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DEVELOPING A PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY, CAREER GOALS AND PROBLEM SOLVING SKILLS: AN MBA CAPSTONE WITH A CAREER PREPAREDNESS FOCUS

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ABSTRACT

Critics of modern MBA programs maintain that the programs are not adequately preparing candidates to enter the workforce and start a career. Many programs have a capstone where students integrate the materials from their other courses to solve a business problem. We propose a capstone course where an integrated experiential project is only part of the course. During the experiential action learning component, the students will not only solve a business problem, they will learn the problem solving process. The other parts of the course are used to build a professional identity and establish career goals. Activities and techniques include reflective writing, self-assessments, goal setting and planning techniques. When the course is successfully completed, the student will know who they are, what they 'bring to the table', have a timeline for their careers, and have some experience in solving real world problems.

INTRODUCTION

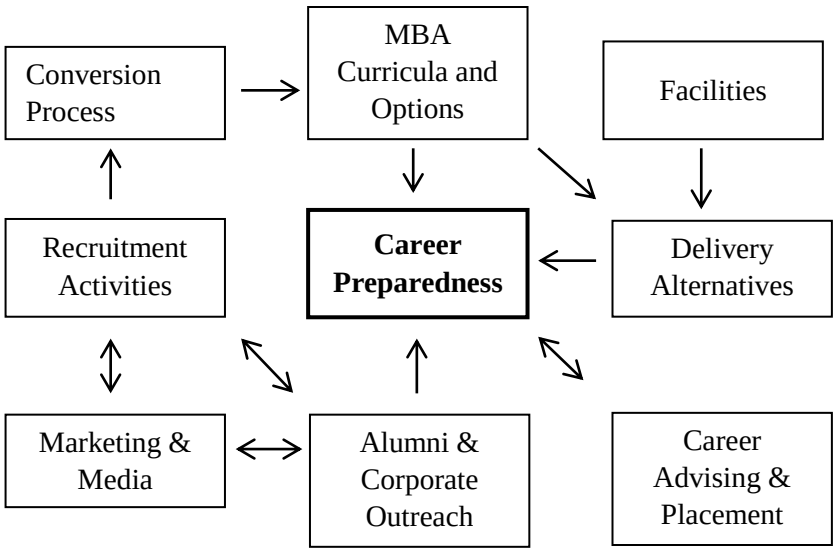
Career preparedness should be an objective of any effective MBA program; however the curricula and student experience do not always reflect this goal. Despite the fact that some indicate that MBA programs have changed (Kopas & Purcell , 2003), Mintzberg's criticisms (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2004) that students are not being adequately prepared for the challenges they will face, seems to still be relevant (Laud & Johnson, 2013). Even the top ranked schools are criticized for maintaining functional silos, not integrating the curriculum and lacking experiential components and themes (Navarro. 2008). To overcome these obstacles our principle approach is experiential learning with a focus on skill set development. The use of experiential approaches in MBA programs is generally thought to be a positive complement or alternative to traditional 'Sage-on-a-stage' lecturing, case studies or discussion of collections of published articles. (Bell & Leberman, 2010). Furthermore, experiential approaches and skill set development become more important as schools accept students with less experience 'real world' experience (Badenhausen, 2009), a reality in today's competitive MBA market. Among still other reasons to adopt an experiential learning approach is because it has been shown to be effective in integrating social responsibility, ethics and sustainability, our other potential themes, into a curriculum (Baden & Parkes, 2013; Gundlach & Zivnuska, 2010).

During our current MBA redesign we are taking a theme-based approach. Our primary theme is 'career preparedness'. In this paper we will briefly present an MBA Program Design Strategy (see figure 1). We will explore various challenges and issues that arose during our journey through the process and open the floor to explore various curriculum approaches that keep the focus on career preparedness, experiential learning and skill-set

development. Along the way we will share some innovative approaches that we found in our research or developed ourselves.

In addition to an experiential learning and skill set development focus, we consider it equally important for the curriculum to be current and relevant in order for our MBA graduates to be prepared. To this end we are taking efforts to design curriculum options that reflect the skill sets required by organizations now and in the future. To this end we are repositioning our concentrations. We are committed to continuously develop new courses and perhaps concentrations to address current issues. Finally, although all elements of the curricula concentrations, courses, etc. should reflect the 'career preparedness' theme by staying current with an applied, skill building focus, we propose that the capstone course focus on career preparedness.

Figure 1
Overview of Career Preparedness in MBA Program



CAREER PREPAREDNESS IN AN MBA PROGRAM

Where should 'career preparedness' reside in an MBA program? Answer Everywhere! It should be an underlying theme of the program. However it fits in better in some places than others and specific 'career preparedness' activities can be included as stand-alone components. Figure 1 shows some specific elements that can help or hinder career preparedness.

MBA CURRICULA STRATEGIES FOR CAREER PREPAREDNESS FOCUS

There are many ways that an MBA program can be designed and implemented. In this section we will list and briefly comment on the 'top ten' that we examined in our MBA redesign.

Orientation 'Boot-Camp'

Orientation programs can help with MBA retention and success. (Sherman. 2013)

Experiential Exercises in courses

Many MBA programs are moving towards experiential learning (Livadas. 2014). Experiential based programs are linked to career mobility. (Ryan, Silvanto & Brown. 2013)

Skills Based Approaches in courses

MBA programs are being criticized for not developing managerial skills (Varela, Burke & Michel. 2013), whereas competencies are related to career success (Langbert. 2011). Establishing a philosophy of life-long learning regarding managerial skills is a worthwhile goal (Varela, Burke & Michel. 2013)

Self-Assessments/Key Issue Reflections in core courses

Reflective practices can help students uncover, understand and develop their values (Waddock & Lozano. 2013), and values can influence career choices (Vigoda-Gadot & Grimland. 2008). Reflection can also prepare older MBA students manage career transitions, an important responsibility often overlooked in MBA programs (Hallam, Hallam, Rogers & Azizi. 2009).

Management Portfolio (self-analysis and career plan) in core course

The ability to manage a career path is an essential part of an individual's employability (Preethi & Raj. 2013). Career development is important in maintaining a high quality of work life. (Li & Yeo. 2011), and students with specific and challenging career visions are more satisfied with their jobs. (Holtschlag &. Masuda. 2011). There are many meanings to MBA career success and it is advantageous for schools to recognize this plurality (Hay & Hodgkinson. 2006), therefore students are encouraged to set their own definitions of success.

Experiential Capstone Consulting Project

Consulting projects are considered an effective mean to develop relevant skil sets (Bullough. 2014; Chaves & Yacovelli, 2008; Neiva de Figueiredo & Mauri. 2013 There are also challenges with experiential learning projects, such as those stemming from the different goals of the schools and outside organizations that they partner with, (Bell & Leberman. 2010; Kamath, Agrawal & Krickx, 2008)

Concentrations that are or will be in Demand

Business Schools are in a state of transition (Howard & Cornuel. 2012) with a key criticism being they are teaching to old models of the workplace.

Ability to have two concentrations

The MBA is looked at as a source of opportunity ion the modern 'boundaryless' career (Kelan & Jones. 2009). Students can use multiple skill sets to design their own career path.

Electives that reflect current topics and skill sets. It is essential to align the competencies required on the job with those being developed in the curricula. Many schools have curricula that are not aligned with the competencies being sought by employers (Kumar & Jain. 2010).

Cross Discipline MBAs

There is increasing demand for MBA skill sets in areas such as sports management, music management and Health care (Hess, 2013; Hilsenrath, 2012).

In addition to the curricula strategies, there are things that can be done regarding non-curricular support to facilitate the above curricula ideas. Some non-curricular issues include close connection with corporate partners, Dean's Advisory Board, internship programs, career advising & placement, mentoring, career issue seminars, executive speakers program, and alumni events. Orientation programs can help with MBA retention and success. (Sherman. 2013) All of these activities are important and supported by the literature and fit into figure 1 but are beyond the scope of this article.

INTEGRATED EXPERIENTIAL CAPSTONE COURSE

Integrated capstone courses have become an accepted final course in MBA Programs. In our program we expanded the course to include additional career development components. This course is designed to prepare the MBA candidate for their career by professional development exercises, career planning activities and integrating the various disciplines that the MBA candidate has studied with a focus on a particular application in the real world. Students will establish their professional identities through reflective assignments and self-assessments. Next, they will learn use various goal setting techniques to develop a career plan. Finally, students will develop an action-learning project where they can apply new skills in an area of professional interest. Students may choose to investigate an issue at their place of work, or undertake research that will lead them to new fields or career interests. Many others have outlined action learning and experiential projects, therefore in this section we will briefly explore the career preparedness elements.

Reflection and Self-Assessment

The purpose of the reflection and self-analysis section of the course is to help the student formulate a professional identity with specific career competitive advantages that can be utilized and exploited within organizations. This will be done with a series of exercises and essays. The exercises are intended to provide insight. The essays are reflective pieces where students articulate well-justified personal stances regarding issues of ethical behavior, cultural diversity, sustainability and other current issues in organizations.

Some examples of areas where self-assessment scales and exercises are available: Self-esteem, entrepreneurial aptitude, ethics (i.e., identifying 'guiding principles' Cowden, Hartman & Desjardins, 2008), Global Manager Potential (i.e., Spreitzer, McCall And Mahoney, 1997), Holland Personality Types, Big Five, DISC Inventory, MBTI, Emotional Intelligence, Decision Making Style (i.e. Rowe, Boulgarides & McGrath, 1984), Adaptibility (i.e. Ard, Donovan, Plamondon & Pulakos, 2000), learning style, conflict management style, decision making style, and undertaking a personal SWOT analysis.

Goal Setting and Career Planning

Student use the self-assessment and reflection to develop and/or revise their career goals and plans of action, identifying opportunities for growth and development. The section of the course will start with a formal introduction to planning and goal setting identifying the tools and techniques available. Students will then use what they have learned in the self-assessments to determine areas of career interest and potential. Next, in groups, students will help each other develop short, mid-range and long term goals. Along with the goals will be an

exploration of the strategies and tactics that can be used to reach these goals. Additional career related activities and ideas will be introduced such as networking and contacts, mentoring and internship programs.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we have outlined component elements of an MBA Program with a formal focus on 'career preparedness'. The ideas presented are just some of the many approaches that we found in use or being considered by successful programs. The key is to match the set of tools and activities to your program. FUll time day students with assistanceships and no experience will need different things that those in a prt-time night/weekend program that has students with years of experience.

We also proposed a capstone course approach that expands on the experiential learning idea and incorporates professional identity and career planning elements. The capstone project can provide some experience in planning and conducting a project, and having the career elements in the same course provides a context for that learning.

THE IMPACT OF SPECIALIZED COURSES ON STUDENT RETENTION AS PART OF THE FRESHMAN EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

First-year college experience seminars that are part of an effort to increase retention and graduation rates are becoming ubiquitous in higher education. Retaining students is an important imperative from the perspectives of business operations and reputational program quality consideration of an institution. This manuscript compares fall to spring retention rates of students enrolled in five different classifications of freshman experience courses at a mid-sized regional university. The empirical results provide evidence that students taking specialized freshman experience course in business, agriculture, nursing, education, or other discipline-specific areas associated with a major have the highest retention rate. Generalized freshman experience courses or English courses perform in the middle grouping with respect to student retention. Seminar university transition courses modified in support of transfer students yields the lowest retention rate. The specialized courses in business yield a retention rate that is almost 9% higher than seminar courses targeting transfer students.

INTRODUCTION

In a study published by the National Student Clearing house Research Center in April of 2015, it was reported that of all students who started college in the fall of 2013, 69.6 percent returned to college at any U.S. institution in the fall of 2014 (a measure known as the persistence rate), and 59.3 percent returned to the same institution (a measure known as the retention rate). Thus, 30 percent of students who start college will not continue beyond the first year, a disappointing figure for students and parents who start college with the goal of graduation in mind. Low retention also creates inefficiency from the perspective of a college. Strategically, it is cheaper and more conducive to reputation enhancement for an institution to retain a student than to continue to compete for new students via the recruitment process.

In the state of Texas, the General Academic Institutions Formula Advisory Committee has recommended that state funding for general academic institutions during the 2016-17 biennium should be based on seven defined metrics to include six-year graduation rates and retention rates to 30, 60, and 90 semester credit hours (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2015). This focus on retention, with financial implications for universities, illustrates the increasing demand for institutions to focus on student success and retention. The purpose of this manuscript is to compare student retention rates in general versus specialized freshman courses designed to enhance the college experience. The manuscript is organized into five sections. The first section offers a brief review of the literature. The second section puts forth background information relating to the courses that are part of the research cohort. The third section describes the methodology and data. The next section applies the empirical results. The final section is the conclusion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Colleges and universities have been working to find ways to improve retention rates and to help students with the transition to college for many years. Mentoring programs, new student orientations, learning communities, first-year seminars, and many other initiatives have been implemented with this goal in mind. Early research on the subject of retention determined that persistence and retention rates could be improved by increasing student involvement, and the level and quality of a student's interactions with faculty and staff (Astin, 1977). Tinto suggested that institutions can improve retention rates by having a strong commitment to quality education and building a strong sense of inclusive educational and social community on campus (1993).

The earliest freshman seminar is said to have been offered at Lee College in Kentucky in 1882 (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996). In the 1940's, freshmen seminars were utilized to provide freshmen opportunities to collaborate with faculty members with similar interests on research opportunities as a form of engagement (Levine, 1985). In the 1960's, these courses were virtually nonexistent due to the individual accountability philosophy of this decade, but fiscal and academic challenges of the mid-1970's including decreasing numbers of traditional-age students, demographic shifts in the entering student population, a commitment to access for students previously excluded from higher education, the alarming student dropout rate which peaks between the freshman and sophomore year, and a renewed concern about the quality of undergraduate education created demand for the resurgence of freshmen seminar courses (Gordon, 1991; Barefoot & Fidler, 1996). Since the 1970's, John Gardner's work with the University 101 program at the University of South Carolina, his research publications, and his later founding of The Center for the First Year Experience (FYE) and Students in Transition has been influential in the growth of such courses across the nation (Ryan and Glenn, 2004).

A first-year seminar has been defined as a course intended to enhance the academic and/or social integration of first-year students (Barefoot, 1992). Ryan and Glenn (2004) suggest that these courses fit into two broad categories: academic-socialization models, where courses built around academic themes are used for the purpose of academic socialization, and learning strategies models, where active learning skills (such as note taking, textbook reading, and time management) are taught. Barefoot (1992) suggests a classification system that offers five basic types of courses:

- *Extended orientation seminars.* Often called freshman orientation, college survival, college transition, or student success course, these courses include an introduction to campus resources, time management, academic and career planning, learning strategies, and to student development concerns.
- *Academic seminars with generally uniform academic content across sections.* This type may be an interdisciplinary or theme-oriented course and sometimes is part of a general education requirement. The primary focus is an academic theme, or discipline, but will often include academic skills components, such as critical thinking and expository writing.
- *Academic seminars on various topics.* This seminar's content is similar to the previously mentioned academic seminar except that specific topics vary from section to section.
- *Preprofessional seminars or discipline-linked seminar.* These seminars are designed to prepare students for the demands of the major or discipline and the profession and are oftentimes taught within specific disciplines, professional schools, or majors.

- *Basic study skills seminars.* Generally offered to academically underprepared students, these seminars focus on basic academic skills, such as grammar, note taking, test-taking strategies, and critical-reading techniques.

Some institutions offer first-year seminars that are a hybrid of two or more of these types, so hybrid seminars are now considered a sixth type (Young and Hopp, 2014). The National Resource Center for the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition has surveyed institutions across the nation every three years since 1988 to collect data on first-year seminars (Young and Hopp, 2014). One finding of the year 2000 survey administration was the proportion of institutions offering academically-focused first-year seminars has increased, while seminars classified as extended orientation seminars has decreased (Hunter and Linder, 2005). Also, an increasing number of institutions report offering first-year seminars linked with other courses, from 17.2% in 1994 to 35.7% in 2009 (Barefoot & Fidler, 1996; Hunter and Linder, 2005).

George D. Kuh (2008) identified first-year seminars and experiences as one of ten high-impact educational practices to increase rates of student retention and engagement. He noted that the highest-quality seminars or experiences include critical inquiry, frequent writing, information literacy, collaborative learning, and other skills that develop students' intellectual and practical competencies.

Greenfield, Keup, and Gardner (2013) refer to first-year seminars as the curricular anchor for several other educationally effective practices, including service-learning, learning communities, common intellectual experiences, writing-intensive experiences, and undergraduate research, among others. This suggests that one benefit of students enrolling in first-year seminars could be the connection to these other opportunities that enhance the students' chances for success in college.

Ryan and Glenn (2004) found that freshmen who enrolled in strategy-based seminars were significantly more likely to re-enroll the following fall as compared to freshmen who enrolled in a socialization-focused seminar or in no seminar. Further, freshmen who enrolled in the socialization-focused, academic theme-based freshman seminar were less likely to re-enroll the following fall than students who were not enrolled in any seminar.

One finding of the 2012-2013 National Survey of First Year Seminars was the need for increasing academic rigor in all first-year seminars (Young & Hopp, 2014). The authors noted that it is important for first-year seminars of any type to provide students with an appropriate level of challenge and that students will not be well prepared for the challenges they will face in the remainder of their academic career and beyond if there are low expectations in courses they take when they first arrive on campus, including the first-year seminar. In the book, *Student Success in College: Creating Conditions that Matter*, the authors state the vast majority of students learn more when performance standards require a level of effort greater than what students would ordinarily put forth if left to their own devices. Being stretched in this way helps students cultivate habits of the mind that become the foundation for pursuing excellence in other areas of life (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh & Whitt, 2005).

BACKGROUND

The research cohort for this study is derived from a public university located in the Southwestern part of the United States. The institution is mid-sized with a total enrollment of approximately 9,500 students which includes 7,500 undergraduate students and 1,200 undergraduate business students. The university requires students to complete six hours in the core curriculum designated as the component area option, known as core 90, by the Texas

Higher Education Coordinating Board. This is commonly referred to a general education requirement in other states. During New Student Orientation (NSO), freshmen are encouraged to enroll in a freshman seminar course to satisfy part of this core curriculum requirement. In some disciplines, students are encouraged to enroll in discipline-linked, pre-professional seminars, or approved courses within the college (e.g., English majors are required to complete ENGL 1302 for this core requirement). The following courses are approved by the curriculum committee to satisfy the component area option requirement:

- AGRI 2300 – Personal and Professional Leadership Development
- BUSI 1304 – Business Communication (taught in the College of Business, with general information provided about campus resources and occasional discussions about college success topics)
- CS 1301 – Introduction to Computer Science (taught in the College of Agriculture, Science and Engineering)
- CIDM 1301 – Introduction to Information Science (taught in the College of Business, with general information provided about campus resources and occasional discussions about college success topics)
- ENGL 1302 – Academic Writing and Research (students must first complete ENGL 1301, Introduction to Academic Writing and Argumentation)
- ENGL 2311 – Introduction to Professional and Technical Communication
- FIN 1307 – Introduction to Personal Finance (taught in the College of Business, with general information provided about campus resources and occasional discussions about college success topics)
- IDS 1071 (1-3 hours) – Elementary Group Dynamics (this is the University's first-year seminar course with most sections focusing on basic study skills, some sections geared toward transfer students, some are linked as a part of a learning community, and other sections discipline-linked seminars catering to student in areas such engineering, nursing, and education)
- PHIL 2303 – Logic (taught in the College of Fine Arts and Humanities)

As the university works to improve retention rates, it is important to determine whether a student's choice to satisfy a core curriculum requirement during the first semester could impact retention. This research can also be useful to other institutions as they evaluate their first-year seminars and look for alternatives to engage students and help improve retention rates. The hypothesis of this study is that specialized courses within a major (e.g., BUSI 1304, CIDM 1301, and FIN 1307 in the business school) yield a higher retention rate than generalized courses (e.g., IDS 1071) based on the expectation that students in specialized courses are more engaged with access to content and faculty related to major area of interest. The alternative hypothesis is that there is no difference in retention across different freshman course classifications. The alternative hypothesis supports the notion that the first year experience in college is dominated by the often difficult transition from high school or junior college to university life, which is more of a maturation process than an academic engagement issue.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The institution for the study is a regional university with a Master's Comprehensive Carnegie Classification. The public institution is located in the Southwest and has an enrollment of approximately 9,500 students with 58 undergraduate degree programs and 40 graduate programs, which includes a doctoral program in agriculture. The student body is

56% female, 62% Caucasian, 23% Hispanic, 6% African-American, 2% Asian, and 7% as other.

Seventy-six courses approved as core 90 options and offered during the fall semester of 2014 were classified into five categories for the purpose of this study. The five categories are as follows: (1) BUSINESS (includes BUSI 1304, CIDM 1301, and FIN 1307); (2) SPECIALIZED (includes discipline-linked seminars in specialized majors outside of business); (3) TRANSFER (IDS 1071 courses tailored for transfer students); (4) GENERAL (all IDS 1071 courses that are not linked, targeted to a group, or discipline-specific); and (5) ENGLISH (ENGL 1302, ENGL 2311, and PHIL 2303). The university Office of Institutional Research is the data source. The primary variable for this research is the percentage of students enrolled in each fall of 2014 class that returned to the institution and enrolled in spring of 2015 classes (fall to spring retention). Table 1 puts forth a mean retention rate percentages by course classification of 86.54 for BUSINESS, 85.82 for SPECIALIZED, 77.87 for TRANSFER, 83.69 for GENERAL, and 82.76 for ENGLISH. Sample sizes by course classifications range from a low of three courses in the TRANSFER classification to a high of 24 courses in the SPECIALIZED classification.

The Kruskal-Wallis test is sensitive to differences among means in the *k* populations and is extremely useful when the alternative hypothesis is that the *k* populations do not have identical means. The null hypothesis is that the *k* retention rates in the different course classifications come from an identical distribution function. For a complete description of the Kruskal-Wallis test, see Conover (1980). The specific equations used in the calculations are as follows:

(1) $N = \sum_i n_i$ with i = 1 to k

(2) $R_i = \sum_j R(X_{ij})$ with j = 1 to n_i

(3) $R_j = \sum_i O_{ij} R_i$ with i = 1 to c

(4) $S^2 = [1/(N-1)] [\sum_i t_i R_i^2 - N(N+1)^2/4]$ with i = 1 to c

(5) $T = (1/S^2) [\sum_i (R_i^2/n_i) - N(N+1)^2/4]$ with i =1 to k

(6) $\left| (R_i/n_i) - (R_j/n_j) \right| > t_{1-a/2} [S^2(N-1-T)/(N-k)]^{1/2} [(1/n_i) + (1/n_j)]^{1/2}$

where *R* is the variable rank and *N* is the total number of observations. The first three equations find average ranks. Equation (4) calculates the sample variance, while equation (5) represents the test statistic. If, and only if, the decision is to reject the null hypothesis, equation (6) determines multiple comparisons of retention rates across the various course classifications.

RESULTS

The retention rate for core 90 business courses and specialized courses from other majors have a statistically significant higher retention rate than any other classification. The retention rate of general IDS classes and the English (EPML) classes are in a second grouping for retention. Finally, the lowest retention rate is for IDS classes focusing on transfer students.

The non-parametric empirical approach yields an equation (5) test statistics of 34.63 (p-value = .0001), indicating a significant difference in the average rank order of retention rates across one or more of the five classifications. Table 2 presents a summary of the average rank value of retention rates for each course classification. Assuming an alpha level of .05, the empirical results from equation (6) indicate there are three groupings of course classifications with retention rates that are statistically different.

The most statistically significant observation from Table 2 is the relatively high retention rate observed in BUSINESS and SPECIALIZED course classifications. The result

provide evidence that freshman experience courses that focus on specialized content relating to the area of student interest will facilitate fall to spring retention. The implication for business schools is significant given that most institutions do not have curriculum options for freshman business students that are part of the major. Courses in history, communication, math, science, political science, English, and other common body of knowledge content tend to drive freshman retention rates at most institutions. Business programs might lose a significant percentage of students before they ever take a single course in the business curriculum. Institutions that offer a freshman experience seminar course as part of the common body of knowledge can significantly increase retention if there are course options designed for specific majors or that are specialized. Introductory courses in business communication, financial planning, and computer information systems are a few options that appear to facilitate business program retention. The business program is not the only area that can benefit from program specific content in the freshman seminar. The empirical results indicate that specialized courses in nursing, agriculture, education and other areas also yield fall to spring retention rates that are higher than other classifications.

The course classifications with the second highest retention rate are GENERAL and ENGLISH classes. The difference in average retention rate for BUSINESS and SPECIALIZED courses versus GENERAL and ENGLISH courses is less than four percent. The rank order approach employed with the nonparametric test statistic yields a statistically significant difference. It is not surprising that student retention rates are higher in freshman seminar courses that offer specialized content related to a major over courses that cover general information or explicit English language content. English language courses are often difficult for students transitioning to university curriculum and general content in a freshman experience course can easily become perfunctory.

The most interesting result from the study is the low retention rate from the TRANSFER classification. The research sample institution modifies the freshman experience seminar for transfer students in recognition that most of the transfer students are from junior college environments and need helps adjusting to university expectations but this adjustment is not the same as a traditional high school student joining a university as part of a freshman cohort. The research results clearly show TRANSFER as the course classification with the lowest retention rate. The results imply that the transition from the junior college environment to university is a significant adjustment for many students. Simply modifying a freshman experience seminar with content that aligns with being a transfer does not appear to be an effective retention tool. The non-traditional traits often associated with transfer students might require a completely different engagement approach than is often put forth in a new student university experience seminar. Time management, financing college, tutoring services, and support services via resources such as childcare are needs that are often critical for the success of transfer students as they move into a new university environment. Although transfer students are usually more mature than traditional freshman, the results from this research indicate a more aggressive approach with respect to engaging content and support is in order to facilitate success in retention.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research is to compare student retention rates of five classifications of courses at a mid-sized regional university. The courses are part of a common body of knowledge component in the university curriculum that can include a freshman experience seminar. The five course classification include applied introduction to business courses, specialized introduction courses in majors that are not in business, general freshman seminar courses, introductory English and philosophy courses, and college

experience seminar courses targeting transfer students. The statistical methodology incorporates a nonparametric Kruskal-Wallis test to compare the retention rate of the course classifications in the research cohort.

The results of this study provides evidence that specialized courses in business and other majors yield the highest fall to spring retention rate while courses designed for transfer students have the lowest retention rate. One policy implication is that institutions seeking to increase retention should find ways to engage students in course content specific to a program major as part of the freshman seminar experience. A second policy implication is to recognize that, despite being more mature than traditional new incoming freshmen, transfer students are a high-risk group requiring explicit academic content and student support services in order to facilitate persistence.

One of the limitations of the study is the observation that all of the data is from one academic institution. A more robust study for future research is to obtain data from multiple institutions. The inability to account for differences in rigor across the various courses in the sample cohort is a second limitation of the study. The curriculum in courses classified as GENERAL are likely to be driven more by participatory considerations while BUSINESS and SPECIALIZED courses are least likely to apply credit for simple participation. A confounding variable issue that mitigates the empirical research in the study is a lack of controlling for the impact of other freshman courses in math, history, political science, lab science, and related common body of knowledge course on freshman retention. An avenue for future research is to examine retention across the start of two academic years via a more robust empirical approach instead focusing on the less traditional fall to spring retention rate. Exploring four and six year graduation rates of an in incoming group of new students as a cohort is another avenue for future research.

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Table 1
Summary Statistics For Student Retention

Classification	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum	n
BUSINESS	86.54	0.076	73.30	100.00	9
SPECIAIZED	85.82	0.086	72.20	100.00	24
TRANSFER	77.87	0.117	66.70	90.00	3
GENERAL	83.69	0.050	74.40	92.30	23
ENGLISH	82.76	0.091	65.20	95.50	17

Table 2
Comparison of Retention Rates by Course Classification
(Average Rank Order Value of Retention)

BUSINESS	SPECIAIZED	TRANSFER	GENERAL	ENGLISH
44.78 **	41.80 **	23.81 -	36.04 *	36.47 *

Notes: Asterisk(*) and negative signs (-) signify difference in average rank values as follows:

(1) ** Indicates classification with the highest statistically significant retention rate derived from equation 6.
(2) * Indicates classification with the second highest statistically significant retention rate derived from equation 6.
(3) - Indicates period with lowest statistically significant retention rate derived from equation 6.

BEHAVIOR EDUCATION COMFORT AND EASE: AN UNDERLYING THEME IN ORGANIZATIONAL

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ABSTRACT

The study of Organizational Behavior (OB) is a very complex subject as it attempts to explain the actions of people within the organizational context at the individual, group, and organizational level while taking into account the interplay between the levels. When surveying the texts used to teach the field at the undergraduate level, one can find an underlying theme which explains a great deal of this behavior: comfort and ease. Simply put, many theories in OB suggest that people do things because it is easy for them or it makes them comfortable. This paper reviews several popular textbooks used to teach Organizational Behavior at the undergraduate level and discusses the subjects therein within this framework of comfort and ease. Subject areas that are covered include ethics, organizational commitment, organizational culture, job satisfaction, decision making, leadership, and motivation. The theories in these areas are obviously providing more complex explanations, but it is argued that comfort and ease are a common focus. This paper does not suggest that comfort and ease are the basis of all behaviors, but they do provide significant guidance in understanding, explaining, and influencing behavior within organizations.

THE INSTRUCTOR'S ROLE IN EARLY ALERT SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

This study offers a theoretical discussion of the instructor's role in facilitating student success via Early Alert systems. The instructor reaction to a struggling student is critical as it may be only the instructor who is in a position to identify a potential threat to student academic success. Early Alert systems afford to instructors an opportunity to facilitate a community response to a student's crisis situation, and to offer the student a second chance for success. Because the instructor inherently has the opportunity and authority to intervene, the instructor may positively impact a college or university's efforts to improve student retention.

INFLUENCE OF GPA AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT ON STUDENT LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Many studies have stated or suggested that activity based learning environments universally lead to improved learning outcomes. However, little research tests whether the improvements are consistent across all students. This research investigates whether an activity based learning environment is correlated with improved final course grades. Further, this research addresses the question of whether entering student ability or preparation moderates the correlation between learning environment and final course grades.

The performance of 512 students enrolled in eight sections of an undergraduate business statistics course taught from the fall 2012 semester through the spring 2014 semester provided measures of interest in this experiment. These sections were taught by three different instructors. Analyses isolated the influence of several variables such as individual instructors, learning environment, demographics such as class standing and gender, and entering GPA. Interestingly, entering GPA and learning environment were the only independent variables that proved to be statistically significant.

Results showed that entering GPA moderated the relationship between learning environment and final course grade In particular, students entering with high GPAs were advantaged by an active learning environment while those students entering with low GPAs appeared to be disadvantaged by an active learning environment. The final grade of students that fell within one standard deviation of the mean entering GPA score did not seem to be influenced by the leaning environment.

Subject Areas: Active Learning, Experiential Learning, Learning Outcomes, Pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

Lohr (2009) notes that understanding basic statistical concepts can be critical to graduates' success. Unfortunately, a lecture based learning environment that provides only a passive learning experience typical of the learning environment of many undergraduate business statistics courses may not generate the desired learning outcomes.

Several authors have provided evidence that learning outcomes may be improved by the adaptation of an activity based learning environment (e.g. Roelh et al, 2013). At the same time that many are observing the benefits of these activity-based learning approaches, the advancement of technology has facilitated their use. Digital resources support blending learning environments leading to opportunities for increased use of activities in classroom settings. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider whether the increased use of activity-based learning approaches through the blended learning resources provided by technology should lead to improved student learning. However, Noftle & Robins (2007) suggest that learning outcomes may also be influenced by entering student GPAs. This would suggest that activity-based learning experiences may not universally improve learning outcomes.

We investigate the questions as to whether activity-based learning environments universally improve student learning by measuring the impact of learning environment on final course grades. Also, we investigate the question of whether final course grades for students with high entering GPAs are advantaged and whether final course grades for students with low entering GPAs are disadvantaged by an activity-based learning environment.

METHODOLOGY

Students from eight sections were divided into two groups: courses taught with a lecture based learning environment or students taught with an activity based learning environment. After excluding data from students that was incomplete, the sample used in the analyses contained information from 441 students. Tests of demographics suggested that the resulting data was representative and appropriate for analysis. Primary analyses regressed the independent variables 1) entering GPA, 2) learning environment, and 3) variables containing demographic data such as gender, class standing, and instructor against course grade. Statistical tests were employed to confirm that test assumptions were satisfied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Learning environment and entering GPA proved to be statistically significant. No other independent variables were included in our final model. Entering GPA was found to moderate the relationship between learning environment and final course grade. Those students entering the course with high GPAs (greater than one standard deviation from the mean entering GPA) were advantaged by an activity-based learning environment. In contrast, those students entering the course with low GPAs (less than one standard deviation from the mean entering GPA) were advantaged by a lecture-based learning environment.

CONCLUSIONS

Our results suggest that conscientious students with high GPAs would be advantaged with courses employing activity-based learning environments. However, students with low GPAs would be advantaged with courses employing lecture-based learning environments.

These results suggest that students with varying degrees of conscientiousness are best served with learning environments that focus on their specific situations. For example, students with high entering GPAs might be advantaged by enrolling in honors sections that apply activity-based learning environments. Similarly, courses based upon lecture-based learning environments might advantage students with low entering GPAs. Also, for instructors applying activity-based learning techniques, these results can provide cautions to prevent disadvantaging less conscientious students. Finally, for instructors employing lecture-based learning techniques, these results can provide motivation to provide learning experiences that will advantage more conscientious students.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Limitations of this research include the assumption that the newness of the learning environment for students did not influence the results. Also, this research did not employ a direct measure of student motivation. Further, this study focused on students participating in a quantitative subject matter, business statistics. It is natural to question if these results extend to less quantitative subject areas.

Future research could investigate the impact of instructor experience with activity-based learning environments. Also, confirming studies could address limitations identified above.

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ON THE INCREASING SALARIES BEING PAID TO UNIVERSITY PRESIDENTS

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ABSTRACT

For the past decade or more, the salaries of the Chief Executive Officers of American firms have been a topic of heated debate. This debate in the corporate world of business seems to have more recently spilled over into at least some of the salaries that are being paid to the presidents of various universities. Today, there are scores of university presidents receiving a million or more in yearly compensation. On top of the yearly salary, there are the perks, bonuses, and retirement costs that can add another million or two to the package.

Citing examples from the corporate world as well as higher education, the objectives of the paper are several. First, like in the world of business debate, is the difference in the salary of the person at the top and those further down the hierarchy widening? Second, it is an attempt to determine to what extent the rising salaries of university presidents are problematic. Third, to investigate and propose some ratios that might be appropriate for comparing those differences across campuses and over time. Fourth, the study looks at average faculty salaries and how those compare to average presidential salaries. And, fifth, it is an attempt to provide some insight into the factors that boards of education use in determining presidential pay.

Among the findings and conclusions of the paper are the following. There remains a big gap between what is happening to CEO salaries in the corporate world and those in higher education. On the other hand, there appears to be a slippery slope effect taking place in salary creep for presidential salaries. This slippery slope is creating a ratcheting up effect on various levels just below the president. All contributing to what may be a more pressing issue, requiring a need for further analysis, and that's the growing bureaucratic costs of running a university.

ONLINE HOMEWORK SYSTEMS: EFFECTIVENESS FOR ACCOUNTING MAJORS

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ABSTRACT

The use of online homework systems (OHS) has become increasingly popular over the last decade. With the demand for online courses in all fields of study, OHS have become invaluable due to continuous access, automatic grading and instant feedback. While OHS are certainly convenient for both instructors and students, previous studies report mixed results with regard to how well students perform when such systems are employed.

Several studies have been conducted to test whether OHS are perceived by students to be better than the traditional hand-written method of completing homework. Others have examined performance in varying disciplines including math, science, economics, stats and finance. Fewer studies have tested whether OHS significantly improve performance in the accounting classroom and those studies have typically been conducted in introductory courses where a variety of business and non-business majors are represented.

In this paper, accounting majors in their first required accounting course for majors were studied to determine whether accounting majors who used the OHS performed better than the control group who prepared hand-written homework. While students who used an OHS were significantly less likely to change majors, results of this study support previous findings that students' overall academic competence as measured by prior GPA and ACT scores, rather than the technique used to deliver homework, are better predictors of student performance.

INVOLVEMENT OF ACCOUNTING PROFESSIONALS IN UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO'S ACCOUNTING PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

The Accounting Department at the University of Idaho actively involves accounting professionals in the accounting programs. These accounting professionals are accounting advisory board members, employers, recruiters, and alumni. This paper presents specific examples of how academics can involve professionals in their classrooms, assessment, and other teaching activities. It also shows specific examples of how professionals can reach out to students to help prepare them for their professional careers.

Accounting professionals have been involved in every aspect of the accounting programs including:

- *revising the department's mission statement, strategic plan, and learning goals of the undergraduate accounting major and Master of Accounting program*
- *participating in assessment activities*
- *revising the curriculum and course content*
- *participating in course delivery*
- *participating in outreach activities*
- *participating in Beta Alpha Psi activities*
- *participating in the Accounting Department's CPA Firm Fair*

Assessment activities that the professionals participates, include, assessing professional accounting knowledge, critical thinking skills, research skills, and written skills of course assignments (i.e. tax research papers and ethic cases), assessing oral communication skills during course presentations, participating in student focus groups, and completing employer surveys and alumni surveys. They also provide recommendations to "close the loop" to improve student learning.

As a faculty we feel that the involvement of accounting professionals is vital to students learning and to the assurance of learning process. They are of significant value, to help maintain the programs' currency, to keep our students prepared for the ever-changing needs of the accounting profession, to help our students develop into a successful accounting professional.

GOT TO SOCIALIZE? CHINESE FIRST YEAR STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF RESIDENCE HALL CLIMATE

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ABSTRACT

Composing the largest nationality of international students at American universities, Chinese undergraduate students in the United States have dramatically increased over the previous decade (IIE, 2013). Despite the extensive research on the challenges facing Chinese students in the American classroom, in-depth research on the residence hall socialization process for Chinese students remains lacking (Briguglio & Smith, 2012). This mixed methods study assessed first year Chinese students' perceptions of racial climate and community in residence halls at a mid-sized Midwestern private institution.

INTRODUCTION

The numbers of Chinese undergraduate students in the United States have increased by about 40,000 students in the 2012 academic year accounting for a 215% increase from the previous year (IIE, 2013). With such a dramatic increase, Chinese students frequently compose the largest nationality of international students at American universities. For first year college students, friendship forms a vital basis of support, serving as a source of emotional support, practical information, and social companionship (Sovic, 2009). Despite acculturation challenges, the Chinese student experience were not negative at all, as many lauded the American education system and considered their experiences in the United States rewarding (Yuan, 2011). In Wang et al. (2012), less than a quarter of Chinese international students experienced severe psychological distress during their initial cultural transition to the United States; the majority of students reported minimal fluctuation in the psychological distress immediately before and after their transition to the U.S. This finding challenges studies on international student adjustment that focused heavily on psychological distress such as depression and anxiety (Dusselier et al., 2005). An investigation into the factors contributing to Chinese students' social adjustment may thus provide insights on how they might perceive a positive living and learning experience.

Providing a foundation to incorporate the multifaceted transitional needs of Chinese international students, residential living communities are optimal starting points to initiate cross-cultural interactions when compared to other campus locations due to the ample chances to interact with domestic students (Paltridge et al., 2010). On the other hand, the integration process with domestic students was faced by resentment among domestic students claiming that Chinese students dominate the classrooms or the residence halls (McMahon, 2011).

OBJECTIVES

This study employed the sequential explanatory design, which is characterized by the collection of quantitative data in the first phase of research followed by qualitative data in the second phase (Creswell, 2005). The study poses the following research questions: 1) What are Chinese students' perceptions of the residence hall living environment, community, and diversity? 2) How do these perceptions impact their level of engagement on the floor? 3) What are the social and cultural aspects influencing Chinese students' perception and attitudes regarding their living experience?

BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

International students with positive peer interaction experiences have reported better academic adjustment and less psychological health problems (Sovic, 2009). Through intercultural friendships, Chinese students build stronger language skills and better overall adjustment to their new environment. McMahon (2011) found that Chinese students struggled with non-academic aspects of their college life. Among these were isolation from domestic students and lack of intercultural awareness. Students also described the failure to develop meaningful relationships with American students as a disappointment representing the most problematic aspect of the acculturation process (Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006).

Barriers to Social Adjustment

Culture and communication are always at the forefront of the social adjustment barriers (Razek & Coyner, 2013). Chinese international students often face acculturative stress while adjusting to the new culture (Wei et al., 2012). McMahon (2011) found that language difficulties and cultural differences inhibited Chinese students' interaction with domestic students, an essential component of the educational experience. Further, the students expressed interest in chatting with American students but could not find a mutual topic of discussion. Barriers of student adjustment are intensified for students from non-Western backgrounds due to the linguistic and cultural factors. English language competency is essential for the social and economic security in an English speaking country (Marginson et al., 2010).

Silence in the Chinese Culture

Chinese learners have often been portrayed and perceived as silent and reticent in class (Bartlett & Fischer, 2011). They are seen as reluctant to participate in class discussions and as seldom speaking up about their opinions, offering terse replies if they did answer questions (Xie, 2010). This 'silent Chinese' phenomenon is culturally manifested, as part of Confucius' 'maxims of modesty' is to avoid dominating the discussion and being seen as prideful by their Chinese peers (Liu & Littlewood, 1997). Carson and Nelson further asserted that Chinese international students engaged in extensive self-monitoring to avoid disagreeing with the perspectives of their peers (as cited in Ping, 2010). Additionally, group harmony is achieved through maintaining one's face or image (*mianzi*) in order to preserve the relationships (*guanxi*) that are already built (Hwang, 1987). While silence might be a strategy Chinese students use to maintain harmonious relationships with others, this cultural disposition could be misinterpreted by their American peers. Practitioners will thus need to consider and understand the complexities undergirding the silence of some Chinese international students.

METHODS

Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected at Parish University (PU), a mid-sized, religiously affiliated institution with approximately 7,000 undergraduate students with a population of 1,900 international students. Approximately, 350 Chinese students live in on-campus housing. Quantitative data were collected through two rounds; one in the spring of 2013 and the second in the fall of 2013. A quantitative, cross-sectional paper survey was conducted on first year Chinese students living in residence halls in the spring 2013 and fall 2013 terms. Respondents were students enrolled full time in the university on international student visas. With a response rate of 57%, the spring survey had 86 respondents out of a total of 150 first year students who lived on-campus. The fall survey had a response rate of 56% with 57 respondents out of 101 Chinese students. Later in the fall semester, seventeen first year Chinese students voluntarily participated in semi-structured interviews.

INTERPRETATION OF SURVEY FINDINGS

Survey findings suggested that students' first impression of the residence hall environment had an impact on how they subsequently perceived the sense of community on the floor. This perception showed an impact on how much students perceived they have gained from living among domestic students. RAs impacted the learning of Chinese students in different ways, by how well they relate to multicultural students and the type of hall programs that they organized. Residents who felt their RAs took efforts in getting to know them were more likely to perceive a personal benefit from engaging in intercultural interactions. Subsequently, students who perceived their RAs as open and welcoming were more likely to perceive that they organize hall programs for people of all races. Interestingly, even when there were diverse floor programs, the Chinese students did not necessarily perceive them as a learning opportunity for ethnic inclusivity. Instead, they benefited more by directly interacting with their hall peers, perhaps in more casual settings.

Racial harmony on the floor was a strong predictor for whether Chinese students perceived their hall as a great place to live. When they felt like everyone got along well regardless of race, students were more likely to engage in intercultural communication and meet new people. Students who felt accepted by their hall peers are also more likely to positively rank their ability to live cooperatively with others. Generally, the Chinese students' attitude toward floor acceptance and harmony correlates with their perceived ability to meet new people, live cooperatively with others, improve their communication skills, and respect diverse others.

The students' overwhelmingly positive response on the questionnaire appears to contradict studies that highlight the strife of first year international students (Dusselier et al., 2005). Based on the findings, one main research question emerged: What are the social and cultural factors influencing the students' perception of hall climate and diversity? For example, how might the students' high school living experience impact their first foray into the American campus? In order to better interpret the quantitative results and to develop a better understanding of the Chinese students' perception, a qualitative approach was used to explain the findings in more detail.

QUALITATIVE STUDY INTERPRETATION

The interviewees' high school experience had a significant impact on their subsequent adjustment into living in residence halls. Although they did not specifically state that they attended elite private schools, their living and learning experience contributed to a generally

smooth transition in college. Because the students felt restricted with strict disciplinary regulations and curfews in high school, they were quick to appreciate their newfound independence and freedom. Interestingly, all of the respondents roomed with co-nationals, with the exception of one student who lived in a single room. They generally reported positive relationships with their roommates despite experiencing some initial conflicts. All of the interviewees developed close relationships with mainly Chinese students due to linguistic and cultural similarity. Parental influence was also apparent among the interviewees, as they reported a constant reliance on their parents for support and advice. This motivation may be in part culturally influenced, as there is an "all-or-nothing quality" to the Chinese quest for education, with parents and children alike aiming for success (Pine, 2012). Based on the responses, having this support system could have offset acculturative stress that new international Chinese students typically experience.

All of the interviewees felt positively about their American peers and they perceived having "good relationships" with their floor mates. The Chinese students also view their RAs as a resource and typically attended floor programs to meet new people. This finding correlates with the quantitative data that the Chinese students recognized, albeit not fully, the impact of their RAs in their intercultural learning. The survey data revealed that perceived racial harmony correlated with whether the Chinese students perceived their hall as a great place for diverse students to live. The interviews suggested similar findings, as students unanimously regarded their peers as friendly and helpful.

The language barrier did not appear to deter students from communicating with their local peers. Instead, the interviewees attributed their communication challenges to perceived cultural differences. Notably, the partying life style every weekend was frustrating for the students due to noise and vandalism. A closer examination of the relationship between American and Chinese students revealed that the interviewees felt like the depth of their relationships were limited as they were "not quite in the circle." Despite being able to establish a friendly rapport with home students, the interviewees felt unable to understand jokes in conversations or engage in deep conversations. At the same time, because the students had already established strong social groups with fellow Chinese students, there was no apparent urgency for the interviewees to rectify that. The IEP students, for example, were confident that they would be able to build better relationships with American students once they become fully enrolled into an academic program.

LIMITATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study revealed important factors influencing Chinese students' perceptions of the racial climate in the residence halls as influencing their learning experiences. Moreover, the qualitative interviews revealed various constructs contributing to the lived experiences of Chinese students in the residence halls. However, the small number of the interview participants limited the findings to the group of self-nominated students. Future research may be conducted to ascertain whether similar findings emerge with other cohorts of Chinese students at different levels of study and whether other East Asian students display similar patterns of adjustment. Longitudinal research may be helpful to measure motivation to adjust and the long-term impact of on-campus living for Chinese students over time.

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STUDENT LOCUS OF CONTROL AND ONLINE COURSE PERFORMANCE: AN EMPIRICAL EXAMINATION OF STUDENT SUCCESS IN ONLINE MANAGEMENT COURSES

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports a study exploring the performance of students in undergraduate online management principle courses and the moderating effect of student locus of control (LOC) on performance. Using Rotter's (Rotter, 66) definitions of internal and external locus of control, we explore LOC and how it relates to performance outcomes in an online learning environment. Specific hypotheses are developed around the presumption that LOC has a moderating effect on performance outcomes in online courses. These are tested in a series of online management principles courses over a 6 year period with 243 students participating. Our findings suggest that LOC is an important psychological construct that may impact student performance in online courses. We conclude with a discussion of these findings and how they may be useful in effectively designing online management courses.

INTRODUCTION

A recent 2014 survey by the Babson Survey Research Group and co-sponsored by the Online Learning Consortium found that well over 6.7 million students reported taking one or more online course, a 3.7 percent increase from 2013. Thirty-two percent of higher education students now take at least one course online. The percent of academic leaders rating the learning outcomes in online education as the same or superior to those in face-to-face was 74.1%. The proportion of chief academic leaders that say that online learning is critical to their long-term strategy is at a new high of 69.1 percent. (online learning consortium.org/2014Survey).

Eduventures estimates that in 2011, almost 3 million students were enrolled in fully online programs (Eduventures, 2012). Many other programs provide a portion of their course delivery through online coursework. The same study forecasts the future growth of web-based courses over the next decade to average around forty percent annually. Moreover, distance delivery of curriculum is now becoming a standard medium for supplementing or replacing traditional classroom teaching (Dolezalek, 2003; Drago Peltier & Sorensen, 2002). For many institutions, the increased demand by students for online courses and improvements in web-based technology have made this an economical and useful way to increase student enrollment. The increasing availability of distance education reveals the growing importance of this method of instruction.

The increase in distance education offerings is directly related to the development of the internet and technologies that support online learning. Online education appears to be

dramatically altering the education landscape. Although innovative technologies are important for the development of online course delivery, they are not sufficient to assure that distance education is effective. Online course delivery poses a whole set of unique problems that must be cleverly addressed. Moreover, despite the increased growth and interest in online management education, research surrounding its effectiveness is significantly sparse (Hay et al., 2004a; Martins & Kellermanns, 2004; Zapalska & Brozik, 2006). Future growth of online education will depend on the ability of educators and administrators to assure that this type of education delivery system will prepare students to meet today's competitive challenges (Dolezalek, 2003; Hay et al., 2004b). Clearly, not enough is understood about how to best plan, implement, and to evaluate online courses (Peltier et al., 2003). Pedagogical theories and approaches to effective teaching are needed in online learning environments (Arbaugh, 2002).

Online courses by their very nature are a unique form of course delivery. Many of the traditional methods of delivery in a brick and mortar classroom do not transfer well to the web-based environment. Therefore, online course delivery may have unique issues regarding student success. One such issue may be how well a student deals with the self-directed study nature of online courses. Considerable thought should be applied in the design of online courses, with particular attention paid to how students can more easily move through course content. This paper examines student success in online management principles courses and how that success may be linked to individual student self-motivation. We are interested in knowing whether a student's locus of control will be a partial determinant of their success in online courses. This information in turn can be used in course planning and teaching strategies for online course development.

The next section of this paper provides a review of the extant locus of control literature. The remainder of the paper details the hypotheses, methodology, and results and concludes with a discussion.

Literature review

Locus of control (LOC) was first introduced in 1954 by Julian Rotter (Rotter, 1954). It is conceptualized as an individual's perception of the source of control over their destiny or actions (Gershaw, 1989). It is the extent to which a person believes that an external force is related to the influence on particular events in their life (Moorhead and Griffin, 2004; Firth et al., 2004). A person who considers that their own capabilities and actions can determine their rewards, are referred to as internals. Externals believe that they obtain outcomes outside of their control (Rotter, 1966). Thus, "internals" consider that they have the capability to influence the environment around them and that they can alter the outcome of events that influence them through their own behavior, ability and effort. "Externals" consider that the outcomes they realize are a function of uncontrollable or incomprehensible forces such as fate or luck (Phares, 1962).

This concept has been first applied to the field of organizational behavior by Spector (1982). There has been a plethora of further research, especially in the field of management, examining the effect of LOC on job satisfaction, job performance and job stress (Chen & Silverthorne, 2008; Martin et. al., 2005), motivation (Chen & Silverthorne, 2008) and commitment (Judge et al., 2000). In addition, it has been presented as a moderating factor between incentives and motivation, satisfaction and turnover. Also, many scholars proved that high internal LOC scores are good predictors of occupational success (McShane & Von Glinow, 2008).

According to Phares (1962), people with internal LOC prefer to have power over their own environment, learn faster and perform better in tasks that require expertise and skills.

They do not value outside support or help, and prefer to count on themselves. Their capability will lead to high self-confidence. However, individuals who think that the rewards they receive are due to external factors rather than internal factors are more likely to be less productive and act more passively. Externals tend to adapt to the group's influences and believe that success is achieved with the help of others. Rahim (1996) concluded that internals can cope with stress more easily and effectively than externals. According to Kalbers and Fogarty (2005), individuals with an internal LOC are less likely to experience a high level of stress but those with an external LOC are more likely to be vulnerable to stress and perceive certain events as stressful. Moreover, external LOC has a significant negative influence on job stress and tends to reduce personal accomplishments and job performance. Internals are more likely to have higher levels of job performance and satisfaction (Martin et al., 2005).

Internals, tend to seek more information about the tasks they have to perform in order to increase performance (Lefcourt, 1992). According to Gershaw (1989), internals can better evaluate, learn and obtain larger benefits from social support. They search and apply new knowledge that is helpful for dealing with difficulties and for control.

LOC and Online Learning

As Rotter 1990 suggests, people who are internally motivated like internals will-depend on their own resources to solve problems and work hard. They will likely thrive in a self-regulated, self-motivated environment. People who are externally motivated will depend on others for problem solving and motivation. Externals will often desire contact and collaboration with other students. In online learning situations, internally motivated students will require less of the instructor's time than will externally motivated students. Externals will look to the instructor for information, direction and consistent reminders.

Students often do not clearly understand the asynchronous and virtual nature of online learning, and that it calls on learners to be self-directed and to take responsibility for their learning. They must take greater control of monitoring and managing the learning process. Since this is more the natural approach to learning of the Internal, they may be more inclined to success in the online environment.

Additionally, many students find online course structure to be, in general, very challenging as it often does not fit well with how they have been conditioned to expect to learn. Combine the requirements of online learning with an external locus of control and students may begin with a host of disadvantages that are difficult to overcome. Thus, instructors are challenged to realize the responsibility for providing structure and guidance that will encourage and support students who are assuming increased control of their learning.

Asynchronous online learning rewards and promotes self-directed and self-regulated learning. A model of self-directed learning that integrates motivation with issues of reflection and action is provided by Garrison (1997). The key dimensions are self-monitoring and managing the learning process. Monitoring is the assessment of a variety of information, while managing has to do with "self" control of learning tasks and activities. Initiating curiosity and maintaining determined effort are essential elements in self-direction and effective learning. Without self-monitoring and self-management, learning effectiveness will be diminished considerably. Again, these are some of the clear strengths associated with an internal locus of control.

HYPOTHESES

It seems clear that internals are "wired" for self-monitoring and self-management of

the online learning process, whereas externals are less so. Consequently, the researchers predict that:

> H_1 *Student's with an Internal LOC will perform significantly better than those with an External LOC in an online course environment.*

Additionally, it appears that internals will find both comfort and success in the online environment and will, therefore, be more satisfied with this form of learning. Externals, on the other hand, will more likely be more frustrated and less successful in online courses. The researchers predict that:

> H_2 *Student's with an Internal LOC will be more satisfied with online course learning than will those with an External LOC.*