatibility

Participants were asked to identify the quantitative and qualitative data analysis software programs for which they anticipate requiring familiarity with in the next two years. Sixty-eight percent of respondents (n=17) reported an anticipated need for familiarity with SPSS within the next two years (see Figure 18). Furthermore, almost half of respondents (48%, n=12) reported an anticipated need for familiarity with Nud\*ist or N5 (see Figure 19) within the next two years.

**Figure 18. Quantitative Data Analysis Software**



**Figure 19. Qualitative Data Analysis Software**



# Appendix A: Participant Focus Group Questions

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## INTRODUCTION

5-10 MINUTES

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in today's focus group discussion. The purpose of the focus group is to explore the extent to which the SEARCH program is meeting your expectations and to understand what you are gaining from the program. With your permission, today's discussion will be audio-taped for transcription and analysis purposes. Verbatim comments may be used for illustrative purposes in the evaluation report, but comments will not be attributed to specific individuals or focus groups. At this stage of the program, we have scheduled 2 focus groups – today in Calgary and one next week in Edmonton. The only people who will hear the recording or see the transcript will be myself, the assistant, and the transcriptionist.

## PERCEIVED SHORT-TERM IMPACT

15-20 MINUTES

Please think about the ways in which the SEARCH program has made a difference to you personally and professionally.

1. What has been the impact of SEARCH for you at this point in the program?

Potential probes: Have you had the opportunity to apply and improve the skills you have acquired through SEARCH thus far? Why or why not? That is, what makes it easy or difficult to bring what you learn from SEARCH into your everyday work? To what extent and in what ways do you feel supported, or not supported, by your organization (including supervisors and colleagues) for participation in SEARCH?

## GOALS, EXPECTATIONS, AND MOTIVATION

15-20 MINUTES

2. Please think back to what you initially hoped to achieve through participation in SEARCH. Now that you are 12-months into the program, to what extent are you at the point you expected to be? Have your expectations and goals changed?

## PROGRAM CONTENT AND CURRICULUM

15-20 MINUTES

3. How satisfied are you with the curriculum to date? (*Probe for examples. Are there areas of learning you expected to have, and did not experience? Are there areas that you didn't expect? What aspects of the program are most relevant to your daily work? Least?*)
4. How satisfied have you been with the course organization and delivery? (*Probe for examples.*)

# Appendix B: Participant Survey Questions

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Note: The survey was delivered online via the SEARCH Desktop (one question per screen). Thus, the format of questions did not appear to participants as they are presented below.

## SECTION A: Demographic and Background Information

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1. Please specify the geographic location of your organization: a) rural, b) regional centre (Mistahia, Northern Lights, Chinook, Palliser, David Thompson), or c) large urban (Edmonton, Calgary).
2. What is the primary function of your current position? a) clinical/front-line, b) management, c) information/research, or d) other. If other, please specify.
3. How did you initially come to participate in SEARCH?  
 self-directed as part of existing position (i.e., I requested to participate)  
 self-directed as part of new position (i.e., I applied for a position that included SEARCH responsibilities)  
 employer-directed as part of existing position (i.e., I was asked or instructed to participate by my organization)  
 employer-directed as part of new position (i.e., I was transferred into a role that included SEARCH)  
 other. IF OTHER, PLEASE SPECIFY:
4. Prior to SEARCH, did you have experience with an online or web-based learning environment?  
 Yes       No

## SECTION B: Networking

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Developing connections between health care professionals, researchers, policy-makers and decision-makers is one of the SEARCH mandates. It is these connections that constitute the SEARCH network.

During the May focus group discussions, we heard that “improved professional and personal networks” was considered an immediate impact of the SEARCH program. We are interested in further exploring what parts of the network you use, and the extent to which you use them.

5. Do you currently use the personal and/or professional networks established through SEARCH?  Yes  No

IF NO: Please go to next question.

IF YES: Please answer the next set of questions.

5a) Over the past 14 months, how often on average have you contacted SEARCH faculty members *in between the residential modules*? (Response options included: Never, less than monthly, monthly, or weekly). Please use the space provided to indicate reasons you may have contacted SEARCH faculty members between modules.

5b) The above question was repeated for each of the following: non-SEARCH university professors, fellow SEARCH III participants, previous SEARCH participants, and other members of the SEARCH network.

## SECTION C: SEARCH Projects

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During the focus group discussions, many participants expressed that they were not as far along with respect to the SEARCH projects as they had initially anticipated by this point of the program. We would like to further explore the extent to which initial expectations and current progress may differ among SEARCH participants.

Please think back to where you expected to be at this point of the SEARCH program (i.e., 14 months into the program) with respect to progress on the individual and group projects.

6. At the beginning of SEARCH, what were your initial expectations with respect to the group project by this point of the program? PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.

	INITIAL EXPECTATIONS FOR GROUP PROJECT
▪ Topic Identified	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Research question determined	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Literature review completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Project Proposal (design and method) Developed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Ethics Review Completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Collection Underway	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Collection Completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Analysis Underway	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Analysis Completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Draft Report Prepared	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Final Project Report Submitted	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Don't know/Did not have prior expectations	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. Please indicate your current progress on the group project. PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.

	CURRENT PROGRESS ON GROUP PROJECT
▪ No Progress/Not Yet Started	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Topic Identified	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Research question determined	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Literature review completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Project Proposal Developed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Ethics Review Completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Collection Underway	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Collection Completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Analysis Underway	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Analysis Completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Draft Report Prepared	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Final Project Report Submitted	<input type="checkbox"/>

8. At the beginning of SEARCH, did you have expectations regarding progress on the individual project by this point of the program? PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.

	INITIAL EXPECTATIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL PROJECT
▪ Topic Identified	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Research question determined	<input type="checkbox"/>

	INITIAL EXPECTATIONS FOR INDIVIDUAL PROJECT
▪ Literature review completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Project Proposal Developed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Ethics Review Completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Collection Underway	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Collection Completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Analysis Underway	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Analysis Completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Draft Report Prepared	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Final Project Report Submitted	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Don't know/did not have expectations	<input type="checkbox"/>

9. Please indicate your current progress on the individual project. PLEASE CHECK ALL THAT APPLY.

	CURRENT PROGRESS ON INDIVIDUAL PROJECT
▪ No progress/not yet started	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Topic identified	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Research question determined	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Literature review completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Project Proposal Developed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Ethics Review Completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Collection Underway	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Collection Completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Analysis Underway	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Data Analysis Completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
▪ Draft Report Prepared	<input type="checkbox"/>

10. In your opinion, how many group projects should be required by the SEARCH program?

"0"  "1"  "2"  "3"  "4 or more"

11. In your opinion, how many individual projects should be required by the SEARCH program?

"0"  "1"  "2"  "3"  "4 or more"

12. Do you have any recommendations regarding the format, structure, or process for participation in the **group** projects? (e.g., improvements to process, benefits, challenges, support required, topic selection, collaboration among group members, etc.)

13. Do you have any recommendations regarding the format, structure, or process for participation in the **individual** projects? (e.g., improvements to process, benefits, challenges, support required, topic selection, etc.)

**SECTION D: Time Allocation**

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A common explanation provided for not being as far along on the SEARCH projects as one had hoped was “lack of time”. Furthermore, focus group participants expressed that the recommended 40% time allocation for SEARCH was not occurring in practice. Participants also indicated that it was not always possible to review all of the material available through SEARCH given competing demands and time constraints. Given the pervasiveness of “time constraints”, we would like to further explore the actual and ideal time allocations to assist in the planning and delivery of SEARCH IV.

- 14. On average, over the past 14 months, what % of your **work time** have you allocated to the SEARCH program?
- 15. On average, over the past 14 months, how many hours per week of your **personal time** have you allocated to the SEARCH program?
- 16. In order to fulfill the objectives of the SEARCH program, what % of your work time **should** be protected?
- 17. In order to fulfill the objectives of the SEARCH program, what do you think is a reasonable expectation of your commitment of personal time?

**SECTION E: Residential Training and Inter-Module Activities**

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- 18. In your opinion, what is the ideal length for each residential training module? (number of days)
- 19. How many residential training modules should be included in the overall SEARCH program? (number of modules)

	First Six Months	Second Six Months	Third Six Months	Fourth Six Months
20. How many residential training modules should be included in each 6-month time period over the course of the 2-year SEARCH program?				

- 21. To what degree are the inter-module activities (i.e., not project work specifically) helpful or not helpful to you?

Not at all helpful    Somewhat helpful    Very helpful

Not applicable/have not completed any inter-module activities

Comments:

- 22. We would like to know whether or not the quantity (number) of inter-module activities is sufficient to meet your learning objectives. Please indicate whether you would prefer more or less inter-module activities.

Would like more    Right amount    Would like less    Don't know

Comments:

**SECTION F: Skills Acquired to Date**

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- 23. During focus group discussions, some participants expressed they would have preferred more specific skills development earlier in the program. Thus, please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement:

“I would have preferred greater emphasis on specific skills development earlier in the program.”

*Response options included: strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree*

- 24. If agree or strongly agree, please list the skills for which you would have preferred greater emphasis earlier in the program.

25. Please list the 3 most useful skills you have acquired through your participation in SEARCH so far.

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26. What skills, if any, have you not yet acquired from the program that you had hoped to acquire?

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**SECTION G: Responsibility for Choosing, Using, and Creating Evidence**

As you know, the current SEARCH curriculum is based on three overlapping themes: Choosing, Using, and Creating Evidence. We would like to assess (a) how your responsibilities for choosing, using, and creating evidence may have **changed** since enrolling in the SEARCH program, as well as (b) the extent to which you **apply** these skills in your current work environment.

(a) Please rate the extent to which your responsibilities for Choosing, Using, and Creating evidence have **changed** over the past 14 months.

	Decreased Substantially	Decreased	Neutral/ Stayed Same	Increased	Increased Substantially	DOES NOT APPLY
27. To what extent has your responsibility for <b>choosing evidence</b> (e.g., information searching and retrieval, critical appraisal, research syntheses, etc) changed since you started the SEARCH program?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 0
28. To what extent has your responsibility for <b>using evidence</b> (e.g., managing the interface of research and practice, organizational change and change management, etc.) changed since you started the SEARCH program?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 0
29. To what extent has your responsibility for <b>creating evidence</b> (e.g., research design, data analysis, developing and funding research projects, etc.) changed since you started the SEARCH program?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5	<input type="checkbox"/> 0

(b) In the section below, please rate the extent to which you **apply** skills related to choosing, using, and creating evidence in your current work environment.

	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily
30. To what extent do you apply skills related to <b>choosing evidence</b> (e.g., information searching and retrieval, critical appraisal research syntheses) in your current work environment?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
31. To what extent do you apply skills related to <b>using evidence</b> (e.g., managing the interface of research and practice, organizational change and change management) in your current work environment?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5
32. To what extent do you apply skills related to <b>creating evidence</b> (e.g., research design, data analysis, developing and funding research projects) in your current work environment?	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3	<input type="checkbox"/> 4	<input type="checkbox"/> 5

**SECTION H:  
Compatibility**

**Virtual Learning Community, Technical Support, and Software**

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33. Please rate the level of importance of the virtual learning community to your success in SEARCH.
- not at all important       somewhat important       very important
34. Since participation in SEARCH, what % of the technical support you have needed have you received from the **Centres for Health Evidence (CHE) - Edmonton**?
35. Since participation in SEARCH, what % of the technical support you have needed have you received from **your organization**?
36. What, if any, are your unmet technical support needs?
37. Which of the following *quantitative* data analysis software programs do you anticipate requiring familiarity with in the next two years? Please check all that apply.
- SPSS     STATA     SAS     EpiInfo     Other     None
38. Which of the following *qualitative* data analysis software programs do you anticipate requiring familiarity with in the next two years? Please check all that apply.
- Nud\*ist or N5     Nvivo     Atlas     Other     None

**SECTION I: Other Comments**

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39. Do you have any additional comments?