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An Exploration of the Characteristics of Public Relations in Regards to Face-to-Face Versus Distance Learning in Two Private Liberal Arts Higher Education Settings

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by

Cessna Catherine Smith Winslow

A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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School of Education

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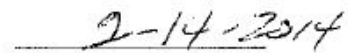
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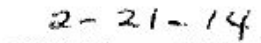
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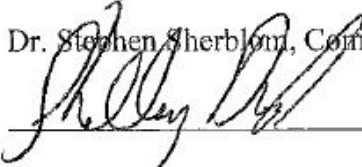
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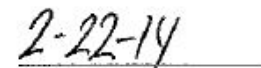
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Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Cessna Catherine Winslow

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Abstract

This study explored perceptions of Public Relations (PR) among graduate higher education publics regarding distance learning as contrasted with face-to-face learning contexts. The research questions assessed student, faculty and administrator perceptions of characteristics of PR: trust, communication, quality, respect and rigor.

Participants included students and professors who had experienced both online and face-to-face learning, as well as administrators from two private universities. The larger of the two schools was in the Midwest region of the United States, and at the time of this study, was relatively new to online instruction. The smaller school was located in the Southeast region and offered an established online instruction program. Survey responses were collected from 69 students and 108 faculty, staff, and administrators. Out of those surveyed, six students, seven faculty, and six administrators were interviewed. Furthermore, I interviewed three human resources administrators from educational establishments who had experience hiring people with graduate education degrees. In addition, I analyzed student evaluations of courses taught both online and face-to-face at the smaller university.

Following completion of qualitative coding of interview data, examination of numeric descriptive trends within survey responses, and analysis of course evaluations, the findings revealed overall positive perceptions with strengths identified in online communication, respect, and rigor and weaknesses in trust and quality. Recommended improvements included strengthening academic integrity efforts through the consistent use of anti-plagiarism software and implementation of a rigorous culture of ethical enforcement. There is also a need for proactive provision of professional development for

online teaching to provide the most student-efficient distance learning environment. Additionally, results of this study indicated a need for restructure of student evaluations of teaching to ensure assessment of the unique dynamics of online coursework.

The significance of these findings is two-fold: First, the data can potentially help university administrators effectively connect with internal and external publics and possibly foster collaboration between administration, faculty, and PR staff. Secondly, the insights reported from the analyzed data may be useful in rationalizing institutional beliefs and subsequent needs when writing departmental or institutional strategic improvement plans.

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Chapter One

In his book, *When Doctors Become Patients,* psychiatrist Klitzman (2008) described his experiences and the lessons learned when he became ill and needed medical attention. Sharing his insightful story, he reflected, "The experience forced me to cross the border from provider to patient and taught me how much I didn't know" (2007, p.4).

I can relate to Klitzman's (2008) experience from my own experience in a different setting. Until I became a doctoral student my previous classroom experience had been two-plus decades earlier when I earned a Masters of Arts in Journalism. Since then I have, however, served as an adjunct instructor and an assistant professor. In the decades that have passed since I completed my master's degree, much has changed. Take, for example, how my earlier course papers were written on a typewriter and errors were adjusted with correction fluid. Contrast that process to now where writing is done on a computer that prompts me about a possible error and, with a simple key stroke, the correction is made. During my undergraduate experiences most of my classmates were close in age. In more recent times it is not unusual for a student to learn alongside a cohort which varies greatly in age (Aud et. al., (2012). Being in a classroom with sometimes three different generations adds a new dynamic to the learning experience.

Another notable change is how adult students attend school and how the instruction is delivered. As of this writing, instead of meeting in a classroom face-to-face a large population of students participates in learning experiences online (Aslanian & Clinefelter, 2012, p. 4). This format varies in pedagogy and delivery method with some online courses being taught entirely at a distance and others employing a hybrid arrangement where they meet partially online and partially face-to-face (Nagel, 2009;

Lorenzetti, 2011). Enrollment size is also varied. While some colleges allow thousands of students to enroll in a class, other schools prefer to restrict the size of their distance learning courses (Marques & McGuire, 2013), which can increase the tuition cost. Explaining the costs associated with the smaller class sizes of online learning, an administrator at a private liberal arts college shared "In a (traditional) class we might have 30-35 people but our (online) limit is 20" (University administrator, personal communication, August 5, 2013). Another distinguishing characteristic of distance learning is that throughout an entire term it is possible that none of the participants will actually meet in person (Moore & Kearsley, 2012).

As impersonal as that may sound, distance learning is increasing in popularity. In their book *Distance Education: A Systems View of Online Learning*, authors Moore and Kearsley (2012) reported that "In the 2008-2009 school year, over 4 million college students were taking at least one distance learning course online" (p. 48). As of this writing that number continues to increase (Aslanian & Clinefelter, p. 4.).

In 2011 I became one of those students when I took my first online class, a course in student affairs. Though I had taught online, until I began my doctoral studies, I had never been a distance learner. That experience, as Klitzman (2008) noted, has "taught me how much I didn't know" (p.4).

There are many advantages to online learning, both for the instructor and the student. As a professor, I enjoyed the flexibility of being able to work where I chose. For instance it was not uncommon for me to instruct sitting by a fire while I savored a cup of coffee. However, the price for that comfort and flexibility was that online teaching was very demanding since I was expected to deliver instructional services and respond to

questions during a varied and wide timeframe. In addition to those constraints, online teaching requires instructors to be thorough and clear in their written communication and mindful of what their words communicate since students do not have the benefit of visual and auditory cues. This represents a challenge in that emoticons and abbreviated expressions are not adequate substitutions for the lilt, pauses, volume, and non-verbal cues and messages provided in person.

Likewise, online learning affords benefits for students. Research showed that students appreciated being able to learn according to individual schedules and preferred location, "I don't have to show up to a classroom at a specific time. I can study at my dining room table in my pajamas with no makeup if I want!"(Aslanian & Clinefelter, 2012, p. 16).

As a result of the flexibility afforded by asynchronous interaction, some students discover and need to be more communicative in written word, just as some instructors. Since two-way, real-time interaction that occurs in a traditional classroom is typically replaced with asynchronous written discussions, the quality of the written exchanges becomes more important. Not seeing the instructor's or classmates' expressions or hearing their vocal tones, limits the ability to collectively and fully engage. It is there that questions of "public relations" (PR) come in. Fostering a relationship with someone not physically seen nor heard can be challenging. In a similar manner, connecting with a public using communication that is mediated by technology can be difficult.

After I became a distance learner one of the issues I began to see more clearly was how some of the student discussions (or posts, as they are also called) seemed shallow and pointless.   As a professor, I was often dumbfounded by the lack of application and

content that was filled with grammatical and typographical errors, which one colleague aptly described as "unintelligible dribble" (personal communication, February, 2012). Wanting to explore this dynamic further, for a doctoral course project, I interviewed students and educators and wrote about their online communication experiences-specifically discussing their perceptions of course discussions. That project planted the seeds for this dissertation as the public relations professional in me saw that there were issues relevant to my interest in relating to different publics. My study soon took form.

As I researched communication and quality issues in distance learning with both students and instructors for the course project, I discovered I was not alone in my observations and frustrations. The insights and comments by the educators and students participating in the project were enlightening. They expressed public relations concerns with regard to distance learning. In reporting a few of those comments, pseudonyms are used to maintain confidentiality for the participants.

Linda was an administrator at a private college where she also taught online graduate courses. Linda found discussion learning enjoyable when students utilized the course readings and applied their personal and professional experiences. That noted, she expressed concern over what she described as a "lack of doctoral-level responses with discussion questions and participation posts" (Winslow, 2012 p. 5). She adds, "It is very challenging to create a learning community online when students are not providing well though-out, substantive responses" (2012 p. 5).

To address these problems, Linda modified her syllabi to be more specific about the discussion requirements and planned to communicate her expectations clearly. "In my welcome email, I will be adding a statement about the importance of participating at the

doctoral level, integrating the reading material as well as personal and professional experiences" (Winslow, 2012 p. 5). Linda also intended to incorporate use of a rubric which she thought would communicate her expectations, an idea she borrowed from Rick, a colleague at the school where she taught.

Rick was also having difficulty evaluating the online discussion posts of his students. Interaction on the discussion boards in his courses represented a significant part of the course grade, but he too was often confronted with students' posts that showed little thought or effort. "It was frustrating trying to grade posts that might have technically answered the questions I asked, but didn't demonstrate any real reflection on the prompts or reading material," he noted. He added, "Rubrics are a best practice in assessment, so it only made sense to develop one for my discussions" (Winslow, 2012 p. 6).

Rick reported that since he began using the rubric in his courses, grading discussions became more time consuming but more fair and straightforward. He has also noticed improvements in his students' posts, which, in his words, "made the effort totally worth it" (Winslow, 2012 p. 6).

David completed a bachelor's degree in Communication Studies from a small, parochial, urban college. During his studies he took four online courses. He agreed that online students needed to do their part to foster a quality learning environment and he added that professors should be purposeful in their participation.

Instructors who do not use the comments and feedback feature in online learning forums are missing the point. Just as I would expect feedback written on a hard copy assignment, I expect some kind of feedback from online assignments. It's

frustrating when you receive no feedback and continue to lose points without knowing why or even how to improve. (Winslow, 2012 p. 7)

David recognized that instructors do not have comments for every assignment or post, but observed, "I think instructors who do not provide any feedback portray themselves as teachers who aren't concerned with their students learning the material. Feedback is the nature of the learning process and I'm afraid we're losing that in online learning" (Winslow, 2012 p. 7).

The point about desire for quality was illustrated in *Business Practices in Higher Education* when an author said, "Customers are usually happy if they get more than they expect; however, students may tend to be less satisfied with the instructor and the course if the coursework is intensive" (Kretovics, 2011, p. 19). Some students may take issue with that statement. Those who wish to get the most out of their learning may be disappointed when professors do not provide a quality experience. Learning should be purposeful. These thoughts, along the doctoral course project interview responses, inspired the selection of topics for research questions and provided the purpose for this study.

Rationale

While much is written about rigor in distance learning and PR in general, little research specifically addresses public relations in distance learning (Deggs et al, 2010; Dominick, 2009; Lattimore et. al., 2012). I believe this gap in research literature is, in part, because of a lack of understanding of what PR is and the value it brings to higher education in general, for both the traditional setting and the distance format. Examining

characteristics of PR and its relationship to higher education in a manner similar to the process followed in this study can serve to help clarify this matter.

Understanding the role that rigor, trust, and communication play in providing a mutually beneficial educational experience is essential in the distance learning forum as those factors are key components of the relationship between students and instructors. The literature supports this and is clear about the challenges of computer-mediated communication and the importance of fostering relationships between instructors and students (Aslanian & Clinefelter, 2012; Ghezzi, 2007; Sherblom 2010). For this study, I will be exploring these issues from the view of students, faculty, administrators, and employers. To keep this study focused rather than overly broad, my research will address perceptions of those connected to graduate education.

Distance learning is at a PR crossroads. While it is gaining in popularity, some professionals believe research needs to be done to establish credible ways of providing distance learning. To remain a viable learning format, online learning providers and consumers will benefit from research showing which strategies and approaches are effective and which are not. In 2010 a poll of 449 randomly selected human resource (HR) professionals, by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) found that 60 percent preferred job applicants with a degree from a traditional institution over those who earned an online degree, presuming the candidates had similar professional experience. That discrepancy noted 19% of the polled HR professionals Strongly Agreed and 68% Agreed that distance learning was viewed more favorably than it was five years previous to the poll. The study also showed that because traditional schools were adding online programs, and online institutions were adding physical locations, the ability to

distinguish the online degree was becoming more challenging (SHRM, 2010*).* I believe

this report contributes to the value of my study, as I too assessed employer perceptions of

online learning along with that of student, faculty, and administrators.

Brief History and Overview of Public Relations

To appreciate the significance of public relations in higher education, and why I

have made it a focus of doctoral study, it is helpful to understand the history and role of

public relations in society and education. While not initially given the public relations

label, the art of persuading and communicating with a purpose has been going on for

centuries. The work of rhetoricians, press agents, and promoters could be seen in Plato's

day. Persuasive skills have played a vital part throughout the course of history. During

the American settlement times, colonies used publicity and persuasion to attract settlers.

The opportunity for higher education was a part of those efforts, as well. In 1641,

Harvard College employed PR tactics when it launched the first organized U.S. fund-

raising campaign (Lattimore et. al., 2012, p. 26). More than a hundred years later Kings

College (now Columbia University) announced its graduation exercises by issuing a press

release (Lattimore et. al., 2012, p. 27).

PR in higher education has been practiced in many forms and with many publics-

not limited to students, employees, alumni, donors, and the local community. Effective

administrators understand how important possession of positive communication skills is

to the success of their institutions and the fostering of good relations with internal and

external publics (Rowicki, 1999, pp. 1, 6; Lattimore, et al, 2012, pp. 326-327). Today,

while college faculty are not referred to as public relations professionals, simply by the

fact that they have the most interaction with students (a primary public), they are, in a sense, PR agents of their institutions.

As a public relations instructor and consultant I have frequently encountered people who confuse PR with marketing. While the two have areas of overlap, and are often practiced in conjunction with each other, they are very different. When I teach public relations courses I explain the differences between PR and marketing this way: "Marketing is about creating or fostering an image; PR is about building trust and respect" (Winslow, n.d., p. 2). I further expand on that by pointing out "In marketing you are concerned with successfully getting your message out. In public relations your primary concern is fostering trust and for that to happen your publics need to both hear you and at the same time believe that they are being heard" (Winslow n.d., p. 2). In short, marketing requires one-way communication whereas PR requires two-way communication. Thus, a good informational campaign will foster name recognition and engender positive feelings. Successful PR will go beyond that and establish trust and respect on the part of an organization's publics, effectively building relationship.

Fostering relationships with publics is at the core of public relations and how people are perceived. To thrive, relationships require trust, respect, and quality communication. In writing about trust and PR from a management perspective, Williams (n.d.) at Wright State University noted "Characteristics of trustworthy managers include integrity, reliability, fairness, caring, openness, competence, and loyalty" (p.1). Though applied to management in this example, those same traits are important in the classroom setting (p.1).

Trust is a key component of relating to one's publics and therefore the same things that build relationships in interpersonal relationships apply, to some extent, to PR. Rawlins (2007) noted the imperative role that trust plays in the practice of public relations. He observed that in order "to satisfy the role of being messengers for organizations, public relations practitioners must have credibility" (para. 23). That credibility was essential for another reason: "Trust is critical to public relations' primary purpose of establishing and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders on whom the success of the organization depends" (para. 23). This facet of public relations, relationship building, was receiving increased attention as the PR profession evolved.

In order to develop trust, public relations endeavors require significant, purposeful communication. Dominick (2009) noted,

Public Relations is concerned with communication. Most people are interested in what a given organization is doing to meet their concerns and interests. It is the function of the public relations professional to explain the organization's actions to various publics involved with the organization. As noted previously, public relations communication is two-way communication. The PR professional also pays close attention to the thoughts and feelings of the organization's publics. Some experts refer to public relations as a two-way conduit between an organization and its publics. (p. 319)

Just as the PR professional is a communication conduit for the intended publics, faculty meet the needs of students in a similar manner. As noted earlier, instructors are not assigned the title of public relations professional, but they do possibly play a vital role in higher education PR. How the faculty members communicate and interact with

students affects the perceptions students have of their institution and the confidence in the education they receive. Face-to-face learning is conducive to relationship-building with students. Online learning, however, is void of that personal component and so faculty must employ different methods as they seek to build trust and respect with an unseen public. That is what I want to explore in this study. How do students perceive their online instructors? How do rigor and quality affect perceptions of distance learning and how are online degrees viewed outside of academia?

Research Questions

For this study, I surveyed and interviewed students, faculty, and administrators at two distinct institutions from different regions and with diverse demographics. While both schools are co-educational, private, liberal arts institutions, the larger of the two is located outside of a major, metropolitan area which contributes to its diverse faculty and student body. The smaller college is located in the southeast region of the country and is deeply rooted in its Christian format and mission. A unique feature of that studied institution is that all of the graduate education courses were offered both traditionally and online, with both sections taught by the same instructor. Additionally, I analyzed student evaluations of teaching from eight courses at the smaller institution. The questions I sought to answer in this study were:

1. What characteristics are present that indicate a trust, or lack of, between the learning institution and its faculty and the learning institution and its students with regard to both face-to-face and distance learning coursework?

2. What characteristics are present to indicate communication, or lack of, between the learning institution and its faculty and the learning institution and its students?

3. What characteristics are present to indicate the existence of quality or rigor with regard to both face-to-face and distance learning coursework?

4. What administrative issues exist that can affect the reputation of a learning institution and its distance learning program with regard to both face-to-face and distance learning coursework?

5. What employment issues exist that can affect the reputation of a learning institution with regard to distance learning?

6. What similarities and differences are most salient between the two formats?

7. Are there differences in perceptions among students and staff at a small private liberal arts institution and a medium private liberal arts institution with regard to face-to-face and distance learning programs?

Definition of Terms

Blended Learning - A "combination of distance education and classroom instruction…usually involves a series of on-site classes or training sessions that are supplemented by the use of the Web or a learning-management system for access to learning resources, test-taking, assignments, or grades" (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 92). As the researcher, I will be using the terms Hybrid Learning, Hybrid Teaching, and Blended Teaching synonymously with this term.

Communication - "The act or an instance of communicating; the imparting or exchange of information, ideas, or feelings" (Communication, 2009).

Distance Learning - Teaching and planned learning in which teaching normally occurs in a different place from learning, requiring communication through technologies as well as special institutional organization (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 2).

Face-to-Face Learning - "A face-to-face session is one in which participants,

      instructors, and facilitators meet together in the same place and at the same time.

      Face-to-face sessions are synchronous. While no communications technologies

      are required for a face-to-face session, often other technologies, such as LCD

      cameras and overhead projectors, are used" (Face-to-face., 2011). On-site

      Learning, On-site Teaching, and Face-to-Face Teaching, Traditional Learning,

      and On-ground Learning are commonly synonymous with this term.

Perceptions - "The process by which an organism detects and interprets information

      from the external world by means of the sensory receptors" (Perception, 2009).

Public Relations - A strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial

      relationships between organizations and their publics ((Public Relations Society

      of America [PRSA], 2012c). To simplify this, as the researcher I add: PR is about

      building trust and respect within its publics using two-way communication.

Quality - From the students' perspective, quality largely equates to the experience they

      have in the classroom, whether on campus or online. As educators, we are

      responsible for ensuring an excellent learning experience by providing the

      planning, resources, and assessment which culminate in courses that contribute to

      the achievement of program outcomes in support of students' overall educational

      and professional goals. (Franklin University, 2012, p. 1)

Rigor - The process of instructors being "Inflexible in their demands for more critical

      thinking" (Jacobs & Colvin, n.d., p. 1).

Trust - "To place confidence in (someone to do something); have faith (in); rely (upon)"

      (Trust, 2009).

Limitations and Delimitations of this Research

Because of the setting in which this study was conducted my research is limited to views and perceptions within small-to-medium private liberal arts institutions of higher education. Since my sample was neither large nor my findings may not explain views of online learning at other institutions (Mertler & Charles, 2011). The small population size of this study and the fact that it specifically addressed views of education by faculty, graduate education students, and employers in the education sector, limits the generalizability of my results.

The delimitations of this study include the decision to exclude the study of hybrid courses, undergraduate students, and massive online college courses (MOOCs), though I acknowledge that all of those are part of the distance learning community and are worthy of gleaning related insights (Mertler & Charles, 2011). I believe pursuit of those areas would broaden the findings and thus lessen the value of the insights gleaned. Additionally some of the questions I asked in data gathering would need differentiation to accommodate the unique aspects of these additional types of learning. I recommend that anyone who wishes to duplicate this study follow similar limitations.

Summarizing and Looking Ahead

"Communication is at the heart of education "(Rowicki, 1999, p. 1). Public Relations is important to the manner in which higher education institutions communicate and connect with their publics. Rowicki (1999) further added "The paths for communication are as diverse as they are numerous, yet this is also the source of many problems that arise within schools" (p. 1). To better understand and appreciate that role of PR in the online format, this study assessed perceptions of the characteristics of PR: trust,

communication, quality, respect and rigor and contrasted them with traditional learning.

Participants included students, faculty, administrators, and education employers. Chapter

Two introduces research concerning public relations and online learning, as shared by

other researchers and authors. A historical view of those topics is also included. Chapter

Three discusses the methodology and participants, and Chapter Four reports the findings

of the research, which in addition to the surveys, interviews, and focus groups, includes

an analysis of Student Evaluations of Teaching from courses taught both online and face-

to-face by the same instructor. All of this research is summarized along with

recommendations for improvements and additional research in Chapter Five.

Chapter Two: The Literature Review

Chapter Two summarizes educational research literature concerning a number of areas related to online learning and public relations, such as: PR history and theory, trust, PR tools, distance learning history, application, future trends, and student, faculty, administrator, and employer perceptions of online learning. The chapter closes with research on student evaluations of teaching, as related to online learning. Research and writings referenced in this chapter were provided by authors such as Dominick (2012), Lattimore et. al. (2012), Rawlins (2007), and Seltzer (2006). Kolowich (2013), Leckart (2012), and Moore and Kearsley (2012) are among those who contributed to online learning knowledge. Ghezzi (2007), Jones (2013), and Lorenzetti (2005, 2007) provided philosophical insights while Aslanian and Clinefelter (2012), Beranek and French (2011), Wyatt (2005), and Truell (2001) were among those who incorporated research in their writings. Additionally, though more dated than others, Rowicki (1999) provided communication insights specific to the education setting.

This study examined the public relations (PR) aspects of online learning. Any investigation into public relations characteristics of an educational program or institution would be incomplete without a discussion of what exactly is meant by the term *public relations*. That is particularly important since public relations has been defined – and indeed practiced – so differently over the years.

In the very early days of PR, Edward Bernays defined public relations "as a management function which tabulates public attitudes, defines the policies, procedures and interests of an organization followed by executing a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance" (Stein, 2012, para 4). This rather clinical definition

emphasized the "pulse-taking" function of PR, placing a premium on what the public perceived, and adjusting the organization's image accordingly. This is very much in line with Bernays' philosophies, which were highly influenced by conversations about social science with his psycho-analyst uncle, Sigmund Freud (Lattimore et. al., 2012, p. 33).

Another early pioneer of PR was journalist Ivy Lee. The son of a minister, Lee emphasized honesty and transparency in public relations. Lee believed the public should be kept informed and that words should be demonstrated with actions (Lattimore et al., 2012, p. 36).   In 1904, he partnered with fellow newspaper reporter, George Parker, to establish a public relations agency. The firm was hired by George F. Baer to represent his company during mine strikes. While the labor leaders were open with the press, Baer was previously silent, and that led to media coverage that was less sympathetic to the mine owners than the workers. Lee was able to turn the tide when he successfully persuaded Baer to be transparent with the media and he issued a Declaration of Principles to local media outlets. In that Lee said: "All our work is done in the open. We aim to supply news. This is not an advertising agency" (p. 30).

Ivy Lee came on the scene at a time when many organizations were making extravagant claims about themselves and their products. Circus promoter P. T. Barnum made this kind of puffery a fine art in the late 1800s, and he had many imitators. Vivian's (2010) writings referred the era as one of puffed-up advertising claims and hyperbole. Lee noted, however, that people soon saw through the hyperbolic boasts and lost faith in those who made them. In launching his public relations agency in 1906, Lee vowed to be accurate in everything he said and to provide whatever verification anyone requested (Vivian, 2010, p. 296).

That kind of open communication has remained a hallmark of good public relations practice to this day. Dominick (2012) noted:

Public Relations is concerned with communication. Most people are interested in what a given organization is doing to meet their concerns and interests. It is the function of the public relations professional to explain the organization's actions to various publics involved with the organization. As noted previously, public relations communication is two-way communication. The PR professional also pays close attention to the thoughts and feelings of the organization's publics. Some experts refer to public relations as a two-way conduit between an organization and its publics (p. 319).

The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) is an organization dedicated to the advancement of the public relations profession as well as the public relations professional (PRSA, 2012a). In 1982, PRSA published the following definition of PR: "Public relations helps an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other" (PRSA, 2012b).

Thirty years later, PRSA launched a campaign to modernize this definition. The organization went about the process by polling members online and allowing PR professionals to define and vote on an agreed-upon definition: "Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics" (PRSA, 2012c).

This definition focuses more on the relationship aspect of PR than did previous definitions. When viewed in this light, PR is very much about building relationship with

publics, and therefore the same things that build relationships in interpersonal

relationships apply, to some extent, to PR.

The Role of Trust in Relationships

Rawlins (2007) noted the imperative role that trust plays in the practice of public

relations. He observed that in order "to satisfy the role of being messengers for

organizations, public relations practitioners must have credibility" (Rawlins, 2007, para.

23). That credibility is essential for another reason: "Trust is critical to public relations'

primary purpose of establishing and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders on

whom the success of the organization depends" (para. 23). This facet of public relations –

relationship building – is receiving increased attention as the PR profession evolves.

Rawlins summed up his thesis as follows:

> Trust is critical to the functioning of our society at all levels, interpersonal, small
>
> group, organizational, and societal and is especially central to the practice of
>
> public relations. You can't have credibility without it. And, trust appears to be the
>
> most central component to satisfactory relationships. If the purpose of public
>
> relations is to establish and maintain relationships with key stakeholders through
>
> communication and other efforts, then public relations is essentially in the trust-
>
> making business" (Rawlins, 2007, para. 54).

The practice of public relations is essential to the success of institutions of higher

education. Without a purposeful effort to build trust and respect with internal and

external publics, colleges and universities will fail to make vital connections and reach

their intended audiences. Trust and respect are important for service-oriented institutions;

that is universally accepted in education (Rowicki, 1999). What those public-relations efforts are comprised of, however, is not completely agreed upon.

Seltzer (2006), for instance, maintained that public relations is often a one-way relationship when instead it should be integrated. He advocated for measuring the effectiveness of public relations efforts by focusing "on the quality of the relationship between an organization and its publics by using established relationship measures within a co-orientational framework" (p. 2). He went on to say, "Furthermore, the strength of the OPR (organization-public relationship) over time can then be used to help demonstrate the return on investment in public relations in order to illustrate the value of public relations to managers and clients" (Seltzer, 2006, p. 3).

While this may seem obvious, early application of public relations often failed to see the value of an integrated approach; a practice that facilitates two-way communication between organizations and stakeholders. At the time of this writing, some organizations continue to view public relations as a one-way relationship-marketing. Too often organizations do not understand the difference between public relations and marketing. The idea of integrating their practices with the many facets that make up their publics is something that is hard for some to comprehend and achieve.

A PR crisis at a private college in rural Ohio illustrates this reality in higher education. In 2008, Cedarville University was the subject of negative headlines across the state after a faculty termination dispute went viral. The resulting publicity created internal and external PR problems when students, faculty, and alums questioned the administration's personnel decisions and actions. Using social media, websites, and other communication vehicles, these key publics shared concerns about trust and

communication. It was those efforts that caught the attention of the media (Gottschlich, 2008; Nails & Hoekema, 2009). In response, the university launched a marketing campaign using direct mail and billboards, a one-way communication approach that did little to ease the tensions media (Gottschlich, 2008; Nails & Hoekema, 2009). It is possible that if the administration had initially used an integrated approach when the terminations were first announced, the negative publicity would have simmered as two-way communication would have helped facilitate mutual dialogue and thus eased fears and speculation. This illustration serves to show the dynamics of PR and marketing in higher education and illustrate that there is a gap in the applied integration of public relations in the higher education setting. Much data is gathered in the private sector of PR research, but little can be found in education as a whole.

Seltzer (2006) supported the belief that "relationships should be the primary unit of analysis in public relations" (p. 4) and concluded that:

Looking at the relationship between the OPR measures and public relations activities will indicate the effectiveness of these activities in actually changing the relationship that exists between the organization and the public. By looking at individual dimensions, it will be possible to identify exactly which aspects of the relationship were affected by public relations efforts (Seltzer, 2006, p. 23).

McAllister-Spooner (2008) took a slightly different angle in her view of public relations. She advocated for what she called a dialogical approach-one that "involves an understanding of the past and the present, but also has a focus on a continued and shared future for all participants" (p. 3). Using the Cedarville illustration, an expansion of McAllister-Spooner's approach would also have benefitted the college. The college's

marketing campaign promoted its history and present-day strengths but it failed to combine that message with a two-way dialogue about a shared future. The university's one-way approach was ineffective and a "climate of fear" prevailed (Gottschlich, 2008, p. A1).

Looking at how public relations is employed, McAllister-Spooner (2008) noted that within academic and professional contexts there is a gap in effectively utilizing the Internet for public relations purposes. This is a problem that, according to McAllister-Spooner can also be addressed by the dialogical approach. She noted, "Public relations practitioners have become an important part of not only attracting students, but also redefining the college's relationship to the community. By maintaining dialogue, colleges can redefine existing relationships and proactively build ongoing relationships with the diverse constituency base" (2008, p. 2). That view was shared by Aslanian and Clinefelter (2012) who found that internet searches were the initial vehicle used by almost half of studied students in determining online programs of interest (p. 22).

McAllister-Spooner's (2008) emphasis on the Internet is certainly merited. As Judd (2010) noted, college students spend an inordinate amount of their time communicating and networking online– particularly on social media sites.

Judd's study sampled undergraduate biomedical students' computer and Internet usage. Between 2005 and 2009, he compared email and social networking usage that included a mix of study-related and personal/social activities analyzed in an open computer laboratory during August and September of each year. The analysis revealed that as social networking use increased, there was a decrease in email usage. This

decrease in email was particularly noticeable in the use of the university's email service. The big drop is seen in 2009 with email use falling 21% (Judd, 2010).

The researchers concluded that this data highlighted important issues for university administrators and faculty. While email was the primary avenue for official academic communication it was declining among students. This emerging reality may create barriers in learning and communication and overcoming these barriers, as the authors noted, "represents both a major challenge and an opportunity" (Judd, 2010, p. 3).

In an effort to overcome this communication barrier, David Perry, a history professor at Dominican University has embraced a philosophy of "Go Where the Students Are" and uses Facebook to facilitate online discussions (Perry, 2013). Over the years Perry noticed students' enthusiasm toward online learning management systems and email was lacking while at the same time he observed increasing use of Facebook. In response he created a private Facebook group for each course. After embracing this form of Internet communication, Perry commented "I am seeing students engage in online discussions that are student-driven and multidirectional. . . The discussion ebbs and flows over the course of the semester, but it never really stops" (Perry, 2013).

Not everyone, however, shares Perry's positive view of using social media as a communication tool in college courses. To illustrate this, consider the following personal communication. Though not published literature, the comment is counter to Perry's assertion. "Jared" was a freshman when he took a composition class at a community college where extra-credit assignments and discussions were completed on Facebook. He disagreed with Perry's belief that such interactions enhanced student participation. "The discussion on Facebook was worse than what was in class. If on Blackboard it would

have been viewed as an assignment. On Facebook the grammar, punctuation, and formality were lacking. People wrote like they were texting. Not formal. They used emoticons" (Personal communication, undergraduate student, May 13, 2013). Another issue was that Jared did not have a Facebook account and so he resented having to create one simply to fully participate in a class. "I thought the requirement was dumb. I did it just for a grade" (Jared, personal communication, May 13, 2013). In Jared's experience using social media to engage students was not effective in building relationships as it did not improve communication nor foster quality dialogue.

Perry concluded his article noting that using social media as a teaching resource is fleeting. "The day is coming when students won't naturally check Facebook constantly. There will, however, be some form of virtual social space, which I will try to identify and adapt for teaching" (Perry, 2013 p 3). In summarizing his unconventional method he noted "Perhaps if I go where my students are, they will move closer to where I'd like them to be" (Perry, 2013 p 3). Perry may have to change where he goes if Ramspott, a communications specialist at Frostburg State University is right. She commented "Facebook is no longer the solo giant that everybody has to be on. Geographically people are looking for new places to exist" (Straumsheim, 2013, para 4).

Part of the educational public relations challenge has to do with establishing and maintaining trust with a population with whom the modes of communication have changed dramatically. However, research has revealed that communication at a distance does not preclude establishing such trust.

Using surveys taken at the beginning and end of two sections of a course in an MBA program (one face-to-face and one online), Beranek and French (2011) found no

significant differences of building trust among student team members. The researchers explained, "A possible explanation for this finding which has important implications for online teaching is that in this study the teams were required to work together in solving the cases and were therefore, in a sense, 'forced' to communicate on a regular basis with their teammates" (Beranek & French, 2011 para 8).

Related to exploring trust and communication in education, Henschke (n.d.) developed a self-report measurement to evaluate teacher beliefs, feelings, and behaviors as they work with adult learners. Using a Likert-type scale, the Modified Instructional Perspectives Inventory (MIPI) has 45 statements that respondents use to self-assess in such areas as communication, appreciation, relationship quality, and instructional methods and application (Henschke).

Since this study looks at public relations characteristics in higher education and online learning, it is important to understand PR and discuss related research as well as explore research and topics in distance learning.

Historical Background of Distance Learning

To understand issues facing distance learning it is helpful to know the historical background and continued evolution. In the book, *Distance Education: A Systems View of Online Learning*, authors Moore and Kearsley (2012) describe the evolution of distance education in five generations: First, Correspondence; Second, Broadcast radio and television; Third, Open universities; Fourth, Teleconferencing; and Fifth, Internet/Web (Moore & Kearsley, p. 24). Authors Anderson and Simpson (2012) shared similar historical insights in a more concise and global perspective.

The correspondence generation that began in the early 1880s was commonly known as 'independent study' by universities or 'home-study' by early for-profit schools (Moore & Kearsley, p. 23). Chautauqua Correspondence College was the first higher education institution to provide teaching through the mail. (p. 24). "The principal motive for the early correspondence educators was the vision of using technology to reach out to those who were otherwise unprovided for" (p. 25).

During the second generation, 'schools of the air' provided K-12 educational programs; "radio as a delivery technology, however, did not live up to expectations" (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 29). The arrival of cable television in 1952 introduced 'telecourses'. The Adult Learning Service of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and more than 1,000 institutions of postsecondary education signed on each year educating more than a half-million adult learners (p. 31). Anderson & Simpson (2012) pointed out that this generation "saw an increase in scholarly and research work" (p. 3).

Technology continued to bring change to distance learning. The Third Generation welcomed The Open University (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 244). The Open University promoted itself as a "unique, world-leading style of distance learning [that] enables [students] to study from home, work or even on the move" ("Study Explained", 2014, p. 1).

Technology continued to bring change to distance learning. The Third Generation welcomed the Open University which remains "the premier model of distance education around the world" (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 244).   Though popular in Great Britain, the Open University was not well-received in the United States in part because of the fact that states controlled their own higher education systems which in turn hindered the

ability to unify on a national policy or establish a national system (p. 34). That reality

noted, it was the Open University "that led to an explosion of interest in distance teaching

in the rest of the world" and with the availability of satellite technology, the interest

spread to the United States (p. 37). Technologies of teleconferencing (the Fourth

Generation) drove the passion for American distance education seen in the 1980s.

Teleconferencing appealed to a wider number of educators because "it was a closer fit to

the traditional view of education as something that occurs in 'classes,' unlike the

correspondence or the open university models, which were directed at individuals

learning alone, usually in 'home study'" (pp. 35-36).

"The use of computer networking for distance education got a big boost with the

arrival of the World Wide Web" (Moore & Kearsley, 2012, p. 42). This technology

offering the ability to work collaboratively using text, audio, and video on a single

platform in an organized manner, has fostered new ideas in how to organize online

Internet-based virtual classes and "has led to a worldwide explosion of interest and

activity in distance education" (p. 44).

This fifth generation introduced Web-based learning systems proved to be popular

in higher education (Anderson & Simpson, 2012). Using management systems (such as

Blackboard) learning online allowed for asynchronous and synchronous communication

between instructors and students. Using the Internet, these systems allowed for integrated

learning and provided student-management resources and secured testing options. Moore

and Kearsley (2012) noted:

Generally, instructors have found the most valuable feature to be the

asynchronous threaded discussion forum in text format. A discussion forum

allows students and instructors to interact by posting reading messages, while each has flexibility regarding when they do it. Usually a Web-based course involves a number of assignments or activities; students post their responses to the discussion forums and the instructors post comments there also (p. 81).

These resources and technologies have allowed colleges to address issues with staffing cuts and enrollment increases and create opportunities for diverse groups to learn. With this reality, authors Thormann and Zimmerman (2012) commented that "For both K-12 and higher education, the evidence is clear that online education will become more prevalent" (p. 179).

That reality may in part be because of the fact that at the time of this research many college students were part of the Millennial generation. While there were differing views on exactly when this generation (also referred to as Generation Y) was born, researcher Richard Sweeney described Millennials (that he said have birthdates between 1979 through 1994) as "demanding consumers who expect more selectivity, personalization and customization in their products and services" (Sweeney, 2006, p. 1).

Sweeney (2006), who has conducted more than 35 focus groups of Millennial college students in 15 states, further characterized this generation as "impatient, experiential learners, digital natives, multi-taskers, and gamers who love the flat, networked world and expect nomadic connectivity, 24x7" (p. 1). On May 16, 2013 Millennial Branding, a Generation Y research and consulting firm, along with Internships.com, conducted an online survey of 1,345 students from colleges across America. The findings were summarized in a study called "*The Future of Education*" and published on their website. In it, the researchers noted, "Millennials today expect

customization and convenience, and colleges are having to find ways to cater to different situations" (Schwabel, 2013, p. 1).

Dan Schwabel (2013) is the founder of Millennial Branding. In response to this study he commented:

Millennials understand that the future of education is online and since they were brought up with the internet, they are prepared for that change. Education should not be a one size fits all model because everyone learns differently, regardless of age, occupation and location. More online courses should be offered to cater to those who learn better in a virtual classroom. (p. 1)

In regard to rigor, the study revealed that 78% of the students surveyed still believe classroom learning is easier than online. But with that truth, the study noted that "as the cost of a college education steadily rises, some experts say the data suggest virtual campuses are likely to grow, largely because they need to" (Schwabel, 2013, p. 1).

Schwabel (2013) pointed out that economics is forcing today's students to make choices. "The bottom line is that students need options, and they are increasingly turning to online learning" (p. 1).

Massive Open Online Courses – MOOCs

In response to increasing demand, online education continued to evolve with the introduction of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs). Briefly explained, MOOCs are online classes taught to a large group (sometimes hundreds of thousands at once) with little instructor involvement as students learn via video presentations and complete assignments that are machine-graded or assessed by other students.

Familiarity with key MOOC players is important to understanding. Below are brief descriptions of prominent names in massive open online courses:

Coursera – Founded by two Stanford University computer-science professors, this for-profit company has contracts with high-profile colleges "that agree to use the platform to offer free courses and to get a percentage of any revenue" ("What you need to know", 2013, p. 1).

edX –b - A joint-venture by MIT, Harvard, and Berkeley, this nonprofit group plans to "freely give away the software platform it is building to offer the free courses, so that anyone can use it to run MOOCs" ("What you need to know", 2013, p. 1).

Khan Academy - Founded in 2006 by MIT and Harvard graduate Salman Khan, this nonprofit organization started with instructional videos created for Mr. Khan's cousins. More than 3,000 videos (primarily geared toward secondary-education students) soon became available on YouTube ("What you need to know", 2013, p. 1).

Udacity – Though also founded by a Stanford University computer science professor, Udacity is unlike other MOOC providers in two ways: First, it works with individual professors instead of universities. Secondly, Udacity courses are solely focused on computer science and related fields ("What you need to know", 2013, p. 1).

Udemy - Designed to allow anyone to set up a course, instructors charge a small fee that is shared with the company. A unique characteristic of this for-

profit operation is that some of the instructors are not affiliated with any

educational institution ("What you need to know", 2013, p. 1).

While the above are major players, it is important to note that as MOOCs

increased in popularity, colleges and individual faculty also entered the global distance

education frontier and have developed their own massive open online courses ("What you

need to know", 2013, p. 1).

To date participants cannot receive credit for MOOCs but some colleges are

allowing students to buy or receive certificates that confirm course comprehension. As

institutions explore the value of MOOCs, questions of earning credit and maintaining

standards will be debated and addressed. At the minimum, this emerging form of online

learning "has raised questions about the future of teaching, the value of a degree, and the

effect technology will have on how colleges operate" ("What you need to know", 2013,

p. 1).

The American Council on Education entered the debate and in 2013, endorsed

five MOOCs for credit. Duke University and the University of California at Irvine will

each offer two lower-level undergraduate courses. The University of Pennsylvania will

offer a calculus course in MOOC. In a written statement, ACE President, Molly Corbett

Broad noted the significance of this step: "The approval of the first Coursera MOOCs is

'an important first step in ACE's work to examine the long-term potential of MOOCs' to

deal with issues such as 'degree completion, increasing learning productivity, and

deepening college curricula' "(Kolowich, 2013a, para. 11). "But the second step, in

which colleges begin accepting MOOC certificates for credit as if they were Advanced

Placement scores, is equally important, and there is no guarantee that colleges will do so" (Kolowich, 2013a, para. 12).

That second step may be slow in coming. Shortly after Duke University administration announced plans to offer credit for MOOCs, the undergraduate faculty derailed the effort when it voted down a proposal. That move was similar to a vote by professors at Amherst College. "Like the Amherst faculty, members of the faculty council at Duke passed an alternative resolution affirming that they intended to pursue online education, just not like this one, right now" (Kolowich, 2013b, para. 4). Seventy-five professors were against the partnership and in a published letter to the student newspaper said "While paying Duke tuition students will watch recorded lectures and participate in sections via Webcam, enjoying neither the advantages of self-paced learning nor the responsiveness of a professor who teaches to the passions and curiosities of students" (Kolowich, 2013b, para. 7).

Roth (2013) was the president of Wesleyan University who, after volunteering to teach a MOOC, developed an appreciation for the controversial format. "I was no fan of the massive online classes I'd checked out. It seemed clear to me that whatever learning happened online via lectures, quizzes, and peer-graded essays was very different from what I'd experienced in residential colleges" (Roth, 2013, para. 4). Roth wondered if teaching a MOOC would affect his view of teaching and learning. "I certainly wasn't looking for ways to replace the campus experience, but I was open to expanding the framework within which to think about it" (Roth, 2013, para. 5). Reflecting on the experience afterward, Roth noted "Students use MOOCs differently than they use the classroom, and we should pay attention to that rather than think the online world fails to

replicate a "really real" classroom" (Roth, 2013, para. 10). Appreciating the diversity and global perspectives the MOOC provided, Roth further said he will incorporate lessons learned into the campus version of the course. "This will be more than just using recorded lectures as homework. It will be integrating perspectives on things great thinkers have said, and things I've said, from an amazing range of people from across the globe" (Roth, 2013, para. 10).

Politicians have also weighed in on MOOCs. In an effort to reduce the number of students shut-out of courses in the three California public higher education systems as a consequence of diminishing financial resources, State Senator Darrell Steinberg sponsored Senate Bill 520. The bill was designed to provide "a statewide platform through which students who have trouble getting into certain low-level, high-demand classes could take approved online courses offered by providers outside the state's higher-education system" (Gardner & Young, 2013 p.1). If this becomes law, California public colleges and universities may be required to accept MOOC credits and that would launch "the controversial courses into the mainstream faster than even their proponents had predicted" (p. 1).

The ramifications of this direction may be cause for concern. Youngberg (2012), an assistant professor of economics at Bethany College, maintained that academic integrity is a factor to consider. "The honor code worked, but only because we couldn't get college credit. The incentive to cheat was very weak" (para. 3).

Commenting on MOOCs, President of Franklin & Marshall College Daniel R. Porterfield also expressed concern. "No MOOC can give young minds the in-person experience of working directly with older experts to create, deepen, and connect ideas"

(Porterfield, 2013, para. 6). In response to the ongoing call for colleges to cut costs and make higher education more affordable, Porterfield noted "I believe we have a collective responsibility to challenge the notion that MOOCs are the future of American higher education. If we really want to make a difference for most students, let's make 2013 'The Year of the Seminar'" (Porterfield, 2013, para. 2). Porterfield's defense of seminars included his belief that by listening actively, reflecting critically, forming positions and sharing with classmates, "seminars help college students develop a set of higher-order intellectual capabilities that literally rewire the brain" (Porterfield, 2013, para. 4). The college administrator further argued that to agree with MOOC providers who contend that these massive virtual learning communities better connect students globally than traditional settings would require one to "diminish" how we use the words "learning," "community," and "connect" (Porterfield, 2013, para. 10).

Survey Says

In an effort to understand faculty views of MOOCs, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* attempted to identify every professor who has taught at least one. In early 2013 an online questionnaire was sent to 184 professors. The survey considered courses open to anyone, enrolling hundreds or even thousands of users with the median number of students per class at 33,000. Of those surveyed, 103 responded. Of note is that before teaching a MOOC nearly one-third of the respondents described themselves as being "somewhat" or "very" skeptical about online-only courses but after teaching a MOOC more than 90 percent were enthusiastic about online classes (Kolowich, 2013c, para. 62).

To briefly summarize the survey, many of the respondents "felt that these free online courses should be integrated into the traditional system of credit and degrees …

and an overwhelming majority believe that the free online courses will make college less expensive in general" (Kolowich, 2013c, para. 9). More specifically the survey found the following median values: 1) 33,000 students enrolled in a MOOC; 2) 2,600 students completed a MOOC with a passing grade; 3) 100 hours were spent preparing for a MOOC; and 4) 8 hours per week spent in participation during a MOOC session (Kolowich, 2013c).

Table 1.

MOOC opinions expressed.

Question	Percent			
	Yes	Yes - Somewhat	Yes - Marginally	No
Do you believe students who succeed in your MOOC deserve formal credit from your home institution?	28			72
Did teaching a MOOC cause you to divert time from other duties such as research, committee service, or traditional teaching?	55	26		19
Do you believe MOOCs could eventually reduce the cost of attaining a college degree in general?	45		41	15

As for motivating factors in choosing to teach a MOOC, altruism was the most frequently-cited reason. Additionally, professional aspirations contributed to the reasoning as "a number of the professors in the survey said they hoped to use MOOCs to increase their visibility, both among colleagues within their discipline (39 percent) and with the media and the general public (34 percent)" (Kolowich, 2013c, para. 18).

Looking ahead surveyed faculty believe MOOCs will have a lasting impact on distance education. Walter Sinnott-Armstrong at Duke University had 185,000 students in a communications course. He commented: "Some big introductory lecture courses will be replaced by MOOCs so that students can get to higher levels more quickly" (Kolowich, 2013c). John Owens taught Introduction to Parallel Programming at University of California at Davis to 15,000 students and said, "I think MOOCs could potentially replace large-enrollment courses with little teacher-to-student contact. It makes little sense for 3,000 teachers to prepare Calculus I annually when one teacher given 10 times the time and resources could potentially do a better job" (U.S. Chamber of Commerce Foundation, 2013, para. 16).

Eager to embrace that potential future, Sebastian Thrun, co-founder of Udacity, prophesized "In 50 years there will be only 10 institutions in the whole world delivering higher education and Udacity has a shot at being one of them" (Leckart, 2012, p. 3).

In a commentary explaining why he does not believe MOOCs are a threat to higher education, Youngberg (2012), an assistant professor of economics at Bethany College, said employers' perceptions are an influencing factor to consider. He pointed out that companies typically are

> not after radical thinkers who want to turn a company upside down with bizarre ideas. Those who have a problem with authority are to be avoided.… Getting an unconventional degree suggests you're probably one of the usurpers who are more trouble than they are worth. MOOC's are the nose rings of higher education. (para. 7)

Daniel Porterfield shared a similar concern with the directive:

Ask yourselves how the people we educate today will deal with complex issues in the workplace of tomorrow. Imagine a team of national-security leaders in 2025 analyzing whether promoting economic development would prevent terrorism. Imagine government officials, public-health experts, anthropologists, and economists searching together for the solution to a border-crossing disease. All taking account of multiple views. All trying to interpret data. All working at the mind's limits. (Porterfield, 2013, para. 15)

As all of these questions and commentaries are pondered, it is clear that at the time of this writing MOOCs along with the many forms of distance learning, are constantly changing.

If online is the future and bigger is better, what part do rigor and quality in distance learning play? Several studies have been completed that address that topic. Using a chi-square analysis on a perception questionnaire, 266 randomly sampled students who completed both online and traditional coursework at a medium-size university in the Midwest were surveyed and their opinions of distance learning were assessed. The questionnaire consisted of 13 items including closed-ended questions and statements and had a completion rate of 45% (Wyatt, 2007, p. 4).

The findings revealed 77% of the students believed that online learning instruction offers a good or excellent academic experience and only 10% rated it marginal or poor (Wyatt, 2007, p. 5). When asked their thoughts on rigor-specifically "how academically demanding" online courses compared with traditional, 57% said distance learning was slightly or much more demanding (Wyatt, 2007, p. 5).

In an effort to understand student retention and satisfaction with online learning, students at two community colleges in Washington state were surveyed. An encouraging finding was that in deciding to drop a class, one of the least important factors given had to do with students expecting the online course to be less demanding and with less homework than the traditional format. "This is a welcome change from concerns in distance education nationwide just a few years ago, when experts fought to prove that online courses were characterized with equal rigor to courses that took place on campus"(Lorenzetti, 2005, p. 6). In discussing strengths of online learning a representative from one of the surveyed colleges commented that online studying attracts self-motivated students and that distance learners "benefited from imposing structure on their own lives rather than waiting for it to come from an outside source" (Lorenzetti, 2005, p. 3).

In *The Online Doctorate: Flexible, But Credible?,* former education reporter Ghezzi (2007) raised the question of rigor in online graduate degree programs. This article presented both sides of the debate with a professor of educational leadership who studies superintendent trends arguing that online studies at online colleges "cannot prepare educators for executive-level positions in a school district" (Ghezzi, p. 1). "They are definitely second class or third class…Is someone going to learn data disaggregation online?" (Ghezzi, p. 1). On the other side of the debate, administrators at online institutions argue that their programs are comparable and possibly even more rigorous than those offered at traditional schools. "They contend their electronic classes emphasize practical skills and applicable research over education theory and say their instructors are

practitioners who understand the public education landscape better than tenured

professors who may be decades removed from working in school settings" (Ghezzi, p. 2).

Discussion forums are a collaborative communication tool in online courses.

And, as noted in Chapter One, discussion forums can be ineffective and frustrating when

not properly led. Recognizing issues in online discussions, Ashford University professor,

Jones wrote how he believed originality in online discussions was vital in ensuring rigor

and quality. "In demanding originality, we must convey that we are not seeking baseless

opinions. Quality responses reveal that the student has learned the material and can carry

on an intelligent discussion regarding the topic" (Jones, 2013b, para 5). Jones elaborated:

> Online students have the advantage of reflection time, along with having the
>
> textbook and Internet search engine open when responding to discussion
>
> questions. With a few simple clicks, virtually any question can be answered by
>
> searching the Internet. … Classroom learning takes place when students are
>
> required to think; that's a few steps beyond clicking copy and paste. As
>
> instructors, we should encourage our students to be resourceful and to learn the
>
> skills of locating and incorporating scholarly literature into their work. But we
>
> also must instill the learning value of synthesizing sources in such a manner that
>
> produces evidence of gained knowledge. (Jones, 2013b, para 4)

Great Expectations

Using electronic focus groups to interview adult graduate students enrolled in an

online degree program at a research university in the mid-south, Deggs, Grover, and

Kacireck (2010) asked participants to describe their expectations and positive and

negative experiences in regards to online learning. The researchers found that students

expect faculty to communicate effectively, be accessible, and provide appropriate feedback. In summarizing their findings, the team concluded that student satisfaction goes beyond the classroom and includes experiences with student services, academic support, and technical support systems. With those realities in mind, the researchers suggested that colleges should continually examine graduate experiences on many levels to determine if student expectations have been met.

Ashford University professor, Jones, echoed these findings in an article published in *Faculty Focus*. "Although online learning holds many advantages, the potential drawbacks revolve around the lack of personal interaction between the instructor and student, as well as the student-to-student contact. Keeping students engaged in the course is a vital function of an effective instructor," (2013a, para. 1). To help facilitate that advice, Jones provided six steps: "1) Get to know your students. . . . 2) Know the classroom mechanics of an online course. . . . 3) Be accessible and respond to student inquiries in a timely manner. . . . 4) Go beyond the university requirement of posting a brief, weekly announcement. . . . 5) Provide substantive feedback and positive critique. … 6) Inject some fun into the classroom . . ." (para. 5-16).

Jones concluded his insights with a reminder to fellow faculty "Teaching in the online environment requires us to go beyond posting a lecture or an assignment. Build within your students a sense of anticipation. Give students a reason to be engaged by making sure you are fully engaged in their success" (2013a, para.10).

In a similar manner, suggestions for distance learners were found in a *U.S. News & World Report* article in which a student shared lessons she learned after completing her first online course. In this reflective writing, Haynie (2013) advised her peers to be

purposefully organized when she observed **"**online learning requires discipline and time management skills, but it took participating in an online class and actually missing a deadline to fully believe it was true" (2013 para 5). She also advised classmates to "Seek out a course with various approaches to learning" (para 7)**.** She additionally explained that her learning style did not fit the teaching style of the online course and that was another matter to consider when selecting a learning format. **"**If I do this again, I'll look for a class format that better fits my learning style, likely one that includes podcasts, video lectures and some kind of narrated visual presentation" (para 8). And finally, Haynie advised fellow students to seek opportunities to connect with classmates. **"**One of the hardest parts of online learning in my experience was the lack of face-to-face interaction with my instructor and classmates. There is something about engaging with classmates and instructors that keeps me motivated and helps me feel invested in a course" (para 9).

Faculty Perceptions of Online Learning

In an effort to better understand educator views of distance learning, Inside Higher Ed collaborated with Gallup to survey college and university faculty and educational technology administrators across the United States. The study was conducted via e-mail Tuesday, June 18 through Tuesday, July 9, 2013. In the end, 2,251 Web surveys were collected from university faculty and 248 from academic technology administrators. Based on the sample size, the margin of error for faculty survey results is ±2.1 percentage points. The margin of error attributable to sampling error is ±6.2 for technology administrators (Jaschik & Lederman, 2013).

When questioned about the quality of online courses, only seven percent of the surveyed faculty "strongly agree that online courses can achieve student learning outcomes that are at least equivalent to those of in-person courses at any institution" (Jaschik & Lederman, 2013, p. 8). That number increased almost four-fold for the technology administrators in which 27 percent were more likely to Strongly Agree that online student learning outcomes are comparable to those of traditional classes (Jaschik & Lederman, 2013).

The study also revealed that an overwhelming majority of faculty members (85 percent) "believe the quality of online courses is lower than that of in-person courses with respect to the interaction with students during class" (Jaschik & Lederman, 2013, p. 6). When asked about the "comparative effectiveness in delivering content to meet expected learning objectives," the surveyed faculty were evenly divided (Jaschik & Lederman, 2013, p. 6).

Looking deeper into these views, when asked about the contributing factors to quality in distance learning, "about 6 in 10 say that whether an online program is offered by an institution that also offers in-person instruction is a "very important" indicator of quality" (Jaschik & Lederman, 2013, p. 6). It is noteworthy that 604 of those surveyed have taught an online course while 1,417 have not (Jaschik & Lederman, 2013).

College Administrator Perceptions of Online Learning

In spring of 2011 Pew Research Center conducted a pair of surveys assessing peoples' views of online learning in America. One was a telephone survey of 2,142 adults. The other, done online and in association with the Chronicle of Higher Education, surveyed presidents of 1,055 two-year and four-year private, public, and for-profit

colleges and universities. One of the findings showed a clear difference in the views of

the two groups with regard to the value of online learning. While half (51%) of the

college presidents surveyed say online courses offer an equal value compared with

courses taken in a classroom, only 29% of the public agreed (Taylor et. al., 2011, p. 3).

How the question is presented affects the responses. When asked if they believe

that college should prepare students for career opportunities, 59% of the presidents said

online classes provide the same educational value as in-person classes. When asked if

they believe that the role of higher education is to enhance intellectual and personal

growth, only 43% maintain that distance learning is equal to traditional (Taylor et. al.,

2011, p. 7).

The prevalence of distance learning was also revealed as 77% of the surveyed

administrators reported that in 2011 their schools offered online courses. The presidents

predict that online learning will continue to grow with 15% saying "most of their current

undergraduate students have taken a class online, and 50% predict that 10 years from

now most of their students will take classes online" (Taylor et. al., 2011, p. 1).

Table 2.

College Presidents' view of potential growth in Online Learning.

Statement	Percent
Percent of Student Body previously enrolled in online	51% or More
10 years from now most students will take classes online	50% Agree

Note: Adapted from PEW Research Center (Taylor et. al., 2011),

The fact that college presidents are major adopters of new digital technologies

may influence these findings and explain why they are positively disposed to

advancements in learning. The PRC study revealed that "87% use a smartphone on a

daily basis, 32% use a tablet computer such as an iPad daily and 15% say they use an e-

reader" (Taylor et. al., 2011, p. 7).

Since my survey addressed trusts and asked about students doing their own work

the presidents' response to questions about plagiarism interested me (Table 3).

Table 3.

College Presidents' views of plagiarism over the past 10 years.

Status change in plagiaristic activity	Percent responded
Increased	55
Stayed the same	40
Decreased	2

Note: Nonresponse not shown. Adapted from PEW Research Center
(Taylor et. al., 2011).
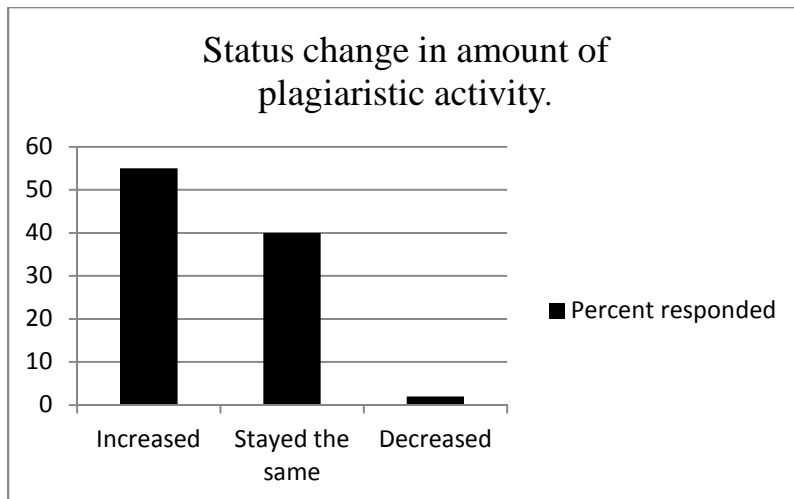
Note: Adapted from PEW Research Center (Taylor et. al., 2011),

Figure 1. College Presidents' views of plagiarism over the past 10 years.

As indicated in Figure 1, the authors noted that of the 55% who believe

plagiarism is increasing, 89% believe that computers and the internet have significantly

contributed to that trend while only 7% "say these new technologies have played a minor role" (Taylor et. al., 2011, p. 6).

Employer Perceptions of Online Learning

Securing gainful employment is often a key reason people invest in higher education and so the view of online learning from an employer perspective is important. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) sought to gain insights into employer views of distance learning and in 2010 surveyed 449 randomly selected human resource (HR) professionals. SHRM found that, presuming the candidates have similar professional experience, 60 percent of HR professionals preferred employment applicants with a degree from a traditional institution over those who earned an online degree. However, 19% of those polled Strongly Agree and 68% "agree" that distance learning is viewed more favorably than it was five years ago. The study also showed that because traditional schools are adding online programs and online institutions are adding physical locations, distinguishing online degrees is becoming more challenging.

While acceptance of online degrees may be increasing in the workforce, skepticism remains. Career information company, Vault Inc., surveyed 101 employers in 2007 and learned that a small majority (51%) said they favored applicants who earned a traditional degree over those with online degrees (Carnevale, 2007, p.1). Researchers noted that the most skeptical managers are the ones who may possibly know the least about it and as more traditional schools increase their online offerings, applicants may find that hiring managers may not be able to distinguish between online and traditional learning (Carnevale, p.1).

Student Evaluations of Teaching

Perceptions play into how differing publics relate to each other. In understanding how students perceive faculty, a component of this study looked at a sampling of faculty evaluations, more formally known as the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET). This tool is a helpful resource in assessing how professors are relating to students. In explaining the value of this tool, University of Maine at Machias Policy & Procedures Manual (2005) noted:

> The first purpose is to assist the individual faculty member in improving his or her teaching . . . This kind of evaluation has little effect unless it is conscientiously examined by the particular faculty member to whom it is addressed. Whether or not anyone other than the faculty sees these formative evaluations may be of little lasting consequence. What is important is that they be thoughtfully considered by that faculty member. Indeed, the critical examination of these formative evaluations by a number of other faculty and administrators may cause the faculty member to view the evaluations defensively rather than constructively, thus defeating the central purpose: bringing about warranted change in his or her teaching style. ("Student Evaluations", 2005, para. 3)

Student evaluations have been the subject of many studies. Seeking to understand faculty perceptions of the effect of SETs upon the tenure, promotion, and merit decisions at a Texas institution of higher education, Irons, Carlson, Kirk and Monk (2011) found student ratings of faculty were affected by the difficulty of the course and the class size. In looking at uses of evaluations, the researchers found that administrators "use student evaluations of faculty as the major data source for summative faculty evaluations," and

"Popular courses generate more favorable student ratings of faculty" (Irons et al, 2011, p.92).

In response to their findings, the researchers recommended that administration be more responsible for providing supervision and assistance to faculty. For faculty, the researchers recommend that they be responsible for reading and reacting to students' input. They added that a professor-designed survey administered mid-way through the semester may be helpful in gleaning student input to facilitate learning. For students, the researchers propose that they be held responsible for their faculty evaluations by "devising a system where students names are attached but kept confidential (faculty does not have access) so that administrators can contact students for follow-up interviews and information that becomes useful for improving teaching and learning" (Irons et al, 2011, p. 96).

Wright (2006) recommended changing to a confidential system of evaluation. Summarizing his findings, Wright noted, "Under a system of anonymous evaluations, students need take no responsibility for their opinions. With no possibility for follow-up, students need not think through their decision. … An evaluation could be based solely on latent anger resulting from a recent grade received on an exam, or from a single negative in-class experience with an instructor over the course of an entire semester (p. 419). The researcher believed that a confidential system will improve credibility in that it will allow supervisors to follow up on particularly high or low evaluations and provide a tool to investigate the relationship between grades and student evaluations (Wright, 2006, p. 420).

Exploring whether evaluations are perceived differently based on gender, researchers explored the thoughts and feelings that faculty have about SETs. The team surveyed faculty at a veterinary and biomedical sciences college and found that overall, female faculty were more negatively impacted by student evaluations than their male colleagues. "Female faculty are more likely to feel emotions related to unhappiness and anger after reading SETs than male faculty" (Kogan et. al.,, 2010, p. 629). In response to the negative impact of SETs on female faculty, the researchers found that "they report being less likely to change the material they teach based on SETs" (p. 628).

Looking at how students view online courses, Truell (2001) found that there is no significant difference in how students evaluated internet-assisted instruction. Using a researcher developed 21-item scale, he sampled students enrolled in an online communications course at a major Midwestern university. Upon reviewing his data, Truell recommended "evaluation of instruction relative to face-to-face and Internet-assisted delivery of the same course should be conducted" (p. 48)

With faculty evaluations moving toward an online process (as opposed to pencil and paper) researchers found that students tend to be more insightful when evaluating faculty. Through use of surveys, studying students at a college of pharmacy on the school's use of online evaluation forms, Anderson, Cain and Bird (2005) noted "Moreover, comments provided in the online evaluations were on average more frequent and lengthy than those handwritten on the paper forms" (p. 1).

Writing for the Journal of the Academy of Business Education, Ling, Phillips, and Weihrich (2012), researchers from Seattle University, sought to understand if one method resulted in higher evaluations over another. Using data from 138 different undergraduate

and graduate classes, the researchers found that faculty scored an average rating of 4.26

with paper evaluations and 4.34 with the online version. In summarizing their findings,

they noted:

> Most prior research has concluded there is no difference in ratings between in-
>
> class paper evaluations and online evaluations. However, prior research had either
>
> large sample sizes comparing the two modes of evaluations, but not directly
>
> comparing an individual instructor's ratings on paper with online evaluations, or
>
> had very small sample sizes comparing instructors' ratings using the two different
>
> modes of evaluation. Our findings confirm that although there is a lower response
>
> rate with out-of class online evaluations, teaching ratings are not significantly
>
> different from in-class"(p. 158).

The Value of the Researched Literature as it Relates to my Study

This research has provided valuable insights and clarification to the information I

have sought to discover in this study. More and more, the PR profession has been seeking

to identify issues related to trust and relationship as integral to public relations. And as

the demand for continued education increases and technology plays a vital part in

meeting that demand, the connection between public relations and distance learning will

become stronger. Employer perceptions of distance learning are also important and merit

attention that my study will address. Additionally, as institutions continue to recruit and

compete for students, perceptions of students (a primary public) are increasingly valued

in the evaluation of faculty.

Chapter Three: Procedures

In Chapter Two I discussed the relationship between public relations and issues in higher education distance learning. Exploring the research and seeing what others discovered allowed me to better understand the need for this study and the value it can provide.

In further understanding the need and value of such study, this dissertation describes a qualitative study using surveys, interviews, and focus groups as data gathering techniques. From these methods, my hope is that this research will reveal if perceptions of Public Relations (PR) amongst various higher education publics within the distance learning community and the face-to-face learning community align. It involved an exploration of five characteristics of public relations: trust, communication, quality, respect and rigor. The purpose was to possibly provide insight into which areas, if any, needed to be addressed within the higher education distance learning community; such as improvement of communication and trust.

For students, communication, quality, respect, and rigor were the most studied traits within this research, while with faculty I explored trust, communication, and rigor. Discussion was a category that threaded through all of the others and affected outcomes that all students and faculty would find important to their goals, and so it is studied indirectly. With administrators, I examined issues surrounding trust and quality, as well as matters that affect reputation. The interviews with employers focused primarily on quality- and reputation-related matters.

Understanding these topics in the distance learning forum is essential as components of the relationship between students and instructors and the relationship

between institutions and prospective employers. The quantity and quality of

communication in the classroom may influence students' perceptions of teaching and

confidence in their education (Rowicki, 1999, p.4). How graduate education students

viewed their online learning experiences and how online degrees are viewed outside of

academia are topics explored in this study. Graduate education courses were offered both

online and face-to-face, and thus the ability to contrast the two formats was possible.

Participants for this study were experienced and/or affiliated with graduate education

programs.

Research Questions

With the above understanding in mind, I designed the following research questions:

1. What characteristics are present that indicate a trust, or lack of, between the

    learning institution and its faculty and the learning institution and its students with

    regard to both face-to-face and distance learning coursework?

2. What characteristics of communication are present between the learning

    institution and its faculty and the learning institution and its students?

3. What characteristics are present to indicate the existence of quality or rigor with

    regard to both face-to-face and distance learning coursework?

4. What administrative issues exist that can affect the reputation of a learning

    institution and its distance learning program with regard to both face-to-face and

    distance learning coursework?

5. What employment issues exist that can affect the reputation of a learning

    institution with regard to distance learning?

6. What similarities and differences are most salient between the two formats?

7. Are there differences in perceptions between a small private liberal arts institution and a medium private liberal arts institution with regard to face to face and distance learning programs?

Research Settings

In selecting my study subjects and deciding how I would get a clear picture of public relations in online learning, I deliberately chose two very distinct institutions of higher learning from different regions and with diverse demographics. To protect the anonymity of the participants and their institutions, continuing from this point the universities will be identified as University Number One and University Number Two.

University with Large Enrollment. University Number One, the setting with the larger enrollment, was selected for these reasons: 1) Geographic proximity and familiarity; 2) Diversity of faculty and student body; and 3) Researcher-perceived need for exploring components of online learning. At the time of this research, University Number One was early in its programming of online coursework.

Located outside of a major metropolitan area, University Number One was originally established as a women's finishing school and affiliated with the Presbyterian Church. Almost two centuries after its establishment, the University had evolved into a private, independent liberal arts university. In 2012, the university offered more than 120 undergraduate and graduate degree programs and enrolled 3,749 graduate students (University Number One Factbook, 2012). In the fall of 2013, University Number One had 264 full-time faculty, 8 part-time, and 750 adjunct instructors (Administrative Assistant, personal communication, October 1, 2013). According to the Graduate Course Catalogue (2013-2014), the Graduate School of Education (GSE) at University Number

One offered 27 degrees ranging from master, education specialist, and doctorate. While most of the course offerings were taught in the face-to-face format, 32 classes were available online in Fall 2013. For this research, University Number One study subjects were affiliated with the GSE program.

University with Small Enrollment. University Number Two, the setting with the smaller enrollment, was \selected because of the format in which all of the graduate education courses were offered. Both sections of coursework offered made available both traditional and online formats, and both sections were taught by the same instructor. Studying a school with that trait was strategic to the research design since the data from the surveys and interviews, along with information gleaned from the Student Evaluations of Teaching, provided unique insights. University Number Two was a co-educational liberal arts institution, which was originally founded as a high school and chartered under a church-affiliated denomination. In 1957, high school courses were discontinued, and the school was accredited as a two year liberal arts college. In 1991, the institution began offering baccalaureate degrees and became a university. In Fall of 2013, University Number Two offered 31 major programs of study to 2215 undergraduate students and five graduate degree programs to 181 students (Dean, personal communication, September 25, 2013).

Participants for this study were affiliated with the university's Graduate Teacher Education Program. The Graduate School of Education employed two full-time faculty and three adjunct instructors. In 2012-2013 there were 39 students enrolled in the program (Dean; personal communication, May 5, 2013). The students were enrolled in either a Master of Education (MEd) program with a K-12 focus to prepare licensed

teachers or a 42-hour Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program designed for students who seek certification to teach. University Number Two was a much smaller institution than University Number One, and studying the two colleges provided a contrast that added valuable insights into this effort.

Surveys

In setting out to understand how public relations is practiced in online learning, the survey prompts and interview questions specifically addressed topics related to the research questions. As noted earlier, these categories were derived from their definitions as understood in the field of public relations and their relevance to education. Trust is crucial to strong relationships, personal or professional, and therefore it is a characteristic I sought to examine. Building relations requires quality, purposeful dialogue, and interaction between students and instructors, and this can be synchronous or asynchronous. With that truth, communication is a characteristic I sought to examine. Quality and rigor were chosen because they affect the perceptions of an educational program outside of the classroom. Table 4 provides the student survey prompts with an indication of the characteristics the prompt was intended to examine. Some prompts were related to more than one of the pre-chosen characteristics of Quality, Trust, Discussion, Communication, Respect, and Rigor, as they pertain to distance and online learning situations.

Table 4.

Student survey items by category.

No.	Student	Q	T	D	C	Rs	Rr
4	In online coursework, assignment instructions and course expectations are communicated clearly.				X		
5	The online instructor is actively engaged in the teaching of coursework.	X			X		
6	The online instructor gives his/her best effort.	X					
7	The online instructor carefully evaluates submitted work.	X					
8	The online instructor posts relevant discussion content.	X		X			
9	In online coursework, questions and concerns are NOT typically addressed respectfully.				X	X	
10	In online coursework, discussion forums allow sufficient communication between the instructor and classmates			X	X		
11	The online instructor is professional in his/her conduct.	X				X	
12	The online instructor differentiates instruction and feedback.	X					
13	The online instructor communicates in a regular and timely manner.				X		
14	In online coursework, discussion forums provide insufficient communication between the instructor and students.			X	X		
15	The online instructor communicates at an appropriate professional level.				X	X	
16	The online instructor is engaging.	X			X		
17	Typically, there are sufficient options and methods to reach the online instructor.				X		
18	The online instructor seeks to get to know the students.		X		X		
19	In online coursework, assignment instructions and course expectations are NOT typically communicated clearly.	X			X		
20	In online coursework, the course is NOT as challenging as other courses.	X					X
21	In online coursework, students are appropriately challenged.	X					X

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor
Other questions were informational in nature.   **Continued**

Student survey items by category; continued.

		Q	T	D	C	Rs	Rr
22	In online coursework, students must work hard in order to achieve success.	X					X
23	In online coursework, assignments require original thinking.	X					X
24	In online coursework, course materials are at appropriate level of rigor.	X					X
25	In online coursework, course materials are NOT at graduate level of rigor.	X					X
26	In online coursework, assignments require the student to read and apply the course materials.	X					X
27	In online coursework, interactions are relevant to subject matter and course objectives.	X		X			
28	In online coursework, students are challenged to produce work that is of high quality.	X					X
29	In online coursework, student engagement reflects quality and originality.	X					X
30	In online coursework, the course is well designed and applicable to the course discipline.	X	X				X
31	In online coursework, appropriate technology is used effectively.	X					
32	The online instructor responds to questions and concerns in a respectful manner.			X		X	X

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor
   Other questions were informational in nature.

By soliciting students' input, I hoped to find agreement or disagreement among student perceptions on how faculty related to students and if trust is being fostered. Communication and quality are assessed in multiple prompts. For instance, prompt 32 asked students to rate the statement "The online instructor responds to questions and concerns in a respectful manner" while prompt 5 assessed quality with the statement "The online instructor is actively engaged in the teaching of coursework." Again, with agreement or disagreement, my hope was to learn how communication and quality are viewed by students. Respect and rigor can be found in prompts 15 and 22.

Table 5 provides the faculty survey prompts with an indication of the characteristics each prompt was intended to examine. Some prompts were related to more than one of the pre-chosen characteristics of Quality, Trust, Discussion, Communication, Respect, and Rigor, as they pertain to distance and online learning situations. Faculty survey prompts were deliberately aligned to student survey prompts to provide a discussion of the comparison of student views to those of faculty.

Table 5.

Faculty survey items by category.

No.	Faculty/Staff/Adjunct	Q	T	D	C	Rs	Rr
4	In online coursework, most students are, themselves, doing the work that they are posting.	x	x				
5	In online coursework, overall students are giving their best in the course.	x					x
6	In online coursework, students are regularly reading the course materials.	x					x
7	In online coursework, students are routinely unprepared when posting their discussion responses.	x		x			
8	In online coursework, students are abiding by an honor code when doing their work.	x	x				
9	In online coursework, students incorporate constructive criticism and feedback provided by the instructor in evaluated coursework into future assignments.	x	x			x	
10	In online coursework, overall students seem comfortable communicating with the instructor.		x		x		
11	In online coursework, overall students regularly communicate with classmates.				x		
12	In online coursework, students frequently do not communicate at the proper academic level.	x			x		
13	In online coursework, there is open and honest communication in the course.		x		x	x	
14	In online coursework, students have ample opportunity and means to communicate with the instructor.				x		

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor
Other questions were informational in nature. **Continued**

Faculty survey items by category.

15	In online coursework, students have to work hard to achieve in the course.	x	x
16	In online coursework, course assignments require original thinking.	x	x
17	In online coursework, course assignments require students to read and apply the course materials.	x	x
18	In online coursework, course interactions are relevant to subject matter and course objectives.	x	x
19	In online coursework, course assignments are applicable to course discipline.	x	x
20	In online coursework, student work is not consistently of high quality.	x	
21	In online coursework, use of technology is effective and appropriate.	x	

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor

Other questions were informational in nature.

Asking instructors to respond to the prompt "In online coursework, there is open and honest communication in the course" (prompt 13) illustrates how trust is assessed. By soliciting their input, I hoped to find agreement or disagreement on how faculty believed they were fostering trust. Communication and quality assessment is illustrated in multiple prompts. My hope as a researcher was to gain insights on faculty perceptions of communication and quality. Respect and rigor can be found in prompts 13 and 15. When I asked instructors in prompt 13 to respond to the statement "In online coursework, there is open and honest communication in the course" I hoped to learn about respect as well as trust. In prompt 15 I asked faculty if students had to work hard and with that inquiry I sought to understand the faculty view of rigor in online learning.

Content Validity Process

Before I began to study perspectives of select participants, I composed survey prompts and interview protocols. Using the researcher-designed tools, I pre-screened my

questions by asking individuals with relevant experience and/or similarities to the intended participants to respond to the survey and interview questions. This pilot team was comprised of seven carefully-selected testers.

One was a corporate human resources professional (and graduate student) in his mid-sixties. He tested the questions and prompts that were to be posed to employer and students. Another was a college graduate with a degree in communications who has taken both online and traditional courses. He was 23 at the time of this study and was employed as a marketing specialist with a national media outlet. I asked him to test the student questions and also relied on him to address questions about writing clarity. I also sought insights from a 24-year-old corporate supervisor who has a degree in communications. She tested the student and employer questions and also addressed questions about the writing clarity. A 53-year-old college advancement director and former private business owner evaluated the employer and administrator questions while a 61-year-old college communications professor with an education degree tested the faculty questions. Since my study involved students in a graduate education program, I asked a 48-year-old former K-12 teacher and current education graduate student/adjunct instructor to review the student and faculty questions. And to address the public relations aspect of this research, I recruited the expertise of a chief executive officer of a PR/advertising agency. This 50-year-old executive tested the employer questions and reviewed all of the survey/interview protocol through a public relations lens.

Along with the insights of the above I also considered generalized feedback from the communications director of one of the participating universities. As a result personal

and demographic questions were added, and survey prompts were rearranged to keep assessed characteristics in close proximity.

Interviews

Following the collection of survey data and its analysis, I began the interview process. The first round of interviews was conducted at University Number Two during the last week of May 2013. This school was a long distance away, and so I traveled and spent five days during which I personally met and interviewed three students, four faculty, and four administrators. An administrator at the college pre-arranged meetings with students, faculty, and administrators to allow for proper stratification between the categories of student, faculty, and administrator. The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder and were immediately copied to a password-secured personal computer.

Employer and University Number One interviews were conducted in person when participants were available between June and September, 2013. Participants were chosen from the volunteer pool in a stratified manner to ensure that each public, student, faculty, and administration, was represented. The students and administrators whose schedules allowed them to participate and all faculty who volunteered were interviewed. Following recommendations from staff at University Number One, and other educators who had knowledge of human resource managers in the education field, I contacted employers to request interviews.

In total, 23 participants, either individually or part of a focus group, were interviewed from both universities and the pool of employers. I personally transcribed each interview within 72 hours after it was conducted and then saved the content on a

password-secured computer as well as a supplemental external hard-drive. Identifying

information was removed from the transcribed interviews and, for coding purposes,

interviewees were assigned a pseudonym as shown in Table 6.

Table 6.

Confidentiality Coding

Administrators	Faculty	Students	Employers
U1-A1	U1-F1	U1-S1	E-1
U1-A2	U1-F2	U1-S2	E-2
U2-A1	U1-F3	U1-S3	E-3
U2-A2	U2-F1	U2-S1	
U2-A3	U2-F2	U2-S2	
U2-A4	U2-F3	U2-S3	
	U2-F4		

Note: Researcher-created coding

Interview Protocol

With employers and administrators I was interested in views of quality and rigor

in online learning, thus their interview questions were targeted at gaining those insights.

For example, employers were asked if there is a generalizable difference between

employees with online degrees than those with traditional degrees, and if an applicant

with an online degree is viewed differently than one with a traditional degree. The hope

was to see if one form of education was favored in the workforce at the time of the study.

Administrators were given an opportunity to share if they viewed prospective

employees and students with online degrees differently than traditional, and if they

believed distance learning is more conducive to certain majors than others. To assess how

quality is maintained, I purposefully asked administrators questions about maintaining

academic integrity, professional development efforts, and resources for distance learners.

Table 7 shows each question and its related study characteristic(s).

Table 7.

Administrator interview questions by category.

No.	Student	Q	T	D	C	Rs	Rr
1	When you see an applicant with an online degree, what is your INITIAL impression?					x	x
2	Do you think all programs could be online or is online learning only appropriate for certain fields of study? Please illustrate your response.					x	x
3	What training do you provide distance learning faculty to ensure students are receiving a quality education?	x					
4	What evaluation methods do you employ to assess distance learning faculty? *How do they differ (if at all) from face-to-face assessments?*	x					
5	Are online courses charged differently than campus-based courses? If yes, what is the rationale?					x	
6	Are there resources available to distance learners that allow them to be a part of the campus community? *Do you think that is important?*	x					
7	What safeguards do you have in place to ensure that your online students are doing their own work?	x					x
8	What do you think is lacking in online learning programs? *What are you doing to address those?*	x					
9	What is your personal experience with online learning/teaching?					x	

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor

Employers were asked to share if they viewed prospective employees with online

degrees differently than traditional, and if that view was affected by the applicant's

school. Additionally, I inquired if they viewed differences in employees who studied

online in contrast with those who earned traditional degrees. Finally, employers were

asked to discuss their perceptions of the strengths and weakness of the two learning

formats. Table 8 shows each question employers were asked and its related study

characteristic(s).

Table 8.

Employer interview questions by category.

No.	Student	Q	T	D	C	Rs	Rr
1	If you see an applicant with an online degree is he/she viewed differently than someone with a traditional degree? *Does it matter where they matriculated? Is it different for some positions than others?*					x	x
2	Do you believe there is a generalizable difference between employees with online degrees and those with traditional degrees? *If so, please elaborate.*					x	
3	Are there unique strengths of online learning programs? *Do you think there are unique weaknesses?*	x					
4	Are there unique strengths of campus-based programs? *Do you think there are unique weaknesses?*	x					

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor

Quality, trust, communication, and rigor were the focus of the questions directed

at faculty. Table 9 shows the questions instructors were asked with the study design

characteristic theme(s) noted.

Table 9.

Faculty interview questions by category.

No.	Student	Q	T	D	C	Rs	Rr
1	How do you foster an environment where students feel free to communicate openly? *Is that complicated by computer-mediated communication?*		x		x		
2	How do you go about fostering trust in your classes? *Does not having in-person dialogue hamper that effort?*		x				

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor
Other questions were informational in nature.   **Continued**

Faculty interview questions by category.

#	Question	Q	T	D	C	Rs	Rr
3	How do you ensure that your course requires an appropriate degree of rigor? *Do you differentiate between online and face-to-face?*	x					x
4	How do you ensure that students are reading and applying the course materials? *Does it differ from your face to face? If so, how?*		x		x		
5	What do you do when student work is not of high quality?	x					x
6	Speaking of online courses…what tools do you use to be available to students and foster communication? *Does it differ from your face to face?*	x			x		
7	What methods do you employ to foster students coming to discussions prepared? *Does it differ from synchronous/asynchronous discussion?*	x		x			
8	How do you design assignments to foster course application?	x					x
9	What resources do you use to ensure that students are doing the work that they are posting/submitting?		x				x
10	What technology is used to facilitate learning? *Does it differ between the two formats?*	x					

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor

I intended to interview students in a focus group setting. Since most of my questions are comparative and exploratory, I believed the focus group setting, which would encourage students to interact as they responded to each other, would best serve my purpose. That desired interaction did indeed occur in the two focus group sessions. Additionally, two students were unable to attend the focus groups and were interviewed individually. Table 10 illustrates the questions the students were asked with the study design characteristic theme(s) noted.

Table 10.

Student focus group questions by category.

No.	Student	Q	T	D	C	Rs	Rr
1	Do you learn better in traditional or online courses? *Explain why you think that is.*	x					x
2	Do you work harder in online or traditional courses? *How so?*	x					x
3	Do you participate more in one format than the other?						
4	Is participation different between the two? *Elaborate.*			x	x		
5	Are the course interactions more focused in one format than another? *Secondary prompt: Do students tend to go off on "rabbit trails" in more format than another? Elaborate.*			x	x		
6	Is there a difference in the kind of feedback you receive in the two types of courses? *Does it differ significantly between professors?*	x			x	x	
7	Is there a difference in accessibility between the two formats? *Which format fosters better communication between students and professors?*			x		x	x
8	Do you feel that your instructor is giving his/her best effort in the course facilitation? *Are there differences in that regard between the two formats?*	x	x		x	x	x
9	How do you evaluate the quality of online courses compared to evaluating the quality of face-to-face courses?	x	x	x	x	x	x

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor

Interview Coding Characteristics Described

After all of the interviews were transcribed, I began the coding and analysis process. For this, I assigned coding themes that addressed the research questions, and then, from the information found in the interviews, I assigned sub-codes within those codes. Initially, I had 18 primary codes but found that to be excessive. After consulting with my committee, I re-assigned the codes to align with and answer the research questions, as well as highlight key topics generated from the interviews. This

consolidation allowed a clearer analysis. Transcribed quotes were then assigned an appropriate sub-code and discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation. Table 11 lists the five primary coding themes and the respective sub-codes:

Table 11

Coding Themes

Trust	Communication	Quality	Reputation	Instructional Format	
Integrity	Relational	Teaching Process Rigor	Credibility	Similarities	Learning Preference
Relational	Feedback	Resources	For-Profit versus Non-Profit	Participation	Effort
	Methods	Professional Development	Niche	Traditional Pros/Cons	Online Pros/Cons
	Accessibility	Accountability			
				Cost Differences	Teaching Evaluations

Note: Researcher-created coding

The characteristic of Trust is raised in Research Question One. For this I used the definition "To place confidence in [someone to do something]; have faith [in]; rely [upon]" (Trust, 2009). Within the characteristic of Trust I had two sub-categories: Trust-Integrity and Trust-Relational. For coding purposes, I defined Trust-Integrity as those things that have to do with methods used to maintain scholarly honesty. For the Trust-Relational coding, I looked for comments that focused on how faculty establish a rapport with students and seek to gain a sense of trust and confidence in them.

Communication is addressed in Research Question Number Two. The definition I used was, "The act or an instance of communicating; the imparting or exchange of information, ideas, or feelings" (Communication, 2009). For this coding theme, the responses were divided into three sub-categories: Communication-Relational,

Communication-Feedback, and Communication-Methods/Accessibility. I used Communication-Relational to explore the methods or value placed on the process of communication. Communication-Feedback categorized comments that addressed the input instructors provide students in regard to assignments and assessment. Communication-Methods/Accessibility looks at the different ways and tools faculty use to connect with their students.

Research Question Number Three addresses the topic of quality which for coding purposes I defined as:

From the students' perspective, quality largely equates to the experience they have in the classroom, whether on campus or online. As educators, we are responsible for ensuring an excellent learning experience by providing the planning, resources, and assessment which culminate in courses that contribute to the achievement of program outcomes in support of students' overall educational and professional goals. (Franklin University, 2012, p. 1)

To assess thoughts on this area, responses were divided into three sub-categories: Quality-Teaching/Process/Rigor, Quality-Resources, Quality-Professional Development/Accountability. Quality-Teaching/Process/Rigor is a collective code I defined to encompasses characteristics that highlight quality from an educational perspective. These include application, feedback, and differentiation. Quality-Resources explores the learning methods and technology used in teaching and the services available to students to enhance their learning experience. Quality-Professional Development/Accountability seeks insights into the efforts the studied schools invest in training and faculty support, along with methods to ensure quality in the classroom.

The reputation of online learning is addressed in Research Questions three and four. This topic was coded in three sub-categories: Reputation-Credibility, Reputation-For-Profit versus Non-Profit, and Reputation-Niche. Reputation-Credibility is looked at two ways: First, as applied to the format of a learning experience, questioning if one or the other is inferior. Second, Reputation-Credibility includes comments that address the educational and professional experiences of those who teach online or have administrative oversight of distance learning programs. Reputation-For-Profit versus Non-profit distinguishes perceptions of higher education institutions that are corporate or commercially based in contrast to those that are not profit-based. Reputation-Niche identifies comments that illustrate unique characteristics about an institution.

Understanding the unique characteristics of the two learning formats is central to this study and thus the final coding identifier is Instructional Format. Within this code, I have identified and self-defined eight sub-groups: Similarities, Learning Preference, Participation, Effort, Traditional Pros/Cons, Online Pros/Cons, Cost Differences, and Teaching Evaluations.

Instructional Format-Similarities looks at the similarities between the two learning platforms. Instructional Format-Learning Preference addresses students' thoughts on whether they learn better online or onsite as well as administrator and employer thoughts on format suitability in regard to academic courses and degree programs. Instructional Format-Participation explores students' level of engagement in the two learning formats. In Format-Effort I coded views that address which learning format is more challenging and requires students to work harder to succeed along with their perceptions of faculty efforts. Instructional Format-Traditional Pros/Cons includes

comments that address the advantages and disadvantages of learning onsite; and likewise Instructional Format-Online Pros/Cons does the same with learning online. Instructional Format-Cost Differences includes comments that provided insights and explanations behind the reasons for charging students more to learn online than onsite are discussed. And finally, for the code of Instructional Format-Teaching Evaluations, I collected comments that dealt with the Student Evaluation of Teaching process.

Procedures

Once Research Questions were designed to address the purpose and rationale of the study, I selected survey, interview questions, and focus group topics. Since I was inquiring about beliefs, opinions, and experiences, I chose to use qualitative methodology. By using this research method, I was able to garner personal views, concerns, and perspectives and then narrate the data and tell a story. In brief, a qualitative study allowed me to "obtain a more complete picture" of the research (Fraenkel et al, 2012, p. 425)

To check content validity and alignment of all prompts and questions with research design, the tools were given to a pilot group to provide a procedural run through, feedback, and critique of the tools and processes. Satisfied with what was learned and following appropriate adjustments to researcher-designed tools, the surveys were formatted for Survey Monkey and distributed first to University Number One. Emails were sent. One hundred four Faculty, Administration, and Staff from University Number One responded to the online survey. The sample was divided into 42.3% Faculty, 32.7% Staff, 13.5% Adjunct Instructors, 9.6% Administration, and 1.9% University Executives. The experience of the respondents was represented by 57.7% who had taught face-to-face

courses and 4.8% who had previously taught an online class. Sixty-six graduate students

from University Number One responded to the online survey. The sample was divided

into 59.1% Master students, 4.5% Specialist, 28.8% Doctorate, 6.1% Graduate Certificate

students, and 1.5% without a declared category. The experience of the student

respondents was represented by 31.8% who had enrolled in a mixture of online and

hybrid coursework, 24.2% who had enrolled in a mixture of online, hybrid and face-to-

face coursework, 9.1% who enrolled in a mixture of hybrid and face-to-face, and 1.5%

who enrolled in a mixture of online and hybrid coursework.

During that same timeframe, an administrator at University Number Two distributed

paper copies of the surveys, which were then collected and returned to me. All of the

surveyed students and instructors at University Number Two volunteered to be

interviewed. In total, three students and four instructors were surveyed and interviewed.

The survey data revealed that all of the surveyed students at University Number Two had

enrolled in a mixture of online and face-to-face courses. Similarly, all faculty taught

courses in the two formats.

     At the end of the survey, participants were asked if they would be willing to be

interviewed. The names of those who volunteered were collected and they were later

contacted. After survey data was gathered I analyzed the responses. The analysis

involved tallying the survey responses, converting them into percentages and then

entering the percent of agreement and disagreement for each prompt into a table.

Alignment of Tools

     Tables 4 and 5 represent survey prompts. Tables 8 through 10 represent interview

questions, and Table 10 represents focus group discussion. Each question and prompt is

marked with the appropriate characteristic pre-determined as an integral part of public relations. To illustrate alignment, student survey prompt 22 aligns with the faculty survey prompt 15 and connects with faculty interview question number three and student focus group question number two. I deliberately aligned the survey prompts, interview questions, and focus group questions according to topic, to provide triangulation of data results. The alignment of these items allowed me to formulate answers to research questions number three and four.

Student Evaluations of Teaching Analysis

Another source of data available from only one of the two universities, which provided insights into student perceptions of their learning experiences was the Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs). The conversations I had in pursuing this study indicated that there were some issues with how schools design and use SETs, as well as how students viewed that task. So in response, I analyzed Student Evaluations of Teaching SETs to see if there were differences in how students evaluate online and face-to-face instruction. To accomplish this, I acquired SETs from eight courses at University Number Two that were taught in both online and traditional formats. Descriptive analysis of this data provided deeper insights into trends regarding how students perceived teaching and related coursework. The findings from the content analysis are reported in Chapter Four. I was unable to find literature to specifically address issues concerning differentiation of SETs for different instructional formats nor was I able to find research assessing student understanding of the purpose of SETs, and so in Chapter Five I made recommendations as to how SETs for online teaching can be improved and I suggest related additional research.

Summary

In consideration of the generalizability of the results of this research I deliberately sought perspectives from multiple categories of constituents; students, faculty, administration, and employers. To gain a broad view I varied the data gathering techniques though use of a Likert-scale perception survey, face-to-face interviews, and student focus group discussions, as well as the online evaluations of courses by students. I limited my research to online coursework and chose to eliminate discussion of hybrid and MOOC formats, leaving those topics as future research focus. I carefully aligned all data gathering tools to deliberately seek perspectives in all categories relating to public relations with respect to a product, course content delivery, and the consumers.

Chapter Four: Findings and Results

Introduction

In this chapter I will present the results of this qualitative study comparing the characteristics of Public Relations (PR) with regard to face-to-face versus distance learning in a small and medium private liberal arts higher education setting. As noted previously, the characteristics I am comparing are associated with the seven research questions that explore the relationships between students, faculty, administrators, and employers when considering issues of trust, communication, quality, respect/reputation, and rigor regarding academics.

Below are the seven research questions along with the methodology used to address them noted in parentheses:

1. What characteristics are present that indicate a trust, or lack of, between the learning institution and its faculty and the learning institution and its students with regard to both face-to-face and distance learning coursework? (Survey, interview, and focus group)

2. What characteristics of communication are present between the learning institution and its faculty and the learning institution and its students? (Survey, interview, focus group, and content analysis)

3. What characteristics are present to indicate the existence of quality or rigor with regard to both face-to-face and distance learning coursework? (Survey, interview, focus group, and content analysis)

4. What administrative issues exist that can affect the reputation of (respect for) a learning institution and its distance learning program with regard to both face-to-face and distance learning coursework? (Interview and focus group)

5. What employment issues exist that can affect the reputation of a learning institution with regard to distance learning? (Interview)

6. What similarities and differences are most salient between the two formats? (Survey, interview, focus group, and content analysis)

7. Are there differences in perceptions between a small private liberal arts institution and a medium private liberal arts institution with regard to face to face and distance learning programs? (Survey, interview, and focus group).

Methodology

There are four publics in this study: Students, Faculty, Administrators, and Employers. Students and faculty at two universities were both surveyed and interviewed. Administrators and employers were interviewed. Additionally, a simple content analysis of data gathered from select student evaluations of teaching was conducted.

For the survey reporting, I have organized the responses by membership in one of the publics mentioned above, and in doing so I examined relevant aspects of public relations were found.   Following the survey reporting, an analysis of the interview data provided through two universities is presented in a qualitatively coded format, and then content analysis is explained.

Survey Responses: Students

For this part of the study, 207 students completed a survey. Out of those survey respondents, six students (three from each studied school) voluntarily participated in focus groups or interviews.

For the survey portion, students were asked to respond to 29 statements addressing characteristics of public relations with regard to their online and onsite learning experience. The response options were: Do Not Know, Strongly Disagree, Moderately Disagree, Moderately Agree, and Strong Agree. Their responses to the questions were tabulated with the assigned characteristic and are shown in Table A1. While discussion board conversation is not a characteristic of PR, as shared in Chapter One, in this setting discussion does pertain to communication and quality and therefore it too is categorized and assessed as part of this study.

In Table 12, the student responses show a strong agreement on all prompts regarding Quality. To illustrate, both prompt 7 and 39 resulted in Strong Agreement. Prompt 7 states "The online instructor carefully evaluates submitted work." To that prompt, 39 students Strongly Agreed, 27 Moderately Agreed, while 15 did not know, and nine each noted that they Moderately Disagreed or Strongly Disagreed. In statement 12, students were prompted to respond to the statement "The online instructor differentiates instruction and feedback." The majority of the students, 32, Moderately Agreed, while 28 of them Strongly Agreed. Only nine students Strongly Disagreed and six Moderately Disagreed while 25 responded that they did not know.

Table 12.

Student survey questions by proportion of response: Quality.

No.	Student	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
5	The online instructor is actively engaged in the teaching of coursework.	17	8	14	30	**32**
6	The online instructor gives his/her best effort.	20	6	11	24	**39**
7	The online instructor carefully evaluates submitted work.	15	9	9	27	**39**
8	The online instructor posts relevant discussion content.	19	6	6	26	**43**
11	The online instructor is professional in his/her conduct.	19	2	2	20	**59**
12	The online instructor differentiates instruction and feedback.	25	9	6	32	**28**
16	The online instructor is engaging.	17	8	14	37	**25**
19	In online coursework, assignment instructions and course expectations are NOT typically communicated clearly.	17	**44**	24	12	3
20	In online coursework, the course is NOT as challenging as other courses.	18	**55**	15	9	3
21	In online coursework, students are appropriately challenged.	15	5	5	31	**45**
22	In online coursework, students must work hard in order to achieve success.	14	3	8	27	**49**
23	In online coursework, assignments require original thinking.	15	8	3	36	**38**
24	In online coursework, course materials are at appropriate level of rigor.	14	8	8	**36**	35
25	In online coursework, course materials are NOT at graduate level of rigor.	18	**52**	20	8	3
26	In online coursework, assignments require the student to read and apply the course materials.	15	2	6	23	**54**
27	In online coursework, interactions are relevant to subject matter and course objectives.	17	3	6	26	**49**
28	In online coursework, students are challenged to produce work that is of high quality.	14	2	9	31	**45**

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor
Other questions were informational in nature. **Continued**

Student survey questions by proportion of response: Quality.

No.	Student	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
29	In online coursework, student engagement reflects quality and originality.	17	3	15	**35**	29
30	In online coursework, the course is well designed and applicable to the course discipline.	14	5	11	32	**39**
31	In online coursework, appropriate technology is used effectively.	14	3	5	33	**46**

Note: DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement;
MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Similarly, under Communication, students agreed that there are ample ways to communicate with online instructors and that instructors communicate in a timely manner (Table 13). These views are supported by responses to prompt 17 and 13. When asked to respond to the statement "Typically there are sufficient options and methods to reach the online instructor", 52 students Strongly Agreed and 31 Moderately Agreed. Only two Moderately Disagreed and zero Strongly Disagreed, while 16 stated that they did not know. To prompt 13, which asked if the student believed "the online instructor communicates in a regular and timely manner," 42 Strongly Agreed and 27 Moderately Agreed.

Table 13.

Student survey questions by proportion of response: Communication.

No.	Student	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
4	In online coursework, assignment instructions and course expectations are communicated clearly.	15	6	6	**36**	**36**
5	The online instructor is actively engaged in the teaching of coursework.	17	8	14	30	**32**
9	In online coursework, questions and concerns are NOT typically addressed respectfully.	20	**63**	5	6	6
10	In online coursework, discussion forums allow sufficient communication between the instructor and classmates	17	11	14	29	**29**

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor
Other questions were informational in nature. **Continued**

Student survey questions by proportion of response: Communication.

		DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
13	The online instructor communicates in a regular and timely manner.	15	9	6	27	**42**
14	In online coursework, discussion forums provide insufficient communication between the instructor and students.	18	**32**	14	27	9
15	The online instructor communicates at an appropriate professional level.	15	2	8	19	**57**
16	The online instructor is engaging.	17	8	14	37	**25**
17	Typically, there are sufficient options and methods to reach the online instructor.	16	0	2	31	**52**
18	The online instructor seeks to get to know the students.	20	15	14	**27**	24
19	In online coursework, assignment instructions and course expectations are NOT typically communicated clearly.	17	**44**	24	12	3
27	In online coursework, interactions are relevant to subject matter and course objectives.	17	3	6	26	**49**
32	The online instructor responds to questions and concerns in a respectful manner.	15	6	9	20	**50**

Note: DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement; MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Table 14 indicates that, in regard to Rigor, again, students overwhelming agreed that online coursework is as challenging as other courses. This discussion includes responses that illustrate perspectives on the topic of Rigor. In prompt 21 a collective 76 agreed that "In online coursework, students are appropriately challenged" while only 10 collectively disagreed and 15 did not know. The test prompt or reverse-coded item was assessed in prompt 20 where students responded to the prompt "In online coursework, the course is NOT as challenging as other courses." In reverse, a collective 70 disagreed and 12 agreed, while 18 did not know. Prompt 28 addressed online assignments by asking students to evaluate the statement "In online coursework, students are challenged to produce work that is of high quality" and again, students responded affirmatively with 45

in strong agreement and 31 who Moderately Agreed while only two Strongly Disagreed

and nine Moderately Disagreed.

Table 14.

Student survey questions by proportion of response: Rigor.

No.	Student	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
20	In online coursework, the course is NOT as challenging as other courses.	18	**55**	15	9	3
21	In online coursework, students are appropriately challenged.	15	5	5	31	**45**
22	In online coursework, students must work hard in order to achieve success.	14	3	8	27	**49**
23	In online coursework, assignments require original thinking.	15	8	3	36	**38**
24	In online coursework, course materials are at appropriate level of rigor.	14	8	8	**36**	35
25	In online coursework, course materials are NOT at graduate level of rigor.	18	**52**	20	8	3
26	In online coursework, assignments require the student to read and apply the course materials.	15	2	6	23	**54**
28	In online coursework, students are challenged to produce work that is of high quality.	14	2	9	31	**45**
29	In online coursework, student engagement reflects quality and originality.	17	3	15	**35**	29
30	In online coursework, the course is well designed and applicable to the course discipline.	14	5	11	32	**39**

Note: DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement;
MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Tables 15 through 17 indicate proportion results for the remaining categories

measured by the student survey. Table 15 lists the questions that addressed the topic of

Trust. The dominant responses were Moderately Agree and Strongly Agree

Table 15.

Student survey questions by proportion of response: Trust.

No.	Student	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
18	The online instructor seeks to get to know the students.	20	15	14	**27**	24
30	In online coursework, the course is well designed and applicable to the course discipline.	14	5	11	32	**39**
32	The online instructor responds to questions and concerns in a respectful manner.	15	6	9	20	**50**

Note: DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement;
    MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Table 16 lists the questions that addressed the topic of Discussion. Including the translation of a reverse-coded question, the dominant response from students in all three prompts was Strongly Agree

Table 16.

Student survey questions by proportion of response: Discussion.

No.	Student	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
8	The online instructor posts relevant discussion content.	19	6	6	26	**43**
10	In online coursework, discussion forums allow sufficient communication between the instructor and classmates	17	11	14	29	**29**
14	In online coursework, discussion forums provide insufficient communication between the instructor and students.	18	**32**	14	27	9

Note: DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement;
    MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Table 17 shows the questions that addressed the topic of Respect. Including the translation of a reverse-coded question, the dominant response from students for all three prompts was Strongly Agree.

Table 17.

Student survey questions by proportion of response: Respect.

No.	Student	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
9	In online coursework, questions and concerns are NOT typically addressed respectfully.	20	**63**	5	6	6
11	The online instructor is professional in his/her conduct.	19	2	2	20	**59**
15	The online instructor communicates at an appropriate professional level.	15	2	8	19	**57**
32	The online instructor responds to questions and concerns in a respectful manner.	15	6	9	20	**50**

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor
     DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement; MA - Moderate
Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Survey Responses: Faculty

For this portion, 104 participants instructors responded to 18 statements addressing characteristics of PR in relation to their teaching experiences. One hundred four Faculty, Administration, and Staff from University Number One responded to the online survey. The sample was divided into 42.3% Faculty, 32.7% Staff, 13.5% Adjunct Instructors, 9.6% Administration, and 1.9% University Executives. The experience of the respondents was represented by 57.7% who had taught face-to-face courses and 4.8% who had previously taught an online class. Sixty-six graduate students from University Number One responded to the online survey. The sample was divided into 59.1% Master students, 4.5% Specialist, 28.8% Doctorate, 6.1% Graduate Certificate students, and 1.5% without a declared category. The experience of the student respondents was represented by 31.8% who had enrolled in a mixture of online and hybrid coursework, 24.2% who had enrolled in a mixture of online, hybrid and face-to-face coursework, 9.1% who enrolled in a mixture of hybrid and face-to-face, and 1.5% who enrolled in a mixture of online and hybrid coursework.

The response options were: Do Not Know, Strongly Disagree, Moderately Disagree, Moderately Agree, and Strong Agree. Their responses to the questions were tabulated with the assigned characteristic and are shown in Table B1. As noted in the student survey reporting, discussion pertains to communication and quality and therefore it too is categorized and assessed as part of this study.

As illustrated in Table 18, the responses to the Quality prompts show faculty mostly in agreement. However, while the students leaned toward Strongly Agree, the faculty responses show a higher frequency of moderate agreement to the prompts. For example, prompt 9 stated "In online coursework, students incorporate constructive criticism and feedback provided by the instructor in evaluated coursework into future assignments" and only 12 instructors Strongly Agreed while 41 Moderately Agreed. The second highest response was Do Not Know, at 37, while only two Strongly Disagreed and eight Moderately Disagreed. A similar pattern is shown in 15 where faculty responded to the prompt "In online coursework, students have to work hard to achieve in the course." The highest number was 36, who Moderately Agreed. The second favored response was Do Not Know at 29 and 25 Strongly Agreed with that statement. Only one instructor Strongly Disagreed and 10 Moderately Disagreed.

Table 18.

Faculty survey questions by proportion of response: Quality.

No.	Faculty/Staff/Adjunct	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
4	In online coursework, most students are, themselves, doing the work that they are posting.	36	1	4	**42**	17
5	In online coursework, overall students are giving their best in the course.	32	2	14	**44**	9
6	In online coursework, students are regularly reading the course materials.	33	5	20	**35**	7
7	In online coursework, students are routinely unprepared when posting their discussion responses.	**46**	9	25	20	1
8	In online coursework, students are abiding by an honor code when doing their work.	**40**	3	12	33	13
9	In online coursework, students incorporate constructive criticism and feedback provided by the instructor in evaluated coursework into future assignments.	37	2	8	**41**	12
12	In online coursework, students frequently do not communicate at the proper academic level.	**39**	5	17	31	9
15	In online coursework, students have to work hard to achieve in the course.	**29**	1	10	36	25
16	In online coursework, course assignments require original thinking.	34	3	10	**35**	18
17	In online coursework, course assignments require students to read and apply the course materials.	29	0	5	**36**	30
18	In online coursework, course interactions are relevant to subject matter and course objectives.	**35**	0	4	32	29
19	In online coursework, course assignments are applicable to course discipline.	33	0	0	**37**	30
20	In online coursework, student work is not consistently of high quality.	**38**	13	28	18	3
21	In online coursework, use of technology is effective and appropriate.	28	2	5	**38**	28

Note: DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement; MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Similarly, under Communication, the majority of the faculty agree with the

students that communication between them is sufficient (Table 19). In response to prompt

14, "In online coursework, students have ample opportunity and means to communicate

with the instructor," 36 instructors Strongly Agreed and 27 Moderately Agreed. Zero

Strongly Disagreed and five Moderately Disagreed. Of note here is that 32 did not know.

In prompt 10, faculty were asked if they believe students are comfortable communicating

with them, to which 28 instructors replied that they "Strongly Agreed" while 31 said they

Moderately Agreed. Collectively, the number of those who disagreed is a low total of six;

however the Do Not Know response was again high at 34.

Table 19.

Faculty survey questions by proportion of response: Communication.

No.	Faculty/Staff/Adjunct	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
10	In online coursework, overall students seem comfortable communicating with the instructor.	**34**	2	4	31	28
11	In online coursework, overall students regularly communicate with classmates.	**40**	8	21	26	6
12	In online coursework, students frequently do not communicate at the proper academic level.	**39**	5	17	31	9
13	In online coursework, there is open and honest communication in the course.	38	1	15	**40**	7
14	In online coursework, students have ample opportunity and means to communicate with the instructor.	32	0	5	27	**36**

Note: DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement;
MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Table 20 indicates that in regard to Rigor, again, faculty overwhelming agreed

that online coursework is challenging, though they only Moderately Agreed that students

give their best, work hard. To illustrate the first point about rigor, in prompt 15 a

collective 61 instructors either strongly or Moderately Agreed that "In online coursework,

students have to work hard to achieve in the course" while only 11 collectively disagreed

and 29 did not know. To illustrate the second point about student effort, note that each

question associated with student effort in online courses the highest faculty response was

Moderately agree, followed by Do Not Know (which may or may not be a polite way for

faculty taking the survey to avoid answering the question).

Table 20.

Faculty survey questions by proportion of response: Rigor.

No.	Faculty/Staff/Adjunct	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
5	In online coursework, overall students are giving their best in the course.	32	2	14	**44**	9
6	In online coursework, students are regularly reading the course materials.	33	5	20	**35**	7
15	In online coursework, students have to work hard to achieve in the course.	**29**	1	10	36	25
16	In online coursework, course assignments require original thinking.	34	3	10	**35**	18
17	In online coursework, course assignments require students to read and apply the course materials.	29	0	5	**36**	30
18	In online coursework, course interactions are relevant to subject matter and course objectives.	**35**	0	4	32	29
19	In online coursework, course assignments are applicable to course discipline.	33	0	0	**37**	30

Note: DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement;
MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

With the Trust prompts, I was seeking to gain relational insights along with insights into issues surrounding academic integrity (Table 21). Prompt 9 explored the relational aspect of trust with the statement "In online coursework, students incorporate constructive criticism and feedback provided by the instructor in evaluated coursework into future assignments" to which 41 instructors Moderately Agreed and 12 Strongly Agreed. Only two Strongly Disagreed, while eight Moderately Disagree. Again, there were a high number of Do Not Know responses at 37. This may be because the prompt asked about "future assignments" and faculty interpreted that as being outside their knowledge.

Prompt 4 addressed academic integrity and asked instructors to respond to the statement "In online coursework, most students are, themselves, doing the work that they

are posting." Again, there was high agreement with 59 collectively agreeing with the

statement and only five collectively disagreeing. The Do Not Know response is 36.

Table 21.

Faculty survey questions by proportion of response: Trust.

No.	Faculty/Staff/Adjunct	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
4	In online coursework, most students are, themselves, doing the work that they are posting.	36	1	4	**42**	17
8	In online coursework, students are abiding by an honor code when doing their work.	**40**	3	12	33	13
9	In online coursework, students incorporate constructive criticism and feedback provided by the instructor in evaluated coursework into future assignments.	37	2	8	**41**	12
10	In online coursework, overall students seem comfortable communicating with the instructor.	**34**	2	4	31	28
13	In online coursework, there is open and honest communication in the course.	38	1	15	**40**	7

Note: DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement;
    MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Tables 22 and 23 indicate proportion results for the remaining categories

measured by the faculty survey. Table 22 lists the faculty question that addressed the

topic of Discussion. Whereas students Strongly Agreed on these prompts, the dominant

response from faculty was Do Not Know. The question is a reverse-coded prompt which

explains how the second highest response was a collective disagree.

Table 22.

Faculty survey questions by proportion of response: Discussion.

No.	Faculty/Staff/Adjunct	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
7	In online coursework, students are routinely unprepared when posting their discussion responses.	**46**	9	25	20	1

Note: DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement;
    MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Table 23 lists the faculty questions that addressed the topic of Trust. The dominant response was Moderately Agree, and the second most popular response was Do Not Know.

Table 23.

Faculty survey questions by proportion of response: Respect.

No.	Faculty/Staff/Adjunct	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
9	In online coursework, students incorporate constructive criticism and feedback provided by the instructor in evaluated coursework into future assignments.	37	2	8	**41**	12
13	In online coursework, there is open and honest communication in the course.	38	1	15	**40**	7

Note: DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement;
    MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Initially the frequency of the Do Not Know response was troubling for me, but I soon realized that it illustrates a need and thus is discussed in more detail in Chapter Five. Table 24 illustrates the prompts that generated high percentages of Do Not Know responses.

Table 24.

Faculty survey questions by proportion of response: Do Not Know category.

No.	Faculty/Staff/Adjunct	SD	MD	MA	SA
7	In online coursework, students are routinely unprepared when posting their discussion responses.	9	25	20	1
11	In online coursework, overall students regularly communicate with classmates.	8	21	26	6
8	In online coursework, students are abiding by an honor code when doing their work.	3	12	33	13
12	In online coursework, students frequently do not communicate at the proper academic level.	5	17	31	9

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor
    Other questions were informational in nature.   **Continued**

Faculty survey questions by proportion of response: Do Not Know category.

20	In online coursework, student work is not consistently of high quality.	13	28	18	3
18	In online coursework, course interactions are relevant to subject matter and course objectives.	0	4	32	29
10	In online coursework, overall students seem comfortable communicating with the instructor.	2	4	31	28
16	In online coursework, course assignments require original thinking.	3	10	**35**	18
15	In online coursework, students have to work hard to achieve in the course.	1	10	36	25

Note: DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement;
MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Interviews

While the survey data provided a glimpse into student and faculty views of online learning, the interviews allowed me to dig deeper into their beliefs and responses. Six surveyed students ranging in age from 25 to 47 were interviewed; two in two separate focus groups and two individually.

For faculty, the interview part of this study allowed me to probe further into their beliefs and experiences and possibly gain insights into some of the Do Not Know survey responses. Seven surveyed instructors were interviewed for this research. A few themes from the faculty interviews include: a) Overall, instructors believed that not all learning should be online, but since most of their courses were application-based, either format worked well; b) Some differentiation was practiced to accommodate course objectives and needs between the formats; c) Social media was used as a discussion tool by some faculty while others strongly opposed using it; and d) Use of plagiarism-detection technology, while available to all faculty, was inconsistently used.

The student interview questions can be viewed in Appendix E and the faculty interviews can be viewed in Appendix F. Along with students and faculty, I interviewed

six administrators from the two studied schools. Additionally, I interviewed three

employers, more specifically education human resources administrators, who have

experience in hiring people who have earned a graduate education degree. The questions

asked in those interviews are found in Appendix G and H.

In total, 23 people were interviewed for this study. Their transcribed interviews

were coded according to the characteristics found in the research questions and then each

primary theme was broken down into related secondary themes. Table 11 shows the five

primary categories with their respective secondary coding options.

To ensure anonymity, the respondents were given pseudonyms that only reveal if

the response is from a Student (S), Faculty (F), Administrator (A), or Employer (E). The

other identifying characteristic is whether the respondent is from University Number One

(U1) or University Number Two (U2). Table 6 indicates the assigned pseudonyms.

Trust

Research Question Number One addresses the topic of trust and thus trust is a

coding category. The responses were divided into two sub-categories: Trust-Integrity and

Trust-Relational. Trust-Integrity has to do with methods used to maintain scholarly

honesty on the part of the student, such as guarding against plagiarism while Trust-

Relational focuses on how faculty establish assurance with their students.

Trust-Integrity. Trust-Integrity was a theme found in responses by faculty and

administrators. In this category there was a clear distinction between the comments

gleaned from the two universities. University Number One is a larger school and invests

significant resources into maintaining academic integrity and that is shown in their

responses.

Response # TI-1. "This [maintaining online academic integrity] is one of those things that we've spent years trying to work through. . . . Every time I go to the Higher Learning Commission conference that is the main thing I look for. And I go to every single session that has anything to do with online, hoping that we'll find an answer. I also talk to all of the people in the exhibit room to say 'What are you doing? How can you help me?'"(U1-A1).

For both online and onsite courses, University Number One encourages its faculty to use Turnitin, a plagiarism-detection program. The use of this program is clearly consistent with the school's commitment to maintaining integrity as illustrated by Response # TI-2, which was echoed by other University Number One respondents.

Response # TI-2. "I use Turnitin for every little thing . . . traditional or online classroom" (U1-F3).

In addition to Turnitin, University Number One employs Tegrity software to ensure honesty when students are taking exams remotely.

Response # TI-3. "What happens is I ask the students to log onto Tegrity and it starts recording and what it does is it records everything that's on their screen and the preparation for it is they have to hold up a picture ID next to their face and take a picture of it so that I can see that that person is in fact that person" (U1-A2).

While software like Tegrity is available at University Number One, not all of the instructors are familiar with or have used it.

Response # TI-4. "For my online I've not used any type of proctor [system]…I think that is something that I would like to look into more" (U1-F3).

Maintaining honesty in writing and test-taking were not the only academic integrity issues University Number One was concerned about. Similar comments concerning these two issues were expressed by both faculty and administrators at University Number One.

Response # TI-5. "How do we know the person who did the homework? It's the same way we don't know the person who does the homework for on-ground. We've done everything we possibly can" (U1-A1).

Response # TI-6. "Another issue that we run into is students sharing information with other students. What we tell faculty to do is to create a test pool . . . and let the computer randomize and randomly select questions and therefore no two students will take the same quiz" (U1-A2).

University Number Two's responses to questions regarding Trust-Integrity were somewhat different from those at University Number One, more characterized by an emphasis on trust than a concern with integrity.

Response # TI-7. "We're kind of unique in the fact that we're a Christian university so most of my students, if not all of them, have a view that their work is their work and that they shouldn't take others' work" (U2-F2).

While instructor Response # TI-7 suggested that there was no need to be concerned about honesty, one administrator acknowledged that integrity may need to be more emphasized.

Response # TI-8. "We trust a lot. . . . I mean that's something I'm learning that I might need to look at little more. There is software on Blackboard. I don't typically use it myself but others do. . . . perhaps we should put more money into different kinds of

software because we have had a few cases [of plagiarism] that I've caught myself" (U2-A1).

And while University Number Two does have SafeAssign, a plagiarism-detection software, the use and opinions of the program vary among the faculty resulting in some using it and others not.

Response # TI-9. "I don't typically use [SafeAssign]. Other faculty members do. . . . We just trust. But there is software, we're learning that there's better software that might we might look into" (U2-F1).

A second administrator argued though software options are available to anyone who chooses to use them, there is no need to do things differently.

Response # TI-10. "The only thing that we can do is trust students be honorable. … We have some very keen professors who recognize the same work being submitted by students and they have been kicked out online. . . . We do have SafeAssign. And they do some kind of check for plagiarism for electronic papers but it's up to the professor to use it. It is not up to the university to make them use it. But the resource is out there" (U2-A2).

Another administrator noted a lack of confidence in plagiarism-detection software adding that is not a concern since it aligns with the belief that students at University Number Two are completely trustworthy.

Response # TI-11. "I find [plagiarism software programs] aren't very helpful anyway. Maybe it's naïve but we've encountered very few instances of that kind of inappropriate behavior" (U2-A4).

Use of technology and software provide a few examples of methods faculty employ to address academic integrity. Other methods are more personal. For instance, Responses # TI-12 and # TI-13 indicate an instructional approach.

Response # TI-12. "I establish that initial criteria and I lay the groundwork for ethical conduct and integrity of their work" (U2-F3).

Response # TI-13. "In our syllabi we have a statement that anything that is not your idea, something that has been used before for credit, is plagiaristic . . . But after you teach a course several times . . . you know from a student's writing what their discussion is like. You know whether or not it sounds like them" (U2-F4).

The approach recorded in Response # TI-14 is communicative and relies on adherence to a code of ethics.

Response # TI-14. "The first thing I do is I describe it. I make it part of the syllabus. I describe the academic integrity that is expected" (U2-F3).

With these methods, one instructor noted that collectively students are aware of application of academic integrity, and that helps with accountability.

Response # TI-15. "Students get the word out amongst themselves when they know that you monitor them and I think that keeps them a little more accountable" (U2-F1).

As noted in Response # TI-16, building a trusting relationship with students is fundamental to fostering academic integrity.

Response # TI-16. "I don't know that [they are doing the work they submit]. But I do have a relationship. I establish a relationship with them right up front and it's the

relationship that teaches and it also builds the trust. . . . They develop a trust in me because I make a decision to trust them" (U1-F2).

Trust-Relational. In addressing the topic of trust as a researcher, not only was I seeking to explore how institutions maintain academic integrity (which contributes to rigor), but I also sought to gain insights into how faculty establish a rapport with students and gain a sense of trust and confidence in them. Many responses illustrated that rapport is something instructors believe is important.

Response # TR-1. "I also always do what I say I will do. I try almost to a fault, even when it's kind of obnoxious that I come back and do something that probably didn't need to be done but I do it anyway so that they can see that I am as good as my word" (U1-F2).

Faculty indicated a range of things they do to establish an online rapport and foster trust:

Response # TR-2 . "They feel safe because in a lot of the posts I'll say please be honest yet respectable, keep information confidential, and then I'll also model this behavior but I will also reveal information that I have experienced professionally and/or personally" (U1-F1).

Response # TR-3. "I think with trust because of some of the sensitive topics we talk about we try to be very clear that we want to be open and trust that we can have these conversations and we're not going to be accusing anyone, judging anyone, that this is part of our society and we want to talk about it" (U1-F3).

Response # TR-4. "One thing I say frequently is there is nothing you will experience in this course that we cannot work out together. That gives them reassurance

that I am there" (U2-F4).

Some of these methods include modeling.

Response # TR-5. "I'll share information about [my university] and say I experience this at this location. So for me to put that out there to the student shows well the professor can talk about her current place of employment and it's safe and okay, then I can as well. I'll also share [personal experiences I've had with my life] with the students" (U1-F1).

And, some expressed that being timely in their communication is key to building trust:

Response # TR-6. "I respond to them as soon as possible. I find that that really builds a good relationship and they learn to trust me through that way. They know that if they have a question I am going to be there for them" (U2-F4).

While a good rapport is important, some faculty noted that online contexts may demand more of them to foster relationships with students.

Response # TR-7. "I want them to know that there is a human face, a human on the other side of that connection . . . I hope through my rapport, my personality, that they know I'm a person they can trust" (U2-F3).

One instructor who teaches same classes in both formats noted that establishing relationships in face-to-face classes previously contributes to building trust in online courses.

Response # TR-8. "I think it's very important that if you are going to have someone teach online class that they also have students face to face so they're familiar

with many of the students . . . it's much easier to develop that trust because they know

who you are already" (U2-F2).

Not all faculty are convinced, however, that online communicating can simulate

face-to-face interactions.

Response # TR-9. "There is no way that you can replicate the relationship and the

interaction that you have between a student and a professor. And I can stand at a podium

and sit beside them at a table, look them in the eye and I know when they are stressed

over an assignment and I know when they just don't get it. . . . With an online you almost

have to give them the benefit of the doubt . . . if they don't express it in written form,

there's no way to effectively discern that from the online communication that exists"

(U2-F3).

All of these shared examples illustrate an attention to the relationships fostered in

the classroom along with one-on-one interactions between instructors and students.

Communication

Communication is addressed in Research Question Number Two, and thus it is a

coding category. The responses were divided into three sub-categories: Communication-

Relational, Communication-Feedback, and Communication-Methods/Accessibility.

Communication-Relational explores the method or value placed on the process of

communication. Communication-Feedback is studied because of its importance to the

learning experience which was noted in this quote in Chapter One, "I think instructors

who do not provide any feedback portray themselves as teachers who aren't concerned

with their students learning the material. Feedback is the nature of the learning process

and I'm afraid we're losing that in online learning" (Winslow, 2012 p. 7). Finally,

Communication-Methods/Accessibility looks at the different ways and tools faculty use to connect with their students.

Communication-Relational. Faculty responses that were coded under Communication-Relational included elucidations about techniques used to foster communication and thoughts on how computer-mediation strengthens or hinders communication.   For this professor, fostering communication begins before the class officially collectively meets.

Response # CR-1. "The first online class I ask students to complete a voluntary, kind of welcome where they say who they are, what they like, what their interests are. Before class begins I send them an email that welcomes them to the class" (U1-F1).

Being timely, transparent, and purposeful in their communication is another way faculty foster communication.

Response # CR-2. "I respond to them as soon as possible. I find that that really builds a good relationship and they learn to trust me through that way. They know that if they have a question I am going to be there for them" (U2-F4).

Response # CR-3. "Sending periodic emails to check on their progress and asking what you can do to help them, that all builds a sense of somebody's there for me that will help me" (U2-F2).

Response # CR-4. "[Fostering communication is accomplished] . . . by communicating with them freely and often throughout the course, make sure that everything you say or communicate is not just course-based" (U2-F4).

Even though a course is online, this professor believes that for connectivity, there needs to be some component of initial face-to-face time with students.

Response # CR-5. "I almost always require an initial face-to-face group meeting to meet as a cohort. . . . I've never been comfortable with a student depending on an avatar whether it's on blackboard or any of the other platforms. I think it's critical that we establish a rapport-human connection. . . . And then once we have that initial [connection] then we go about our business conducting the online portion of it" (U2-F3).

Looking at communication in online learning, several instructors suggest it is complicated by technology, while in the same conversation they admit it is enhanced. The invisibility of computer-mediated communication seems to embolden some people.

Response # CR-6. "I think in some ways [open communication] is [complicated by computer-mediated communication] because people know if you're in an on-ground class you're verbally saying something but once you put something in writing people are a little bit concerned. . . . Opposite end some people feel bolder when they're online because we don't know what you look like or who you really are so they act sometimes to reveal more information" (U1-F1).

Response # CR-7. "I notice that a lot of students open up more online. … I always explain that they need to share, they need to give their opinions, that everyone has a different opinion" (U2-F1).

Response # CR-8. "I am amazed what people will say online when they don't have to say it to someone's face. Sometimes I think people are a little more open even though we do identify who each other are online, I still find that people are very open online. . . . I've had to prompt and facilitate more to get to open communication in the traditional classroom whereas I've felt that I haven't had to facilitate as much, it just kinda starts to happen in online" (U1-F3).

Having to write one's thoughts with regard to an assigned prompt, and not simply spouting what comes to mind, seems to add a purposeful dynamic to communication in regard to online learning.

Guiding group discussions is a different dynamic on-site than online, with strengths and challenges for each format.

Response # CR-9. "[Communicating openly] is complicated by [computer-mediated communication] . . . with [what we discuss and do] they are interacting talking and communicating. . . sometimes you get more purposeful posts than what people just learned in class. So I like both. In class you get the one student who takes over the whole topic every time too, who is always raising their hand and steers in one direction so there's good and bad for that onsite" (U2-F1).

Response # CR-10. "I do think that not being face to face with someone does foster better communication" (U1-F3).

Students at University Number One had strong and differing views about communication effectiveness and style in both online and onsite classes. One argued that onsite instructors can interrupt or redirect a student.

Response # CR-11. "The online course starts off focused and then it veers off and then I've noticed it's hard for the instructor or professor to bring that person back to the point since it's all being typed. Opposed to the face to face where if a student gets off point it's easier for the professor to bring that student back to the main point. . . . So I think the face to face will foster better communication as far as keeping the students more focused" (U1-S3).

Other students argued that the instructor, not the format, can make or break a course.

Response # CR-12. "I think [focused course interaction] depends on the professor's moderation abilities. If a professor just lets the conversation go wherever it wants it does. I think it has a lot to do with the personality or style of the facilitator" (U1-S1).

Response # CR-13. "I think [focused course interaction] is ultimately the professor and the professor establishes the scene. So if it's in person or even if it's online because it's online it wouldn't have to be boring. The professor can do something to make it more interesting. . . . I think the professor sets the tone for whatever you get" (U1-S2).

A student, recorded in Response # CR-14, noted that online discussion offers certain freedoms.

Response # CR-14. "The other piece of that is that if somebody is off topic online I will ignore them. If somebody is off topic in the class, a lot of people feel compelled to like 'Oh well that's interesting.' Nobody wants to just sit there and like crickets chirp (laughter) and yea run with it. Online it can be 'No one's responding to this person!'" (U1-S1).

Lastly. the potential difficulties of computer-mediated communication was noted in Response # CR-15.

Response # CR-15. "We all know that sometimes things get miscommunicated through typing, sometimes you think it but your fingers aren't typing it. . . . The face-to-face definitely fosters better communication" (U1-S3).

Communication-Feedback. Feedback is a form of communication that was raised in different contexts throughout the interviews and focus groups. Faculty communicated the role feedback plays in their teaching and students noted differences in the feedback between the two formats – online and onsite.

First, representative quotes from the faculty:

Response # CF-1. "I give them constant feedback . . . I have rubrics, so they're getting their rubrics back as well as additional comments and I'll also communicate with them via email if there are any issues or concerns. Because what I've found, especially with [American Psychological Association] APA, is that a lot of our students are not up to par with APA so a lot feedback as well as well as their writing skills and they're not used to also having to integrate so much information and having to read so much information and so this is all kind of new so I'm getting them prepared hopefully for dissertation one day" (U1-F1).

Response # CF-2. "I give them feedback in the way they want it. . . . More than not, they like handwritten. . . . They want to meet face to face. And I'll say 'You manage me. I am not going to manage you. You use me for what you need. I will do whatever you need in order to make it work for you'" (U1-F2).

Response # CF-3. "They're getting constant feedback about what they need to do to bring their discussion posts up to par" (U1-F1).

Students were mixed in their assessment of which format lends itself to better feedback. Response # CF-4 is in favor of onsite:

Response # CF-4. "In the online course, the feedback, it seems like not as much is there. The face to face [feedback] is clear. You can completely understand. If you have a

question, you can ask the question and get immediate feedback. Where online it may be a day or so before you get your questions answered and then by then you've forgotten where you were going. So the face to face is more beneficial with getting what you need back" (U1-S3).

Response # CF-5. "I do prefer the face-to-face with getting feedback. I do think the face to face is quicker than the online course" (U1-S3).

Those in favor of online shared the following reasons:

Response # CF-6. "[Online] requires more feedback . . . because they have the comments box. But I've had professors who never used it. So it depends on the format. … I feel [feedback] is more online. I think communication is more important in an online class because you're not face to face so there's no non-verbal" (U1-S1).

Response # CF-7. "I would agree there's more feedback online because of the comment boxes. Most students would expect to read something and make sure that you're clear and giving enough feedback" (U1-S2).

The student comments discussed in this section all came from University Number One. None of the students at University Number Two mentioned feedback issues.

Communication-Methods/Accessibility. Under Communication, the sub-topic Methods/Accessibility yielded the most coded comments. Most of these repeated as instructors shared their preferred ways to communicate. Besides similar methods, it appeared that attempts to be accommodating was a recurring theme.

Response # CMA-1. "Certainly cell phone and email but individual conferencing. I readily avail myself to the students. I'll tell them if we need to meet, or if it's an urgent matter, we meet here face to face" (U2-F3).

Response # CMA-2. "I always give out my cellphone number. [I encourage face to face] and drop in if you want to. . . . [I use whatever tools] everybody has. I check email several times a day. . . . However they want to [communicate] and I'm available all of the time. . . . I go where the learner is. . . . You start where they are. You go where they are" (U1-F2).

Response # CMA-3. "I do give students my cell phone number. I know a lot of professors don't. I do because for me it's easier sometimes to have quick texts instead of email" (U2-F1).

Response # CMA-4. "I use email, texting, also phone calls. If they need me for any reason I always tell them communication is key and I give them all the ways that they can communicate with me. . . . I make myself available with any kind of communication they use as students, I make myself familiar with and use that as well. So we can communicate on Facebook for example. I create a class page which is closed so they can contact me a variety of ways. . . . I use email, texting, phone calls, Facebook/social media and also within the communication network within Blackboard. . . . Everyone can get hold of me some way" (U2-F2).

Response # CMA-5. "I give my office phone to them. They have my email account. They have the discussion board through Blackboard. Communicate through Turnitin.com. And then I have given my cell phone out a couple of times when there was some issue and I was away from my office, and I want to be able to communicate on a weekend" (U1-F3).

In regard to accommodating, one professor suggested that online students may have a greater need for reliable communication means than onsite students.

Response # CMA-6. "For the online class of course we have the Blackboard, that's what the class is taught on. Email is also one. I also give the students my personal email because that one comes directly to my phone so if they're in a panic or need a response a lot quicker they have access to it. I also give them my home phone. On-ground classes I do not give out my home phone or my personal email address. . . . Difference is if you're online you feel as though you need to have that access to your instructor whereas if it's on-ground they know they're going to see you once, twice, or three times a week as a given" (U1-F1).

Professors indicated that they were being very accommodating in their efforts to be accessible but students Responses # CMA-7 and CMA-8 indicate that such efforts may not be as visible:

Response # CMA-7. "Online forces the student and the professor to be focused on email, I mean like they have to check their email. They have to respond in a certain time. But in class a student may be like 'Yeah I had a question on that' and then later sends the email and then the professor is like 'Well I'll see him in class' and they don't really respond as quickly to email but they still see you in class and they'll discuss it. But I think with online there's definitely more of a focus on response on the emails" (U2-S3).

Response # CMA-8. "I did my whole masters online and I never went more than 24 hours without a response from a single professor. . . . I've had a few professors here that you can email and a week later you still don't know if they got it. …. I feel like online they're more required to have a presence though I'm sure some of them don't. I think they're more accessible online" (U1-S1).

The use of Facebook to communicate with students garnered strong opinions with high contrast from faculty. In brief, they either use social media as a way to connect with students, or they oppose the use in the educational setting. Responses # CMA-9 through CMA-11 opposed to using Facebook, stating:

Response # CMA-9. "I have not started a Facebook [group]" (U1-F3).

Response # CMA-10. "I don't do chats. I don't do Facebook. I do email" (U2-F1).

Response # CMA-11. "No. No. [I do not use Facebook]. I think you have to walk a fine-line… I maintain a clear distinction between what I expect from [students] professionally and what they do personally. And I don't muddy those waters, or try not to"(U2-F3).

Responses # CMA-12 through CMA-15, in favor of using Facebook to enhance educational experiences reported:

Response # CMA-12. "I do a lot of weekly announcements on blackboard, I'm available through email. I don't use Facebook as any kind of communication" (U2-F1).

Response # CMA-13. "I use Facebook groups…Facebook is a great way for students to connect" (U2-A2).

Response # CMA-14. "I make myself available with any kind of communication they use as students. I make myself familiar with and use that as well. I create a [Facebook] class page which is closed so they can contact me a variety of ways" (U2-F2).

Response # CMA-15. "Of course we do utilize Facebook and a lot of our students do chat back and forth on Facebook to connect" (U2-A2).

Quality

Research Question Number Three addressed the topic of Quality. To assess thoughts on this area, responses were divided into three sub-categories: Quality-Teaching/Process/Rigor, Quality-Resources, Quality-Professional Development/Accountability.

Quality-Teaching/Process/Rigor is a collective code that encompasses a variety of characteristics that highlight quality from an educational perspective. These include application, feedback, and differentiation. Quality-Resources explores the learning methods and technology used in teaching and the services available to students to enhance their learning experience. Quality-Professional Development/Accountability seeks insights into the efforts that the studied schools invest in training and faculty support along with methods to ensure quality in the classroom.

Quality-Teaching/Process/Rigor. As faculty shared their insights in regard to ensuring quality in the classroom, comments about using best practices and other teaching techniques were shared. While each professor shared one or more techniques, rubrics, exemplars, group work, student-led learning, and differentiation were often noted as preferred approaches.

Ensuring quality in teaching prompted a lot of dialogue from one professor who, as noted in the comments in Responses # QTPR-1 through QTPR-3, believes choice and differentiation are key:

Response # QTPR-1. "Because they have choice and they will pick things they want to learn that are relevant to them just based on the assumptions of the adult learner, they are going to go at it with rigor just because they're interested in it and they're not

forced to learn something or be presenting with someone they don't want to or on a topic they're not interested in so it's allowing them to be self-directed and fostering their self-directedness in the way I set up my classes and the processes I use. And I tailor my approach to each individual, I differentiate" (U1-F2).

Response # QTPR-2. "I think sometimes curiosity has been beaten out of adults who walk into a class such as mine and they have not really had to use their creativity, their brains, as much as perhaps as might have to in a class such as mine where they have to figure out what they're going to learn and what will be the evidence and how are you going to validate that it really was the right thing to do in order to meet that brain objective and be willing to turn on a dime if that strategy doesn't work…so I take a unique tailored approach, differentiated approach" (U1-F2).

Response # QTPR-3. "I go where the learner is. That's about facilitating learning is that you start where the learner is. Whether it's about how they communicate or what they know or what they want to know. You start where they are. You go where they are" (U1-F2).

Ensuring that students read assigned resources was noted as key to ensuring quality by instructor Responses # QTPR-4 and QTPR-5:

Response # QTPR-4. "I try to ensure they read the course materials through some of the standard quizzes and exams we have, discussions that we post online that go along with the topic that we're reading, do different online searches where they have to find material online and report back on their discussion" (U1-F3).

Response # QTPR-5. "Their discussions must include information from their reading. They can no longer make posts that are not based off of the readings so that way

they're integrating their personal, professional, and reading assignments into the course so now they have to be prepared to respond" (U1-F1).

Another instructor used peer communication:

Response # QTPR-6. "I make sure I have a place where they can ask questions of one another over the material so there's a dialogue continued throughout the semester" (U2-F2).

Using questions to grasp the content was part of one instructor's efforts to ensure quality in teaching *(*Response # QTPR-7*).*

Response # QTPR-7. "I may ask multiple questions. So for example if we're in a discussion and they give a particular statement which really doesn't fit, I go and ask a different question to get another answer and lead them to the correct conceptual view that I'm looking to check up on. So they know that they're going to be bombarded with lots of small questions to get where I need to be" (U2-F2).

Posting instructions was a technique mentioned by this professor:

Response # QTPR-8. "I actually give the instructions 'Do not approach your discussion question until you have read the text or researched it or looked at the videos I have included in that chapter.' So I say this order, do this, this, this and then respond. . . . Otherwise I get winging" (U2-F4).

Response # QTPR-9. "Another thing I said is that if you see a discussion question that has been adequately responded to, don't pile on. Choose one that hasn't and that encourages students who are self-starters to choose one they want and respond and not have to be delegated to one they maybe did not want to respond to" (U2-F4).

And this Response # QTPR-10 tried to cover all of the learning styles, so that

everyone was able to grasp the course content.

Response # QTPR-10. "I always make sure that I have many different modalities in the classroom to meet different learning styles obviously. I want to make sure I'm doing the visual, the auditory, the kinesthetic, that I'm focusing on multiple intelligences. Making sure students find the best connect. So every objective is taught in a different type of assignment, visual, kinesthetic, all kinds of discussion, so there's no one falling through the cracks" (U2-F2).

Recognizing that graduate research requires mastery of American Psychological Association (APA) writing style, Response # QTPR-11 indicates a professor who holds students accountable for ensuring their work follows APA guidelines.

Response # QTPR-11. "I ensure that their sources of research are correctly cited according to APA but I first show them teach them this is an APA citation and this is what I expect because one day you are going to be an author and you will want your work cited likewise" (U2-F3).

Application is another area that faculty expressed as way they seek to ensure quality.

Response # QTPR-12. "My objective is for them to use the information, apply the information, therefore I start with 'What do they need to know and then how are we going to get there?'" (U2-F4).

Response # QTPR-13. "A lot of the projects that I design are authentic examples so they have to give a real-world scenario; they have to apply the knowledge" (U2-F2).

Response # QTPR-14. "I give a lot of assignments where they have to state things they learned, things they don't understand. I usually have charts that they have to fill out.

It doesn't necessarily show that they read everything but it has to show that they got the concepts and they understand how to apply them" (U2-F1).

And while most faculty say their methodologies do not differ between formats, online or onsite, a few, such as Responses QTPR-15 through QTPR-17, noted there are distinctions.

Response # QTPR-15. "The students must complete discussion questions each week. In their response they must integrate material from the reading in their response to receive full credit. Yes it does differ from face-to-face because in traditional classes, I can call on students and see if they have read the material or not. Unfortunately this cannot occur in an online class because once students reach the minimum participation posts they usually do not post or respond to additional posts" (U1-F1).

Response # QTPR-16. "I try not to make what I teach online just busy work. I try to create a sufficiently challenging series of assignments-whether it's a summative or formative assessment- that causes them to think and perform at a different level so it's not something they can simply extract from a website or research source. . . . I try to find a way to cause them to take that to a different level so it's an authentic measure of what they're doing. And I know it's rigorous enough that it's not simply replication of something they're just extracting from a search" (U2-F3).

Response # QTPR-17. "Most assignments I keep the same rubric so with the rubric there you have the same expectations for assignments. I'll vary assignments a little [between the formats]. Obviously onsite I don't ask them to do as many discussion postings as an online class so I do differentiate a little bit" (U2-F1).

In regard to Rigor, each format offers unique challenges and advantages. Students were split on which format was more rigorous.

Response # QTPR-18. "I think [I work harder] online because I can't see what other people are doing so I feel I am more in competition with myself. In a regular classroom if you see that other people aren't really putting forth a lot of effort you kinda lay back too. You don't have to try so hard to be your best. Whereas when you're online a lot of times you don't know how everyone else is doing" (U1-S1).

Response # QTPR-19. "I would say [I work] equally hard. For me I'm always going to try my best so I can't see [the format] making a difference. I would want to do my best" (U1-S2).

Faculty communicated that ensuring rigor is important regardless of the format. That noted, these comments in Responses # QTPR-20 through QTPR-22 illustrate that there are distinctions which require different strategies to ensure rigor:

Response # QTPR-20. "For [online courses] the rigor becomes hard with the posts because if you're in class I can increase class participation by calling on a person and they feel obligated to respond. But if I post a question online and they've already made their posts for the week, they're no longer obligated to respond so that's a significant challenge" (U1-F1).

Response # QTPR-21. "Through list serves [on professional organizations] I'll ask what people are doing for this type of level course . . . and make sure that I'm not offering too few requirements or too many requirements, that the rigor is where it should be for the course as well as for the type of students we have here" (U1-F1).

Response # QTPR-22. "Alignment is key. So regardless if you're face to face or

if you're online, you still have your objectives. You still align all of your activities and assessments together. . . . We do a lot of writing, a lot of in-depth discussion and application of knowledge. Those key things fit together to equal rigor" (U2-F2).

Employers weighed in on Rigor, recalling experiences as a graduate student:

Response # QTPR-23. "The online classes I took were very, very rigorous and whether you do a campus class or an online class [the rigor] can vary" (E-3).

Response # QTPR-24 indicates an employer with experience teaching online and traditional courses, and with that background offered a unique view of rigor in online learning.

Response # QTPR-24. "I do think that in online learning I expect you're held to a higher level of accountability with regard to deadlines, quality of work because there's no personal interaction that really becomes a part of it to sway a professor one way or the other. You earn what you earn" (E-1).

When asked how instructors address student work that is lacking quality, faculty consistently suggested that communication is integral to correcting problems and helping students understand how to improve their work. As seen in Responses # QTPR-25 and QTPR- 26, communication takes several forms. Revision is one form mentioned:

Response # QTPR-24. "First thing I do is tell them this is not the quality expected from a graduate level. And I ask them to perhaps revise part or even all of, let's say for example it is a research paper, I'll provide feedback, some edits, suggestions, and ask them to go back and resubmit what they have given these suggestions" (U2-F3).

Response # QTPR-25. "I return [the assignment] and they re-do it. For example if they've not read or not drawn conclusions that are consistent with the learning outcomes I

give them other prompt questions to think about. So re-write this with the lens of this concept" (U2-F2).

Rubrics and exemplars were also cited as examples.

Response # QTPR-26. "[A rubric] is given to the students before the semester begins and they know how they're going to be graded on their posts. [I model posts] and in their feedback I'll say 'Your discussion posts were thorough or you only had one citation when you need at least three, um grammatical errors, things of that nature'. They're getting constant feedback about what they need to do to bring their discussion posts up to par" (U1-F1).

Response # QTPR-27. "I will provide an example of the type of work because if you depend on them to go on their own you're going to get pieces of work that run the full continuum. So again that's part of the more labor intensive aspect of online is the little bit of that spoon-feeding thing but at the same time, examples, you're really pointing them in the direction to go with an example" (U2-F3).

Response # QTPR-28. "I have rubrics for so they're getting their rubrics back as well as additional comments and I'll also communicate with them via email if there are any issues or concerns. Because what I've found, especially with APA, is that a lot of our students are not up to par with APA so a lot feedback as well as well as their writing skills and they're not used to also having to integrate so much information and having to read so much information and so this is all kind of new so I'm getting them prepared hopefully for dissertation" (U1-F1).

Responses # QTPR 29 and QTPR 30 are illustrative of how faculty help students improve their work by being relational and accommodating.

Response # QTPR-29. "I approach the student through email and sometimes I'll meet with them face to face. It depends what the problem is. Is it a matter that you don't understand how to create a lesson plan because you've never had a teacher ed course. I meet with them one on one and we walk through, here's how you find the standards, here's how you use the standards and then I give them a guide. Sometimes it's online through emails and sometimes it's face to face" (U2-F4).

Response # QTPR-30. "I give them feedback in the way they want it. … More than not, they like handwritten. … They want to meet face to face. And I'll say 'You manage me. I am not going to manage you. You use me for what you need. I will do whatever you need in order to make it work for you'" (U1-F2).

Quality-Resources. The responses that were coded "Quality-Resources" explore two different meanings of the term resources. The first addresses the learning methods and technology used in teaching which can contribute to the quality of learning experiences for the students. The second use of the word resources focuses on the physical, those experiences and services that traditional students have while on campus. The question posed solicited responses from administrators to assess if distance learners have similar or same resources as their onsite classmates.

As indicated in the sampling of comments below, Responses # QR-1 through QR-6, faculty responses to the first meaning of this code did not differ observably with most professors noting their use of course management, presentation technology, and teaching tools.

Response # QR-1. "I use the web resources, search engines, Youtube, for both. . . . I think sometimes the online may get a little more because I am not there with them"

(U2-F4).

Response # QR-2. "Blackboard is the technology that is used. I also use videos from YouTube or different websites. I'll use Turnitin for the anti-plagiarism. Even for my on-ground classes I use all three of those all of the time" (U1-F1).

Response # QR-3. "I use all kinds of presentation technology. I use film. … I don't really use YouTube, I use TeacherTube which is for education. And then of course there's a lot of materials that come from the publication like online videos and education labs. In online use something called Camtasia where I capture my lectures and videos. Also Prezi and I can put video on there. Most of the time I just give them assignments to see something and I give them the links" (U2-F2).

Response # QR-4. "I use Blackboard for both. We do a lot of online discussion threads. We use a lot of YouTube videos or ABC/FOX videos … I use Powerpoint and links to web pages for both. The technology [between formats] is the same" (U1-F3).

Response # QR-5. "I like the use of case studies…. There are certain things I don't like. I will identify sources they are not to use, are not reliable. . . . I imbed videos. I use audio files for speeches. It doesn't differ [between formats]. I use video conferencing. . . . Tweets" (U2-F3).

Response # QR-6. "I use YouTube and Blackboard and [websites]… I find that the simpler the better. I look for the common denominator of what everyone can do. … We teach through what we say and what we do" (U1-F2).

Similarly, the administrator responses to the second meaning of this code did not differ significantly as this question demonstrated that online and onsite students have

access to the same or similar resources. Use of such is not restricted by the universities,

but rather is situational and limited by the student.

Response # QR-7. "We want all of our students to feel engaged. They have access

to basically everything that a regular on-ground student has. They have access to their

portals. They have access to the business office, financial aid, and their advisor. They

also have access to all of the library facilities online and being the technology age that we

are, most of what students do in terms of research is online anyway. . . . students online

have the rights and privileges, free passes to games, all of those things that a regular on-

ground student has" (U1-A1).

Response # QR-8. "They have all of the financial services, tutoring services . . .

through Blackboard" (U1-A2).

Response # QR-9. "They can access the main campus. . . . They can use the

fitness center, get football tickets, library on the main campus they have access to.

They're treated as undergrads in that way. It is important. A lot of them don't use it but

it's there. Oh the writing center that's another one" (U2-A1).

Quality-Professional Development/Accountability. This final Quality sub-code

term looks at procedures and efforts the universities invest in ensuring that instructors

have the resources and training they need to be effective in the classroom. While the two

studied schools have different approaches, one common thread is that both have a staff

person who is responsible for training and assisting faculty on Blackboard and related

distance-learning technology.

Response # QPDA-1. "We do have a distance learning director and it is part of his

job description to train new faculty in how to use Blackboard, how to utilize it, how to

create different environments in there. He has extensive experience teaching online. . . .

So he does a very good job. We have a really good person doing that" (U2-A2).

Response # QPDA-2. "One of our faculty members here is designated as our

director of online learning and he provides either one-on-one training or group training

depending on what our needs happen to be" (U2-A4).

Response # QPDA-3. "We have a Blackboard trainer . . . she's available to work

with any faculty member at any time whether individually or small groups. We are

offering Blackboard courses, workshops for adjuncts and full-time people" (U1-A1)

Response # QPDA-4. "We just hired a trainer and one of the difficulties that we

run into is that a lot of faculty members feel that they can teach online without any

problems, you just get the students to sign up and let them go on their own. Well, it

doesn't work that way" (U1-A2).

In addressing the issue of professional development and the relation to distance

learning, University Number Two emphasized that it placed a premium on hiring faculty

who were skilled at teaching online.

Response # QPDA-5. "A lot of faculty come to us already having taught online in

some other setting and so we maybe don't have to do quite as much orientation as might

otherwise be expected" (U2-A4).

Response # QPDA-6. "The people we have have already taught a lot of online

courses. I know that from talking and interacting with them. Most of them have already

used Blackboard" (U2-A1).

While hiring experienced instructors is part of ensuring quality in online learning,

University Number Two also offers some training to its faculty.

Response # QPDA-7. "We have, as needed, instructional sessions with faculty whether they're refresher sessions or brand new introductions" (U2-A4).

Response # QPDA-8. "[We don't provide] a lot of training but … we do have a guy who everyone goes to for tech issues and we make sure he's available quickly to help them get things set up to do best practice kinds of advice" (U2-A1).

In contrast, University Number One administrators did not comment on recruiting faculty with previous online teaching experience, but rather they emphasized the value placed on internal professional development and accountability.

Response # QPDA-9 speaks to professional development:

Response # QPDA-9. "We've only been into online programming for a few years and each year we add more . . . all faculty members who are new to online teaching will have to pass a Blackboard test. . . . We also have a mentor for people who are brand new. . . . the mentor has to sign off saying the mentee is ready to go before the person is given a second class" (U1-A1).

Response # QPDA-10. "If the faculty member has not taught online before or has taught less than two semesters online then … they have to go through a Blackboard certification course. . . . We will not let them teach online unless they have been certified through Blackboard. Once they've got the Blackboard certification then we assign a mentor to them. The mentor has to be somebody in their department and they go through and walk them through the establishment of the course itself, the shell online. So yeah we're really concerned about quality of the course online" (U1-A2).

Response # QPDA-11. "The issue that we're working through is to make sure that all of the faculty members are qualified, that they are certified on Blackboard and we

have a trainer who now will do either a one-on-one with them or do group sessions" (U1-A2).

Response # QPDA-12. "We're doing not only beginner training but we're also doing advanced training and tips and tricks as things go on. So that's our answer to the fact that faculty members think it's a piece of cake to put a course out there. I think [they underestimate] they think that you just dump the materials on there and it's the same as their regular class. But it takes a little more" (U1-A2).

Accountability is addressed with Responses # QPDA-13 through QPDA-17.

Response # QPDA-13. "When we create an online course it first of all has to go through the deans for approval to be created as an online course so that everyone is aware of it. And then what happens is we pay an instructor … to create that course and before it is approved and offered the first time [an administrator] has to approve its structure to make sure it follows the best practices by the Higher Learning Commission and either the department chair or the dean will approve the content so that we at least know going in that the material meets the standards that we have for all courses. We want to make sure that we maintain quality and that we are checking on the quality of a course, before it's offered, during its offering, and after it's offered" (U1-A1).

Response # QPDA-14. "The dean of distance learning maintains high standards in that he wants us to work with the Higher Learning Commission's [HLC] Best Practices. We do ask that each course be reviewed while the course is going on to see if faculty members are sending out the initial letter, having students participate in discussion, turning in assignments regularly" (U1-A1).

Response # QPDA-15. "All the distance learning courses are supposed to be

visited each semester. It is [a dean's] responsibility to at least once a semester go into every course to see if the instructor is keeping up with best practices" (U1-A1).

Response # QPDA-16. "To develop a course the course has to be reviewed by me to make sure it meets HLC standards. What I'm looking for is threaded discussions. I'm looking for group work. I'm looking for student and professor interaction, student-to-student interaction, that kind of thing" (U1-A2).

Response # QPDA-17. "During the semester I will download what the faculty member has been doing online and review it to make sure that they're spending at least a minimum of every other day in the class; that they're either doing emails or participating in discussions or group work online. So we review it very, very closely" (U1-A2).

One student indicated a lack of knowledge of the background of the typical instructor:

Response # QPDA-18. "I wonder how many professors who teach an online course have really had certification or something. Because I think sometimes that makes a difference too" (U1-S2).

In further discussing accountability, an administrator at University Number Two noted that onsite faculty are reviewed more closely than online and recognizes that may be a weakness.

Response # QPDA-19. "Our face-to-face professors are evaluated periodically directly by the respective dean. In other words the dean will sit in on the classes and then gauge whatever follow-up may be needed. We don't do that for online classes and we probably need to develop something specific to that but we're not" (U2-A4).

While no additional students nor instructors commented on faculty development, the administrators at both schools recognized the importance it plays in ensuring quality at their institutions. And, that matter is part of the reputation an institution has outside of the campus.

Reputation

The reputation of online learning is addressed in Research Questions three and four. This topic is coded in three sub-categories: Reputation-Credibility, Reputation- For-Profit versus Non-Profit, and Reputation-Niche. Reputation-Credibility is looked at two ways: First, as applied to the format of a learning experience, questioning if one or the other is inferior. Second, questioning the educational experiences of those who teach online-both as instructors and students. Reputation-For-Profit versus Non-profit distinguishes perceptions of higher education institutions that are corporate or commercially based in contrast to those that are not profit-based. Reputation-Niche is coded to identify comments that communicate a uniqueness about an institution.

Reputation-Credibility. In regard to credibility of a distance education, there is a consensus by employers and administrators that the format of the learning experience is irrelevant in skill and content mastery. Employers' were unified in this belief.

Response # RC-1. "[The online degree] has been seen from an administrative view as a way in the education world to move themselves on the salary schedule or … change paths within the educational setting. So I don't believe from a post graduate standpoint that there is any difference or there is a negative connotation viewed for an online degree" (E-2).

Response # RC-2. "I think that within a virtual program or within a physical

program, people get out of their education what they put into it and what they want to get

out of it. You can usually tell that in an interview process. I think you can tell what

somebody walked away with by the experiences they talk about throughout their learning

process and what they learned that would apply to the next experience. And I don't think

that has to do with online or not online" (E-3).

Response # RC-3. "In the graduate study most all of the [online] ones that I have

seen have been rigorous courses in which there has been a great deal of discussion as well

as the regular sort of qualitative/quantitative work associated with it. So I don't believe

there to be a great difference at the graduate level" (E-2).

Response # RC-4. "I think from a post graduate standpoint I don't believe that

there is a great deal more or less that you would get from an online program-provided it's

a quality online program" (E-2).

Administrators agree with employers and one, in fact, believed all learning could

be done remotely with nothing sacrificed.

Response # RC-5. "I do believe that all programs could be online. It will take

creativity on the part of instructors. … I think there are ways to Skype and Facetime and

we know that you can do group work online" (U1-A1).

Response # RC-6. "I know in the case of a lot faculty and a lot of people who

were very traditional there's a sense that online education on its face [is] inferior. We

don't agree with that" (U2-A4).

One of the employers noted that vocation and personal situations influence the

choices people make when considering their education institution and learning format.

Response # RC-7. "Typically people who are going to go into a field that has a very personal basis for it are people who want to go to class and sit and have interactions personally with people. I think people separate themselves based on their own qualities…their own skills set, their own ability to learn, and we tend to go into things in which we feel most successful so that's the avenue people are going to choose" (E-1).

Response # RC-8. "People who chose [online education] are typically people who are going to be in a profession that will be technical in nature versus personal in nature" (E-1).

Others were not as quick to overlook the online component of the degree and had questions about the reputation and/or quality of the earned education.

Response # RC-9. "The initial impression is I wonder why they decided to go online instead of traditional and my initial response is don't hold it against them but I want explore why they chose that option" (U2-A3).

Response # RC-10. "I definitely believe there is a difference between the universities where one would matriculate from. With so many diploma granting institutions now offering online classes, I think [there] is still some stigma attached to where you matriculated from as opposed to whether or not if it was online or in a classroom" (E-2).

Response # RC-11. "I think that for an undergraduate setting . . . that there would be question marks there because of the general interaction in the socialization aspect of being a teacher that would raise some red flags" (E-2).

While respondents were comfortable with employees having online degrees, they did, however, note a few stipulations in their consideration of employee candidates. The institution, and its reputation was an expressed consideration.

Response # RC-12. "I guess it would depend on the school they came from. If I am aware of the school and it has a strong online degree program, I would give it a lot of credibility. In most cases a degree is a degree is a degree so whether they have an online degree or whether they have a traditional bricks and mortar degree to me it really doesn't matter" (U1-A2).

Response # RC-13. "For better or for worse, if someone [local] gets a degree from one of those [identified diploma mill] institutions there would be some question, as opposed to if you were taking online classes through [reputable local not-for-profit] schools. So there is definitely a stigma tied to where the degree is from" (E-2).

The studied discipline was another matter of question.

Response # RC-14. "It's different for some positions than others. So having an online degree does not concern me if it is for particular types of positions. … If it is for teaching, I would not consider an applicant for a first-grade teacher, for that type of position. Being able to view and see how people interact, how people communicate, what sort of empathy and genuine regard they have for people is part of what the teaching process is….If I were trying to hire a network administrator I would be happy to have an online degree"(E-1).

Response # RC-15. "For jobs that are technical in nature, knowledge based in nature, I would be happy to hire someone with an online degree. For those jobs that are service and interactive such as teaching, I would not be" (E-1).

Another area of credibility that is identified and coded in this research is the experience of those commenting on distance learning. In asking related questions, I wanted to understand the teaching and learning experiences of those who teach online and/or supervise distance learning programs. Most, I found, have either taught or studied online, and in some cases they have been both student and instructor.

Response # RC-16. "I did take classes online -not very many. . . . I had a few courses and a few independent studies . . . and I've taught a few courses at a few different universities. So I've learned the good and bad, different platforms, best practices" (U2-F1).

Response # RC-17. "I've never taken an online class and I'm not teaching full-time but I probably teach online now about as often as I do in the classroom" (U2-A4).

Response # RC-18. "I've done it all. I've taken classes. I have been both. As a student I believe in some of my online courses I've learned way more than my onsite classes" (U2-A2).

Response # RC-19. "I had started teaching online and I continued teaching online for a couple of education courses" (U1-A1).

While online learning is not for administrator U2-A3, confidence and respect remain. The honesty and candidness in response to this question was refreshing.

Response # RC-20. "My only online courses have been fun things like … a boat safety course or something about hunting or golf. I've never taken an online course for credit but I like it. It's convenient. I'm a feely-huggy kind of guy and I still have trouble with it and so as an administrator I respect it but I have never taught one" (U2-A3).

Reputation - For-Profit versus Non-Profit. During the interviews, administrators and employers were purposeful in clarifying their answers to be specific about whether they were referencing online learning that was provided at a for-profit institution or an education from a non-profit school. With that being noted, I decided that under the reputation code it was worth having a sub-category that contrasts the two types of colleges. As seen in these comments, concerns and beliefs about for-profit colleges are strong. As alluded to earlier, these views echo a belief that the learning format has less bearing on the reputation of a degree than the actual institution where the degree is earned.

Response # RPvNP-1. "Most schools don't indicate it's an online degree so the only schools we would earmark as an online would be something like [named for-profit schools] and that's because they are known . . . for the massive number of degrees they put out that are low quality. I'm not really sure if that is because of their online experience or if it is because they are for-profit and they don't care whether they educate anybody. It's a combination probably. Now when I see those, I would not even interview them. From those universities [my impression is] that is a diploma mill" (U2-A2).

Response # RPvNP-2. "If [the degree] was [earned at] a for-profit school I'd be a little more interested in what was involved. If the school had a good reputation, I don't think it would be a red flag. . . . I would more than likely ask them to describe their coursework. And their dissertation, I might be more interested in the level researched" (U2-A1).

Response # RPvNP-3. "I question [the online degree]. I'll be very honest, I believe in online teaching. I believe in online learning. I've taught online. I know that it

can be successful but I will say that my initial impression is question. And then I look to

see where the degree is from, that makes all the difference in the world for me. If it's

from a traditional school . . . that has a basis in teaching on-ground and has moved into

online I feel more comfortable than with a straight online, for-profit, program" (U1-A1).

Response # RPvNP-4. "The one that we check when we look at people coming in

here is to make sure they didn't go through a degree mill. If they went through a degree

mill, we don't lend much credibility to that degree" (U1-A2).

Response # RPvNP-5. "For better or for worse, if someone [local] gets a degree

from one of those [identified diploma mill] institutions there would be some question, as

opposed to if you were taking online classes through [reputable local not-for-profit]

schools. So there is definitely a stigma tied to where the degree is from" (E-2).

Reputation - Niche. Maintaining its niche and distinctly Christian atmosphere

was central to the reputation of University Number Two. Administrators there were

passionate about their culture and the impact they believed it had on their reputation and

the education the school provided.

Response # RN-1. "We are unique in how we approach education and how we do

it here. Not many schools anymore are committed to quality education and the biblically

sound Christ-centered environment and really have a passion for Jesus Christ and a

passion for lost souls. And so we go over that thing thoroughly with every professor

[regardless of whether they are] teaching [in] the classroom or whether they're doing an

online-we expect [the] same results" (U2-A3).

Response # RN-2. "Everything we do here, first and foremost, is to integrate faith

in learning. And we want every student to have a chance to accept Jesus Christ and get

stronger in their walk so we try to impress even more on distant learning opportunities that we have said, look we can't lose that mission. We gotta be true to our mission; number one as an institution and number two, accrediting agencies are going to be checking. . . . So we have to remind our folks that we have to be who we say we are and . . . continue to remind our professors who are teaching online that we don't want to lose that specialness" (U2-A3).

Instructional Format

Understanding the unique characteristics of the two learning platforms is central to this study and thus the final coding identifier is Instructional Format. Within this code, I have identified eight sub-groups: Similarities, Learning Preference, Participation, Effort, Traditional Pros/Cons, Online Pros/Cons, Cost Differences, and Teaching Evaluations.

Instructional Format-Similarities looks at the similarities between the two formats as shared by students, faculty, administrators, and employers. Format-Learning Preference analyzes thoughts on which format is conducive to learning. Responses coded under Format-Participation noted comments about students' level of engagement in the two learning formats. In Instructional Format-Effort students discussed their views on which format is more challenging and requires them to work harder to succeed along with their perceptions of faculty efforts. Instructional Format-Traditional Pros/Cons is where opinions on the advantages and disadvantages of learning onsite are shared and likewise Instructional Format-Online Pros/Cons does the same with learning online. Instructional Format-Cost Differences is where administrators discussed their understanding and explanations behind the reasons for charging students more to learn online than onsite.

And finally, Instructional Format-Teaching Evaluations is where students and administrators reveal their thoughts on the Student Evaluation of Teaching forms.

Instructional Format - Similarities. Online and onsite learning are different, and yet similar, in many ways. This code highlights some of the similarities shared by the two platforms and the ways in which things are, or should be, alike. Rigor, teaching, and technology are areas that instructors of the two platforms feel are generally similar.

Response # IFS-1. "I think teaching is one of those things that doesn't matter which modality you use. If you have goals, have your objectives, your learning outcomes, your assessments all aligned with the goals, the rigor will be there" (U2-F2).

Response # IFS-2. "I take whatever I'm going to have the onsite course requirement be I just adjust it so that it fits the time requirements for the online format" (U2-F4).

Response # IFS-3. "Our online courses and our traditional courses, at least in the graduate school, are set up exactly the same way in terms of learning outcomes. The assignments may be tweaked a little one way or the other" (U2-A4).

Response # IFS-4. "Alignment is key. So regardless if you're face to face or if you're online, you still have your objectives. You still align all of your activities and assessments together. And so rigor is . . . we do a lot of writing, do a lot of in-depth discussion, and application of knowledge. Those key things fit together equals rigor" (U2-F2).

While course structure and tools differ between the learning formats, some respondents made a point of commenting that the platform should not affect how the professor teaches or relates to the students.

Response # IFS-5. "There is nothing that guarantees that a face to face classroom per se is better than online classroom. If the professor is not engaged in and is not current the same issues are there regardless of the setting" (U1-F2).

Response # IFS-6. "If a professor is really good about giving feedback, they're going to be consistent whether it's online or in class" (U2-S2).

Instructional Format-Learning Preference. Comments about format, learning preference came from administrators, employers, and students. Students' comments dealt more with learning issues between the formats while employers and administrators talked about conduciveness to certain fields of study.

When asked their thoughts on which format is more conducive to their ability to learn, students provided detailed responses. The reasons given in the following five comments illustrate this insightfully. Those preferring online offered these explanations:

Response # IFLP-1. "I prefer online because I can go at my own pace. And when I want enrichment I can be in control of that as opposed to in a classroom if there other people that aren't getting it like when I took a stats class . . . I feel like I wasted about 75% of my time in the in-person class because I had it, I didn't need to be there. . . . Had I been online I could have ask the professors my own questions and gone a little deeper whereas I felt the need to be quiet because there were people that didn't understand step one and I was on step six. So I prefer online" (U1-S1).

Response # IFLP-2. "I learn better with online courses because I am being forced and I'm like given 'this is what needs to be done' and I'm being forced to discuss my thoughts. So I learn the subject better from online. However, I would prefer the face to face because . . . I'm forced to talk with you. I feel [the diversity] and I can hear a

conversation . . . But when I'm online . . . I don't hear any chatter. I don't hear anything. All I see is words responding to questions" (U1-S3).

Response # IFLP-3. "I think I do better in online. As far as learning stuff. It may have something to do with me doing it myself kind of thing. I don't think it has anything necessarily to do with the instructor" (U2-S2).

Those preferring traditional classrooms were older than the other respondents and their reasons are rooted in their need for accountability and the face-to-face relationships offered in a physical classroom:

Response # IFLP-4. "I do better with traditional. I need that accountability of going to class, being spoon-fed. Relating to the other people in the class, I do that better face to face" (U2-S1).

Response # IFLP-5. "I would say I [learn] better in traditional because there's more interaction. When I think of online I think of computer first and then maybe professor second. Even if people are responding I don't really think of faces. I just think of cursors. Not really people" (U1-S2).

As administrators and employers talked about preference, their comments focused on which format is best for learning on a general level. While most seemed to concur that online learning is suitable for certain fields of study, a hybrid program was suggested by some as the preferred ideal learning environment.

Response # IFLP-6. "I do believe that the probably the best model is a hybrid model as I reviewed it which allows both the classroom as well as online . . . I like the hybrid approach . . . I'm okay with someone going all online. But I think they get a better education if they did have some face-to-face" (U2-A3).

Response # IFLP-7. "For something like nursing I suspect a balance between both (traditional and online) like a hybrid would be appropriate" (E-1).

Response # IFLP-8. "We've got to figure out how can we make [online] personal … that's why I do like hybrid – that's why I do like some face-to-face when at all possible" (U2-A3).

Responses # IFLP-9 and IFLP-10 indicate belief that course structure is key to creating an ideal learning environment:

Response # IFLP-9. "I think it would depend on the makeup of the specific program. Online by itself is okay either way, whatever as long as there is a practicum component, especially for teachers in the classroom, and time to go observe. And I think essential to any learning process is being able to dialogue and interact. And there are a lot of ways to do that but I think it is essential to have a way for learners and workers in whatever field to be able to interact with each other within a program" (E-3).

Response # IFLP-10. "I'm assuming that even the online education courses would have a component tied to classroom instruction so that you can't complete an education degree without going onsite and doing so many hours of supervision and observation and practicum teaching" (E-2).

Instructional Format - Participation. Students had a lot to say in response to a question soliciting their thoughts on which format they believe fosters the most participation. Along with their personal experiences, they offered insights into classroom decorum and teaching styles. Overall, the consensus was split.

Those who say that they are more inclined to participate in a traditional class than online attribute that insight to the perceived ease that being face-to-face with classmates offers.

Response # IFP-1. "I like in class better just because I do like discussing things in person. . . . because you can have more divergence with side topics. In an online class it's very focused . . . But in class we can go off on a tangent a little bit" (U2-S3).

Response # IFP-2. "Definitely [I participate more] in class … in online it's kinda hard to get the same type of discussion going. . . . I mean like I've had a couple of online classes where it's just posting thoughts" (U2-S3).

Response # IFP-3. "In some ways (participating) is harder online because you're not seeing the person, you're not seeing how they are reacting to what you're saying so you really have to be more careful about what you say because you don't really know the other students. And you don't want to … start a political discussion and make people mad. So I think in some ways you have to hold back online whereas traditional class you talk to the kids, you make relationships hopefully and so you feel more comfortable to be more open"(U2-S1).

Response # IFP-4. "I would say that the format in online is not really conducive to quality [participation] … It's not really worth the read. I think that a lot of that is because … a lot of professors go with forum threads and that's a really bad way to have a conversation. Whereas if they had a (synchronous) chat that might come out differently. And then the requirement to participate a certain amount (online) kinda funks it up. Stales it" (U1-S1).

Those who say they participate more online attribute their feelings to personal style as well as course expectations.

Response # IFP-5. "I participate more in online…When I'm in a classroom, I'm more introverted, more to myself, I don't really speak up. I let others do the talking. Sometimes I may add an afterthought or something like that. . . . With online you can be more open with your thoughts and your instructor is giving you something to do and you have to participate. . . . you almost have to participate to show your presence. . . . Sometimes I just don't want to talk or participate [in a classroom]" (U1-S3).

Response # IFP-5. "I think there's more accountability with online discussions than there are in classroom discussions because I feel like you can just kinda sit in there in a classroom discussion, whereas with online discussions you have to participate" (U2-S2).

Response # IFP-7. "Usually online . . . you have to post two times by this date and respond this many times whereas in the classroom setting you know if there's 12 people in there and you don't talk the whole class period, no one notices. So you do participate probably more online because it's a requirement" (U2-S1).

Response # IFP-8. "In the traditional classroom the teacher will try to get everyone to participate but it's not going to reflect on your grade. Whereas online they will give you a grade for [having the] posts you were supposed to have" (U2-S1).

Students also commented that both formats offer participatory qualities.

Response # IFP-9. "With online [course interactions are] definitely more focused on the content. And I mean that's a good and a bad thing. In class we get the content covered but we go above and beyond sometimes. But with online it is focused on the

content. . . . No frivolous talk. Sometimes in class it's not relevant but sometimes surprisingly it might seem like a rabbit trail but then we bring it back and it kinda cements the purpose" (U2-S3).

Response # IFP-10. "[Participation is different] with in-class [because] it's very easy to build on a base question and the class just goes with it.. . . . But with online it's definitely more mediated [by] the professor" (U2-S3).

Response # IFP-11. "I think that participation is better in person but it's more [quantity] online because you're required to. I think with online classes there's less social compulsion to participate . . . whereas in a classroom the professors usually don't require you to participate so if you don't want to, you don't have to. Your participation is voluntary so you get more out of it. . . . Whereas in [traditional] class you wouldn't have five people saying the same thing at five different times in one room" (U1-S1).

Instructional Format-Effort. Similar to participation, students were asked to share insights in regard to which format they invest more effort - online or onsite. While some noted that effort was influenced by the professor, not the format, those who did select a format consistently said online is more challenging.

Response # IFE-1. "[How hard I work] really depends on the class, not just the format of the class. . . Some of my other online classes or some of my traditional classes there hasn't been as much work or dialogue so it really does depend on the class" (U2-S3).

Response # IFE-2. "I work harder in online. And it goes back to the guidelines given to you. You know exactly what you need to do so you study harder so you can have

good participation with your online peers. With the face to face it's so much more relaxed that I just don't think I work as hard if that makes any sense" (U1-S3).

Response # IFE-3. "I do what I have to do regardless of what the class is but as far as the format I think that the way an online class is set up I think I put more work into it"(U2-S2).

In discussing which format the students thought their instructors put forth the most effort, again they indicated that devotion is more personality based. With that, they some offered strong opinions.

Response # IFE-4. "With the face to face I believe they're giving their best effort because they're being forced, they're face to face with you so they have to. But with the online course it's almost like the students are independent so there's a level of independence with the students. For the online I feel like the instructor is more of a facilitator and kinda sits back and lets the students share thoughts in writing and things like that. So I think there is a difference there. I think traditional there's more best-effort than the online" (U1-S3).

Response # IFE-5. "Here I feel that all of my classes, both traditional and online, have been good classes. The teachers put effort into it" (U2-S1).

Response # IFE-6. "I think [the effort] depends on the professor. Once again if they're a really good professor they're going to give their best whether it's online or in class" (U2-S2).

Response # IFE-7. "I think age can play a part there too because some people have taught traditionally for so long it's hard, I think, to make the transition to the online

classes. . . . Whereas I think the younger teachers are so used to technology that they don't have any trouble with the online and being open and doing a good job" (U2-S1)

Administrators were not directly asked questions about faculty or student effort but, comments gleaned in other areas of their interviews contribute to this code and are shared here. Administrators at both schools noted that they strove to let students and faculty know what was involved in online learning.

Response # IFE-8. "I do think in some cases students think 'I'm going to take online because it's going to be easier.' Same thing with faculty members, 'I'm going to teach online because it's going to be easier.' They don't recognize that rather than three times a week for 50 minutes it's 24/7. And as a former online instructor I know that I put in at least two if not more times the energy into an online class because it was every day, all day long. So education is a big part of it, making sure that students understand when they take an online class they'll be working at least as hard" (U1-A1).

Response # IFE-9. "I think especially for the immature students there's a lack of understanding as to how much self-discipline is required to be successful with online courses and so we try hard to communicate that to our students" (U2-A4).

Instructional Format-Traditional Pros/Cons. During the course of the interviews and focus groups, not much was shared about the pros and cons of traditional learning. And the limited comments offered were more about the advantages than the disadvantages, with employers being the most vocal.

Response # IFTPC-1. "There's a significant benefit to [synchronous learning] as well as to some extent the online classes you can have some of that but it is less fluid. You have less opportunity on campus to sit and compose your thoughts and come up with

research and you get more of a true reflection of peoples' inner-beliefs as they try to

make arguments toward something because they can't sit and contemplate prior to typing

and editing their remarks. So that is a skill too" (E-2).

Response # IFE-2. "The strengths to the campus learning are that communication

skill and the ability to navigate the interpersonal relationships of the class, doing

collaborative work, and the networking component" (E-2).

Response # IFE-3. "For me having the professor in front of me, that relationship

as a learner, as a teacher, being able to interact with colleagues in my field and then walk

away and then in practice meeting those people and sharing

ideas back and forth was a priceless part of my campus [educational experience, very

much a strength"(E-3).

Response # IFE-4. "The relationship building, the networking, the

communication skills, all of that, I think are definite strengths to campus-based learning"

(E-2).

As for the cons, again, it was an employer who was most vocal. He drew on

earlier experiences as a graduate student.

Response # IFE-5. "One of the weaknesses of the campus based system as I have

seen it, a number of the classes in which I took on campus, the instructors, it was

education that I could've gotten from a library card and they said "You're gonna . . .

jigsaw the textbook and you're gonna present every week" and I really got no benefit

from the instructor being there at all" (E-2).

Response # IFE-6. "I think that's a negative component of campus learning in

that the instructors sometimes view that as a way to have student-centered learning, that

[in reality] is more student doing the learning and a lack of instruction" (E-2).

Looking at traditional learning more holistically employer Response # IFE-7, who had experience teaching courses in human resources, saw both pros and cons of classroom instruction.

Response # IFE-7. "I think in graduate programs we have a tendency because people are in class to overvalue the attendance, the participation, and the interaction that people have in class and undervalue whether the person is meeting the benchmark standards with quality of work. … When I see that you're engaged, you're attentive, your eyes are lighting up, that somehow that influences what we think about students. And it may be an indicator that this is the perfect [venue] for this person to learn" (E-1).

Instructional Format-Online Pros/Cons. Discussions on the advantages and disadvantages of online learning also generated much dialogue. Regarding the pros, the insights were varied and the insights focused on different characteristics including discipline, rigor, opportunities, and reflection.

Employers remarked:

Response # IFOPC-1. "The people who make it through rigorous online programs are self-motivated, self-starting folks who don't need constant supervision. So that would definitely be a unique benefit to those programs" (E-2).

Response # IFOPC -2. "The strength of an online program would be accessibility" (E-3).

Response # IFOPC -3. "I don't think it's as much really about the program as it is the student. I think for some people [online is] perfect. They can get everything out of it they need" (E-1).

Administrators mentioned:

Response # IFOPC -4. "You have to read. You have to synthesize, use and assimilate the information in a different way. You have to do it because you are not sitting in a classroom. . . . I think writing is the Number One way we can teach people to assimilate information anyway. Online pushes more writing. You can't do it without writing" (U2-A2).

Instructors noted:

Response # IFOPC -5. "For my kinds of topics [in the classes I teach] I think [online] does help people feel more trusted and they're not going to be judged" (U1-F3).

Response # IFOPC-6. "I always give me students a lot of rights [in online courses]. You get to be sole instructor of your own online course and you were TA for the others so that you can get in their courses. And that allows students to bring media in from outside and not have to go through me. So there's a psychological element to that they know that I have given them all of the rights of an instructor in this course other than that you can't see grades or how much time people spend in any particular area" (U1-F2).

Students' comments included insights similar to these:

Response # IFOPC-7. "I think you stay more focused in online discussions because you can just edit what you say. In classroom discussions you can't take back what you say" (U2-S2).

Response # IFOPC-8. "You do get to think about it before you post it, edit, and re-type. There are rabbit trails online and you can see students go off topic but I think most of the time the teacher will try to bring that back in or the other students won't respond to it" (U2-S1).

In discussing the advantages and disadvantages of distance learning, the cons comments exceeded the pros. This result may, in part, be because administrators and employers were specifically asked to share insights on weakness and strengths of online learning. Many of the responses were themed around interpersonal concerns.

Response # IFOPC-9. ". . . the downside to [online learning] is the socialization and relationship building that are naturally associated with a program in which you have to interact interpersonally with other people. And in the business of education where you're interacting with 25 to 30 young adults that could be a question . . . of 'Can you communicate your message in person or have you been trained to communicate . . . through a computer screen or through electronic communication?'"(E-2).

Response # IFOPC-10. ". . . Face-to-face you get the personalities. You get the relationship. Just through email and chats [with online learning], it's not there. You can think it is but it's not the same. So that would definitely be lacking" (U2-F1).

Response # IFOPC-11. "I think the weakness of an online program would be if it did not include a way for learners to engage with each other because I truly believe that interactive part of learning is foundational" (E-3).

Response # IFOPC-12. "No question to me [what is lacking in online learning] is the personal touch…we've got to figure out how can we make it personal . . . that's why I do like hybrid – that's why I do like some face-to-face when at all possible" (U2-A3).

Having experience teaching online courses employer Response # IFOPC-13 noted that not every student is equipped to learn remotely:

Response # IFOPC-13. "[Some people] just don't have the skills set and qualities to help them be successful in [an online] learning environment" (E-1).

Sharing similar concerns, administrator Response # IFOPC-14 questioned if all learning can take place online:

Response # IFOPC-14. "I actually believe it would be very, very difficult to do online learning in some areas such as nursing where you need some clinical experience. . . . So there are certain classes in certain areas that I don't see that you could do" (U2-A2).

Response # IFOPC-15. "I don't think you could do (a speaking-required course) online. I just don't see how you could but it doesn't mean the degree can't be online it just means that if a student chooses that class, they're going to have to be present in a classroom, at least in a hybrid sense if nothing else" (U2-A2).

Another issue raised in this discourse was the belief that within higher education there is a lack of clarity about what is involved in online learning on the part of students and faculty alike.

Speaking about students:

*Response # IFOPC-16. "*I do think in some cases students think 'I'm going to take online because it's going to be easier.' Same thing with faculty members, 'I'm going to teach online because it's going to be easier.' They don't recognize that rather than three times a week for 50 minutes it's 24/7. And as a former online instructor I know that I put in at least two if not more times the energy into an online class because it was every day, all day long" (U1-A1).

Response # IFOPC-17. "I think especially for the immature students there's a lack of understanding as to how much self-discipline is required to be successful with online courses and so we try hard to communicate that to our students" (U2-A4).

*Response # IFOPC-18. "*The difficulty we have is that we have a fairly large dropout rate in online because the student figures the online class is easy … and they don't realize the amount of work they have to do when they get in the course" (U1-A2).

Speaking about faculty:

Response # IFOPC-19. "I think a lot of professors make the mistake of trying to turn an online class into what their face to face class was. They try to do online whatever they were doing face to face and they fail to understand the potential that you have of creating something different and sometimes even better and that is because that ability to rehearse before they jump into the discussion and sometimes you find people who won't talk in a regular class they suddenly find their voice in an online class because they can sit back and listen to what other people say so they don't be the fool for saying something that, and in a face to

face class they may wait so long that we're on a different topic and then they never have jumped in" (U1-F2).

Response # IFOPC-20. "I think most professors don't know how to teach in the classroom period. So they don't know how to teach online. … You almost need to start with giving them some training in pedagogy and learning theories to begin with that help them to understand what it means to create learning. They don't know."(U2-A2).

Occasionally the limitations with online learning are technology or personality based and out of the instructor's control.

Response # IFOPC-21. "Sometimes online … I have to ask [the students] to seek the technology because I can't, for whatever reason, put that stuff up myself" (U2-F1).

Response # IFOPC-22. "For [online courses] the rigor becomes hard with the posts because if you're in class I can increase class participation by calling on a person and they feel obligated to respond. But if I post a question online and they've already made their posts for the week, they're no longer obligated to respond so that's a significant challenge" (U1-F1).

Response # IFOPC-23. "You have to spoon-feed a little more for online. It's more labor-intensive. You have to filter and discriminate" (U2-F3).

Another con of online learning is the expense associated with delivering computer-medicated education. With that consideration, the last Format code addresses financial issues.

Instructional Format-Cost Differences. When I first considered this dissertation topic and talked with fellow students about online learning experiences, questions of why online classes cost more than traditional courses often came up. Realizing that costs can affect the reputation of a college, I presented the money question to administrators.

As shown in these responses, some administrators at University Number Two Do Not Know why there is a cost difference between the two formats; others, however, insightfully addressed the matter.

Response # IFCD-1. "I really don't understand why there is a difference in cost. To me either/or, you're getting the same education with both. But [online classes] are charged more. The rationale is that it's convenient, it's for the student. Not that we're trying to do them a favor but it is easier for them to access information anytime, they don't have to come on campus and not pay gas money I guess is how they rationalize it. So since it's more convenient for them, it's charged more" (U2-A1).

Response # IFCD-2. "We charge a higher rate because essentially the student pays for the convenience of not having to come to class" (U2-A4).

Response # IFCD-3. "In my view it's convenience more than anything else. It's also we're traditional residential. And so we see this as another approach to share Jesus Christ and give students an option to get a higher education and its taking a little bit more of our time and effort to do it" (U2-A3).

Response # IFCD-4. "For us the cost is massively great online. Blackboard … costs tens of thousands of dollars a year. So in that respect it's more. It's also more because we pay professors to develop courses and teach courses. So if you develop a course and then you teach it, you're going to pay a good bit more than you are if you teach it in that classroom. And I'm not sure why it's different but that is the difference. So it is absolutely more, and people ask me that all of the time . . . but it actually is way more costly for us to provide online education" (U2-A2).

Administrators at University Number One were able to provide clear insights into the tuition difference between the learning platforms. As noted in these responses below, part of the higher expense is because of class size and the costs involved, along with having a support staff and resources to make distance learning successful.

Response # IFCD-5. "There's a 10% surcharge for all online courses. . . . The reason is many-fold. One is that our online instructors are paid more. [Online] adjuncts are paid more than adjuncts who teach an on-ground course. Our full-time faculty receive one and a half deployments. So rather than teaching three courses they will be teaching two courses, meaning that third course will probably have to be adjuncted out. So you're looking at cost there" (U1-A1).

Response # IFCD-6. "There is a lot of money involved in having [a designated distance learning office] having the Blackboard trainer . . . The technology itself keeping up to pace is very expensive and so it helps make the [charge] difference"(U1-A1).

Response # IFCD-7. "We limit [online classes] to 22 . . . a traditional class has 35. I can't put 35 students in an online class because . . . they get lost. We set the limit at 22. The reason for 22 is we allow a 10% attrition so by the time the course is well underway we're down to 20 students which is what we originally set it at. . . . And [with the fewer students we have] lost revenue" (U1-A2).

While students question and may not like the additional charge, one administrator noted that enrollment has not been affected by the difference.

Response # IFCD-8. "To date that hasn't hurt our enrollment. And our tuition is lower than that of most of our competition so even charging a higher rate for online classes doesn't hurt us-at least not going up against much of our competition"(U2-A4).

Another matter that students raised when I began working on this study involved the methods in which students formally assess instructors. With that in mind, Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) was discussed during the interviews and focus groups and is coded in this section.

Instructional Format-Teaching Evaluations. Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) are one method that administrators use to glean insights into perceptions of instruction and how instructors are performing in the classroom, be it virtual or traditional. Considering the value that those insights could add to this study, students and administrators were asked about SETs. A good illustration of student thoughts was captured in this exchange during a focus group:

Response # *IFTE-1.* "The number of boxes [on the evaluation form] is stupid" (U1-S1).

Response # *IFTE-2.* "I think the evaluations are awful. Finding the numbers and what's this and what's that. . . . No descriptors for you to consider. But I don't think I evaluate in a different manner [based on course format]. I don't think I do" (U1-S2).

Response # *IFTE-3.* "I think my personal opinion of teacher is different based on [format] but the evaluation I try to pay attention to that. . . . I think I have a lower tolerance for ambiguity online. I think I'm much more likely to be frustrated with a professor who gives vague instructions in an online course. But . . . I do think I form a more polar opinion of a professor in person than I do online. But I think that's because they have opportunity to socialize a little bit more or not" (U1-S1).

Response # IFTE-4. "I think there should be two separate evaluations of the formats" (U1-S2).

This recorded discourse highlights two problems with SETs: First, according to the students, the form used at University Number One is not effective. Second, the two learning formats lend themselves to biases that may not be identified in the evaluation process. Recognizing the problems with the evaluation form, University Number One has set up a review panel to explore improvements.

Response # *IFTE-5.* ". . . we assigned a task force to spend the next year re-evaluating those course evaluations. . . . We do recognize that the evaluations should be different for online and on-ground" (U1-A1).

Response # IFTE-6. "One of the difficulties that we're running into now is as we look at the questions for the traditional is are we evaluating the course or are we

evaluating the professor because there's a mix of questions there. So we're going to straighten that out. We want to have a psychologist evaluate it to make sure that the question that we're asking is the question that we're asking. We're looking at the assessment very, very closely. We aren't there yet but we will be soon" (U1-A2).

Administrators at University Number Two shared that their Student Evaluation of Teaching has been revised but also commented that it could use further review.

Response # IFTE-7. "It is an electronic survey for online and in class. All done through Blackboard. And they are exactly the same. There's no difference. The survey they did use was massive and cumbersome so they streamlined it and brought it down where it's not so many questions. I think they probably need to gear some of the questions toward strictly online classes" (U2-A2).

Response # IFTE-8. "The questions we designed when I first came, we changed the evaluation form and we just pick questions that could go either way. So it's no different [between online or face to face]. The questions are the same" (U2-A1).

Response # IFTE-9. "If we don't [have separate forms for the different formats] I think it needs to be brought out and we need to do a better job of evaluating right. … That's certainly something we need to do. If we are not differentiating, we need to" (U2-A3).

Response # IFTE-10. "In the past they've used the traditional course evaluation and it didn't apply to the online student" (U1-A2).

Students communicated that there is a need for differentiating the SETs. Their comments also suggest that the course format influences their perceptions of the instructor and those biases sometimes come out in the evaluations.

Response # IFTE-11. "When I did the evaluation of the teacher my biases for the online kinda was wrapped into the evaluation which wasn't fair to the instructor. I do have some online biases, and I have some face-to-face biases. But I felt my online biases were tainting my view of the instructor. Whereas face-to-face I could gauge the instructor just like that and I could give feedback on that instructor, how he interacted, how well he/she answered questions. But the online there are so many biases that it just got in the way of how I evaluated" (U1-S3).

Response # IFTE-12. "When you're online it's almost like you need two different evaluations. When I'm face to face I'm pretty much evaluating how that professor interacted with me as the student and the other students. But online it's almost like you just don't get that personal contact where you can properly evaluate that instructor. I'm evaluating the online course more so than I am the teacher. But when I'm face to face I am evaluating that teacher dead-on" (U1-S3).

Response # IFTE-13. "I think it's professor-dependent . . . if they're doing what they should be doing, they should be good whether it's online or traditional classroom. But I think that online classes from a professor's standpoint I probably give … a little more room for them to be given slack as far as preparation and stuff" (U2-S2).

Some students admit that personality plays into their evaluations but others are less influenced that way and purposefully try to evaluate the course on content.

Response # IFTE-14. "I've really enjoyed the conversation and discourse with the professors online or in class. So I normally always grade them high on student evaluations. . . . I realize they're two different types of formats so what the online course can provide they do it well and what the in class can provide they do that well" (U2-S3).

Response # IFTE-15. "I [evaluate] by content. 'Did I get something valuable out of the class? Is this something that I'm going to be applying?' It's not especially [format] because even traditionally format is different between teachers. They have different ways they do things, and online too teachers will do things a little differently. So as long as I am getting something out of the class then I feel the teacher's done their job. [In traditional] I think their personality will come out so that will affect the evaluation. In online you're not going to see the personality as you do in a traditional classroom but you try not to let that affect your evaluation" (U2-S1).

Discussions about student evaluations of teaching during the interviews and focus groups provided insights into student perceptions of the two learning formats and in taking that further, as part of this study, I analyzed actual SETs.

Analysis of Student Evaluations of Teaching

In addition to the survey and interview/focus group data, I analyzed the responses provided on Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) from eight graduate-level education courses offered at University Number Two. For contrast, these SETs were collected from four courses that were offered in both an online and onsite format, thereby totaling eight. Each course pairing was taught by the same professor during different semesters, which combined for the eight assessed classes. Faculty names were redacted and the evaluations were made pseudonymous and given codes: U2-F1, U2-F2, U2-F3, and U2-F4. The instructors' genders were known: two men and two women.

In analyzing the SETs, collectively I did not see any clear preference of one format over the other. In the open-ended section, students noted the strengths of the online format with the following comments:

Comment # SET-1. "The chat sessions were very interesting and we were able to say some things online that we may not have said face to face."

Comment # SET-2. "Online interaction was effective and helpful"

Along with that, students noted that certain online courses would be better suited for an onsite format:

Comment # SET-3. "The course should not be an online class because there are a lot of class discussions that relate to real-life situations…Therefore, I prefer this class to be on-ground." (This is a contrast to comment #1 above as these two comments were from the same course.)

Comment # SET-4. "I would have enjoyed the class being onsite and participating in discussions with my classmates in person."

Students also used the open-ended section to offer constructive criticism for both formats:

Comment # SET-5. "Carefully limit participation by students that do ALL of the talking in class discussions." (Comment from an onsite course.)

Comment # SET-6. "Encourage input from students that never offer information during class discussions." (Comment from an onsite course.)

Comment # SET-7. "I would have liked to hear [professor's] feedback on the discussion board. We had great collaborative conversations as class members, but I would have loved to hear [his/her] input and expertise."

Comment # SET-8. "If we could have met onsite maybe once or twice review, clarify, etc. I would have appreciated that."

Comment # SET-9. "I would recommend full semester for this course and more physical interactions … between the professor and students to discuss on some valuable concepts in the course which would help students to retain more."

One noticeable distinction found in these evaluations was how female faculty received more favorable assessments when they taught their courses onsite than when they taught the same course online, while the reverse was true of the male professors. For instance, in response to the prompt *"The professor was organized and well-prepared for class",* 80% of the onsite students who took the class with a female professor responded Strongly Agree, while only 56% of the students who took the same course with the same female instructor online responded Strongly Agree. Similarly, where that same prompt was applied to a course taught by a male professor, 100% of the online students Strongly Agreed, while only 87% of the onsite students Strongly Agreed that same professor "was organized and well-prepared for class". This pattern of differences by gender between the formats was clear throughout the SETs of all eight courses, albeit this was a small sample.

Summary

The contrast of the two schools along with triangulation of data provided insights to answers for the study research questions. The interviews provided the strongest insights. Student interview responses revealed that they believed communication in online courses was sufficient and that participation was different, but comparable, within the two learning formats. Additionally, students shared a perception of little difference between the quality and rigor in the two learning formats. Another observation was the perception that age

appeared to contribute to learning format preference, with younger students preferring online and older preferring onsite. While age was not a differing factor among instructors, faculty interviews revealed the following: 1) Instructional differentiation was practiced to accommodate course objectives and needs between the formats; and 2) Use of plagiarism-detection technology was inconsistent.   Additionally, instructors believed that not all learning should be online, however since most of their courses were application-based, either format worked well. Administrators were equally supportive of distance learning, with the belief that distance learning programs were comparable to traditional courses. Additionally, administrators at both schools recognized the importance professional development played in ensuring quality at their institutions. Ensuring academic integrity was an area in which administrators at the two schools differed. Key findings of the employer interviews included a belief that the format of the learning experience was irrelevant with regard to skill and content mastery, and that all learning could be done remotely with nothing sacrificed. Conclusions with explanation, to the studied research questions, along what was expected or not expected in the findings will be discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five: Reflection and Recommendations

Overview

This study explored perceptions of public relations of distance learning contrasted to traditional learning in two graduate education venues. Specific topics, as related to distance learning, included trust, communication, quality, respect, and rigor. Using surveys, interviews, and focus groups, along with a simplified content analysis, this study has revealed that there are minimal differences in perceptions of varied learning formats, with regard to distance learning. At the same time it revealed strengths and weaknesses in professional development and academic integrity procedures between the two studied institutions.

Results: Research Questions and Discoveries

For this study I sought answers to seven research questions. In this section I address those questions and share the respective findings.

Research Question # 1. What characteristics are present that indicate trust, or lack of trust, between the learning institution and its faculty and the learning institution and its students with regard to both face-to-face and distance learning coursework?

This question was most thoroughly answered in the interview portion of the study where I found there were a variety of trust characteristics exhibited in the studied learning institutions, faculty, and students with regard to both face-to-face and distance learning coursework. As noted in Chapter Four, the topic of trust was examined in the sub-categories of integrity sense and relational perspective as those were the related themes that emerged.

Comments surrounding Trust-Integrity revealed that the two studied institutions have very different approaches to maintaining academic integrity. The colleges also value integrity differently.

Administrators at University Number One placed a high priority on ensuring that students were honorable in their work. That belief was repeatedly communicated during the interviews. The use of anti-plagiarism detection software was strongly encouraged by the administration and supported by most of the faculty.   Staying on top of the latest integrity-related technology was important to the administration and they communicated that belief by sharing how they invest extensive time and resources into matters related to Trust-Integrity. "Every time I go to the Higher Learning Commission conference that is the main thing I look for. And I go to every single session that has anything to do with online, hoping that we'll find an answer. I also talk to all of the people in the exhibit room to say 'What are you doing? How can you help me?'"(U1-A1; Response # TI-1).

Administrators at University Number Two did not communicate such emphasis, but rather expressed a strong belief in the integrity and character of its students; and that, in its view, appeared to be sufficient in ensuring academic integrity. Anti -plagiarism detection software was available to University Number Two faculty, but both instructors and administrators commented that it was not very useful. "I find [plagiarism software programs] aren't very helpful anyway. Maybe it's naïve but we've encountered very few instances of that kind of inappropriate behavior" (U2-A4; Response # TI-11). Instructors revealed that they did not consistently make use of SafeAssign, and administrators shared that they did not require faculty to use the software. With faith operating as the basis of maintaining academic integrity, students at University Number Two would have to share

this faith and be able to embody it in the same manner, to allow an effective mechanism to ensure academic integrity. Recognizing potential issues, one administrator suggested that exploration of other software may be necessary. There is software on Blackboard. I don't typically use it myself but others do. . . . Perhaps we should put more money into different kinds of software because we have had a few cases [of plagiarism] that I've caught myself" (U2-A1; Response # TI-8).

University Number One was purposeful in maintaining integrity; something I strongly support. In contrast, University Number Two appeared to be more simplistic in its views of, and approach to, academic integrity. That naivety is a concern. That naivety was a concern.

Within the sub-category of Trust-Relational, the interviews illustrated that administrators at both colleges had an abundance of trust and confidence in their faculty. For University Number One much of that confidence stemmed from the investment it made in professional development and the emphasis it had on professional accountability as demonstrated with the investment in training and provision of a staff devoted to online assistance. University Number Two strived to closely identify itself with its religious mission, and so administrators there emphasized that trust was faith-based combined with a belief that they hired experienced, qualified instructors.

Surveys, interviews, and focus groups provided insights into the question of Trust-Relational between faculty and students. The interview comments indicated that faculty at both schools valued trust and were purposeful in their efforts to foster a trusting relationship with their students. Faculty shared that not seeing the students in online learning added a challenge to building trust, but by being transparent and communicating

in a timely and responsive manner, those challenges were easily addressed. During the interviews and focus groups, students did not offer insights that were coded in this category; however survey prompts 18, 30, and 32 (Table 4) addressed trust, and a clear majority of those prompts for all three questions were rated moderately agree or strongly agree by the students.

Research Question # 2. What characteristics of communication are present between the learning institution and its faculty and the learning institution and its students?

Insights into this question can be found in the surveys but were most evident in the interview responses. In coding communication related comments, responses were divided into three sub-categories: Communication-Relational, Communication-Feedback, and Communication-Methods/Accessibility.

Using the code Communication-Relational, I collected insights into the method or value placed on the process of communication. In this view the findings revealed that professors were purposeful in their communication with their online students. Examples of that finding were illustrated in these two comments:

"The first online class I ask students to complete a voluntary, kind of welcome where they say who they are, what they like, what their interests are. Before class begins I send them an email that welcomes them to the class" (U1-F1; Response # CR-1).

"I respond to them as soon as possible. I find that that really builds a good relationship and they learn to trust me through that way. They know that if they have a question I am going to be there for them" (U2-F4; Response # CR-2).

The frequency with which the topic of feedback was raised established a need for a Communication-Feedback coding category. With students, I learned that from a

quantitative stance there appeared to be more feedback with online courses. From a

preference view, students expressed equal satisfaction with the feedback in online and

onsite courses. The survey responses in prompts 4, 13, and 32 that aligned with the

interview protocol on feedback were equally affirming. In these prompts, shown in Table

4, an overwhelming majority of the student respondents indicated a strong satisfaction in

online feedback. While students noted differences in feedback between the two formats,

faculty communicated the role feedback played in their teaching. Overall their insights

revealed that instructors were mindful of the need for feedback and believed that they

took a proactive approach to feedback regardless of the learning format.

"I give them constant feedback . . . I have rubrics so they're getting their rubrics back as

well as additional comments and I'll also communicate with them via email if there are

any issues or concerns"(U1-F1; Response # CF-1).

And while instructors consistently maintained that they were purposeful and clear

in their feedback, and that the process was unaffected by learning format, students had

counter comments. Some, as explained by these students, believed feedback in online

classes was inferior to traditional courses:

"In the online course, the feedback, it seems like not as much is there. The face to

face [feedback] is clear. You can completely understand. If you have a question, you can

ask the question and get immediate feedback. Where online it may be a day or so before

you get your questions answered and then by then you've forgotten where you were

going. So the face to face is more beneficial with getting what you need back" (U1-S3;

Response # CF-4).

"I do prefer the face-to-face with getting feedback. I do think the face to face is quicker than the online course" (U1-S3; Response # CF-5).

Providing an alternative view, these students noted that the technology in online learning assisted instructors with feedback:

"I would agree there's more feedback online because of the comment boxes. Most students would expect to read something and make sure that you're clear and giving enough feedback" (U1-S2; Response # CF-7).

These findings aligned with the suggestions provided in an article about overcoming the challenges of physical separation while engaging students in meaningful learning. The author stated, "The potential drawbacks [of online learning] revolve around the lack of personal interaction between the instructor and student, as well as the student-to-student contact. Keeping students engaged in the course is a vital function of an effective instructor" (Jones, 2013a, para. 1). In listing six suggestions, Jones (2013a) noted that feedback and timely communication were vital to keeping students engaged.

Under the code Communication-Methods/Accessibility, faculty shared thoughts on the how they connected with their students. This sub-code topic had the most coded comments from the faculty participants. Most of these elucidations repeated each other as instructors shared their preferred ways to communicate. Besides similar methods, being available and accessible was a recurring theme. As a professor from University One noted, "I go where the learner is. . . . You start where they are. You go where they are" (U1-F2; Response # CMA-2). Many professors indicated they gave out their cell phone number in order to be completely accessible to online students.

As part of my literature research in Chapter Two, I referenced an article about the use of social media, specifically Facebook (Perry, 2013). Seeing the pros and cons of that medium as an educational resource, I purposefully raised that matter during the faculty and administrator interviews. The passion in responses was clear, but what interested me most was how polarized the views were, as illustrated in these two comments:

"No. No. [I do not use Facebook]. I think you have to walk a fine-line… I maintain a clear distinction between what I expect from [students] professionally and what they do personally. And I don't muddy those waters, or try not to" (U2-F3; Response # CMA-11).

"I use Facebook groups…Facebook is a great way for students to connect" (U2-A2; Response # CMA-13).

While Facebook use was fairly evenly divided, the findings leaned more in opposition than with those who supported or actually used social media to communicate with their students.   Also interesting was that only faculty at University Number Two used Facebook to connect with students, while no one at University Number One shared that they communicated with students via Facebook.

Research Question # 3. What characteristics are present to indicate the existence of quality or rigor with regard to both face-to-face and distance learning coursework?

This question was addressed in various forms by all four studied publics: students, faculty, administrators, and employers. Using surveys and interviews, students and faculty provided insights into this topic. Survey prompts 22, 23, 24, 26, and 30 addressed related topics (Appendix A). In response to those prompts, students consistently

responded by stating they moderately agreed or strongly agreed. In the focus groups, students validated the survey findings with comments similar to these:

"I would say [I work] equally hard. For me I'm always going to try my best so I can't see [the format] making a difference. I would want to do my best" (U1-S2; Response # QTPR-19).

"I learn better with online courses because I am being forced and I'm like given 'this is what needs to be done' and I'm being forced to discuss my thoughts. So I learn the subject better from online. However, I would prefer the face to face because . . . I'm forced to talk with you. I feel [the diversity] and I can hear a conversation . . . But when I'm online . . . I don't hear any chatter. I don't hear anything. All I see is words responding to questions" (U1-S3; Response # IFLP-2).

"[How hard I work] really depends on the class, not just the format of the class. . . Some of my other online classes or some of my traditional classes there hasn't been as much work or dialogue so it really does depend on the class" (U2-S3; Response # IFE-1).

As indicated in these statements, this discovery aligned with what other researchers have found:

The findings revealed 77% of the students believed that online learning instruction offered a good or excellent academic experience and only 10% rated it marginal or poor. . . . Wyatt (2005) reported that, when asked their thoughts on rigor-specifically "how academically demanding" online courses compared with traditional, 57% said distance learning was slightly or much more demanding (p. 5).

Faculty communicated their views about quality with comments regarding the processes they employed to ensure students do quality work. Application of knowledge was one example, as evidenced by the following comments:

"My objective is for them to use the information, apply the information, therefore I start with 'What do they need to know and then how are we going to get there?'" (U2-F4; Response # QTPR-12).

Another professor at the same institution noted, "A lot of the projects that I design are authentic examples so they have to give a real-world scenario; they have to apply the knowledge" (U2-F2; Response # QTPR-13).

Requiring students to incorporate course materials into their discussions and holding them accountable for the reading was another method that demonstrated an effort to ensure rigor. Not a surprise, but enlightening, was a comment from one professor who, like many of the instructors, advocated differentiation as a way to ensure rigor and quality in teaching.

"I think sometimes curiosity has been beaten out of adults who walk into a class such as mine and they have not really had to use their creativity, their brains, as much as perhaps as might have to in a class such as mine" (U1-F2; Response # QTPR-2). .

As I sought administrator insights into this research question, I discovered that University Number One was very committed to ensuring quality and rigor. This finding was illustrated in the comments about the emphasis they put on accountability and professional development.

"The dean of distance learning maintains high standards in that he wants us to work with the Higher Learning Commission's [HLC] Best Practices. We do ask that each

course be reviewed while the course is going on to see if faculty members are sending out the initial letter, having students participate in discussion, turning in assignments regularly" (U1-A1; Response # QPDA-14).

"The issue that we're working through is to make sure that all of the faculty members are qualified, that they are certified on Blackboard and we have a trainer who now will do either a one-on-one with them or do group sessions" (U1-A2; Response # QPDA-11).

After reflecting on these interviews at University Number One, I inquired about specifics into some of the resources available, and in a later, separate conversation a faculty member who was not interviewed for this study shared additional insights that highlighted where technology in online learning was heading:

Blackboard Collaborate is a fairly new technology that we now have available. So far, there are not a lot of professors using it, but those who are absolutely love it. It basically allows for real-time, face-to-face interaction between the instructor and the whole class, the instructor and a single student or small group, or student to student – all through Blackboard. Instructors can use the virtual white board to run PowerPoints or write notes, responses, or anything else they want. It effectively bridges the distance in online learning, allowing for all sorts of new models in blended and online instruction. It promises to be a real game-changer once faculty are trained in what it can do (Education Professor, Personal Communication, December 8, 2013).

The employer interviews revealed that from their teaching and learning experiences, they believed quality and rigor were evident in online learning.

"I do think that in online learning I expect you're held to a higher level of accountability with regard to deadlines, quality of work because there's no personal interaction that really becomes a part of it to sway a professor one way or the other. You earn what you earn" (E-1; Response # QTPR-24).

Based on the many comments regarding quality and rigor from all four of the studied publics, I did find numerous characteristics that indicated the existence of quality or rigor at both institutions. This finding does not surprise me; however, the illustrations provided were unique and encouraging.

Research Question # 4. What administrative issues exist that can affect the reputation of a learning institution and its distance learning program with regard to both face-to-face and distance learning coursework?

This question was addressed by administrators and employers in the interview portion of this study. Though not specific to their universities, administrators discussed perceptions and respectability issues in the Reputation-For-Profit versus Non-Profit coding topic. Here administrators communicated that reputation issues with online learning programs were more problematic within the for-profit sector of higher education.

"Most schools don't indicate it's an online degree so the only schools we would earmark as an online would be something like [named for-profit schools] and that's because they are known . . . for the massive number of degrees they put out that are low quality. I'm not really sure if that is because of their online experience or if it is because they are for-profit and they don't care whether they educate anybody" (U2-A2; Response #RPvNP-1).

That perspective was similar to views expressed by employers. While recognizing both strengths and weaknesses of the two learning formats, none of the employers indicated a reputation problem with colleges that offered courses in the two formats. As noted by this employer, any existing reputation issues had more to do with for-profit institutions: "For better or for worse, if someone [local] gets a degree from one of those [identified diploma mill] institutions there would be some question, as opposed to if you were taking online classes through [reputable local not-for-profit] schools. So there is definitely a stigma tied to where the degree is from" (E-2; Response # RPvNP-5).

From this study I concluded that, as long as coursework was pursued at a not-for-profit institution, there were no distinguishable administrative reputation issues surrounding a learning institution and its distance learning program with regard to both face-to-face and distance learning coursework.

Research Question # 5. What employment issues exist that can affect the reputation of a learning institution with regard to distance learning?

Employers and administrators had plenty to say about this topic. All of the interview participants communicated that obtaining an education online was an effective way to learn and pursue a college degree. The stipulations, however, had more to do with the reputation of the institution than the format in which the learning occurred. Degrees earned at for-profit online institutions were continually mentioned in negative terms with some participants saying they would not even consider an applicant from those types of schools. One employer commented that he would question why an applicant would choose a for-profit online program over an online education from a respected local institution.

Other comments indicated that some believed that people who have success with online learning tended to be self-directed. "The people who make it through rigorous online programs are self-motivated, self-starting folks who don't need constant supervision. So that would definitely be a unique benefit to those programs" (E-2; Response # IFOPC-1).

This belief aligned with Lorenzetti's (2005) findings where a representative from a surveyed college commented on how online studying attracted self-motivated students and further noted that distance learners "benefited from imposing structure on their own lives rather than waiting for it to come from an outside source" (p. 3).

The insights from the three employers seemed to suggest that while many schools promoted the affordability and accessibility of their programs to prospective students, institutions should not overlook their reputations as viewed by prospective employers. In a recent interview about the worth of a college education, Former Secretary of Education William Bennett said "About 88% of people go to college … because [they] want to get a better job" (Lyster, 2013, time mark 2:28). With data like that, colleges need to be sensitive to the desires of employers. With that sensitivity, schools should emphasize and ensure the quality and rigor of their online programs and communicate evidence of those efforts.

Research Question # 6. What similarities and differences are most salient between the two formats?

Between the surveys and interviews I did not find observable differences between the two formats. Both faculty and students alike agreed that rigor and quality were emphasized in both online and onsite learning. All of the participants revealed strengths

and weaknesses of both learning platforms. Any subtle differences were more related to personal preference and teaching approaches. In brief, the PR characteristics I sought to understand appeared to be more instructor-dependent than format-related. For example, when asked "Do you feel that your instructor is giving his/her best effort in the course facilitation?" (Appendix E), this student echoed others in suggesting that the format did not make or break the class. "I think it's professor-dependent . . . if they're doing what they should be doing, they should be good whether it's online or traditional classroom" (U2-S2; Response # IFTE-13).

What was most revealing regarding the formats was found in the analyzed Student Evaluations of Teaching collected from University Number Two. I write about this discovery in detail in the Results-Student Evaluations of Teaching discussion later in this chapter.

Research Question # 7. Are there differences in perceptions between a small private liberal arts institution and a medium private liberal arts institution with regard to face to face and distance learning programs?

The survey responses and the interview comments revealed that there were no differences in perceptions between the two very different institutions. Upon reviewing the data, I could not tell which perception-related responses were from a participant at University Number One or University Number Two. This finding was surprising as I had a preconceived notion that the size of a school would affect perceptions by students and faculty. Surprisingly, the fact that University Number Two was more faith-based and was significantly smaller than University Number One made no noticeable difference in responses. Regardless of any differences, the two schools historically share Christian-

based values. I also thought that size of a school might be a factor with employers. But as noted earlier, perception of universities catering exclusively to online learning with no larger mission was the concern raised by employers.

Results: Student Evaluations of Teaching

Overall the Student Evaluations of Teaching (SETs) showed that there were no distinctions in perceptions between online and face-to-face teaching. However, an interesting observation was that male instructors were evaluated more positively when they taught online versus when they taught the same course in person. For female faculty, the opposite was true. Students favored their face-to-face teaching over their online efforts. The students' open-ended comments on the, albeit limited, analyzed SETs did not explain this distinction, and so I do not have further insights regarding this finding; however I believe this matter merits additional research.

Another observation is that, at the time of this writing, both institutions used the same evaluation form and questions regardless of the course delivery format. SETs from University Number Two, however, had an additional section with questions exclusively for students evaluating an online class, which addressed topics unique to the online forum.. Interestingly, as shown by the following interview data, not all of the administrators were aware of this distinction.

"It is an electronic survey for online and in class. …. And they are exactly the same. There's no difference. … I think they probably need to gear some of the questions toward strictly online classes" (U2-A2; Response # IFTE-7)*.*

"The questions we designed when I first came, we changed the evaluation form and we just pick questions that could go either way. So it's no different [between online or face to face]. The questions are the same" (U2-A1; Response # IFTE-8).

Administrators at University Number One communicated that they recognized the need to tailor their student evaluations. Consequently, they shared that in September 2013, a committee was launched to explore the matter with a view toward designing a new evaluation form to be used in online courses that will ask questions more relevant to that format.

The literature I found on SETs did not address learning format distinctions nor gender in regard to course format. The research reported in Chapter Two is about the SET format, confidentiality, and faculty reactions to SET feedback in regard to gender. With these findings revealing a gap in the literature to date, in the future I am interested in studying two areas regarding SETs: 1) Student understanding of the purpose of SETs and the role their comments play in course quality and tenure and 2) The role gender plays in the effectiveness of one teaching format over another.

Additional Findings

As I answered the research questions, where applicable, I highlighted interesting findings and noted the unexpected. However a significant finding not elaborated on in the research question discussions was the extent of "Do Not Know" (DNK) responses in the faculty surveys. This was troubling to me, and regretfully, without opportunity to further explore this paradigm at this point in my research, I cannot explain how this occurred. However, realizing that the majority of DNK responses came from University Number One, a possible contributing factor could be who participated in the survey portion of this

study. Only instructors and students were surveyed at University Number Two, while students, faculty, staff, and administrators from University Number One responded. Some of the questions were exclusive to the classroom, and that fact may have contributed to some of the DNK responses.

The survey item with the greatest number of DNK responses was prompt 7; "In online coursework, students are routinely unprepared when posting their discussion responses" (Table D-1), as 46 people answered Do Not Know. Upon closer examination, I have to question if my item was not framed as it should be, or if there was something else going on that the respondents were not articulating. The latter dynamic highlights a weakness of surveying and illustrates the value of interviewing and focus groups for a more qualitative examination of a topic. As I reflect on this question, I did not see a problem with the design or verbiage of it. And without further dialogue over the DNK responses with instructors who selected that option, I cannot offer suggestions for techniques professors could use to address this prompt in future interaction.

Another topic not raised in the research questions but addressed in the interview protocol with administrators involved a discussion about access to services students have and the difference between those who study online and those who attend courses on campus. Administrators at both schools stated that there was no discrimination in services for students who attended onsite and those who attended remotely, but noted the infrequency of the use of many of the services by those who attended online. These insights point to the reality that the advantage for learning online was that students could be anywhere and attend school, while a disadvantage of an online education at a

traditional institution was that students may be at a distance that prohibits them from using the promoted services available.

Recommendations

While these findings showed that perceptions of trust, respect, quality, rigor, and communication were comparable in both formats, online and traditional, it is clear that there is a need to invest in continued professional development. Such attention would help ensure that faculty understand the uniqueness and challenges of the two platforms, and that they are not fooled into thinking that to teach a course online one simply transfers what is done traditionally to a computer-mediated platform. Online learning is a different venue and offers many creative teaching options. These studied institutions had different approaches to faculty development, and it is my opinion that University Number One was setting the bar. The interviews with University Number One administrators, along with examination of the academic support resources it provided, validated this belief. University Number Two communicated a naivety and indifference toward academic integrity as well as a lack of value in the importance of professional development. The emphasis there was more so on hiring instructors with online experience and less so on developing and assisting faculty to improve their andragogy.

Lessons Learned

In addition to making personal discoveries, I learned many things about research in general, and more specifically, my research area. The first lesson came when I began the interviews and focus groups. After fumbling my way through the first few interviews I soon realized that, in the test process, I should have done a mock interview with test subjects and not simply had them review and comment on the verbiage and structure of

the questionnaire. That process would have helped me better organize the interview

before conducting it with actual participants.

Also, upon discovering the extent of Do Not Know responses in the faculty

surveys, a more efficient approach may have been to facilitate a focus group to see if any

of them answered DNK and then explore that further. I also should have designed

separate surveys for staff and administrators concerning classroom interactions, rather

than administering the same survey received by faculty members. Some staff and

administrators teach courses, but not all. Therefore, differentiating the surveys between

participant type may help reduce the number of DNK responses.

Additionally, because I did not discover Henschke's (n.d.) measurement of trust

tool, Modified Instructional Perspectives Inventory (MIPI), until my study was designed,

I did not use it. If I were to repeat my study, I would consider utilizing that tool as a

data-gathering measure.

These short-comings noted, on a more positive note, I learned the value of being

purposeful in selecting a committee. And I am glad to say I did just that. Through the

struggles and learning experiences, I have been blessed to have been assisted by the most

caring and helpful people I have ever had the privilege of knowing. As a journalist I have

always understood that a newscast is a team effort. One of my fears in pursuing scholarly

research was that I mistakenly believed it to be an isolated pursuit, something I am not

comfortable with. Through this process I have learned that the most rewarding

discoveries are those that are done collaboratively.

Research Suggestions

As I consider what I learned from this study and make suggestions for future research, let me first say that an interesting discovery was made in this process. As I sought to explore research in this area I found there is an abundance of advice-type writing and commentary on many of the topics I researched but not much empirical research. Studies focusing on relationship-building in higher education are needed as they would assist to provide clearer understanding of the successes and improvement needs of higher education in both formats, online and on-site.

Commenting more specifically, I recommend the design and implementation of the following studies: 1) Apply a similar design to include exploring these same characteristics to the educational setting of massive open online courses as well as expansion of the current study to large public universities; 2) A study that explores using distance learning as a delivery vehicle of corporate professional development; and 3) A study contrasting students who are digital natives with those who are digital immigrants, which explores how they define learning and explores how they conclude that their preferred learning format is ideal for learning. Finally, as discussed earlier, there is value in studying the role gender plays in the effectiveness of one teaching format over another, as well as studying student understanding of the purpose of student evaluations of teaching and the role their comments play in course quality and tenure.

Conclusion

The findings from this study help me further recognize the need to provide ongoing professional development and technical assistance for faculty along with the importance of keeping a pulse on student desires and expectations. Additionally, looking

externally, I must not neglect employer perceptions, as all of these practices will be part of my role as a college administrator.

When internal PR is healthy, with good communication and solid trust, criticism from the outside will not alter the view of those inside. Internal problems filter externally and eventually adversely influence perceptions of those outside. That is because your internal publics are also your external publics (i.e.: employees are also neighbors) and people tend to believe those sources that are closest to the situation. The message of this illustration is two-fold: First it is important to invest in all of your publics. And second, you should never dismiss the desires, opinions, or needs of your internal publics for when you do you create a larger problem.

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Appendix A

Table A1.

Student survey questions by proportion of response.

No.	Student	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
4	In online coursework, assignment instructions and course expectations are communicated clearly.	15	6	6	**36**	**36**
5	The online instructor is actively engaged in the teaching of coursework.	17	8	14	30	**32**
6	The online instructor gives his/her best effort.	20	6	11	24	**39**
7	The online instructor carefully evaluates submitted work.	15	9	9	27	**39**
8	The online instructor posts relevant discussion content.	19	6	6	26	**43**
9	In online coursework, questions and concerns are NOT typically addressed respectfully.	20	**63**	5	6	6
10	In online coursework, discussion forums allow sufficient communication between the instructor and classmates	17	11	14	29	**29**
11	The online instructor is professional in his/her conduct.	19	2	2	20	**59**
12	The online instructor differentiates instruction and feedback.	25	9	6	32	**28**
13	The online instructor communicates in a regular and timely manner.	15	9	6	27	**42**
14	In online coursework, discussion forums provide insufficient communication between the instructor and students.	18	**32**	14	27	9
15	The online instructor communicates at an appropriate professional level.	15	2	8	19	**57**
16	The online instructor is engaging.	17	8	14	37	**25**
17	Typically, there are sufficient options and methods to reach the online instructor.	16	0	2	31	**52**
18	The online instructor seeks to get to know the students.	20	15	14	**27**	24
19	In online coursework, assignment instructions and course expectations are NOT typically communicated clearly.	17	**44**	24	12	3

Student survey questions by category; continued.

20	In online coursework, the course is NOT as challenging as other courses.	18	**55**	15	9	3
21	In online coursework, students are appropriately challenged.	15	5	5	31	**45**
22	In online coursework, students must work hard in order to achieve success.	14	3	8	27	**49**
23	In online coursework, assignments require original thinking.	15	8	3	36	**38**
24	In online coursework, course materials are at appropriate level of rigor.	14	8	8	**36**	35
25	In online coursework, course materials are NOT at graduate level of rigor.	18	**52**	20	8	3
26	In online coursework, assignments require the student to read and apply the course materials.	15	2	6	23	**54**
27	In online coursework, interactions are relevant to subject matter and course objectives.	17	3	6	26	**49**
28	In online coursework, students are challenged to produce work that is of high quality.	14	2	9	31	**45**
29	In online coursework, student engagement reflects quality and originality.	17	3	15	**35**	29
30	In online coursework, the course is well designed and applicable to the course discipline.	14	5	11	32	**39**
31	In online coursework, appropriate technology is used effectively.	14	3	5	33	**46**
32	The online instructor responds to questions and concerns in a respectful manner.	15	6	9	20	**50**

Note: DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement;
MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Appendix B

Table B1.

Faculty survey questions by proportion of response.

No.	Faculty/Staff/Adjunct	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
4	In online coursework, most students are, themselves, doing the work that they are posting.	36	1	4	**42**	17
5	In online coursework, overall students are giving their best in the course.	32	2	14	**44**	9
6	In online coursework, students are regularly reading the course materials.	33	5	20	**35**	7
7	In online coursework, students are routinely unprepared when posting their discussion responses.	**46**	9	25	20	1
8	In online coursework, students are abiding by an honor code when doing their work.	**40**	3	12	33	13
9	In online coursework, students incorporate constructive criticism and feedback provided by the instructor in evaluated coursework into future assignments.	37	2	8	**41**	12
10	In online coursework, overall students seem comfortable communicating with the instructor.	**34**	2	4	31	28
11	In online coursework, overall students regularly communicate with classmates.	**40**	8	21	26	6
12	In online coursework, students frequently do not communicate at the proper academic level.	**39**	5	17	31	9
13	In online coursework, there is open and honest communication in the course.	38	1	15	**40**	7
14	In online coursework, students have ample opportunity and means to communicate with the instructor.	32	0	5	27	**36**
15	In online coursework, students have to work hard to achieve in the course.	**29**	1	10	36	25
16	In online coursework, course assignments require original thinking.	34	3	10	**35**	18
17	In online coursework, course assignments require students to read and apply the course materials.	29	0	5	**36**	30
18	In online coursework, course interactions are relevant to subject matter and course objectives.	**35**	0	4	32	29

Faculty survey questions by proportion of response: continued.

		DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
19	In online coursework, course assignments are applicable to course discipline.	33	0	0	**37**	30
20	In online coursework, student work is not consistently of high quality.	**38**	13	28	18	3
21	In online coursework, use of technology is effective and appropriate.	28	2	5	**38**	28

Note: DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement; MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Appendix C

Table C1.

Student survey questions by proportion of response to Strong Agreement.

No.	Student	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
11	The online instructor is professional in his/her conduct.	19	2	2	20	**59**
15	The online instructor communicates at an appropriate professional level.	15	2	8	19	**57**
26	In online coursework, assignments require the student to read and apply the course materials.	15	2	6	23	**54**
17	Typically, there are sufficient options and methods to reach the online instructor.	16	0	2	31	**52**
32	The online instructor responds to questions and concerns in a respectful manner.	15	6	9	20	**50**
27	In online coursework, interactions are relevant to subject matter and course objectives.	17	3	6	26	**49**
22	In online coursework, students must work hard in order to achieve success.	14	3	8	27	**49**
31	In online coursework, appropriate technology is used effectively.	14	3	5	33	**46**
21	In online coursework, students are appropriately challenged.	15	5	5	31	**45**
28	In online coursework, students are challenged to produce work that is of high quality.	14	2	9	31	**45**
8	The online instructor posts relevant discussion content.	19	6	6	26	**43**
13	The online instructor communicates in a regular and timely manner.	15	9	6	27	**42**
6	The online instructor gives his/her best effort.	20	6	11	24	**39**
7	The online instructor carefully evaluates submitted work.	15	9	9	27	**39**
30	In online coursework, the course is well designed and applicable to the course discipline.	14	5	11	32	**39**

Student survey questions by proportion of response to Strong Agreement: continued.

23	In online coursework, assignments require original thinking.	15	8	3	36	**38**
4	In online coursework, assignment instructions and course expectations are communicated clearly.	15	6	6	**36**	**36**
24	In online coursework, course materials are at appropriate level of rigor.	14	8	8	**36**	35
5	The online instructor is actively engaged in the teaching of coursework.	17	8	14	30	**32**
29	In online coursework, student engagement reflects quality and originality.	17	3	15	**35**	29
10	In online coursework, discussion forums allow sufficient communication between the instructor and classmates	17	11	14	29	**29**
12	The online instructor differentiates instruction and feedback.	25	9	6	32	**28**
16	The online instructor is engaging.	17	8	14	37	**25**
18	The online instructor seeks to get to know the students.	20	15	14	**27**	24

Note: DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate Disagreement;
MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Appendix D

Table D1.

Faculty survey questions by proportion of response to Strong Agreement.

No.	Faculty/Staff/Adjunct	DNK	SD	MD	MA	SA
14	In online coursework, students have ample opportunity and means to communicate with the instructor.	32	0	5	27	**36**
5	In online coursework, overall students are giving their best in the course.	32	2	14	**44**	9
4	In online coursework, most students are, themselves, doing the work that they are posting.	36	1	4	**42**	17
9	In online coursework, students incorporate constructive criticism and feedback provided by the instructor in evaluated coursework into future assignments.	37	2	8	**41**	12
13	In online coursework, there is open and honest communication in the course.	38	1	15	**40**	7
21	In online coursework, use of technology is effective and appropriate.	28	2	5	**38**	28
19	In online coursework, course assignments are applicable to course discipline.	33	0	0	**37**	30
17	In online coursework, course assignments require students to read and apply the course materials.	29	0	5	**36**	30
7	In online coursework, students are routinely unprepared when posting their discussion responses.	**46**	9	25	20	1
11	In online coursework, overall students regularly communicate with classmates.	**40**	8	21	26	6
8	In online coursework, students are abiding by an honor code when doing their work.	**40**	3	12	33	13
12	In online coursework, students frequently do not communicate at the proper academic level.	**39**	5	17	31	9
20	In online coursework, student work is not consistently of high quality.	**38**	13	28	18	3
18	In online coursework, course interactions are relevant to subject matter and course objectives.	**35**	0	4	32	29
10	In online coursework, overall students seem comfortable communicating with the instructor.	**34**	2	4	31	28

Faculty survey questions by proportion of response to Strong Agreement: continued.

16	In online coursework, course assignments require original thinking.	34	3	10	**35**	18
6	In online coursework, students are regularly reading the course materials.	33	5	20	**35**	7
15	In online coursework, students have to work hard to achieve in the course.	**29**	1	10	36	25

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor
Other questions were informational in nature.
DNK - Do Not Know; SD - Strong Disagreement; MD - Moderate
Disagreement; MA - Moderate Agreement; SA - Strong Agreement.

Appendix E

Table E1.

Student focus group questions by category.

No.	Student	Q	T	D	C	Rs	Rr
1	Do you learn better in traditional or online courses? *Explain why you think that is.*	x					x
2	Do you work harder in online or traditional courses? *How so?*	x					x
3	Do you participate more in one format than the other?						
4	Is participation different between the two? *Elaborate.*			x	x		
5	Are the course interactions more focused in one format than another? *Secondary prompt: Do students tend to go off on "rabbit trails" in more format than another? Elaborate.*			x	x		
6	Is there a difference in the kind of feedback you receive in the two types of courses? *Does it differ significantly between professors?*	x			x	x	
7	Is there a difference in accessibility between the two formats? *Which format fosters better communication between students and professors?*		x		x	x	
8	Do you feel that your instructor is giving his/her best effort in the course facilitation? *Are there differences in that regard between the two formats?*	x	x		x	x	x
9	How do you evaluate the quality of online courses compared to evaluating the quality of face-to-face courses?	x	x	x	x	x	x

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor

Appendix F

Table F1.

Faculty interview questions by category.

No.	Student	Q	T	D	C	Rs	Rr
1	How do you foster an environment where students feel free to communicate openly? *Is that complicated by computer-mediated communication?*		x		x		
2	How do you go about fostering trust in your classes? *Does not having in-person dialogue hamper that effort?*		x				
3	How do you ensure that your course requires an appropriate degree of rigor? *Do you differentiate between online and face-to-face?*	x					x
4	How do you ensure that students are reading and applying the course materials? *Does it differ from your face to face? If so, how?*		x		x		
5	What do you do when student work is not of high quality?	x					x
6	Speaking of online courses…what tools do you use to be available to students and foster communication? *Does it differ from your face to face?*	x			x		
7	What methods do you employ to foster students coming to discussions prepared? *Does it differ from synchronous/asynchronous discussion?*	x		x			
8	How do you design assignments to foster course application?	x					x
9	What resources do you use to ensure that students are doing the work that they are posting/submitting?		x				x
10	What technology is used to facilitate learning? *Does it differ between the two formats?*	x					

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor

Appendix G

Table G1.

Administrator interview questions by category.

No.	Student	Q	T	D	C	Rs	Rr
1	1. When you see an applicant with an online degree, what is your INITIAL impression?	x					x
2	2. Do you think all programs could be online or is online learning only appropriate for certain fields of study? Please illustrate your response.	x					x
3	3. What training do you provide distance learning faculty to ensure students are receiving a quality education?	x					
4	4. What evaluation methods do you employ to assess distance learning faculty? *How do they differ (if at all) from face-to-face assessments?*	x		x			
5	5. Are online courses charged differently than campus-based courses? If yes, what is the rationale?					x	
6	6. Are there resources available to distance learners that allow them to be a part of the campus community? *Do you think that is important?*				x		
7	7. What safeguards do you have in place to ensure that your online students are doing their own work?	x					x
8	8. What do you think is lacking in online learning programs? *What are you doing to address those?*	x					x
9	9. What is your personal experience with online learning/teaching?		x				

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor

Appendix H

Table H1.

Employer interview questions by category.

No.	Student	Q	T	D	C	Rs	Rr
1	1. If you see an applicant with an online degree is he/she viewed differently than someone with a traditional degree? *Does it matter where they matriculated? Is it different for some positions than others?*	x					
2	2. Do you believe there is a generalizable difference between employees with online degrees and those with traditional degrees? *If so, please elaborate.*	x					
3	3. Are there unique strengths of online learning programs? *Do you think there are unique weaknesses?*	x					
4	4. Are there unique strengths of campus-based programs? *Do you think there are unique weaknesses?*	x					

Note: Q: quality; T: trust; D: discussion; C: communication; Rs: respect; Rr: Rigor

Vitae

Cessna Catherine Smith Winslow   *ccswpr@gmail.com*

Professional Experience
Communication Consultant (1989-Present). On a freelance basis I advise clients on stakeholder communication, image development, internal/external relations, media outreach, and strategic planning and communication. I also assist with producing multi-media presentations, web content, grant writing, and various writing and editing tasks.

Missouri Baptist University— St. Louis, MO (2008-2011). As an assistant professor, I taught a variety of communication courses and served as faculty advisor to the student-produced online newspaper and weekly newscast. I also developed four communication courses and converted onsite courses into hybrid and online formats

Cedarville University- Cedarville, OH (2000-2008). As an adjunct instructor I taught journalism and communication courses. I also wrote feature articles for the university's magazines and assisted the public relations department with media relations, communication planning, presentations, and marketing tasks. Additionally I created development strategies and facilitated donor relations for the campus radio station.

The Ohio State University - Columbus, OH (1987-88). While pursuing a master's degree, I served as a graduate teaching assistant where I co-taught courses journalism courses. Along with teaching responsibilities, I supervised students in the broadcast production lab and co-advised the student chapter of a professional association.

WAKA-TV—Montgomery, AL (1986-87). At this CBS affiliate I served as a reporter and news producer. Additionally, as needed, I also filled in as an assignment editor and videographer/editor.

CKCO-TV/CFCA-FM/CKKW-AM-Kitchener, Ontario, Canada (1985-86). After being selected to participate in a professional-exchange program, I was hired as a reporter, writer, and production assistant for a radio/television combination station.

ABC Network News-Los Angeles (1984-85). As a production assistant, I helped producers and correspondents with story development and monitored activities at network and affiliate operations.

KGIL-AM/FM-Los Angeles (1981-84). Shortly after starting as a news intern I was promoted to a part-time reporter/producer. During my tenure I covered presidential elections, local government activities, and a variety of high-profile news stories where I earned regional awards for investigative and human interest reporting.

Education
EdD in Instructional Leadership with an emphasis in Higher Education Administration~ Lindenwood University

Master of Arts in Journalism with an emphasis in Public Relations Management ~ The Ohio State University

Bachelor of Arts in Journalism with a minor in Political Science ~ California State University