

SEARCH IV Midpoint Evaluation

Participant Focus Group Findings

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Submitted by:



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Executive Summary

Purpose

The purpose of the current project was to gather qualitative feedback from current SEARCH participants to help staff and faculty plan the remainder of the program, and to incorporate any changes into the final module and wrap-up if appropriate. Project findings may also inform the development of subsequent program iterations.

Project Scope

SEARCH has many facets including face-to-face residential modules, inter-module activities, individual and group projects, the Desktop, integrated curriculum, faculty team support, the SEARCH network and SEARCH manager support. It was beyond the scope of the mid-point assessment to address each element of the SEARCH program in depth.

The scope of the current project was limited to gathering qualitative feedback from SEARCH IV participants regarding the following four key priority areas determined in collaboration with SEARCH program staff and lead faculty:

- perceived impact and application of skills;
- individual and group projects (including progress, faculty support, and process for completion);
- value and relevance of curriculum design; and
- SEARCH awards and recognition.

Methods

In early July 2004, all current SEARCH IV participants (n=27) were sent an e-mail invitation to participate in one of four potential focus group discussions. Based on participant availability, three focus groups were conducted during the week of July 26 – 30, 2004. In total, 14 individuals (52% of SEARCH IV participants) participated in one of the three focus groups.

The discussions were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis. Participant feedback regarding each of the key areas of inquiry was reviewed within and across focus groups. Participant comments were organized by response categories and emergent themes within each area of inquiry.

Individuals unable to participate in the focus group discussions [will be] offered the opportunity to provide input into the evaluation by reviewing the draft focus group report [when it is available and approved for distribution]. In addition, focus group participants will also be invited to review the report and provide additional clarification if necessary.

Intended Audience

The primary audience for this report is the SEARCH program faculty and staff for use in planning the remainder of the current SEARCH program as well as future iterations.

Findings

Impact

Skill development, increased awareness of, and access to, tools and resources (primarily through the SEARCH Desktop), and an extended network emerged as key benefits of initial SEARCH participation. In comparison with previous evaluation results, the perceived short-term impact of SEARCH participation has remained relatively consistent over time and across SEARCH cohorts.

Projects

Project Progress

Some anxiety regarding SEARCH projects was expressed. For some participants, the anxiety was related to lack of clarity regarding project expectations and scope. Other participants expressed difficulty maintaining a balance between the individual and group project, and reported that the group project often took precedence over individual project work. It was noted that the suggestion to focus on individual projects during the first year and group projects in the second year did not occur in practice.

Some participants expressed uncertainty regarding the expectations for a completed SEARCH project. For example, what would it look like? Would a completed SEARCH project be a written report, a poster presentation, or other format?

There was also lack of clarity regarding clearly defined deadlines. Participants expressed appreciation for the adult learning approach within SEARCH; however, most participants agreed that clearly defined deadlines would help to encourage progress and project completion.

Focus group participants agreed that group size should not exceed four to six members. Larger group sizes (e.g., groups with eight or nine members) resulted in increased logistical concerns.

Role of Faculty

Some participants indicated that the support from their faculty advisor(s) had been excellent and could not think of potential areas for improvement.

Other participants expressed several key challenges, including difficulty getting in touch with their advisor and long delays between contacts. Other participants noted that their advisor likely would have been supportive had s/he made any progress on the individual project, but because progress was not made the advisor was not consulted. In retrospect, it was reported that having established key milestones at the onset and scheduling regular meetings would have helped to keep the project moving forward.

Different levels of faculty support were requested by participants. Some participants expressed a preference for being self-directed and stated that they did not need additional support from their faculty advisor. Other participants would have preferred more hands-on support, direction, and feedback.

With respect to faculty support for group projects, some participants described challenges within the process of being assigned a group project advisor.

Overall, participants expressed appreciation for the respect that was inherent in the adult learning model utilized by the SEARCH program. However, it was perceived that finding a

balance between self-directedness and direction from the faculty would be helpful for keeping the projects “on track”.

Role of Organizations

Participants reported diverse levels of organizational support within their respective organizations.

Some organizations were perceived as extremely understanding and supportive. Examples of demonstrating support included providing dedicated time for SEARCH including time away from the office and the flexibility to work from home. Providing dedicated replacement time helped participants allocate work time to SEARCH projects. A few participants further stated that the need to publicly present project findings helped to justify using work time for SEARCH projects.

Other organizations were perceived as less supportive and in some cases less understanding about the goals of the SEARCH program. Organizational changes (including new management) often contributed to this challenge. Participants recommended increased involvement of their manager through regularly scheduled meetings between the participant, manager, and faculty advisor.

Finally, even in the most supportive environments, some participants indicated that it was still difficult to work on SEARCH projects during work time. Two key reasons emerged: a concern of becoming “invisible” within the organization, and the characteristic of being a “high achiever”.

Utilization of the Desktop Project Tool

Reported benefits of the project tool included the following:

- The categories outlined in the tool were perceived as helpful in the early stages of project development.
- The group project “file storage” function facilitated information sharing between group members with access to high speed Internet.

Reported challenges to fully utilizing the project tool included the following:

- Logistical challenges such as lack of spell-check and editing functions available through word processing programs.
- Lack of perceived fit and relevance for moving the project forward and for capturing process-related progress (e.g., ethics applications).
- Perception of updating the project tool as an extra step in addition to other types of progress updates (e.g., e-mail communication with faculty advisors).
- Lack of fit within defined categories for the individual “choosing” project.
- Lack of feedback from faculty and/or program staff regarding use of the Project Tool (e.g., uncertain whether the right information is being captured, and whether the entries are being reviewed).
- Inability of group members without high speed internet access to use the group project tool at home.
- Lack of progress on projects resulting in lack of information with which to update the project tool.

Additional suggestions regarding use of the Project Tool included the following:

- Use of the project tool during meetings between SEARCH participants and faculty advisors, if it is considered an important tool.
- Development of file storage capabilities for the individual project (similar to the group project repository function).

Curriculum

Curriculum Themes

Most participants agreed that the curriculum themes made sense to them “now”, at this point of the program. Participants further indicated that they liked the themes and found them to be a helpful learning framework. Many participants, however, expressed an initial lack of understanding and confusion regarding the curriculum themes. An eventual “a’ha” moment when everything started to make sense was described by many participants.

The timing of the a’ha moment differed among participants. For some participants, the moment occurred after the second or third module. For others, it occurred upon searching the Desktop for specific lecture notes (e.g., by date and module location) and also making the connection by curriculum theme (e.g., choosing theme).

Curriculum Content and Delivery

Participants reported being overwhelmed during the first module. Some participants reported that the first module focused heavily on technology. These participants recommended that the technology component be addressed either in advance of the first module, or within small groups as opposed to one large group. Other participants recollected that the first module focused heavily on group process and discussing expectations for SEARCH.

Participants reported that the social support and networking opportunities were important components of the course structure. Knowing that others were struggling, too, was reported to help build cohesiveness within the group. In addition, the adult learning model utilized by the SEARCH faculty was described as one of the most valuable components of the SEARCH program. Participants further expressed appreciation for the responsiveness to evaluation feedback and the recognition that changes could be made throughout the program.

Awards and Recognition

Awards

The general consensus among focus group participants was that the competitive SEARCH awards were not well-supported by the SEARCH IV cohort. Participants described difficulty in determining appropriate candidates for awards as well as uncertainty regarding the criteria and purpose of awards. Non-competitive participation awards were recommended to recognize the unique contributions of each individual.

Participants also supported the idea of public recognition for SEARCH completion through existing media such as the AHFMR calendar and other publications. In addition, some participants indicated that external recognition for SEARCH may be improved if academic credit could be provided upon program completion. However, the definition of SEARCH completion was not unanimous.

Completion Status

With respect to recognition for participation and/or completion of the SEARCH program, participants discussed the differences between participation and completion.

Most participants agreed that full SEARCH completion should require completion of the individual and group projects. A few participants, however, recommended that the SEARCH certificate should be issued for participation in the program, rather than completion of all program requirements such as assignments and projects.

There was also mixed opinion regarding the option of providing various levels of SEARCH program completion. Most participants reported that project completion should be a mandatory program requirement (i.e., the option not to complete projects should not be offered). Other participants suggested that various levels of SEARCH completion could range from participation in the modules, completion of assignments, to completion of projects.

Closing Comments

In closing, participants expressed appreciation for being part of the SEARCH program. Participants further emphasized that comments provided during focus groups were intended as constructive feedback, and an overall high level of satisfaction with the program was reported.

Finally, participants anticipated a sense of loss upon program completion, given the positive experiences and relationships that had developed over the past two years. While it was perceived that these connections would continue post-SEARCH participation, a sense of mourning the formal end of the program was described.

Implications

Potential implications for program delivery for each of the above key findings are included within the body of this report. These implications are provided for consideration by the SEARCH faculty and program staff for the remainder of the SEARCH IV program as well as to support the planning for future program iterations.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Context

The Swift, Efficient Application of Research in Community Health (SEARCH) program is a health research and professional development program for community-based health professionals. Since its inception in 1995, various modifications have been made to the SEARCH program structure, delivery mechanisms, and curriculum content in the spirit of ongoing learning and continuous improvement. Changes have been responsive to evaluation findings built into the structure of the program, including survey feedback gathered from participants at regular intervals (e.g., following every learning module) as well as selected feedback from other key stakeholders (e.g., organizational partners). While the core values of SEARCH have remained the same over time, new iterations of SEARCH may differ from previous ones. As part of the commitment to ongoing evaluation of the SEARCH program, the current project was initiated to gather participant-level feedback regarding the fourth iteration of SEARCH (i.e., SEARCH IV).

1.2 Purpose

1.2.1 *SEARCH IV Midpoint Evaluation*

The purpose of the current project was to gather qualitative feedback from current participants to help staff and faculty plan the remainder of the SEARCH IV program, and to incorporate any changes into the final module (October 2004) and wrap-up (June 2005) if appropriate. Project findings may also inform development of subsequent program iterations (e.g., planning for SEARCH V).

1.3 Scope

SEARCH has many facets including face-to-face residential modules, inter-module activities, individual and group projects, the Desktop, integrated curriculum, faculty team support, the SEARCH network and SEARCH manager support. It was beyond the scope of the mid-point assessment to address each element of the SEARCH program in depth. There will be additional opportunities to address these elements (e.g., final SIV program wrap-up; long-term follow-up, etc.). In particular, selected quantitative questions (e.g., estimated hours of personal time spent on SEARCH-related activities in between residential modules) may be included in the final, routine SEARCH IV module evaluation.

The scope of the current project was limited to gathering qualitative feedback from SEARCH IV participants regarding four key priority areas determined in collaboration with SEARCH program staff and lead faculty. The process for developing the guiding focus group questions and priority areas is described in the next two sections (1.4 and 1.5) of this report.

1.4 Question Development

To develop the SEARCH IV focus group questions, a variety of sources were reviewed (including previous SEARCH evaluations, focus groups, and survey questions, and the overall module evaluation summaries from SEARCH IV). Based on this review, a list of potential focus group questions for use with SEARCH IV participants was created.

The draft focus group guide was circulated to SEARCH program staff and lead faculty for review and comment. Staff and faculty were asked to review the proposed questions and to indicate which areas of inquiry would be most helpful in terms of planning the remainder of SEARCH IV and ongoing planning for SEARCH V.

Note: one of the goals of this project was to create an instrument that can be used with other SEARCH cohorts at similar time frames. For example, it was anticipated that the same focus group guide may be used with SEARCH V participants at the midpoint of program participation. However, during the development and solicitation of feedback regarding the focus group questions for SEARCH IV participants, it became clear that information needs may differ among key stakeholders and may be dependent on the particular dynamics within a given cohort. Thus, it is suggested that the current questions may provide a standard starting point, but that key priorities and question areas should remain flexible depending on the needs of any given cohort. It may be necessary to briefly revisit the wording of focus group questions for each SEARCH cohort and to confirm priorities with SEARCH staff and faculty before conducting future focus groups.

1.5 Priority Areas of Inquiry

From the process of question development, including review and feedback from key stakeholders, the following four priority areas of inquiry for SEARCH IV focus groups emerged:

- perceived impact and application of skills;
- individual and group projects (including progress, faculty support, and process for completion);
- value and relevance of curriculum design; and
- SEARCH awards and recognition.

1.6 Data Collection Methods

In early July 2004, all current SEARCH IV participants (n=27) were sent an e-mail invitation to participate in one of four focus group discussions. Invitations were sent by the SEARCH Administrative Coordinator. E-mail and phone follow-up was conducted with non-respondents to maximize participation rates.

Based on participant availability, three focus groups were scheduled and conducted during the week of July 26 – 30, 2004.

- Monday, July 26, 2004 (Edmonton, in-person, n=6);

- Tuesday, July 27, 2004 (Calgary, in-person, n=4); and
- Thursday, July 29, 2004 (Various other locations via videoconference, n=4).

In total, 14 individuals (52% of SEARCH IV participants) participated in one of the three focus group discussions.

A fourth focus group was not feasible given a low response rate among participants in one region for the time frame suggested. Many participants were not available due to summer holidays and the short timeline for focus groups.

1.7 Data Analysis, Feedback, and Reporting

With participants' consent, each focus group discussion was audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

Participant feedback regarding each of the key areas of inquiry was reviewed within and across focus groups. Participant comments were organized by response categories and emergent themes within each area of inquiry.

Individuals unable to participate in the focus group discussions [will be] offered the opportunity to provide input into the evaluation by reviewing the draft focus group report [when it is available and approved for distribution]. These individuals will be asked to indicate whether or not the focus group findings resonate with their own experience, and to add additional comments if applicable. In addition, focus group participants will also be invited to review the report and provide additional clarification if necessary. Revisions will be made accordingly and a final report submitted to the SEARCH program representative for review and final approval.

1.8 Primary Intended Audience

The primary audience for this report is the **SEARCH program faculty and staff** for use in planning the remainder of the current SEARCH program as well as future iterations.

2.0 Findings

2.1 Perceived Impact

Skill development, increased awareness of, and access to, tools and resources (primarily through the SEARCH Desktop), and an extended network emerged as key benefits of initial SEARCH participation. In comparison with previous evaluation results, the perceived short-term impact of SEARCH participation has remained relatively consistent over time and across SEARCH cohorts.

Illustrative participant quotations regarding the perceived impact of SEARCH are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Perceived Participant-Level Impact of SEARCH Participation

PERCEIVED IMPACT	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
Skill Development	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Critical appraisal, literature searching and “choosing” evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“Being able to critically appraise the literature [has been a key benefit of SEARCH so far].”</i> ▪ <i>“Just knowing how you find the information and determining, ‘is this good or not?’...Just because it’s published doesn’t mean it’s decent.”</i> ▪ <i>“Before SEARCH, when it came to research I would think, ‘you know, they put millions of dollars into this and they came up with that answer, so why would I question what they found? Why would I question what they did?’...And then I came to the realization that it’s not so much that all research is flawed but it applies only in a narrow perspective...In terms of applying that evidence it doesn’t always apply to everything in a broader sense.”</i> ▪ <i>“And just going to the literature. I think I’m the only one that’s done that [in my organization] to see what systematic reviews have been done, what’s out there already and then how do we set up a guideline based on that so it’s all the types of things that we pull together that we learn through SEARCH.”</i> ▪ <i>“Searching skills and...the actual searching for literature...that’s the front end because you’re actually appraising, so I have personally developed some skills through SEARCH.”</i> ▪ <i>“I’ve noticed that as well. Early on in my job I started doing a lot of research... I don’t know if I would classify it as research because I would go into search engines and put in some key words and then I’d spend three days reading what I found. So it’s given me the ability to key in the right phrases to get there.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Critical thinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“It assists you in thinking at a different level.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Ability to formulate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“It has really helped me formulate questions in my mind. First of</i>

PERCEIVED IMPACT	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
questions	<p><i>all to question all things and then not just to accept things because that was the policy and that was the way it happened. To really question things and then to be able to formulate those questions and go about finding the right information.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I’m asking different questions and when we’re setting about working on either a long term strategy for the organization itself or looking at ways to address particular populations that we deal with my advice lately has been, ‘What has been done? What is the evidence? How can we better this to better create a program that’s going to address the need?’ Then of course taking it all the way back to what’s the need so we’re learning now to ask questions in a much different way...It’s dramatically changed the way we work here, at least the way I work, the way I influence how things work.”</i> ▪ <i>“It’s not only asking the right questions but asking the questions in the right way and I think that that’s a very important part of what SEARCH is giving us. It’s knowing how to phrase the question so that you can in fact get the answers that you’re looking for.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Decision support and knowledge transfer abilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“It’s taking your job and doing it better. I would frame SEARCH as more decision support rather than just making decisions based on instinct – learning how to make them based on the best evidence possible.”</i> ▪ <i>“I agree with [the other participant]. I liked how s/he worded it that it was a decision support tool and I really think that’s how I view SEARCH...as a tool for decision support. That is my role in the organization...for a vision of decision support and assisting other programs in collecting or reviewing or even evaluating the information that they have.”</i> ▪ <i>“I agree that’s a support feature but I also see it as a lot of knowledge transfer, so you form the decision but then the decision is also placed back upon me to disseminate that knowledge to help implement change, so it is kind of a two-way street.”</i> ▪ <i>“When we look at some of the projects we do in SEARCH, it was just providing the tools and the evidence to inform best practices, and it was also then to take that to the front line staff and to implement it and to disseminate the knowledge. So, having a practical application to your decision.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Credibility and recognition for skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I think it also gives credibility to me and my job because...you’re using the evidence. You’re doing things in a way that’s scientifically sound and we can follow those recommendations because they make sense and there’s something to back them up. We’re not just doing things willy-nilly.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Personal development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I also think personal development has been great...a lot of doors or a lot of opportunities have opened because I have been a part of SEARCH...People know that I’ve been through it, [and] have an idea of what it takes to be a SEARCHer...I’ve been invited to participate in [various committees]... I think having been a</i>

PERCEIVED IMPACT	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>SEARCHer is definitely one of the considerations they looked at when they chose me... Generally speaking, the people involved in these teams are either very administrative or very research-based and having someone who has a bit of both perspectives, it's a unique piece."</i></p>
Awareness and Access to Resources	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Awareness of available tools and resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"[My awareness has increased] way beyond what I knew when I started. [For example], I didn't know there were that many hundreds of thousands of journals out there. The thing that is clear to me every day I go further on is...how much I have learned."</i> ▪ <i>"I don't really know all the answers because there's just so much information out there but [with SEARCH] you at least have an idea of where to start looking."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased access to tools and resources (primarily through the Desktop) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"The Desktop I usually have open at least once a day for requests for information. I'm using the databases constantly."</i> ▪ <i>"I use the tools almost on a daily basis and my [employer] will be asked by directors with a very generic question as to how to solve a particular problem, so then using the skills from SEARCH to make a definable question and be able to go and search out relevant information and literature using the Desktop and then providing an accurate answer."</i> ▪ <i>"Just to be able to push a button and have access to all the best search engines and that somebody's figured that out [and] I can identify them as the best sources of information."</i>
Network and Relationship Building	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relationship building and social support from other SEARCH participants (facilitated by learning in a safe environment) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"The only thing I would add as well is the intrinsic value of or experience of SEARCH and that's dealing with a group of people who are in healthcare who are maybe not like-minded but similar-minded. The support and just the sharing of ideas and the excitement that can come from that and the energy has been valuable."</i> ▪ <i>"And it's in a safe environment, too. People are really receptive and responsive."</i> ▪ <i>"I think when I said earlier that we're very intimate I mean that. [We] spend a week together and we've had six of those opportunities. I remember the very first module. I came in feeling very insecure. I really don't have the [same] background that most of the people in our cohort does but it didn't matter. It didn't matter simply because we were learning the same skills and we were using our experiences as the driving edge in behind the new skills and the faculty of course had been utilizing an adult learning formula [and] were able to pull me through quite rapidly. Much more rapidly than I anticipated and so I felt that my understanding</i>

PERCEIVED IMPACT	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>came much sooner and I was settled sooner. By the second module I was quite looking forward to the experience.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“Just to pick up on [another participant’s] comment about the different skill levels coming in, I think that those barriers were just left at the door and those people who had some ability to help other people came forward and became leaders for that time that they needed to be.”</i> ▪ <i>“And I think during the modules we worked together but we also played together so that helps to build that [sense of intimacy].”</i> ▪ <i>“That support and that comfortableness with one another because the end point of this was just to gain for yourself as much knowledge in this area as you can...We’re trying to pull as much information as we can.”</i> ▪ <i>“I’ve had an opportunity to know SEARCHers from past cohorts and I think there’s a very special intimate connection between all SEARCHers...You have similar experiences. It’s always been – anyone that I’ve met it’s always been a wonderful positive experience...You just get that immediate connection with someone.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Access to SEARCH faculty and other experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“...A couple of other things that I think have been real bonuses or benefits of SEARCH. One of them is... all the faculty. It’s just the accessibility of those people. We traditionally think about us working in a health region and them working with the university and I know there’s been a lot of attempts made over the last few years to bridge those a bit more but you still feel like, I don’t feel in my position that I would just phone up somebody from the university or something like that because who am I? I wouldn’t even know what to ask. So part of it is confidence but part of it is just understanding what resources are there.”</i> ▪ <i>“In addition to the way you critically appraise the situation or make up an approach to it, the connections into the experts in SEARCH - you couldn’t pay to get that so I think that’s really important, and [the] advice and knowing that they’re there and hear you out is just a lovely thing. That’s one of the biggest benefits.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased access to extended networks through being part of SEARCH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“Through SEARCH there’s...more of a reception to your calls.”</i> ▪ <i>“...And it isn’t just the faculty members themselves because quite often you’ll send e-mail or phone them or talk with them at a module and for whatever reason they know somebody at the university totally unrelated to SEARCH who deals with that particular issue or is a much stronger candidate with knowledge in that area so they will say well phone this person and let’s send a quick e-mail off to so and so and say she will be calling you or someone will be calling you.”</i>

2.2 SEARCH Projects

Focus group participants were invited to provide feedback regarding the SEARCH projects (both individual and group projects). Participants commented on overall project progress, the role of faculty and organizational support (with respect to completing SEARCH projects), and utilization of the SEARCH Project Tool (on the Desktop).

Each response category is described in more detail below.

2.2.1 Overall Progress

A degree of anxiety regarding SEARCH projects was expressed by several participants during the focus group discussions, particularly with respect to progress on individual projects. For some participants, the anxiety was related to lack of clarity regarding project expectations and scope. A few participants reported that initial progress on their individual project had been slow, and expressed relief to be moving forward.

Participants described difficulty maintaining a balance between the demands of one's individual and group project work, and often reported that the group project work took precedence over work on the individual project. Participants indicated that the suggestion to focus on individual projects in the first year of SEARCH and group projects in the second year was not happening in practice.

In addition, some participants expressed uncertainty regarding the overall expectations for the SEARCH projects. For example, there was lack of clarity regarding the expectations for a completed project. What would it look like? Would a completed SEARCH project be a written report, a poster presentation, or other format? There was also lack of clarity regarding clearly defined deadlines. Participants expressed appreciation for the adult learning approach within SEARCH; however, most participants agreed that clearly defined deadlines would help to encourage progress and project completion.

Some participants also discussed the role of group dynamics and group size. Focus group participants agreed that group size should not exceed four to six members. Larger group sizes (e.g., groups with eight or nine members) resulted in increased logistical concerns such as scheduling meetings and group communication. In addition, it was perceived that one or two members may end up doing most of the work.

Participant quotations are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. SEARCH Project Progress

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
Progress	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Anxiety and uncertainty regarding progress and expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“They’re both kind of hanging [individual and group project].”</i> ▪ <i>“From my perspective coming into this knowing very little, I found it extremely difficult to actually get started because I had no idea where to start. I had no idea what the end product should look</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>like. I still don't know what the end product is supposed to look like and I still don't know once I submit it is somebody going to give me feedback or is anybody even going to read it or is it just considered done? I don't know...I'm not sure what the expectations or the goals at the end of it are. I know there's supposed to be a project but what is that? Is that a report? Is it a written document? Is it a background piece? Is it an abstract? Is it a poster? Is it all of those things? Some or all? Do I get to choose those, which is fine, but I just was so uncertain I didn't know where to start."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I know that the problem with giving examples is that then you think that's what the product should look like so you know they could give say three or four examples and tell us, 'you know we're open to other things, but these are just some ideas'. I don't think that most of us would avoid being creative."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clarity regarding project scope 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"The other thing that perhaps they need to stress a little bit more [is] the fact that you don't have to start inventing the wheel from scratch, in the sense that they did mention [the individual project] could be something that was ongoing or you were currently involved in. I didn't trigger to that [initially] or I would have been done by now."</i> ▪ <i>"Even if the managers need to be told at the managers meeting that it can be something ongoing...Maybe it was just I wasn't listening closely enough."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relief to be making progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I am finally making progress on my individual project. I'm very excited about it and it's a good feeling because when I first came it was waking me up in the middle of the night and making me feel sick because I thought, oh no, nothing is happening there. So it feels great to move forward on this."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Balance and timing between group and individual projects 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I feel a responsibility towards my group and so my individual project goes on the backburner because I feel as if other people are relying on me to get something done within the group and for my individual project that's just my problem. It doesn't impact a whole lot of other people so I sort of focused on my part of the group project that I needed to get done and that affected my individual project too. I tend to take work time to do my group project because I feel that we all have a sense of responsibility towards other people."</i> ▪ <i>"...You want to be working on your individual project in the first year but all of a sudden we found out our proposal was due and nobody knew how to write one and so how do we do this and how do we get this done and for us it was [a lot] of people. How do we get this all organized? How do we have different people write this and then put it all together so it was just an absolute panic that one person ended up, or two people ended up, with a whole ton of work that they did a really good job on but I just don't know what recommendation to give when you're trying to get your individual project done and also if you're collecting ... everyone's collecting</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>data I'm assuming in their group project. You have to get the proposal into ethics so you have to figure out how does that fit into everything else too...I know SEARCH has tried to do the timelines for the group, for the individual project, but that was just something that became an issue."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"Maybe it's as far as ... doing the individual first so that you've learned some of the basic skills for those of us that don't ... do this and don't have them honed as well...Prior to [the individual SEARCH project] deadline ... is where the group topics simply should be discussed so that when the individual project is completed then everybody's actually completed... [After this they can] focus on the group stuff... as a cohesive group as opposed to having two people working their hearts out to get something done by a deadline when other people either aren't contributing or are still focusing on their individual."</i> ▪ <i>"I haven't balanced my time as I would like to and so I'm a little bit behind on my individual [project] but I think the group project is on track now."</i> ▪ <i>"This is just an observation, not a criticism, but one of the things that I recall being said was that year one was individual and year two was group...It wasn't even half way through the first year and we were forming groups for our group project and trying to lay down the question...My feeling is that it's not year one individual project, year two group project, that that's misleading. It's combined and certainly for me there was a greater sense of urgency around the group project. Maybe that's just having a group of people together and needing to have a question, so a lot of time went to the group project in the first year."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of clear deadlines (and recommendations to schedule an event to encourage project completion) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I don't know if there was actually ever a deadline. It was just at the last module. [Someone] had asked...that we try and get our individual projects wrapped up...because they wanted to talk about them at the Steering Committee meeting [in July 2004]."</i> ▪ <i>"I know that they've made some changes in that SEARCH has a two year learning component and I know they've tried to emphasize the learning part in the first year so that people had the skills and that sort of thing but my recommendation is that at the end of the first year or whenever they want those individual projects to be done that there actually be an event, a SEARCH event where other people, external people are invited, people from the region are invited where we have a poster presentation."</i> ▪ <i>"The person in our group project, she got her individual project done because she had an event. It was tied in with her work and she had an event that she had to have the data ready for so...she had a real deadline."</i> ▪ <i>"Just say you need to bring your poster to Fort McMurray and it's done. Or the sixth module or whatever."</i> ▪ <i>"I agree...I think that there could be more talk about deadlines and more limitations or boundaries put on them."</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“As adult learners...when you go to university, everybody is an adult learner and they have a syllabus and they know what needs to be done when...” ... “So I have an exam on April the 10th and you have a paper due.” ... “How you get there is your option....” “Your own way of learning but there's an end point....” ... “But here's the timeline.”</i> ▪ <i>“It's almost between self-directedness and boundaries.”</i> ▪ <i>“I think it should just be standard that by the end of that first year no matter where you're at you should have all of your 'choosing' part of it done so even if you choose to do more than ... if you select to do more than that you get to that space so everyone's there at that time period and you know everyone knows the expectation isn't to go beyond”.</i> ▪ <i>“I think we had to wait until the second module to get an idea as to the timeline for projects, but that really helped me visualize where I need to be at certain stages, [for example], by module three you should be at this point. That way I was able to gauge my own progress. But one area that I think probably could've been helpful [would have been] some kind of reporting guidelines with my faculty [advisory] for my individual project. If I'd have had some expectations as to we need to communicate at least once a month to get an update, then I would've felt that in addition to the broad timelines that are shared on paper, also having the personal communication to identify where I'm at and what are the next steps that I need to be taking in each of the shorter timeline periods.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Group dynamics and group size 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I think some of the other groups are way too big [e.g., eight or nine group members]...There should have been somebody to say you know what? You can both do this topic, you can all do this topic but it has to be two separate groups. Make a decision because you're right it's unmanageable. You're dealing with more group dynamics than you are project.”</i> ▪ <i>“There's trade offs but in the essence of time, because this is a two year project, the group dynamics doesn't need to be the focus of the group. Unless you can learn something through the group dynamics which is why we do things like simulations and other stuff inside the modules. That's where you learn something about learning to work with a group or learning to work with people that you don't get along with or they have different learning styles.”</i>

2.2.2 Faculty Support

Participants were asked to comment on the role of faculty with respect to the SEARCH projects. Overall, participants expressed appreciation and considered the relationship building opportunities and access to faculty to be key benefits of SEARCH participation thus far.

With respect to the specific role of faculty support for SEARCH **individual projects**, some participants indicated that the support from their advisor(s) had been excellent and could not think of potential areas for improvement. Other participants, however, expressed several key challenges. For example, some participants experienced difficulty getting in touch with their advisor and reported long delays between contacts. Other participants commented that their advisor likely would have been supportive had s/he made any progress on the individual project, but because progress was not made the advisor was not consulted. In retrospect, it was reported that having established key milestones at the onset and scheduling regular meetings with one's advisor would have helped to keep the project moving forward.

Different levels of faculty support were requested by participants. Some participants expressed a preference for being self-directed and stated that they did not need additional support from their faculty advisor. Other participants would have preferred more hands-on support, direction, and feedback.

With respect to faculty support for **group projects**, some participants described challenges within the process of being assigned a group project advisor.

Overall, participants provided the following recommendations for improving the faculty support role with respect to the individual and group projects:

- Encourage regular communication (e.g., monthly updates to the faculty advisor).
- Book appointments early on. These meetings may serve as milestones (e.g., knowing that you have an appointment booked can motivate progress).
- Establish guidelines for turn-around time (e.g., between initiating contact, submitting materials or progress reports, and receiving feedback).
- Maintain flexibility and adaptability (e.g., some participants may require more direction than others – the degree of support, structure, and regularity of meetings should be negotiated early on between the participant and advisor).

Overall, participants expressed appreciation for the respect that was inherent in the adult learning model utilized by the SEARCH program. However, it was perceived that finding a balance between self-directedness and direction from the faculty would be helpful for keeping the projects “on track”.

Illustrative participant quotations are provided in Table 3.

Table 3. Role of Faculty Support for SEARCH Projects

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
Faculty Support	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Appreciation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I can’t speak high enough about it [the support received from the faculty advisor].”</i> ▪ <i>“From the perspective of faculty advisor on my individual project, I can’t speak highly enough. My advisor was very good, and would say, ‘by the next module, please have this prepared for me’, and that’s kept me really on track, so I can’t say enough about my</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>faculty advisor.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“My advisor is very responsive.”</i> ▪ <i>“They [the SEARCH faculty] are truly amazing people.”</i> ▪ <i>“I’m lucky because my advisor is in [the same geographic location] and any time I e-mail we just immediately set up an appointment.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“My faculty advisor is a wonderful person, but I expected [the advisor] to tell me a bit more of what it was that was needed from me and that never came...I probably needed a lot more hands-on than I’m getting and at this point I’m not quite certain how to request that, so it’s a whole other conversation.”</i> ▪ <i>“I think there should be more consistency. It’s very dependent on who your faculty advisor is as to how things go and if you’re on a path and you’re directing yourself.”</i> ▪ <i>“It would have been nice to have had an advisor to really work with [our group]...We were not quite knowing because there would be different faculty at the table at different times. At the end we didn’t actually have an advisor...By the third module we didn’t actually even know who our advisor was ...”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regularity of meetings and process for communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“If we had to meet with our faculty advisor once a month let’s say for an hour I’d be getting a lot more done. Just the pressure of saying you have a meeting. You don’t want to go and waste their time.”</i> ▪ <i>“In hindsight I would have set a meeting every two months or set a meeting every month. I think that would have been more beneficial to my learning process and again I would have been able to use my advisor’s expertise in a better way.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Balance between self-directedness, faculty support, and deadlines 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“It’s tough because on the other hand if they were too directive we might come back and say we’re adult learners so it can be used both ways but I think the fact is that we’re all busy people and our lives revolve around deadlines and so that just seems to be what tends to work for us...Having something structured with better deadlines and that sort of thing would be helpful.”</i> ▪ <i>“I somewhat agree that perhaps more structured communication or more structured timelines would be beneficial for people such as me that occasionally procrastinates and...if the faculty and the participant neither makes any gestures towards the other then you could go for quite a lengthy time before any contact is made but, I don’t want to necessarily put it all onto the faculty because I think we have a responsibility as well to keep that contact up, so I think any time that I did contact the faculty I found that they were extremely helpful, they were fairly quick at answering any of my questions or e-mails but I really don’t know if we need to have, ‘you have to do it by this time’. I really don’t think there should be consequences. We are adults and there are extenuating circumstances to everybody’s roles [and] positions.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Faculty support not 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I don’t feel as if I’ve used my faculty advisor to the extent that I</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
fully utilized	<i>should have because I haven't been working on my individual project in a timely manner...I could have gotten more support and expertise and gained more if...working on my individual project had been set up in a different way. For example, if I hadn't done most of it this month. People aren't around in the summer and this is sort of the only time I've been trying to work on it...I've really condensed this into a three week period versus what should have been done over seven or eight months."</i>

2.2.3 Organizational Support

The role of organizational support for SEARCH – specifically organizational support for the individual to complete the SEARCH individual and group project requirements – frequently emerged during the discussion regarding SEARCH projects.

Participants reported diverse levels of organizational support, understanding, and awareness of the SEARCH program within their respective organizations. Some organizations were perceived as extremely understanding and supportive. Examples of demonstrating support included providing dedicated time for SEARCH including time away from the office and the flexibility to work from home one or two days per week to complete SEARCH requirements without interruption. Providing dedicated replacement time (via another staff person to cover the previous workload) helped participants allocate work time to SEARCH projects. A few participants further stated that the need to publicly present project findings helped to justify using work time for SEARCH projects.

Other organizations, however, were perceived as less supportive and in some cases less understanding about the goals of the SEARCH program. Organizational changes (e.g., new management, departmental reorganization) often contributed to this challenge. For example, new managers may not provide the same degree of support as previous managers who may have had more familiarity with SEARCH. Participants recommended increased involvement of their manager, for example, through regularly scheduled meetings between the participant, manager, and faculty advisor.

Finally, even in the most supportive environments, some participants indicated that it was still difficult to work on SEARCH projects during work time. Two key reasons emerged: a concern of becoming “invisible” within the organization, and the characteristic of being a “high achiever”. For example, some participants expressed concern that if they were unavailable for two days per week for two years, they might become invisible within their organization and miss out on other projects and opportunities. Participants further added that as “high achievers” they were likely to allocate the same amount of time as pre-SEARCH to their work in addition to the various program requirements.

Selected participant quotations to illustrate the role of organizational support for SEARCH projects are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Role of Organizational Support for SEARCH Projects

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
Facilitators	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dedicated time (and suggestions to increase organizational understanding and support for granting dedicated time) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I’m fortunate in my position that there is a dedicated amount of time for SEARCH. I wouldn’t say that it’s 40%. I do feel that it is a fair amount of time that they allocate or I’m allowed to spend working on my projects.”</i> ▪ <i>“I negotiated with my organization. We tried a whole bunch of different things to allot that 40% and then finally it’s a day at home and that’s been very helpful.”</i> ▪ <i>“If that could be written into the contract that says, ‘may include time out of the office’, then they’d probably respect that more...If it says in the contract that this 40% may include time out of the office if that’s what you need then I think we’ll have that support because in my case 40% means two days at home.”</i> ▪ <i>“I also think the 40% [protected time] needs to come with some suggestions of what this really means [such as] that’s two days of the week and maybe this participant will probably need a full 18 days on SEARCH and that needs to be fit into one and a half month’s work...Maybe some comment like that to make it more concrete so that people really understand what 40% is. It sounds easy but it’s not.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Replacement time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I am very well supported...In our area they actually provided someone for replacement, so that within that full time position there would be a point for dedicated time to do SEARCH.”</i> ▪ <i>“I did have support because they actually physically replaced .25 of my work and they didn’t create a lot of extra. They said until SEARCH is done we’re not going to add a lot more onto your work because you’ve got SEARCH.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public presentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“In terms of the project, with me having to present [at a module], I think that’s going to put some fear in my region that if I don’t do a good job it could reflect badly on the region, so I might be able to use that to log off a week to do my project the week before [the module], which is not the best but it’s better than nothing.”</i>
Barriers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of dedicated time (both organizationally and self-imposed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“My regular workload is not just 60%. There’s still the expectation I’m 100%.”</i> ▪ <i>“Part of it is me...I’m trying to be too accommodating with meetings. I don’t take two days a week and block them off the calendar and say I can’t do meetings there. I have a lot of meetings and I tend to sort of accommodate and I think oh I’ll fit SEARCH in here and there and I just don’t do it.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of replacement time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“It’s been a difficult process for me to get my SEARCH work done because, and its no fault of the manager, other than the fact that they don’t replace you right? You know there’s no one there to sit in and be your voice when you’re not there and so that does have</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>implications on your position and your everyday work. So I can, if I wanted to...sit in my office just working on my SEARCH project and [my manager is] 100% supportive of that. I just don't do it."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I think it needs to start from the top and in your budgets if you take a SEARCH person you will have this replacement money so that .4 of a position can be given to somebody else. I don't think it can go any other way but the flip side of it is like you say then you become invisible because you're not around so again that needs management support for the management to bring back to the team what's going on in SEARCH...so that people around are reminded of the fact that you are bringing something back to the organization."</i> ▪ <i>"At the sub-departmental level, I have the commitment to do all the SEARCH I need to do but people outside the department - senior management, the board, other directors, everyone else - has deadlines that they need to meet and need me to do stuff for them...Because I'm not back-filled and I'm the only person in my region with [specific training], I get called to do all these things that if I don't do them they don't get done. So...everyone supports [SEARCH] and thinks it's great but they also know that I need to fill these other roles first."</i> ▪ <i>"I think my individual project is definitely going to be of benefit to the organization and that was one of the reasons they supported me going into SEARCH; however, there is no one here to cover for me when day-to-day stuff happens -- the fires start, someone resigns or someone doesn't show up. You're working with the stuff that absolutely has to be dealt with then and the project, no matter what it was on, would always be a secondary thing -- it's not as urgent. I think they're definitely going to be making use of what I present and what we complete and it will be helpful to the organization, but it's still not an urgent item that has to happen right away."</i> ▪ <i>"The challenge is always that the work is still sitting there. I'm gone that day but it's just piling up."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of manager involvement and support (including changing managers and suggestions to involve managers with SEARCH project development) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"If you look at what's happened in the last year, I've had three different managers and the regions all changed and I'm not the only person who's gone through that, so the priorities change but I can't keep changing my individual project."</i> ▪ <i>"I keep losing managers."</i> ▪ <i>"To me it goes back to structure. If they had some increased method of structuring things, for example, they could have a faculty advisor advising your manager and yourself - if it was the three of you meeting together, you would remain on the same sort of plank."</i> ▪ <i>"I think that would be an excellent idea – to have a meeting between yourself, your manager, and your faculty advisor."</i> ▪ <i>"I think that would be an excellent idea because then it brings your</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>manager more into the program. I don't think my manager is very much connected that way so for her to meet with someone at [the university] – that would be great for other parts of our program.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“The project essentially is an agreement between the SEARCH participant and the manager, and I'm not sure why that couldn't be done as a prerequisite for the application for SEARCH. To have your individual project, at least the topic if not the question.”</i> ▪ <i>“I thought we were supposed to have our individual project decided [before SEARCH]. Mine was in my application. I sat down with my manager and we came up with an individual project. I thought that was one of the questions in the application so I was surprised when in our first module we started having these discussions about what we wanted to do for our individual project because mine was already decided.”</i> ▪ <i>“To have the senior managers and the participants meeting with the SEARCH faculty to identify projects I think it would've been beneficial. They could've all gotten together to do some discussion about the projects and if the SEARCH faculty or support people could actually come to the regions and do small group work prior to the actual start of the program and really talk about what the projects might be and what sort of projects could happen and start looking a little bit more at the scope of the projects prior to even starting the SEARCH program...A bit more upfront discussion with the managers, the participants and SEARCH regarding the projects and identifying topics.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of active support and lack of understanding about SEARCH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“From my perspective I think the intent of supporting the process is there as long as they don't have to do anything active to do it. In other words when I went to them first to sit down and chat with them about ideas, what was a burning issue for us, what kind of projects would be of big benefit to our department...all I got was 'oh whatever'.”</i> ▪ <i>“Finally after six months I got to show them a five minute demo of the SEARCH Desktop and [they said], 'wow, that's amazing, you'll have to show us that again some time'. But people just don't take it seriously enough, I think, and they're not looking long term.”</i> ▪ <i>“I don't think that we've reached the correlation between the tools that we are learning and the benefit to the organizations.”</i> ▪ <i>“A lot of it has to do with politics and culture as we've learned...it's the organizational culture that truly plays a huge part... I think it takes time to breed that part of the resistant culture out and get people to say 'we might learn from this.' I've been telling them I'd love to be able to show you the tools we have on our Desktop and the things that we could use and where it benefits us and maybe help with some lit searching...They think it's great, they just don't want to put it into action.”</i> ▪ <i>“I think there is a real doublespeak that goes on. On the one hand we hear how some of these things are so important but on the</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>other hand there is a culture that needs just 'what's for today? What's for the immediate?' The bottom line...How much of a commitment there really is where you're planting the seeds now for something to grow...I don't know."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I've also heard and had to dispel some rumors that the modules [are all] fun and games and maybe a little bit of learning...[It was] pointed out one module how many hours of graduate level work we've done and I think that is a very important message to give back to the managers."</i>
Participant Factors	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Invisibility concern 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I don't want to lose out on anything for our work times so I sign up still for everything and I want to be involved in everything."</i> ▪ <i>"It's also the perception as well. If you insist on this [taking 40% dedicated SEARCH time], are you limiting yourself professionally in this two year period...It's a balance."</i> ▪ <i>"It could be perceived as that you can't move ahead for two years because you're involved in this and 40% of your time is [SEARCH] so in addition to being this absolutely fabulous opportunity which I consider it is... it's a bit of a limitation when you're moving forward if you want to change careers at this time."</i> ▪ <i>"[To be able to dedicate 40% of time to SEARCH], I've decided that I'm not getting involved in other things [at work]... They don't have another voice but it's worked to my detriment because now I'm not there. They can't see me and so they think I don't exist. They think I don't work for the department anymore."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Desire for high achievement and over-accommodation (wanting to do everything) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I think most of us, why are we in SEARCH? We're people who probably want to go above and beyond. We're people who want to learn more. We're people who want to do a better than average job and so we tend to have high expectations for ourselves."</i> ▪ <i>"You just don't want to leave any of your work kind of half done."</i> ▪ <i>"That's exactly the situation I'm in because I have complete managerial support. My boss says to me take your two days per week but what does that mean to me in my job? It means I don't get involved in [other projects at work] and that means there's no voice from my area... and for myself I'm not satisfied with that...I really think that it's important for me to be there to give that voice and so I take on more things than I should when I should be working on my individual project."</i> ▪ <i>"I don't really think that you're going to ever get somebody that may actually spend 40% of their time on SEARCH because, dare I say, that maybe we're somewhat over-achievers and so we want to do full-time on each job."</i>

2.2.4 Project Tool

Participants were asked to provide feedback regarding the utilization of the SEARCH Desktop Project Tool. While the Desktop overall was perceived as a tremendously valuable resource, utilization of the Desktop Project Tool was limited.

Benefits of the Project Tool included the following:

- The categories outlined in the tool were perceived as helpful in the early stages of project development.
- The group project “file storage” function facilitated information sharing between group members with access to high speed Internet. [Several participants requested a similar place to store documents for their individual projects.]

Challenges to fully utilizing the Project Tool included the following:

- Logistical challenges such as lack of spell-check and editing functions available through word processing programs.
- Lack of perceived fit and relevance for moving the project forward and for capturing process-related progress (e.g., ethics applications).
- Perception of updating the project tool as an extra step in addition to other types of progress updates (e.g., e-mail communication with faculty advisors).
- Lack of fit within defined categories for the individual “choosing” project.
- Lack of feedback from faculty and/or program staff regarding use of the Project Tool (e.g., uncertain whether the right information is being captured, and whether the entries are being reviewed).
- Inability of group members without high speed internet access to use the group project tool at home.
- Lack of progress on projects resulting in lack of information with which to update the project tool.

Additional suggestions regarding use of the Project Tool included the following:

- Use of the project tool during meetings between SEARCH participants and faculty advisors, if it is considered an important tool.
- Development of file storage capabilities for the individual project (similar to the group project repository function).

Illustrative participant quotations are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Utilization of the SEARCH Desktop Project Tool

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
Benefits	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initial project development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I think it does lay out a framework and it does provide you with guiding questions.”</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"It did help me to define my project in the beginning, but now I do not find it helpful to move forward."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ File storage capability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"For our group project, [one of the faculty] set up a repository where we could file the minutes and I have found that useful for our group project, not just because there's a group of us but just to have a central place to put files right away without having to enter things into forms, to cut down on double entry."</i> ▪ <i>"It is nice to be able to share files."</i> ▪ <i>"We use the group tool with a repository where you could store files and I think if you use that at the individual tool where I can just submit my word document that has my background piece or my Excel Spreadsheet...[that] would be much more helpful than me trying to populate their textboxes which may or may not exactly line up with the methodology of my particular study."</i>
Challenges	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Logistical challenges 	<p><u>Contrast with other word-processing capabilities</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I do think the Desktop is amazing but in the project tool there's no spell check...so I don't update things on there because I do everything on a Word document, spell check it and then paste it into there after."</i> ▪ <i>"It doesn't have spell check. I don't find it formats as nicely as Word and I think, 'so what's the benefit' I'm working on my project, I've got it on Word. If I want to show it to my advisor, or if I want to show it to my manager we just transfer it by Word. What's the advantage of the project tool?"</i> ▪ <i>"I think we're also used to Word type processing. [With the project tool,] you can't delete going forward. You have to put your cursor at the end of the line and backspace."</i> ▪ <i>"Even the ability to attach Word documents [would be helpful]."</i> ▪ <i>"Or if they made it a Word template...then you'd have all the benefits. The Table of Contents and everything."</i> <p><u>Firewalls, dial-up and other technical difficulties</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"It doesn't work -- I don't know if it's a firewall in the region or whatever but [another group member] and I can't see when other people update it."</i> ▪ <i>"In our group we have [a participant] on dial-up. She's on dial-up so we can't use the group project [tool] to work on our group project because she can't use it and she does her work from home."</i> ▪ <i>"[There are] little itty bitty spaces and I actually had to get better reading glasses to read the stuff."</i> <p><u>Lack of consistent use</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"The issue for our group project is people don't do things</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>consistently. We said post the minutes on the group project to us. People still send the minutes out by e-mail to everyone and they don't post it on the group project tool."</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Not useful for moving the project forward and for capturing process-related progress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"Is the project tool for the faculty or is it for us? If it's for the faculty to be updated, okay. Is it for us? It doesn't work for us...I don't see it as a tool to move us forward."</i> ▪ <i>"We've been working on our ethics forms [and] letters of support, and there's nowhere to put that information."</i> ▪ <i>"I haven't looked at it for a little while but if I remember right when you update...you're at one stage or the next. It doesn't give you an opportunity to say that I'm looking at this part here. [It would be helpful if there] was a place where I can just say, 'I'm at this process right now' [such as completing the ethics application] and I'm going to review that."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Extra step in the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"It is an extra step to remember to put it in."</i> ▪ <i>"You have to cut and paste."</i> ▪ <i>"Part of the project tool is it's an added task where I'm not sure what the actual benefit is."</i> ▪ <i>"If I'm going to show something to my advisor I could just e-mail her a Word document or I guess I could cut and paste and put it on the project tool but I'm not seeing any particular advantage to using the project tool. I agree with you. It is an excellent framework for us working on a project...the sequence and the types of questions and that sort of thing, but that could be done as a word template. It doesn't have to be done as a project tool."</i> ▪ <i>"I, too, have had to update some of my project and they haven't ended up in the tool and I think the primary reason for that is that I tend to do most of my work in a Microsoft product and then it's an extra step then from posting the word document to actually cutting and pasting it and putting it into the actual tool and while I realize this is good communication to certain members, I find it an extra step that has little value."</i> ▪ <i>"I agree with [the previous participant]. Most of my project is probably done. The tool would not necessarily reflect that because some of the headings don't necessarily fit and I don't work in the tool, I work in Microsoft Office as well. I don't think about updating the tool on a regular basis. It just doesn't come to mind actually."</i> ▪ <i>"It becomes an albatross along your neck [updating the project tool]."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Limitations of defined categories 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"When we first started learning, all of our questions had to be in terms of PICO [population, intervention, comparison, outcome]... And then, if you weren't doing that kind of a question [for the SEARCH project], you'd have all these blank spaces and not know what to put into them."</i> ▪ <i>"I find it a little difficult to use because it looks like you have to answer all these specific questions and if your project doesn't fit</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>those kind of questions, do you leave everything blank or do you write in relevant stuff for your project?"</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"If you didn't have a clinical-based question, the headings didn't necessarily work for you. I struggled trying to find a population for my question."</i> ▪ <i>"I understand the reason why it's set up the way it is, it's to try and make things as easy or as step-by-step for someone as possible but because we all didn't go in the same direction with our questions, it's made it more difficult. The only way to make it easier for my questions would have been to be a little looser with the components of the headings but that would make it more difficult for someone who has specifically clinical-based questions."</i> ▪ <i>"My suggestion would be to have people answer their questions the best they can and have a further indent section to say if your question does fit this, here's this resource rather than forcing you to answer those questions. Have it more generic with links to the more specific. Something like that might help."</i> ▪ <i>"Because our individual project is supposed to be more of a literature review rather than a clinical question, which is how it's set up, it really doesn't fit that well into those particular textboxes."</i> ▪ <i>"I wrote pages and pages of material in Word format...and then I went to the Desktop and nothing I wrote fit into the Desktop so I started fiddling away with it and by the time I got part way through I realized that it had completely changed the purpose of my question of where I had started out so I erased it all off the Desktop... and then I haven't been back to it because I'm totally intimidated by what they've got there. I still have all of my original work, the intent. Everything is there almost right down to what I expect the conclusion is going to be but I haven't been able to translate that into what they want on the Desktop."</i> ▪ <i>"I've run into a similar problem with the group project. Nothing that we had written really fit into [the project tool], so we had to rewrite things and we lost a lot of the original detail. It's quite restrictive."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lack of feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I don't know if it was clear to me at the beginning that that's what they were using to check our progress and nobody was using them so they didn't know where we really stood."</i> ▪ <i>"I'm assuming [the faculty] reads them [updates on the project tool], but is it correct? It would help to get some direction as to whether I'm on the right track or there might be something else I should be adding, or some clarification that they might like to have."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ No new material 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I think it's a great tool. My problem has been that...in order to update the project tool, I'd have to be making progress on my project which, unfortunately, I haven't had time to do lately, although all the headings, everything that's there is great. Once I'm able to get the information into it, I think it'll be wonderful. I</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>haven't used it, not because it doesn't look useful but because I haven't had the time.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I'm similar to [the previous participant] in that when I actually do something on my project, I will update the Desktop tool...I like the idea of having it up there. I think it's great and it has potential. I just need to work on my project first."</i>
Suggestions	
Involve faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"If these are important tools, I think it'd be worthwhile to use that tool during the meetings [with faculty advisors] if at all possible...Even to type in information...making progress that way throughout the whole meeting."</i> ▪ <i>"I think regular meetings would benefit..."</i> ▪ <i>"...And using the tool during the meeting. And whenever someone e-mailed to say, 'we're looking at the updates on the project tool as well'."</i>
File storage for individual tool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"One thing that I would like and maybe somebody can tell me if I've just missed this...The group project [tool] is intended for us to share documents... it allows us to download and upload documents to that tool. I have tried to do that with my individual [project tool] and haven't been able to figure out a place to do that...Instead of trying to burn something to a disk [it would be helpful to] just put it on the Desktop. I couldn't put it on the Desktop because I couldn't find a place on the individual project to actually do that...so that then I can access it from wherever I happen to be rather than, 'oh I left the disk at home'."</i>

2.3 Curriculum Themes and Content

Participants were asked to reflect on the three main curriculum themes: choosing, using and creating evidence. Did the themes make sense? Were they a helpful learning framework? In addition, participants were asked to comment on the curriculum content and delivery. What elements of the curriculum were most helpful? What additional areas of learning would be useful?

Most participants agreed that the curriculum themes made sense to them “now”, at this point of the program. Participants further indicated that they liked the themes and found them to be a helpful learning framework. Many participants, however, expressed an initial lack of understanding and confusion regarding the curriculum themes and in some cases the overall program. An eventual “a’ha” moment when everything started to make sense was described by many participants.

At what point did this “a’ha” moment occur? The timing differed among participants. For some participants, the moment occurred after the second or third module. For others, it occurred upon searching the Desktop for specific lecture notes (e.g., by date and module location) and subsequently also making the connection by curriculum theme (e.g., choosing theme).

Regarding the curriculum content and delivery, participants reported being overwhelmed during the first module. Some participants reported that the first module focused heavily on technology. These participants recommended that the technology component be addressed either in advance of the first module, or within small groups as opposed to one large group. Other participants recollected that the first module focused heavily on group process and discussing expectations for SEARCH. Regardless of participant recollections, there was consensus that a great deal of information was presented during the first module, much of which was not fully absorbed. Most participants supported the notion of a pre-SEARCH orientation to minimize the experience of information overload.

Participants reported that the social support and networking opportunities were important components of the course structure. Knowing that others were struggling, too, was reported to help build cohesiveness within the group. In addition, the adult learning model utilized by the SEARCH faculty was described as one of the most valued components of the SEARCH program. Participants further expressed appreciation for the responsiveness to evaluation feedback and the recognition that changes could be made throughout the program.

Suggestions for additional learning opportunities during the SEARCH program included the following:

- More hands-on application of the “using” theme, similar to and building on the integration exercise delivered during the sixth module.
- Optional workshops to develop practical skills such as CV writing, ethics applications, and time management.

Illustrative participant quotations regarding the curriculum themes as well as the curriculum content and course delivery are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Curriculum Themes and Content

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
Curriculum themes	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initial confusion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I literally couldn't have told you in module three what aspect of the framework we were actually working on because it just didn't click."</i> ▪ <i>"[At first], I didn't grasp the concept and they're talking about choosing, using, and creating, and I'm going, 'what...are they talking about?'...and then I kept seeing this diagram. I had absolutely no point of reference for it for some reason. I just blocked it out."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Appreciation for the curriculum themes, balanced with appreciation for option to also search by date 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I like the concept [of the three curriculum themes]"</i>. ▪ <i>"I think it has merit and it's a way of organizing things."</i> ▪ <i>"Sometimes it's intuitively required to think, 'was that day choosing, creating or using?' So sometimes I do. It's good to actually have both ways of searching. You can go in choosing or you can go in the module. It's helpful that you just don't have to go in one way. There's many avenues to get to where you're thinking."</i> ▪ <i>"When I need to find something I go back to the date - how the module is listed and all the lectures and that's where I go to find things."</i> ▪ <i>"I use [the date function] when I need to find something because I know where I was when we heard that. [For example], 'so I was in Lethbridge, so I've got to go back to module three'."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ A'ha moment and eventual understanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"It just took me a long time to figure out."</i> ▪ <i>"It was the Desktop...when I was looking for [one of the faculty member's] PowerPoint presentation and when it came up the default was choosing, using, and creating...then I started to figure out how that fit together...I had to look under all three to figure out where to start...And I actually went to the date because I knew it was in the first module."</i> ▪ <i>"While I understand it's choosing, using, and creating teams now, it took me until about module three before I actually had an 'a'ha' moment as to this is how they're separated."</i> ▪ <i>"Yesterday afternoon I was thinking of reading a book [and how to deliver a presentation about research]...and bang, it all just sort of swam through my head, the whole [curriculum themes]...Bang-o it all flooded in. That was really good. A whole year is successfully accomplished because I had one thought."</i>
Curriculum content and delivery	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Initial perceived overload 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"We had a lot of information overload [at the first module]. It was intense."</i> ▪ <i>"We were so fried when we got back from the first module. You're getting so much information at once. There may have been an</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>alternate way to do it but I'm not sure that would've made it any less painful. I understand why we needed to get all that information at once so that we were able to start trying to figure it out so we could get to that 'ah ha' moment in module three... the three strands and how things fit together."</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Social support function / human resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"When we came to [the second module] we were just so relieved to know that everyone was on the same level [and were struggling with the amount of information presented in the first module]."</i> ▪ <i>"That was the best part, was finding out that we weren't alone."</i> ▪ <i>"I've since realized that out of the entire program, there are components of it that some of us will not be taking on with us as primary areas of our work. I can do a lot of work in research without ever touching a formula..." "But at the same time you know that you can pick up a telephone and phone [other SEARCH participants for expertise and support]."</i> ▪ <i>"I think the most valuable piece of the entire curriculum to me has been the network and we have some very, very gifted faculty who have been able to just get in there with some ideas."</i> ▪ <i>"One of my favorite terms that I learned in this whole thing and, though I've been working [within] the principles for years, is social capital. I've never used social capital in the way that [a faculty member] uses social capital...and it just has an amazing ring for me."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adult learning approach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I think for me the value is in the way that the material is presented [by a diverse team of faculty members using a combination of didactic and interactive learning]. It's just an amazing, amazing feature of the program."</i> ▪ <i>"SEARCH is a very rich adult learning environment and I give them a lot of credit for making sure that they follow the tenets of adult education. We have an opportunity to work in groups and the people that have strengths help the couple that need to catch up a little bit, and there is a very safe learning environment for people. In regular campus university you don't get that. It's the lecture where everyone sits there kind of dormant. In SEARCH, they do such a good job of teaching adults the way that adults should be taught."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Responsiveness to participant feedback 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"They constantly ask for feedback so I really felt as if [the program] could be changed and altered a lot, even right then and there. They're very flexible. [For example], they asked about mini clinics, [and] they asked about things that we wanted to do for next time...I think they're very flexible and adaptive in our program...If there was any wish that you had in the evaluations... I think they would have tried to meet those."</i> ▪ <i>"The funny part is that they actually went through the evaluations, which is very unusual...Not only do they read it but they appear to respond to it very quickly."</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
Suggestions	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increased time allocated for “using” theme, including exercises to develop skills for meeting immediate needs and producing a quick turnaround 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“Choosing, using, creating... I would prefer that we had spent a bit more time on the using. We spent a lot of time on choosing, which I felt that I could’ve even used more on the choosing. Creating, somewhat we spent on and that didn’t seem to be an issue with me but more on the using, and some more on the how it actually impacts decision support. [For example], when you actually take these articles, what are the impacts to the organization?”</i> ▪ <i>“I, too, really appreciated the time we spent on choosing but I really felt that I could’ve used some more experience with the hands on application of the using theme such as the exercise at the last module...those I found were the most helpful pieces and that it really pulled together being able to choose appropriate evidence and then apply it and put it in the appropriate context.”</i> ▪ <i>“For me, some of the concrete ways of ‘using’ would be learning how to give presentations. For example, how to give a presentation or how to write a one-page summary. Maybe we’ve learned this and I’ve forgotten it, but how to write a one-pager if that’s what the CEO wants...more concrete examples of how to do it, not just that you should but that’s how it should be done.”</i> ▪ <i>“For me it would be how to put the information in a physician paper or something that would be useful in our organization and...we did take some of it but learning more ways to bring the information across would be helpful.”</i> ▪ <i>“I know there are big issues where we do need to do a lot of research, but what I come across most days is small things. They’re still decisions that have to be made where you want to provide evidence or background...Just being able to concisely provide something to your supervisor or your senior management team that says ‘this is the issue, these are our options, this is my recommendation, and this is why’. Short and sweet and helpful at that point in time.”</i> ▪ <i>“I would like more of the short timeframe type of thing where you need to give a quick answer and a quick synopsis.” ... “[For example, the] integration exercise. It was a 24-hour timeline to give and present. We had presenters who gave us a problem and a local context and we had 24 hours to identify literature and come up with some solutions, so it was a very ‘just in time’ type of program.”</i> ▪ <i>“I still agree, though, that those quick and dirty reports are not necessarily a focus of SEARCH. It’s more the involved, how do you go and do the literature research and it’s big projects. Most people don’t want, ‘I’ll get back to you next month or I’ll get back to you next spring’. They want it later today or tomorrow.”</i> ▪ <i>“To follow up on the integration exercise...we had the 24 or 48 hours to work on it and we learned all the skills to do it but I don’t know if we ever really learned the final step of how to actually put</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>it into a presentation or how to actually put it into a physician paper or a one-page summary and that, to me, is missing. I do agree that most things that we have been learning have been on the big scale and my job is, 'I need to know this tomorrow, so get it to me as quick as possible', so that part is lacking a little bit."</i>¹</p> <p><u>At what point in the SEARCH curriculum would you introduce that type of exercise?</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"How about the [last] module...to try and squeeze it in before we're done [SEARCH IV]?"</i> ▪ <i>"For the next SEARCH group, have it maybe a little earlier before you have to start presenting. For most people it's terrifying to present especially if you're like me and your presentation skills are just learned here and there and you don't have any style or don't know what should be done."</i> ▪ <i>"Hearing from what [the other participant] was saying about how to do the quick one-pager, the executive summary, I think you could probably start with an exercise like that as early as module three and then going to the full presentation piece by module five. I agree that combining it with [module] six where we had half the group present their individual projects probably increased a lot of the anxiety that maybe didn't need to be there and I think [at module] five you would've had enough skill to be able to perform at that level."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advanced notice for module readings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"The one thing that was difficult for me was that...a lot of times the readings for the modules were posted the week before when all the crisis deadlines were happening so that there was no way...Half the time I didn't get a chance to check the Desktop because I was trying to get all of my stuff done ahead of time because I was going away for a week."</i> ▪ <i>"I'd like to see them put the readings and the curriculum content for the upcoming module on the Desktop sooner and in some cases I realize they're adapting to the needs of this group and changing information and changing evidence and that sort of stuff but the basic structure of research, like a randomized control trial versus another setting doesn't change much so it shouldn't require as much updating and therefore they should know further in advance what the content of that particular session is. I realize that they're adapting it to who can be there...Maybe if they simply just put it up there for those of us to review in advance so that we can be a little more valuable to the discussion that's happening. The first time I hear it I generally don't understand it well enough to talk intelligently until I have that three modules later but if I was to read it in advance...I think I can contribute to that."</i>

¹ Focus group participants wanted to know how the results from the integration exercise were used in practice by participating regions. It was requested that, if possible, this information be shared at the next module.

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Advanced notice regarding faculty attendance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I have another suggestion. That somehow or other, especially if we're trying to meet up with faculty advisors, that there's some way of letting us know either at the beginning of the module who is going to be around and who isn't so that you don't plan for a meeting Thursday with your faculty advisor only to find out that they've left. Or that they aren't coming this particular module. If you're anticipating because you haven't met with a faculty advisor that I'll catch him at the next module and then find out that they aren't coming for this one...[It would help to know, for example], if you want to catch [your advisor] he's only going to be here for Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of this particular module so book your appointment soon...so that we don't procrastinate.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Orientation to SEARCH 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I guess it goes back though to the orientation...You might not remember some of what they did tell us.”</i> ▪ <i>“When you think back, ‘well actually they did tell us that’, but we just couldn't hear it because we just had no clue as to how it works.”...“And we were maybe overwhelmed by other things.”</i> ▪ <i>“There never is a time that the managers and the faculty and participants are together. An orientation where everybody hears the same thing from the same mouth at the same time might be very helpful.”</i> ▪ <i>“In retrospect, [the first module] was focused on technology.”...“You go in there and you just are totally overwhelmed so it would be good to have an orientation [before the focus on technology]. Like the first time we all first met, even as a small group.”</i> ▪ <i>“I think that it was too focused at the beginning, that there could have been more concepts and getting to know people versus here turn on your machine and get looked after.”</i> ▪ <i>“Within our first module...you're pretty well at high anxiety level and so if somebody is saying other things too it's just not registering. If we had an orientation session prior to the technology introduction so that we could understand a bit more about what the expectations were for the full program and hear from some of the past participants as well as faculty members and so on....[such as] a comment sessions where the manager and us were together. [If we did that] before we walked into the technology piece, I think we might have been able to do the technology piece with a bit more relaxation.”</i> ▪ <i>“Maybe [offer] a one day session for those people who could attend just looking at the computer part of it. Maybe have one in Edmonton, one in Calgary and one, even if it's a teleconference, I don't know if that would work, but just to get a lot of the people familiar with the technology so that when it is presented at module one you don't have everybody asking all the same questions. We learned so much in module one, I can't remember anything we learned the first day. I know there's things I'm supposed to do</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>regularly to my computer and I don't because I don't know what they are any more."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I agree with the amount of information that was presented in the first module and I think my suggestion would be to split it a bit. Make it a shorter module, the very first one, and have a lot more informal type learning, not the classroom because that was just too much. Even a couple of orientation days, just very quick two or three days with some group things and some very basic orientation and then going for the next module after that and getting into some of the workload."</i> ▪ <i>"I liken the first module to trying to drink from a fire hose. It was very intense and I agree what's missing that the first day if there was any technology being taught there I have no recollection of it. I agree that the first module and the first days I think we spent more time on developing the group process and establishing the expectations of SEARCH. If we would've had a half day orientation in your own region when they came around to set up your laptops, that would have been helpful."</i> ▪ <i>"Another suggestion I have would be some more small group stuff, [for example], in the first modules put us into groups of seven and have four stations and you go around with your group and do all four stations during the day but then the technology people are only working with seven people at once and not all 28 of us with our hands up in the air. And some of the stuff that's a little more difficult for most people might be easier in a small group."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Workshops and optional sessions 	<p><u><i>Time management workshop</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"In session one or module one, time management skills -- that's something that some people -- I mean it sounds silly but I'm serious, some people know how to do it on their own and some of us struggle with it. Make it an optional session on time management because I really need someone to teach me that."</i> ▪ <i>"I agree with [the previous participant's] comment about time management. There are some of us, the only point in the timeline that matters is when we need to be done and it's useful to see how we should be following that timeframe but, for some people, because there's so much other stuff going on, it doesn't become a priority until you get close to that end point."</i> <p><u><i>Ethics applications, proposal writing, and CV writing workshops</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"It's just all the practical things... We found out we needed to fill out this form that needed original signatures and so we should have all done that, signed the form in Fort McMurray but we didn't know about it and then we figure out we all need a CV so now I have to do my CV while I'm on holidays"... "I agree those are the practical things. I think they should be a part of a course sometime in SEARCH"... "That [could be] part of the orientation"... "We also</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>need a workshop. [For example], a workshop like we did on questionnaires and the one on focus groups...The idea is that if we had an afternoon workshop on writing proposals"...[Or] doing a workshop on how to prepare a CV and what's included because it's very different than the resume. Those kinds of workshops."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"The practical stuff... Because we all have to do it. We all have to go through ethics. We all have to have a CV."</i>

2.4 Awards and Recognition

Focus group participants were asked to comment on the role of awards within the SEARCH program, as well as the requirements for SEARCH completion.

The general consensus among focus group participants was that, while individual variations in opinion may exist, the competitive SEARCH awards (e.g., best project, best group, etc.) were not well-supported by the SEARCH IV cohort overall. Participants described difficulty in determining appropriate candidates for awards as well as uncertainty regarding the criteria and purpose of awards. Non-competitive participation awards were recommended to recognize the unique contributions of each individual.

Participants also supported the idea of public recognition for SEARCH completion through existing media such as the AHFMR calendar and other publications. In addition, some participants indicated that external recognition for SEARCH may be improved if academic credit could be provided upon program completion. However, the definition of SEARCH completion was not unanimous.

With respect to recognition for participation and/or completion of the SEARCH program, participants discussed the differences between *participation* and *completion*. Participants were asked to consider if SEARCH completion should be dependent on completion of the SEARCH projects.

Most participants agreed that full SEARCH completion should require completion of the individual and group projects. A few participants, however, recommended that the SEARCH certificate should be issued for participation in the program, rather than completion of all program requirements such as assignments and projects.

There was also mixed opinion regarding the option of providing various levels of SEARCH program completion. Most participants reported that project completion should be a mandatory program requirement (i.e., the option not to complete projects should not be offered). Other participants suggested that various levels of SEARCH completion could range from participation in the modules, completion of assignments, to completion of projects.

The following factors were recommended for consideration if SEARCH completion is dependent upon project completion:

- Develop process and structure to request extensions, should projects not be completed within the two-year time period.
- Determine process for “make-up” of missed modules or incomplete assignments.
- Clearly delineate SEARCH completion requirements including attendance at modules, assignment and project completion.
- Consider implications for participants who don’t finish projects within the two year program due to lack of organizational support and dedicated time to work on projects. This consideration was linked with communicating the importance (to organizations) of providing dedicated time for SEARCH participation as well as developing the project topic and question in collaboration with the manager to meet organizational needs.

Illustrative participant quotations regarding SEARCH awards and recognition are presented in Table 7.

Table 7. Awards and Recognition

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
Awards and recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Concerns regarding competitive awards <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I don’t necessarily agree that people should get awards, individual awards or the best group, because I think they’re just different.”</i> ▪ <i>“I agree with you about the awards... I don’t like them. [For example], what’s the point? What’s the benefit of awards? Is it supposed to drive us harder so that we’ll get some award? I don’t see any particular benefit to what we gain out of SEARCH to do an award. I just felt funny at [the end of SEARCH III] when there were three people vying for SEARCHer of the year and one got it and two didn’t, and I’m looking at the two people thinking, ‘how do you feel?’ I don’t see what the benefit is.”</i> ▪ <i>“I think recognition is important but not to sort of hit one against the other. The bottom line is everybody...has worked real hard. Some people may have accomplished more than others or accomplished something more tangible. They got the reports and the rest of it done or done further than just choosing in their individual [project] and that’s fine but that doesn’t discount what you have done, the effort that you’ve put in to get where you’re at. It doesn’t mean that you’ve learned any less than they have.”</i> ▪ <i>“You can have an outcome of a group project where the people absolutely were horrible to each other but they got this great outcome, but nobody else knows their group process. Who is going to judge that? Not that I’m saying that happened...[but] nobody else can make that judgment.”</i> ▪ <i>“I think we had some discussion on our Desktop at the very beginning that this cohort, and maybe I’m speaking for more than just myself, but that we did not necessarily agree with the SEARCH recognition awards, that we would not be able to choose</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>which one was the best project or which one was the best group, that we all worked our very hardest on whatever project that we were working on. I don't agree with the SEARCH recognition [awards]."</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"I was a little unclear on what their criteria were for the recognition. We [had] some overall idea but I found it difficult to pick out one or two, or an individual and a group project, because I think they were all good."</i> ▪ <i>"I don't particularly agree [with the awards]. I do feel that everybody's going to be working as hard as they can on the projects and, on the other hand, I also recognize that people who go above and beyond and do a fantastic job should be recognized but I don't necessarily think that needs to be in the form of an awards night and presentations. I think the hard work is recognition by itself in the cohort."</i> ▪ <i>"We'll get our recognition from the people that we're working through this with who say, 'wow that was interesting', or 'great job', or ask you a question about it. That's enough for me."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suggestions regarding participation awards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"[It would be better to have] some fun thing for everybody."</i> ▪ <i>"From an award standpoint, we talked about it [before]... The discussion was around the fact that awards should be given out – everybody gets an award for something, what the rest of the group felt that their biggest contribution is or, for example, [one person] gets the laughter award because she always kept us laughing or whatever the case may be... so that everybody gets recognized for having contributed."</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Public recognition for SEARCH completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"There should be some way of giving some exposure to the participants, those who have gone through the program and have successfully completed their projects. [There are] various media to get that type of information out so that right across the regions people will know about these participants and that these people have successfully completed the program."</i> ▪ <i>"That's a very good point because AHFMR has the calendar that they do every year, and they do their monthly publication. I don't see too many SEARCH people in those things."</i>
Completion status	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Full SEARCH completion should be dependent on project completion (predominant view) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>"If the projects aren't done then you haven't finished the SEARCH program because the projects are really the applicability of what we've learned... They're not being scored and graded but it is proof that we've taken what we've learned and we put it into something."</i> ▪ <i>"If I use the academics as an example, if you don't complete the work you're not going to get that academic recognition."</i> ▪ <i>"I wouldn't feel good about hanging a certificate up or accepting or receiving a certificate if I'd known I wasn't finished."</i> ▪ <i>"We all kind of thought it was strange that everyone in SEARCH III</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p><i>was getting all these certificates going up and yet nobody, maybe one person had completed their project.”</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I’d almost say it was a joke but it was just sort of, ‘what do you need to do to get a SEARCH certificate?’ You don’t need to have finished anything.”</i> ▪ <i>“I agree and that might really push this along because really the message to us was you don’t have to get it done by the end of June. That was really the message to us.”</i> ▪ <i>“I think you’d have a problem with a different certification level if you complete your projects, because that gives an expectation that you can do SEARCH and not your projects and I think if you didn’t do the projects like individual and group project you’re not really giving everything to the program and someone else could have been in that spot that would be doing something for your organization. So I don’t know if people should be given the opportunity to not finish their projects.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emphasize participation versus completion (alternative view) 	<p><i>Most participants recommended that SEARCH completion should be dependent on project completion. In contrast, a few participants preferred an emphasis on participation (versus completion). For example:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I see the SEARCH program as being the modules. The learning that takes place within the projects, either individual or group, is of benefit of course but I think that the completion should be more a SEARCH participant type thing as opposed to a SEARCH completion. [For example], you participated in the SEARCH IV cohort...I don’t really like the completion part with all the projects because some people may not complete the projects. Some of the SEARCH III people are still working on projects. I think, as a cohort, we had thought that we would be different. I’m not sure whether we will be or not but, anyway, that’s my view is that it should be more of a participant thing as opposed to a completion thing.”</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Compromise or different levels of participation versus completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>“I think the project work is important but recognizing the fact that not everyone might be done their projects the end. I think recognizing the fact that they have been working on their projects means that you sort of completed SEARCH IV because I wouldn’t want to see only some people get their SEARCH completion certificate at the final dinner and others not just because you haven’t finished your project.”</i> ▪ <i>“Maybe different levels of completion might be, [for example], you completed all the modules, and then when you’re done your projects you get that extra certificate. It might be nice to receive a year down the road to say, ‘that’s why I stuck around’.”</i> ▪ <i>“Or [when you finish the projects], you can get the little gold star to put on your certificate...”</i> ▪ <i>“...Maybe you can get the certificate when you participate but you don’t get [AHFMR] to sign the certificate until you’ve met all the</i>

RESPONSE CATEGORY	ILLUSTRATIVE PARTICIPANT QUOTATIONS
	<p>requirements.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “I also think that there needs to be some recognition for those groups who do go above and beyond and are actually able to complete their projects. Maybe not within the time limit, so if you’re looking at SEARCH III [participants] who are maybe now just finishing their projects, I don’t necessarily see anything wrong with some type of recognition that they have finally completed all of the tasks that were set out for them.”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Factors to consider 	<p><u>Need for extensions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “What happens though for the group that...[for example], they get to the ethics approval and the data collection but SEARCH is over before they actually get their final report done...Are they considered as not having done their project?” ▪ “I think then they put a letter of request in, to have to be completed within six months...You request an extension.” <p><u>Process for missed modules</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Having been absent [for one of the modules], my question would be if this was another program and you missed a credit or a course, you’d be able to make it up. What would those of us do who missed a module? How would we be able to make it up to complete it?” <p><u>Lack of organizational support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “My concern of having had completion status by completing all parts of it is that if you don’t finish your group project on time and you’re just not getting support from your region after your two-year commitment to SEARCH, then you have to do it on your own time.” <p><u>Clarity of expectations</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “If they’re going to offer various levels of completion I think they clearly need to delineate it. For me, there’s two or three particular assignments where I’ve finished partly but I never got to part B and I haven’t gone back to complete them all but to tell me now I don’t get to complete SEARCH because I didn’t do those three things, that’s fine except I would have liked to have known that [at the beginning.]”
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academic credit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “If I were to change my job tomorrow I would want to be able to say that I’d spent two years in SEARCH. For [many employers] that would be kind of meaningless...So it would be good if somehow when we say we’ve been through SEARCH that it’s appropriately stated this is a graduate level course although there is no academic recognition for it.” ▪ “I know they’re working on this, but it would be helpful if you could get credit for a couple of courses...so that you could take this and go to university and get a masters degree and at least get credit for two courses so it lightens the load because you’ve already completed it...university transfer kind of equivalencies.”

2.5 Other: Rural and Remote Connections

Participants from remote and rural areas were asked to provide any additional comments or concerns with respect to their experiences within SEARCH. Overall, no major concerns among rural or remote participants were expressed. It was accepted that meeting face-to-face was often not practical, and there was a sense at times of missing out on activities in urban settings. The connections within the SEARCH network were perceived to alleviate isolation, although it was noted that the connections within the SEARCH IV cohort were more established than those with previous cohorts. Examples of comments provided by participants from rural and remote locations are provided below.

- *“Just by virtue of the fact that we’re part of the SEARCH network keeps the more rural or more remote areas connected. My region has one previous participant who’s a few hundred kilometers away, so it’s still not of any value to get together face-to-face because that’s not going to happen, so it’s more of the electronic connections. I find the cohort that I’m in is a lot more connected than thinking about trying to connect with previous ones.”*
- *“I have felt very connected to this cohort. If you need to know something I know I could pick up the phone or send an e-mail...try to get a hold of someone from the cohort to find information or to the faculty and that they’ll definitely reply. You know that you always have that contact out there, but sometimes you feel like you’re missing out on something when you hear about the Edmonton or Calgary meetings because they are able to get together more often because everybody’s closer together. I’d say it’s probably as good as it’s going to get for now considering the distance and time.”*

2.6 Closing

In closing the focus group discussions, participants were asked to provide any additional comments and issues for consideration. Participants provided a variety of closing statements and key issues to be communicated back to the program staff and faculty. The majority of these statements were embedded within the four main areas of inquiry and included in the respective sections of this report.

In addition to the comments regarding perceived impact, projects, curriculum, awards, and recognition three additional overarching themes emerged within participant closing comments: appreciation, emphasis on constructive feedback, and closure. Participants expressed appreciation for being part of the SEARCH program. Furthermore, participants emphasized that comments provided during focus groups were intended as constructive feedback, and an overall high level of satisfaction with the program was reported. Finally, participants anticipated a sense of loss upon program completion, given the positive experiences and relationships that had developed over the past two years. While it was perceived that these connections would continue post-SEARCH participation, a sense of mourning the formal end of the program was described. Illustrative participant quotations for each of these categories are provided below.

Appreciation

- *“One thing that really comes to mind is how much I appreciate the dedication that the faculty and the staff of SEARCH bring to this program. That is such a powerful motivator for me because it just seems that everyone is so accommodating and they’re willing to drop everything to meet your needs. They all bring a very high level of dedication and I appreciate that very much.”*
- *“I feel very privileged to go through [the SEARCH program].”*

Emphasis on Constructive Feedback

- *“I think the faculty and staff are doing a good job and that hopefully it doesn’t appear that we have all these negative comments because I have positive comments too, they just don’t come out in a ‘how to improve SEARCH’ kind of context.”*
- *“Again, I just kind of wanted to reiterate what [another participant] was saying that I do feel this is a very good program and that while we may have been making some comments today, it’s all in the light of how we could make things better. I do feel that they deliver a very quality product so I want to be sure about that.”*

Closure

- *“There’s something about doing a focus group [toward the end of the program]... that it kind of seems like you’re bringing this whole thing to the end so there’s kind of a bit of mourning over the loss of what has come to be a very good group of friends.”*

3.0 Summary of Findings and Implications

Participant feedback provided during the focus group discussions was considered in terms of implications for program delivery. A summary of findings and potential implications is presented in Table 8.

Table 8. Summary of Findings and Implications

CATEGORY	KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
Impact		
Participant-reported examples of program impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Skill development, increased awareness of, and access to, tools and resources (primarily through the SEARCH Desktop), and an extended network emerged as key benefits of initial SEARCH participation. In comparison with previous evaluation results, the perceived short-term impact of SEARCH participation has remained relatively consistent over time and across SEARCH cohorts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key findings confirm that the SEARCH program continues to be of perceived value and brings immediate benefits (i.e., during the program) for participants. ▪ The findings provide additional validation regarding the short-term benefits of SEARCH participation including skill development, access to resources, and extended networks.
Projects		
Project progress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some anxiety regarding SEARCH projects was expressed. For some participants, the anxiety was related to lack of clarity regarding project expectations and scope. Other participants expressed difficulty maintaining a balance between the individual and group project, and reported that the group project often took precedence over individual project work. It was noted that the suggestion to focus on individual projects during the first year and group projects in the second year did not occur in practice. ▪ Some participants expressed uncertainty regarding the expectations for a completed SEARCH project. For example, what would it look like? Would a completed SEARCH project be a 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key findings highlight the need to further communicate expectations regarding project scope and anticipated progress for participants who may be experiencing uncertainty or anxiety. ▪ Findings also suggest that increased adherence to clearly defined timelines would be appreciated and may help to keep projects on track. However, flexibility to grant extensions for extenuating circumstances should also be maintained. ▪ Finally, participant feedback regarding group size should be considered during the creation of future groups (e.g., limiting group size). If

CATEGORY	KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
	<p>written report, a poster presentation, or other format?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There was also lack of clarity regarding clearly defined deadlines. Participants expressed appreciation for the adult learning approach within SEARCH; however, most participants agreed that clearly defined deadlines would help to encourage progress and project completion. ▪ Focus group participants agreed that group size should not exceed four to six members. Larger group sizes (e.g., groups with eight or nine members) resulted in increased logistical concerns. 	<p>group size is not limited, lessons learned from previous cohorts could be shared.</p>
Role of faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some participants indicated that the support from their faculty advisor(s) had been excellent and could not think of potential areas for improvement. ▪ Other participants expressed several key challenges, including difficulty getting in touch with their advisor and long delays between contacts. Other participants noted that their advisor likely would have been supportive had s/he made any progress on the individual project, but because progress was not made the advisor was not consulted. In retrospect, it was reported that having established key milestones at the onset and scheduling regular meetings would have helped to keep the project moving forward. ▪ Different levels of faculty support were requested by participants. Some participants expressed a preference for being self-directed and stated that they did not need additional support from their faculty advisor. Other participants would have preferred more hands-on support, direction, and feedback. ▪ With respect to faculty support for group projects, some participants 	<p>Participants provided the following recommendations for improving the roles between SEARCH participant and faculty advisor with respect to individual and group project support :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Encourage regular communication (e.g., monthly updates to the faculty advisor). ▪ Book appointments early on. These meetings may serve as milestones (e.g., knowing that you have an appointment booked can motivate progress). ▪ Establish guidelines for turn-around time (e.g., between initiating contact, submitting materials or progress reports, and receiving feedback). ▪ Maintain flexibility and adaptability (e.g., some participants may require more direction than others – the degree of support, structure, and regularity of meetings should be negotiated early on between the participant and advisor).

CATEGORY	KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
	<p>described challenges within the process of being assigned a group project advisor.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Overall, participants expressed appreciation for the respect that was inherent in the adult learning model utilized by the SEARCH program. However, it was perceived that finding a balance between self-directedness and direction from the faculty would be helpful for keeping the projects “on track”. 	
Role of organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participants reported diverse levels of organizational support within their respective organizations. ▪ Some organizations were perceived as extremely understanding and supportive. Examples of demonstrating support included providing dedicated time for SEARCH including time away from the office and the flexibility to work from home. Providing dedicated replacement time helped participants allocate work time to SEARCH projects. A few participants further stated that the need to publicly present project findings helped to justify using work time for SEARCH projects. ▪ Other organizations were perceived as less supportive and in some cases less understanding about the goals of the SEARCH program. Organizational changes (including new management) often contributed to this challenge. Participants recommended increased involvement of their manager through regularly scheduled meetings between the participant, manager, and faculty advisor. ▪ Finally, even in the most supportive environments, some participants indicated that it was still difficult to work on SEARCH projects during work time. Two key reasons emerged: a concern of becoming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key findings reinforce the value of continuing to address issues related to organizational support, such as encouraging protected time for SEARCH participation. ▪ Findings also highlight the nature of many SEARCH participants regardless of organizational support, further illustrating the ongoing challenge of achieving 40% protected time in practice. ▪ Participants recommended increased integration between the SEARCH participant, manager, and faculty advisor via regular meetings between all three individuals.

CATEGORY	KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
	<p>“invisible” within the organization, and the characteristic of being a “high achiever”.</p>	
<p>Utilization of the Desktop project tool</p>	<p>Reported benefits of the project tool included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The categories outlined in the tool were perceived as helpful in the early stages of project development. ▪ The group project “file storage” function facilitated information sharing between group members with access to high speed Internet. <p>Reported challenges to fully utilizing the project tool included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Logistical challenges such as lack of spell-check and editing functions available through word processing programs. ▪ Lack of perceived fit and relevance for moving the project forward and for capturing process-related progress (e.g., ethics applications). ▪ Perception of updating the project tool as an extra step in addition to other types of progress updates (e.g., e-mail communication with faculty advisors). ▪ Lack of fit within defined categories for the individual “choosing” project. ▪ Lack of feedback from faculty and/or program staff regarding use of the Project Tool (e.g., uncertain whether the right information is being captured, and whether the entries are being reviewed). ▪ Inability of group members without high speed internet access to use the group project tool at home. ▪ Lack of progress on projects resulting in lack of information with which to update the project tool. <p>Additional suggestions regarding use of the Project Tool included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use of the project tool during 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The findings help to explain the observed low utilization rate of the Desktop project tool for updating project progress. ▪ The findings also provide support for the repository function of the tool, including requests to extend this capability to the individual project section. ▪ The findings highlight an opportunity for possible revisions to the project tool (e.g., integrating word processing capabilities and/or enabling attachments) or revisions to the approach requested for project updates.

CATEGORY	KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
	<p>meetings between SEARCH participants and faculty advisors, if it is considered an important tool.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of file storage capabilities for the individual project (similar to the group project repository function). 	
Curriculum		
Curriculum themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most participants agreed that the curriculum themes made sense to them “now”, at this point of the program. Participants further indicated that they liked the themes and found them to be a helpful learning framework. Many participants, however, expressed an initial lack of understanding and confusion regarding the curriculum themes. An eventual “a’ha” moment when everything started to make sense was described by many participants. ▪ The timing of the a’ha moment differed among participants. For some participants, the moment occurred after the second or third module. For others, it occurred upon searching the Desktop for specific lecture notes (e.g., by date and module location) and also making the connection by curriculum theme (e.g., choosing theme). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The findings provide support for the curriculum themes. Participants liked the themes; however, they reported initial confusion regarding how they fit together and what they meant. It may be helpful to share this finding with incoming SEARCH V participants to alleviate initial concerns. ▪ The findings further illustrate the importance of allowing time between modules to facilitate understanding of concepts. Many participants reported that it just took time for everything to come together. This finding may also help alleviate concerns of incoming SEARCH participants.
Curriculum content and delivery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participants reported being overwhelmed during the first module. Some participants reported that the first module focused heavily on technology. These participants recommended that the technology component be addressed either in advance of the first module, or within small groups as opposed to one large group. Other participants recollected that the first module focused heavily on group process and discussing expectations for SEARCH. ▪ Participants reported that the social 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regardless of participant recollections, there was consensus that a great deal of information was presented during the first module, much of which was not fully absorbed. Most participants supported the notion of a pre-SEARCH orientation to minimize the experience of information overload. ▪ Findings further provide support for the importance of relationship building opportunities within the

CATEGORY	KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
	<p>support and networking opportunities were important components of the course structure. Knowing that others were struggling, too, was reported to help build cohesiveness within the group. In addition, the adult learning model utilized by the SEARCH faculty was described as one of the most valuable components of the SEARCH program. Participants further expressed appreciation for the responsiveness to evaluation feedback and the recognition that changes could be made throughout the program.</p>	<p>SEARCH program, the creation of a safe environment, utilization of an adult learning model, and responsiveness to feedback.</p> <p>Participant suggestions for additional learning opportunities during the SEARCH program included the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ More hands-on application of the “using” theme, similar to and building on the integration exercise delivered during the sixth module. ▪ Optional workshops to develop practical skills such as CV writing, ethics applications, and time management.
Completion and Recognition		
Awards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The general consensus among focus group participants was that the competitive SEARCH awards were not well-supported by the SEARCH IV cohort. Participants described difficulty in determining appropriate candidates for awards as well as uncertainty regarding the criteria and purpose of awards. Non-competitive participation awards were recommended to recognize the unique contributions of each individual. ▪ Participants also supported the idea of public recognition for SEARCH completion through existing media such as the AHFMR calendar and other publications. In addition, some participants indicated that external recognition for SEARCH may be improved if academic credit could be provided upon program completion. However, the definition of SEARCH completion was not unanimous. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ In consideration of participant feedback (both from the Desktop forum and focus group discussions) the decision regarding SEARCH awards should be further discussed by staff and faculty and other key stakeholders. ▪ Alternatives to competitive awards may be considered.
Completion status	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ With respect to recognition for participation and/or completion of the 	The following factors were recommended for consideration

CATEGORY	KEY FINDINGS	IMPLICATIONS
	<p>SEARCH program, participants discussed the differences between <i>participation</i> and <i>completion</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Most participants agreed that full SEARCH completion should require completion of the individual and group projects. A few participants, however, recommended that the SEARCH certificate should be issued for participation in the program, rather than completion of all program requirements such as assignments and projects. ▪ There was also mixed opinion regarding the option of providing various levels of SEARCH program completion. Most participants reported that project completion should be a mandatory program requirement (i.e., the option not to complete projects should not be offered). Other participants suggested that various levels of SEARCH completion could range from participation in the modules, completion of assignments, to completion of projects. 	<p>if SEARCH completion is dependent upon project completion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop process and structure to request extensions. ▪ Determine process for “make-up” of missed modules or incomplete assignments. ▪ Clearly delineate SEARCH completion requirements including attendance at modules, assignment and project completion. ▪ Consider implications for participants who don’t finish projects due to lack of organizational support and dedicated time. This consideration was linked with communicating the importance of providing dedicated time for SEARCH participation as well as developing the project topic and question in collaboration with the manager to meet organizational needs.
Closing		
Appreciation and Emphasis on Constructive Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participants expressed appreciation for being part of the SEARCH program. Participants further emphasized that comments provided during focus groups were intended as constructive feedback. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participants reported high satisfaction with the SEARCH program. Suggestions for improvement were offered in the spirit of critical reflection and not intended as negative criticism of the program.
Closure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participants anticipated a sense of loss upon program completion, given the positive experiences and relationships that had developed over the past two years. While it was perceived that these connections would continue post-SEARCH participation, a sense of mourning the formal end of the program was described. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It may be helpful to address the anticipation of loss and strategies for staying connected during the final module.

Appendix: Focus Group Guide

INTRODUCTION

10 minutes

Thank you for agreeing to participate in today's focus group discussion [1 of 3 scheduled focus groups]. The purpose of the focus group is to gather qualitative feedback from SEARCH participants to help staff and faculty plan the remainder of the SEARCH IV program, and to incorporate any changes into the final module (October 2004) and wrap-up (Spring 2005) if appropriate. Your feedback will also inform development of subsequent iterations of SEARCH (e.g., SEARCH V scheduled to begin Spring 2005). With your permission, today's discussion will be audio-taped for transcription and analysis. Verbatim comments may be used for illustrative purposes in the final report, but comments will not be attributed to specific individuals. The only individuals who will hear the recording or see the transcript will be myself and the transcriptionist. Do you have any questions before we start? *[Address questions, proceed with participant introductions, and initiate discussion.]*

PERCEIVED IMPACT & APPLICATION OF SKILLS

20 minutes

1. **If a friend or colleague asked you to describe how they could benefit from SEARCH, what would you tell them?**
2. **Please describe the impact of SEARCH on your work life and personal life.**

Explore the extent to which areas of short-term impact identified by SIII participants resonates with SIV including increased personal and professional networks; increased access to information and resources such as the Desktop; and increased skills related to choosing and using evidence.

Include additional probing questions if necessary (depending on the discussion that emerges from the initial guiding questions stated above):

- *Have you had the opportunity to apply the skills you have developed through SEARCH in your everyday work? If yes, what skills have been applied? In what ways?*
- *What makes it easy or difficult to bring what you learn from SEARCH into your work?*
- *In what ways are you supported or not supported by your organization to apply what you have learned in SEARCH?*
- *Beyond your day-to-day work, are there any aspects of SEARCH that might contribute to broader development potential over time? In what ways?*

INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP PROJECTS

30 minutes

3. **In the MOU between AHFMR and each participant, there is an agreement to undertake both an individual and group project. For the next portion of the focus group, I'd like to invite your feedback regarding how the projects are going, what's working well, and what aspects of the projects could be improved.**

Initiate discussion regarding SEARCH projects, beginning with a general sense of how the projects are going, using the following key probes where necessary:

- Overall Sense of Progress (both individual and group projects);
- Value and Relevance of Projects;
- Role of Faculty (Support, Feedback, Direction, etc.);
- Role of Timelines/Deadlines/Consequences for Project Completion; and
- Desktop use (*i.e., further discuss the expectations with respect to updating project information and progress on the Desktop based on the Course Coordinator's introduction; probe to understand reasons for use and non-use of the Desktop to update information*).

CURRICULUM CONTENT AND OVERALL THEMES**30 minutes**

The SEARCH program has many facets including face-to-face residential modules, inter-module activities, individual and group projects, the Desktop, integrated curriculum, faculty team support, the SEARCH network and SEARCH manager support. It is beyond the scope of the mid-point assessment to address each element of the SEARCH program in depth. However, I would like to invite your feedback regarding a few elements of the SEARCH curriculum and design, beginning with your perception of the Choosing, Using, and Creating themes.

As you know, the skills and knowledge learned through SEARCH are based on an integrated curriculum including the themes Choosing, Using, and Creating Evidence....

4. Please comment on the extent to which these themes provide a helpful or unhelpful learning framework.

Now I'd like to invite your feedback about some of the specific content areas being taught in the program. The SEARCH curriculum includes a broad variety of content areas (e.g., epidemiology, critical appraisal, etc.).

5. What aspects of the curriculum do you find most valuable? Most relevant to your daily work? Least?

6. Are there areas of learning you expected to have, and did not experience in SEARCH thus far? What topics might be valuable additions? When would you introduce them? What would you trade off? Are there areas of learning in SEARCH that you did not expect?

SEARCH RECOGNITION**20 minutes**

Please comment on the different levels of recognition for SEARCH participation.

- 7. SEARCH Completion Certificates** (Invite discussion and feedback regarding potential different levels of completion, criteria for completion, etc.)
- 8. SEARCH Recognition Awards** (Invite discussion and feedback regarding role and purpose of the SEARCH recognition awards.)

CLOSING**10 minutes**

9. Of everything we have discussed today, what key messages should be conveyed to program staff and faculty to facilitate planning for the rest of SIV and development of SV?

Probe if necessary. For example, can you suggest any ways to improve the delivery of the SEARCH program (e.g., top 3 things to change?) What elements should stay the same?

Thank you very much for your time and participation.