

Spring 5-2012

A Qualitative Study Exploring Faculty Perception and Adaptation of Social Presence in the Online Classroom

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A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING FACULTY PERCEPTION AND
ADAPTATION OF SOCIAL PRESENCE IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

BY

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirement for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Seton Hall University

2012

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ABSTRACT

A QUALITATIVE STUDY EXPLORING FACULTY PERCEPTION AND ADAPTATION OF SOCIAL PRESENCE IN THE ONLINE CLASSROOM

This study is an exploration of faculty perception and adaptation of social presence in the online classroom. This study examines how faculty perceive their role in promoting social presence in the discussion board and what they are doing to promote interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy which are the indicators of social presence. How do they meet the challenges, and what are their strategies? For this qualitative study, open-ended questions were sent to the faculty that participated and focused on the three indicators. The procedure for the study followed the Delphi method and is presented in two parts.

The results revealed that the participants interact with students on average every 24 to 48 hours, and require students to interact with each other. The results showed a substantial amount of interactivity but less immediacy and intimacy. Participants indicated that immediacy was the most difficult to transfer to the online environment in the text-based discussion board. This study concludes that faculty members need to find a balance of intimacy and interactivity, and to experiment with other technologies, such as video chats, pre-recorded podcasts, and audio messages in order to provide immediacy.

Acknowledgement

I wholeheartedly thank my committee, Dr. Rong Chen, Dr. Kathleen Reddick, and especially my mentor, Dr. Joseph Stetar who kept me going by encouraging me to keep looking forward.

I also want to thank the college for allowing me to conduct the study and especially all the respondents who with their generosity of spirit participated in the study.

A special thanks to my classmate Linda Walter. I sincerely thank her for her support, and especially her friendship.

I dedicate this dissertation to my family who believed I would achieve my life-long goal: my husband Bob, and my children Tara, Christy and Charlie.

As my dissertation journey progressed, I often looked to this quote:

“I may not be there yet, but I’m closer than I was yesterday” –*Unknown Author*

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between teacher immediacy behaviors and student learning has been investigated in a series of studies over the past decades and has been reported to have a significant impact on students' learning. In previous studies of both the face-to-face and the online classroom, the focus has been on the students' perceptions of immediacy behaviors rather than the teachers' perceptions of immediacy behaviors. This study investigated the ways in which college teachers have adapted their immediacy behaviors to the online, web-based classroom, specifically in the asynchronous discussion board. Although there are other types of online instructional techniques such as live chats, web cams, and video conferencing, this study focused on asynchronous discussion boards where students have time to reflect on their responses, review others' responses, and respond. This exchange of information is framed around the social presence theory from the teachers' perspective in this study. The online or web-based asynchronous discussion board is referred to as the *discussion board*.

Significance of the Study

Researchers have begun to identify those specific attributes of an online course that lead to increased perceptions of social presence, suggesting that the course instructor has the primary responsibility for creating social presence (Aragon, 2003). It has also been determined that much of the learning in online courses takes place in an asynchronous forum where social interaction takes place during collaborative activities (Kreijns, Kirschner, Jochems, van Buuren, 2004). Numerous studies on student satisfaction, engagement, retention, and learning have been conducted; however, there is little

empirical data on what teachers are doing to promote social presence by employing immediacy behaviors in discussion boards. According to the literature, teacher immediacy behaviors have a significant impact on students' affective and cognitive learning as well as attitudinal changes, such as increases in student motivation. The findings should be of particular interest to instructional design technologists and trainers involved with faculty development in technology and provide a clearer understanding of social presence in the discussion board. The findings may also reveal conceptual and practical teaching strategies that are successful in discussion boards and contribute to the design and development of future online courses.

Background

Learning online has been promoted as being more cost effective and administrators may insist upon the adoption of online courses as a cost-cutting strategy. Over 6 million students took at least one online course during the fall 2010 term. The rate that distance education is growing is ten times that of all of higher education (Allen and Seaman, 2011). The convenience of learning online may also provide educational opportunities for more learners who may have difficulty coming to campus. Rising fuel costs and programs for working adults are cited as having a positive impact on distance education enrollments.

Online education, a term used to describe both the teacher and the learner, has been defined as any class that offers at least part of its curriculum via the Internet without instructors and students being connected at the same time (Berge and Collins, 1995). Being connected via the Internet allows students to participate regardless of geographic location and independent of time and place (Harasim, Hiltz, Teles, and Turoff, 1995). In

other words, students no longer need to meet face-to-face in order to learn.

Glossary of Terms

Computer Mediated Communication (CMC): CMC “is the process by which people create, exchange, and perceive information using networked telecommunications systems (or non-networked computers) that facilitate encoding, transmitting, and decoding messages” (December, n.d.)

Constructivism: A cognitive theory that embodies the construction of knowledge by an individual or a group through exploration, discovery, and authentic collaboration.

Learning Management System (LMS): An application that provides structure to an online learning environment. Examples are Blackboard, eCollege, Moodle.

Discussion Board /Asynchronous / Forum / Threaded Discussion: Are terms often used synonymously. Asynchronous communication does not require teacher and students to be online at the same time. Examples of this include e-mail (the recipient does not have to be logged on when the sender sends the e-mail message) and discussion boards, which allow conversations to evolve and a community to develop over a period of time, and text messaging over cell phones.

Distance Education: Also known as distance learning or online learning. The teacher and learners are geographically separated. Instruction and learning take place either through an internet connection or other form of interactive technology.

Immediacy: The amount of “perceived physical and/or psychological closeness between people” (Christophel, 1990, p.325). Immediacy is characterized by the teacher’s verbal and non-verbal gestures.

Instant Messaging/Live Chat/Synchronous Communication: Direct communication, where all parties involved in the communication are online at the same time. It is a form of synchronous communication.

Interaction or Interactivity: The quality and quantity of communication between teacher and student, and students to students.

Intimacy: A sense of connection one feels in a close relationship. The depth of self-disclosure between individuals determines the level of intimacy.

Isolation: A sense of disconnectedness from others.

Learning Outcome: The direct product of a predefined set of activities.

Online Learning Environment: A virtual space requiring an internet connection. It is typically present in a Course Management System designed to display course materials. It is a place where group discussions as well as access to other students for socializing, communication, and learning takes place electronically via the World Wide Web.

Protocol: The special set of rules in an electronic telecommunications that allows one computer to communicate with another over a network.

Proximity: Proximity means connectedness (Weiss, 2000), and the lack of perceived proximity may lead to feelings of isolation.

Psychological Distance: A “mental dimension of separateness or dissimilarity between people” (Wolcott, 1996, p. 23). The connectedness the learner feels to other learners and to the instructor when not physically in the same location.

Social Presence: The degree to which learners perceive each other as “real.” A theory that embodies the constructs of immediacy, intimacy, and interactivity.

SSL: The Secure Sockets Layer is a commonly used protocol for managing the

security of a message transmission on the Internet.

Student Engagement: Students' involvement in the active participation of learning.

Transactional Distance: A theory that implies the quantity of interactions between learners.

Statement of the Problem

The research in instructional communication has focused on teachers' use of verbal and nonverbal behaviors, and the impact of those behaviors on students in traditional, face-to-face communication; however, there is less research on the ways in which teachers have adapted these behaviors to the online classroom using the discussion board. This concept is known as *teacher immediacy*. This concept, originated by Wiener and Mehrabian (1968), is a measure of the psychological distance between a communicator and an audience. In face-to-face learning environments, teacher immediacy behaviors include smiling, eye contact, body orientation, and gestures. The literature is rich with studies of teacher immediacy behaviors in the face-to-face classroom and their impact on student satisfaction and learning; however, there is little empirical data that explains how teachers have adapted those behaviors to the discussion board. The theory underpinning teacher immediacy is the social presence theory: the degree to which the other person is perceived as "real" (Short, Williams, and Christie, 1976). Social presence theory is used in the literature to give a context to behaviors, relationships, and interactions.

The relationship between teacher immediacy behaviors and student learning has been investigated in a series of studies from the students' perspective. A concern cited in the literature is that the teacher and students are separated. There are two theories that address the issue. Transactional distance theory is the physical separation of students and

teacher, and the psychological distance theory is the feeling of separation and isolation. The research has provided compelling evidence that less physical and/or psychological distance between teachers and students, is associated with enhanced learning outcomes. Learning outcomes were further analyzed by Gorham and Zakahi (1990), and positioned in two domains: affective and cognitive.

The literature purports that, in the face-to-face classroom, teacher immediacy behaviors have a significant impact on students' affective learning (Andersen, 1979) and cognitive learning (Gorham & McCroskey, 1986; Kearney, Plax, & Wendt-Wasco, 1985; Kelley & Gorham, 1988). More recent research has also produced positive empirical verification that high teacher presence, or immediacy behaviors, produces greater affective and cognitive learning (Aragon, 2003; Gorham & Zakahi, 1990; McCroskey, Sallinen, Fayer, Richmond, & Brraclough, 1996; Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 2001). High-immediacy behaviors have been associated with attitudinal changes, such as increases in student motivation (Christophel, 1990; Christophel & Gorham, 1995). In other studies, a relationship between immediacy and student satisfaction in a course was evident (Aragon, 2003; Gunwardena & Zittle, 1997; Shin, 2002; Tu & McIsaac, 2002).

In the online environment, interactions between teacher and student, and among students, take place asynchronously in a learning management system (LMS). Research has begun to identify those specific attributes of an online course that lead to increased perceptions of social presence. The literature suggests that the instructor has the primary responsibility for creating social presence (Aragon, 2003). The literature also suggests that much of the learning in online courses takes place in an asynchronous discussion

board or forum where social interaction takes place during collaborative activities (Kreijns et al., 2004).

An issue in the online learning environment consistently reported in the literature is a feeling of isolation. Rovai (2000) described the impact of a lack of social presence in online learning environments by pointing out that distance learners who have lessened contact with the teacher, and other learners, may feel isolated. The amount of interaction required by students varies and is based on several factors including sociability, learning styles, preferences, and time constraints (Shin, 2002). Moreover, teacher immediacy behaviors embodied in the social presence theory, such as voice inflections, facial expressions, and nodding, not visible in a text-based discussion board, indicated presence and a sense of connectedness between the teacher and the learner (Leh, 2001). Gunawardena and Zittle (1997), Moller (1998), Rovai (2000), Shin (2002), Tu and McIsaac (2002) concurred; however, Tu and McIsaac (2002) also suggested that the degree of social presence is directly affected by the actions of the participants. Therefore, as Moller (1998) suggested, teachers should develop online communities that promote their social presence.

Social presence has emerged as an important social factor in the field of distance learning (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 1999). More research should concentrate on how faculty are using the discussion board in online courses and reveal faculty's reflections of student/teacher and student/student interactions.

This study determines if social presence is evident, as perceived by faculty who teach online, and how faculty promote it in discussion boards. This study will present

conceptual framework and explain how faculty have adapted immediacy behaviors in discussion boards.

Research Questions

1. How do faculty promote social presence which is comprised of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy, within a discussion board?
 - How do faculty promote the indicators of interactivity (between learner and instructor; learner and learner; and learner and content) within the context of a discussion board?
 - How do faculty promote the indicators of intimacy (trust, association, familiarity, self-disclosure, affiliation) within the context of a discussion board?
 - How do faculty promote the indicators of immediacy (individualized feedback, personalized exchanges, use of inclusive language, concern for others) within the context of a discussion board?
2. What are faculty doing within the asynchronous discussion board to meet the challenges and limitations of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy?
 - What are the challenges of transferring the indicators of interactivity, intimacy and immediacy from the face-to-face classroom to the discussion board?
 - What teaching strategies work best in the discussion board to promote the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy?

Chapter II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early researchers (Andersen, 1979; Andersen, Norton, & Nussbaum, 1981; Andersen & Withrow, 1981) studied teacher behaviors in the face-to-face classroom and concluded that perceptions of immediacy behaviors were highly correlated with favorable student attitudes. Teachers displaying immediacy behaviors were viewed by students as being more positive and effective, which led to increased affect toward the instructor and the course. These studies staged teacher immediacy behaviors as a potentially significant factor in improving instructional effectiveness (Christophel, 1990). Gunawardena and Zittle (1997) later examined teacher immediacy in the context of “Social presence as a predictor of satisfaction within a Computer-mediated conferencing environment” and concluded that social presence is a strong predictor of satisfaction in a computer conference. They continued, “Instructors who are accustomed to relying on nonverbal cues to provide feedback and who have a lesser-developed ability to project their personality will need to learn to adapt to the [online] medium by developing skills that create a sense of social presence” (p. 23).

Since this early research, The Sloan Consortium (2011) reported steady increases of students taking online courses.

Every year since the first report in this series in 2003 the number of students taking at least one online course has increased at a rate far in excess of the growth for the overall higher education student body. This year is no different. The most recent estimate, for fall 2010, shows an increase of ten percent over fall 2009 to a

total of 6.1 million online students. The growth from 1.6 million students taking at least one online course in fall 2002 to the 6.1 million for fall 2010 translates into a compound annual growth rate of 18.3 percent for this time period. For comparison, the overall higher education student body has grown at an annual rate of just over two percent during this same period -- from 16.6 million in fall 2002 to 19.6 million for fall 2010 (Allen and Seaman, 2010, p. 11).

Advantages of Learning Online

Research of online learning has demonstrated its many advantages (Jiang & Ting, 2000; Rourke et al., 2001; Simonson, Smaldino, Albright, & Zvacek, 2000; Ward & Newlands, 1998); especially the convenience and flexibility offered by the anytime and anywhere accessibility (Berge, 1997; Harasim, 1990; Matthews, 1999; Swan et al., 2000). The anytime and anywhere catch phrase is widely used by those promoting online education. It means that students have access to courses and course materials 24 hours a day, providing they have access to the Internet, making online education far more convenient than the traditional educational experience (Berge, 1997; Harasim, 1990; Matthews, 1999;). Online education, often referred to as asynchronous learning, has the advantage of allowing students to reflect upon the materials and compose their responses before responding, unlike traditional classroom discussions (Simonson et al., 2000). Students also have the ability to work at their own pace, which is especially important for non-native speakers (Matthews, 1999). Moreover, the ability to conceal a learner's personal identity means that all students, regardless of race, disability, or appearance are on equal ground (Simonson et al., 2000). Another characteristic of online delivery that

may be considered advantageous to learning is that the roles of students and instructors may be transformed. The role of the instructor can be altered to become more like a facilitator than a lecturer, while the role of students can be altered by allowing them to become active learners (Harasim et al., 1995; Simonson et al., 2000). The notion of active learning is not new, in fact, active learning is a component of the constructivist theory (Jonassen, 1995).

Constructivism

Institutions that may have purchased distance education courses, or courses off-the-shelf,¹ in order to stay competitive may find that the courses lack the teacher's creativity, resemble lecture notes, and lack sound pedagogical principles for invoking student engagement. Moreover, the practice of purchasing courses is not conducive to teacher development in online pedagogical technologies and theories. Today's students are often better prepared than their teachers to use new technologies and may be disappointed with lecture-based online courses.

If faculty adopt a lecture-based design for online courses, they often fail to take full advantage of distance learning (Stokes, 2005). "The main criticism about lectures as a teaching method is that students are allocated a passive role and thus their studying efficiency is low" (Frank and Barzilai, 2004, p. 1).

Instruction based on cognitive theories of how learners process information is an alternative to the traditional lecture. The cognitive theory of constructivism encourages student-centered learning through the use of self-discovery, exploration, and authentic collaborative projects (Stokes, 2005). Although some researchers contend that the

¹ Courses off-the-shelf are pre-programmed instructional materials purchased from a commercial enterprise.

constructivist approach produces more learning, there is some evidence that faculty fail to change their teaching methods as they integrate instructional technology (Twigg, 2003; Willis & Cifuentes, 2002). “Instructional goals should drive the adoption of technology” (Donovan, 1999, p. 2). “However, in order to be truly effective and transformative, these technologies must be bundled with dynamic instructional methods and approaches” (Donovan, 1999, p. 2).

One dynamic instructional method involves the constructivist model, which views the teacher as a facilitator who promotes active participation in the learning process. An important component of the constructivist approach is the modeling of the learning process. Several characteristics of the constructivist model are easily adapted for online learning. “Some of these characteristics include: learner construction of meaning; social interaction to help students learn; and student problem-solving in ‘real world’ contexts” (Abbey, 2000, p. 111). According to Von Glaserfeld (1989), learners have a unique mental structure that allows them to construct their own meaning based on prior experiences. This theory seems to be related to schema development as defined by Piaget (1954). The social interaction component also provides meaning; much of what is learned depends upon communication among learners (Vygotsky, 1981). Constructivist theories of learning advocate communication among learners. When there is collaboration and a sharing of personal experience among all class members, these shared multiple perspectives can generate socially constructed meaning (Berge, Mulilenburg & Haneghan, 2002; Wegerif, 1998).

Learning Outcomes

The most important aspect of teaching is learning. The relationship between teacher behavior and student learning has been investigated over the past decades. This research has provided compelling evidence that less distance between teachers and students, both physical and/or psychological, is associated with enhanced learning outcomes (Andersen, 1979; Christophel & Gorham, 1995; Gorham & McCroskey, 1986; Gorham & Zakahi, 1990; McDowell, McDowell, & Hyerdahl, 1980; Richmond, 1990). Learning outcomes were further analyzed in a study by Gorham and Zakahi (1990) and positioned in affective and cognitive domains. Positive empirical verification has been consistent in all reported studies that high teacher presence, or immediacy behaviors, produces greater affective learning. However, cognitive learning, as it relates to teacher immediacy behaviors, is more difficult to determine (Gorham and Zakahi, 1990). Christophel (1990) provided evidence that teacher immediacy affects students' motivation, which consequently influences their learning. Christophel (1990) used a split-class design in which half the students completed immediacy and motivation scales, and the other half completed motivation and learning scales. The results of this study indicated that the impact of immediacy behaviors did not invalidate previous studies, which have asked the same students to complete both immediacy and learning measures. The results strongly suggested that teacher immediacy was related to cognitive learning outcomes as well. "While this relationship may not be as simple as that of immediacy to affective learning, in practical terms the implications are the same: more immediate teachers are likely to effect more learning" (Gorham and Zakahi, 1990, p. 355).

Theoretical Underpinnings

Research that focuses on the domain of affective learning describes teacher immediacy behaviors in terms of intimacy, immediacy, and interactivity and combines them into the theoretical perspective of social presence. Social presence has emerged as an important social factor in distance education (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Rourke et al., 1999). Recent field studies emphasize the importance of examining social and psychological factors that impact learning, and influence the way people communicate in web-based learning environments (Blocher, 1997; Gunawardena, 1995; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997, Hackman & Walker, 1990; Hiltz, 1997; Rourke et al., 1999, Walther, 1992).

The concept of social presence was introduced by Short, Williams, and Christie (1976). These social psychologists based their concept of social presence on previous research of one-to-one communication, or dyads. They described social presence vaguely, as “degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationship...” (p. 65). Short et al. defined social presence “as the quality of the medium itself” (p. 65). However, some researchers in the field of communication (Rafaeli, 1988; Rice, 1984; Walther, 1992) criticized Short et al.’s (1976) definition as unclear. Rice (1984) asked how Short et al. (1976) determined that social presence was a quality of the medium. Rafaeli (1988) criticized Short et al. (1976) for not providing a clear explanation of the qualities of the medium that represents social presence.

Other researchers (Collins & Murphy, 1997; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997) have suggested that Short et al. intended social presence to mean the degree to which learners perceived each other as real within the context of their mediated communication. The

constructs of intimacy, immediacy, and interactivity have a mutual relationship with social presence. If a high degree of social presence exists, then high degrees of intimacy, immediacy, and interactivity also exist (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Hackman & Walker, 1990).

Affective Learning

The learners' attitudes, beliefs, and values toward the content and learning experience encompass affective learning (Bloom, 1956). Lower order levels of selective attention and emotional response toward the content, to higher order levels of behavioral intentions and activity, influences affective learning. Consequently, students who are positive toward the course content are more likely to learn the cognitive content. In addition, learners who have internalized higher order behavioral intentions are more likely to generalize such content to non-academic environments pertinent to their life-long endeavors (Bloom, 1956; Krathwohl, Bloom, & Masia, 1964). Therefore, communication researchers have focused on affective learning in their investigations of teaching effectiveness. Affective learning occurs as a result of a positive effort in the three constructs of intimacy, immediacy, and interactivity.

Intimacy

Research on social presence has identified a relationship between social presence and communication cues (verbal and nonverbal) associated with the constructs of intimacy, immediacy, and interactivity (i.e., interactions). Intimacy reflects the sense of close connection one feels in a close relationship. The depth of self-disclosure between individuals in a relationship determines the level of intimacy, for example.

Wolcott (1994) stated that, “[the] key to group identity and cohesion is to establish and maintain a rapport between teacher and students, and among the students themselves” (p.147). Wolcott (1994), defined *rapport* as, “A function of the perceived closeness among participants, it increases as the perception of closeness (that is, less perceived interpersonal distance), there is more intimacy between individuals” (p. 24). According to Short et al., (1976), the quality of the medium used to communicate depends on its capabilities to convey socio-emotional cues. Further research (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Lombard & Ditton, 1997) concurred with Short et al., (1976) that the qualities of the medium may have an effect on the degree of social presence. Face-to-face provides the greatest degree of social presence due to its capability of providing nonverbal and verbal communication cues, and cognitive and affective interpersonal interactions, Rice (1984) agreed that face-to-face is the medium with the highest degree of social presence because of its ability to convey socio-emotional cues, use natural language, and provide immediate feedback.

Immediacy

Findings from immediacy studies conducted in the educational setting suggested that students viewed more favorably teachers who employ verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors (Gorham, 1988; Hackman & Walker, 1990). These verbal and nonverbal types of immediacy behaviors produce interpersonal closeness (i.e. intimacy), sensory stimulation, and signal warmth and friendliness. The results from these studies indicated that intimacy and immediacy are positive predictors of student learning outcome and student satisfaction, and contribute to social presence. Andersen, Andersen, and Jensen (1979) identified the following nonverbal teacher behaviors as indicative of immediacy:

nods, smiles, eye contact, vocal expressiveness, body movements and purposeful gestures, relaxed and open body positions, and close physical distance.

Teacher immediacy behaviors seem to take into account the same phenomena as social presence without the interactivity of media. Thus, it may be that instructors and students involved in asynchronous communication develop a set of immediacy behaviors that provides an acculturated social presence in online courses as Gunawardena and Zittle suggested (1997).

Interactivity

The interactivity concept in social presence is an attribute of the technology systems, used in distance education, for example (Wagner, 1993). Therefore, interactivity is defined as “real time exchanges of audio, video, text, and graphical information.” (Wagner, 1993, p. 19). These real time exchanges may occur between learners, or between learners and instructors (Wagner, 1997).

The prior work of communication researchers and social psychologists has contributed several important concepts relevant to distance learning (Argle & Dean, 1965; Short et al., 1976; Wiener & Mehrabian, 1968). Those concepts contend that (a) communication is essential in the learning process, especially in distance learning environments (Moore and Kearsley, 1996); (b) interpersonal (intimacy) communication is central to the teaching and learning process because of the separation of the teacher and the learners (Holmberg, 1989; Keegan, 1996; Moore, 1989); and (c) students perceive immediacy as a positive effect (Wiener and Mehrahan, 1968). The relationship between intimacy, immediacy, and interactivity, overlap in the social presence context in a community of learners (see Figure 1).

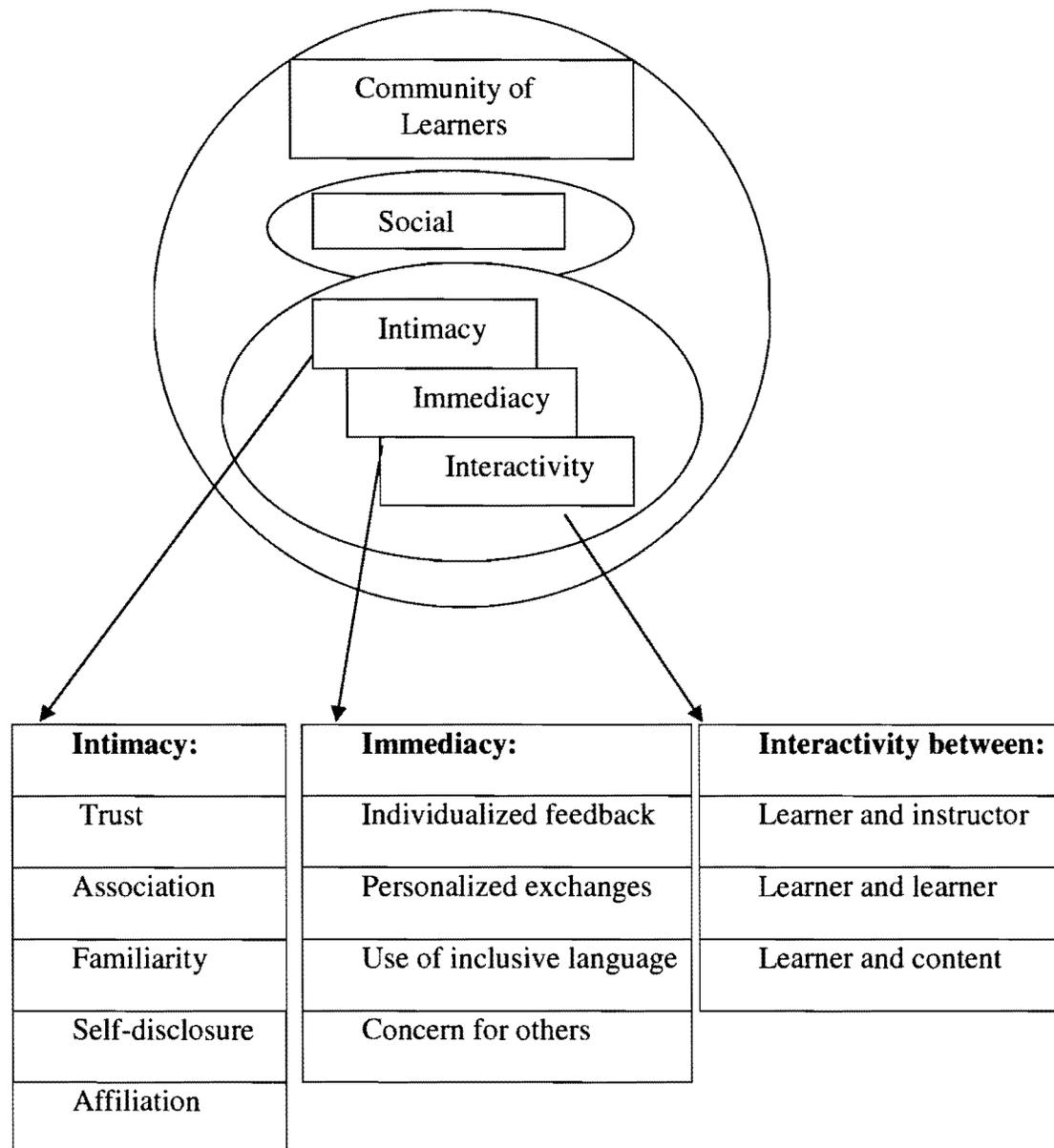


Figure 1. Constructs and indicators that comprise social presence.

Social presence depends on the degree of intimacy and immediacy, and these two constructs are contingent on the quality of interactivity (Mehrabian, 1989; Short et al.,

1976). Likewise, the level of intimacy is dependent on the level of immediacy and the degree of social presence correlates with all three variables.

Lacking in this body of literature research thus far is the faculty's perceptions of the role of social presence within an asynchronous online learning environment and techniques they may have adapted to compensate for distance. In this study, the term *social presence* will refer to the degree to which the instructor perceives that they have established intimacy, immediacy, and interactivity in their online course.

Issues and Concerns

Ways to communicate have been adapting to compensate for missing face-to-face socio-emotional expression (Collins & Murphy, 1997; Hiltz, 1994). In text-based communication, written statements such as emoticons (i.e., ☺, ☹) are used to express emotions to compensate for the distance between learners and instructors (Gunawardena and Zittle, 1997). There are two types of distance--psychological and transactional--which are directly related to the learner's feeling of isolation (Mehrabian, 1969; Wiener & Mehrabian, 1968).

Transactional Distance

The concept of Transactional Distance Theory (TDT) was developed by Michael G. Moore (1973). The theory considered the relationship among learners in the quality and quantity of interactions. Later TDT definitions considered the physical separation of the teacher and learners, and included the pedagogy and course design. (Moore, 1993). According to Martindale (as cited in "Transactional distance theory", n.d.), "an instance of transactional distance requires a learner, teacher, and a communication channel.

Teaching situations involving different transactional distances require different or specialized instructional techniques” (para. 2).

Psychological Distance

Wolcott (1996) defines psychological distance as a “mental dimension of separateness or dissimilarity between people” (p.23). In other words, the connectedness the learner feels to other learners and the instructor when not physically in the same location.

Wolcott (1996) asserts, “Psychological distance contributes to learners’ feelings that they are not part of the learning community” (p. 25). Failure to identify or affiliate with the group or establish a rapport adds to the sense of geographical isolation felt by the learner.

The body of research on social presence shows that to minimize a sense of isolation that a student may feel that as a result of learning at a distance, instructors should consider creating a learning environment that fosters inclusion of all students. Such an environment might contribute to the perception of the presence of others and foster a sense of a connected community of learners.

Student Engagement/Isolation

Distance learners have the highest risk of dropping out (Peters, 1992). Often this is attributed to the isolation experienced by these students (Delahoussaye & Zemke, 2001; Hipp, 1997; Lake, 1999; Okun, Benin & Brandt-Williams, 1996; Peters, 1992; Rogers, 1990). The distance factor becomes important in reducing isolation for students studying in this mode (Meacham & Evans, 1989; Suen & Parks, 1996). Once social presence is established through the use of an asynchronous discussion board, will engagement ensue? Perhaps not. First, instructors do not always convey meaningful expectations to students resulting in meager comments. One likely cause of a meaningless response is poorly

written or absent performance rubrics wherein instructors evaluate the quality of students' postings rather than the number of postings. The notion of the debate engages learners in argumentation, according to Kuhn (1991). Argumentation is an essential kind of informal reasoning that is central to the intellectual ability involved in solving problems, making judgments and decisions, and formulating ideas and beliefs. However, Gunawardena, Lowe, and Anderson (1997) examined interaction in a global online debate and found that the debate inhibited the co-construction of knowledge. Unwillingness to rebut or comment on the positions of others makes debates problematic (Martunnen and Laurinen, 2001). Students actually presented more disagreement during role-playing activities than during debates, which lead the researchers to conclude that role-playing is more effective than debates for engaging higher-level argumentative discussion.

The Formation of the Online Learning Community

Learning online has enabled a potentially new type of learning community that provides a virtual space for group discussion as well as access to other students for socializing and communication. The widespread use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) shows the implementation of this potential (Fisher, Phelps & Ellis, 2000; Oliver & Omari, 1999, Stephenson, 2001). Harasim (1990) described the greatest strength of online education as the ability to facilitate interaction and the strength of CMC group activity. The social, affective, and cognitive benefits of peer interaction and collaboration, which had previously been possible only in face-to-face situations, were now possible through asynchronous (threaded) communication.

Electronic mail (e-mail) is one of the most popular communication forms in the world. Discussion boards have become one of the main features of distance education courses (Jonassen, 2006). Online learning management systems (LMS), such as Blackboard, WebCT, and First Class support asynchronous communication. These systems require the user to connect to the Internet and log on before they can interact. In most discussion boards, learners read a message created by the instructor or another learner, and decide whether to respond, how to respond, and the likely consequences (Jonassen, 2006). Harasim (1990) found that learners reflected more on their thoughts and potential responses in asynchronous form of communication than in face-to-face. Reflection is an important thinking skill. The “need to verbalize all aspects of interaction within the text-based environment can enhance such metacognitive skills as self-reflection and revision in learning” (Harasim, 1990, p. 49).

The greatest advantage to learning online is the propensity for interaction and reflection. The course materials are available anytime, and learners can think about what others have contributed in the discussion board and formulate their own responses. This method is consistent with the cognitive theory of constructivism, which encourages student-centered learning through self-discovery, exploration, authentic collaborative projects, and active participation. Numerous studies claim that the interaction of teacher to learners, and between learners lessens the distance factor, decreases students’ feeling of isolation, and produces greater affective learning. Cognitive learning needs to be studied in the online context since fewer studies claim that the same interaction produces greater cognitive learning. Constructivist theories of learning advocate communication among learners. When there is collaboration and a sharing of personal experience

between learners, these shared multiple perspectives can lead to socially constructed meaning. In social presence theory, behaviors are delineated into three constructs of intimacy (sharing personal experiences), immediacy (feedback), and interactivity (the quantity of communication). The constructs overlap and are dependent on each other to produce a high degree of social presence, thereby producing greater learning outcomes. There are numerous studies on social presence theory in the face-to-face classroom, and more studies are emerging for the online classroom; however, the studies are mainly about the students' perspectives and not the instructors who now need to create an online social presence. The obvious concern in online learning is the distance, both psychological (geographical separateness) and transactional (relationship in the quality and quantity of interactions). Learning management systems have the capacity to bridge distance in both asynchronous (thread discussion boards) and synchronous (live chat) communication. Asynchronous discussions are the favored form of communication due to its capacity to allow reflection.

The facilitation of student engagement is another concern. This is an area that needs further study to reveal how faculty are dealing with social presence in the online classroom and how they are engaging students in the learning process.

Chapter III

METHODS

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the study was to determine the existence of social presence, faculty's adaptation to the online course, and to elicit the faculty's view of what they do to promote social presence in an asynchronous discussion board. Although social presence has been characterized as an important construct in distance education (McIsaac and Gunawardena, 1996), little field research has described the faculty's role in promoting it in a discussion board. Therefore, this qualitative study examined faculty's perceived role in the discussion board and how faculty members are meeting these challenges guided by the following research questions (see Table 1):

1. How do faculty promote social presence which is comprised of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy, within a discussion board?
 - How do faculty promote the indicators of interactivity (between learner and instructor; learner and learner; and learner and content) within the context of a discussion board?
 - How do faculty promote the indicators of intimacy (trust, association, familiarity, self-disclosure, affiliation) within the context of a discussion board?
 - How do faculty promote the indicators of immediacy (individualized feedback, personalized exchanges, use of inclusive language, concern for others) within the context of a discussion board?

2. What are faculty doing within the asynchronous discussion board to meet the challenges and limitations of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy?
- What are the challenges of transferring the indicators of interactivity, intimacy and immediacy from the face-to-face classroom to the discussion board?
 - What teaching strategies work best in the discussion board to promote the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy?

Table 1

A description of how the constructs relate to the research questions

<i>Constructs, Indicators, Research Questions, Open-ended Questions, Interview Items</i>			
Constructs	Indicators	Research Question	Instrument
Interactivity: Interactivity or communication exchanges	Interactivity exchanges a. Between learner and instructor b. Between learner and learner c. Between learner and content (instructional strategy)	How do faculty promote social presence which is comprised of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy, within a discussion board?	Open-ended (OE) written responses
		<u>Subsidiary Questions</u> How do faculty promote the indicators of interactivity (between learner and instructor; learner and learner; and learner and content) within the context of a discussion board?	OE: 1,2,3,4

<p>Intimacy: A sense of closeness through established relationships</p>	<p>Indicators include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Trust Personalized communication Self-disclosure Association Familiarity 	<p>How do faculty promote the indicators of intimacy (trust, association, familiarity, self-disclosure, affiliation) within the context of a discussion board?</p>	<p>OE: 5,6,7,8,9</p>
<p>Immediacy: A measure of the psychological distance that a communicator places between him/her and the object of his/her communication.</p>	<p>Indicators of Immediacy: Individualized feedback</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Use of inclusive language Concern for the individual Presence of positive feedback Constructive/negative feedback 	<p>How do faculty promote the indicators of immediacy (individualized feedback, personalized exchanges, use of inclusive language, concern for others) within the context of a discussion board?</p>	<p>OE: 10,11,12,13,14</p>
<p>Descriptive: Faculty will describe the way things are or “what is” (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996).</p>		<p>Research Question</p>	<p>Instrument</p>
		<p>2. What are faculty doing within their asynchronous web-based courses to promote social presence?</p>	<p>Interview (see Appendix B)</p>

		<u>Subsidiary Questions</u> a. What are faculty doing within their online courses to meet the challenges /limitations of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy? b. What are the challenges of transferring the indicators of social presence from the face-to-face classroom to the online classroom? c. What teaching strategies work best in an online classroom to promote the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy?	I: 4, 7 I: 1, 2, 3 I: 5, 6
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Research Design

A qualitative research design was used to understand social presence in the discussion board from the faculty's perspectives. "Qualitative research is especially helpful when it provides us with someone's perceptions of a situation that permits us to understand his or her behavior" (Krathwohl, 1998, p. 230). Qualitative data, with emphasis on people's experiences, are well suited for finding the meanings they place on events and processes. Moreover, qualitative research connects their perceptions to the social world (van Manen,

1977). The data collected through open-ended questions and interviews reveal the way things are or describe what is (Gall, Borg, and Gall, 1996).

I used the Delphi method for data collection. The purpose of the Delphi method is to, "...obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts" (Dalkey and Helmer, 1963, p. 458). The Delphi method is named after the Greek Oracle at Delphi, and has been adapted in studies to allow anonymity; eliminate confrontation, group domination, and geographical barriers; and most importantly, it allows researchers to measure the level of agreement on the issue under consideration (Dalkey and Helmer, 1963). This method will illuminate instructional strategies used to promote social presence from an expert perspective. To be considered experts for the purposes of the Delphi in this study, participants must meet the criterion described in the procedure below.

In a Delphi study, the researcher sets the criterion and selects the experts who are qualified to answer the questions. The researcher then administers the questionnaire and may combine all the responses for a second round, or design a new questionnaire based on the responses. The respondents are kept anonymous to each other but not to the researcher. The size of the Delphi group does not depend on statistical power, thus the literature recommends 10 to 18 on a Delphi panel. The Delphi method can ask participants to validate the researcher's interpretation of their responses. "In addition to the richness issues of traditional surveys, Delphi studies inherently provide richer data because of their multiple iterations and their response revision due to feedback. Moreover, Delphi participants tend to be open to follow-up interviews" (Okoli and Pawlowski, p. 20).

The research design of this qualitative inquiry was a semi-structured interview using open-ended questioning. The data gathering was done in two sections; the first was open-ended questions that the participants completed at their own pace and had time for reflection. These were completed before the face-to-face interview. The questions asked participants to describe the importance they place on the discussion board, to describe how they form an online community, and how they provide feedback (see Appendix A).

The second section of the data gathering was in two parts. First, questions were sent to all the participants and then follow up interviews were conducted in the instructor's office (see Appendix B). Semi-structured interviews are conducive to candid and spontaneous responses. These characteristics allow for the exploration of reflections, perceptions and feelings. The semi-structured interview seems best suited for garnering descriptive insights (Bogdan and Bicklen, 2003).

According to Okoli and Pawlowski (2004), follow-up interviews may yield additional data; therefore, in-person follow-up interviews were conducted after the questionnaire process was complete. With the participants' permission, the interviews were recorded. The interview questions provided insight to the research questions: What are faculty doing within the discussion board to promote the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy? What are the challenges of transferring the indicators of interactivity, intimacy and immediacy from the face-to-face classroom to the discussion board? What teaching strategies work best in a web-based classroom to promote the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy?

Procedure for Delphi Method

The Institutional Research Department was contacted via email to provide a list of faculty members who have at least 3 years of teaching experience, hold a Ph.D. or Ed.D, and have taught online using asynchronous discussion board sessions for at least two semesters. Faculty meeting these criteria were selected to participate in the study.

The questions found in Appendix A were emailed to each participant. The participants were known to me, however, they were kept anonymous to each other. The participants were given 1 week to complete the questionnaire and return it to me. After 1 week, a reminder email was sent out. Two days later, the final reminder was emailed.

After the first email, responses received were anonymously combined and sent again via email to all participants. This gave the participants the opportunity to amend or add to their responses. They were given 1 week to send additional responses. A final document of anonymously combined responses was sent out to all participants before the in-person interviews were conducted for follow-up.

Site Selection

The study was conducted at a liberal arts college with about 2000 students. The college offered its first pilot course using Blackboard in the fall semester of 2000. This undergraduate course for biology majors, which combined Blackboard and face-to-face meetings, paved the way for 50 completely online courses in the fall semester of 2008. The college's faculty is committed to providing quality courses, and members attend workshops regularly to sharpen their technology skills. The Sloan Foundation had provided a grant to the college for the development of faculty who had conducted

nationwide online courses. The college has since moved its LMS from Blackboard to Moodle and in 2011 there were 107 online courses held and 2 degree programs conducted online. The Sloan Foundation continues to be an integral part of faculty professional development.

Inherent in the college's mission statement are a commitment to scholarship and critical inquiry, and to developing leaders. Responding to the growing need for adult degree programs, the college introduced a continuing education program and an evening program in the early 1970s. Twenty years later, the college established its first graduate programs. Today the College offers 26 baccalaureate degrees including pre-medicine/pre-dentistry/pre-veterinarian/and pre-law and seven master's degrees. In the fall semester of 2007, the college welcomed its first cohort into its Doctoral program.

In the fall of 2010, there were 201 faculty members, 72 of whom were full-time and 129 part-time. Most of the faculty have been trained to use the LMS, whether or not they teach online or just post a syllabus, assignments, and/or lectures. Typically, only online courses use a discussion board. The blended courses meet face-to-face; therefore, only teachers who teach completely online courses were selected for this study. The Delphi method was used to conduct the study; therefore, in order to satisfy the expert criteria for selection, only those who have taught at least two semesters online were selected. According to the Delphi method, a panel of experts should have between 10 and 18 participants.

Selection of Participants

Purposive sampling was used to select behaviors, participants, and sites that would inform me in terms of the focus of the investigation (Krathwohl, 1998). Combination or

mixed purposive sampling combines sampling strategies. Triangulation generates flexibility in the ability to satisfy multiple interests and needs. A sampling strategy has to fit the purpose of the study, the resources available, the question under consideration, and the constraints on the project. This holds true for sampling strategy as well as sample size. This study used homogeneous and criterion sampling. Homogenous sampling reduces variation and simplifies analysis. All of the participants in the study taught at the same college and subscribed to its mission and values. In criterion sampling, criteria will be set and only those cases that meet those criteria will be selected, for example, only faculty who have taught online. This method of sampling is very strong in quality assurance (Kratwohl, 1998).

The participants were required to have taught at least two undergraduate and/or graduate courses online using a LMS. Fifteen faculty members were invited to participate. The faculty members came from the departments of English, theology, business and economics, justice studies, philosophy, communications, sociology, psychology, education, biology, math, nutrition, and history.

Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants had the right to withdraw at any time. Emails were sent out to selected faculty members who had taught at least two semesters online. The email described the study and what was required of them to participate. Interested participants filled out and returned a form expressing their willingness to participate. The college and the participants are kept confidential. In order to conduct the study, I obtained the Institutional Review Board's approval.

The participants had a professional relationship with me that may have put them at ease during the interview.

Instrumentation

Open-ended questioning and follow-up interviews were used for this study. I provided open-ended questions for the participants to complete in written form, and conducted individual follow-up face-to-face interviews with some of the participants. The participants were asked how many times they had taught an online course to ensure that they had taught at least two semesters online in order to be considered an expert for this study. These data were entered into ATLAS.TI for analysis.

Interviews are often used to determine how respondents perceive their situation, its meaning to them, what is especially significant about it to them, what might be significant to others, and how it came to be what it is (Kathwohl, 1998). The first part of the questioning process was limited to open-ended questions about the indicators of interactivity, intimacy and immediacy. The second part included open-ended, written response questions that focused on the challenges and instructional strategies that work best in the discussion board. The follow-up interviews were intended to continue the discussion of the challenges and instructional strategies.

The open-ended, written response questions were designed to answer the research question, How do faculty promote social presence which is comprised of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy, within a discussion board: category 1 (interactivity), category 2 (intimacy), and category 3 (immediacy). The category 1 questions asked faculty: to describe their comfort level conversing with students using the discussion board; how they facilitated the discussions on the content of the course; how they facilitated the discussions between students in the course; and to describe the importance they placed on communication using the discussion board. The category 2

intimacy questions asked faculty to describe how they were able to form distinct individual impressions of some course participants from the discussion board; how they fostered a feeling of trust in using the discussion board; how they fostered a feeling of an online community; and how they got to know their students using the discussion board. The category 3 immediacy questions asked faculty to describe how they provided positive feedback in the discussion board; to describe how they provided negative or constructive feedback using the discussion board; and to describe how they showed concern for their students using the discussion board.

The second part of the questionnaire was designed to answer the research question, What are faculty doing within the asynchronous discussion board to meet the challenges and limitations of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy specifically addresses transferring social presence from the face-to-face classroom to the online classroom. Category 1 contains the information collected on the challenges and limitations in the online classroom. Category 2 contains the information collected on the challenges of transferring from the face-to-face classroom to the online classroom and how they sustain instructor presence. Category 3 contains the information collected on their teaching strategies.

Data Collection

The data collected via written responses to open-ended questions, interviews, or conversations did not contain names or any other identifiers of the participants. Any data collected or stored electronically in the form of a word document, Excel spreadsheet, or email was stored on a flash drive that was password-protected by me. I did not evaluate the participants' courses for design structure.

Qualitative research consists of relationship building with the participants.

I gathered the data in a conversational manner in order to encourage participants to respond openly and honestly. At all times I protected the integrity of the research by following professional ethics. During this study, I protected participants by obtaining their informed consent and by including an explanation of the nature, purpose, and implications of the study, as well as the confidentiality and security of the data.

The collection process consisted of tape-recorded interviews, my written notes, the participants' written responses to posed questions, informal e-mail, and face-to-face conversations. Respondents shared some examples of their discussion boards, but this was not a requirement. The respondents were under no obligation to show their discussion boards to me.

Data Analysis

I used ATLAS.TI to analyze the data collected in Part One. Answers for the main research questions for this part, How do faculty promote social presence? were grouped into the three indicators: interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy. The questions that asked about Interactivity, questions 1 through 4, were coded as Section 1.a with Category 1.a (exchanges between learner and instructor), Category 1.b (exchanges between learner and learner), Category 1.c (exchanges between learner and content). The questions that asked about Intimacy, questions 5 through 9, were coded as Section 1.b with Category 2.a (trust), Category 2.b (personalized Communication), Category 2.c (self-disclosure), Category 2.d (association), Category 2.e (familiarity). The questions that asked about Immediacy, questions 10 through 14, were coded as Section 1.c with Category 3.a (use of inclusive language), Category 3.b (concern for the individual), Category 3.c (presence of

positive feedback), Category 3.d (constructive/negative feedback). This process was followed for each of the 11 participants.

As part of the verification process, I provided the written responses to all of the participants before continuing with analysis. This type of verification is part of the process used in the Delphi method. Considering the hypothesis that all three indicators comprise Social Presence, the data is presented in Chapter IV with the frequencies for the indicators of interactivity, immediacy, and intimacy.

In Part Two, the data were collected through written open-ended questions and follow-up face-to-face interviews. The transcripts were examined to look for themes like instructional design strategies promoting social presence in the discussion boards, perceived obstacles, teaching strategies, and reflections. These data were coded, and I reduced extraneous data for the analysis report. The coding was completed by reading the transcripts of both the written interview questions and the recorded follow-up face-to-face interviews. While reading the transcripts, I made notes and highlighted statements, then categorized the responses as Interactivity, Intimacy, or Immediacy.

The results of the analyses are presented in Chapter V.

Limitations

Some of the factors in faculty's perception of immediacy behaviors in a discussion board that are beyond the scope of this study are: (a) different technical proficiencies of the sample group, (b) whether or not they received formal training for teaching online, and (c) number of courses taught per semester that may cause overload. These are questions that may affect the challenges in the discussion board and they are worth exploring in a future study.

Chapter IV

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine, how faculty promote social presence in discussion boards, the challenges they face, and what seems to work best. Social presence as a conceptual framework was used in this research. The survey was adapted from Gunawardena and Zittle's (1997) survey that measured social presence as a predictor of students' satisfaction in a computer-mediated conferencing environment. The data from this study led to important recommendations for faculty, course designers, and trainers.

The findings in the data analysis for this study are presented in two sections. The first section focuses on the findings organized according to the first primary research question. Following each of the research questions are the survey results related to each of the three constructs of interactivity, intimacy and immediacy. I used the qualitative data gleaned from the written open-ended questions for the three constructs to generate categories, identified themes, and recurring patterns. Category 1 is interactivity, Category 2 is intimacy, and Category 3 is immediacy. The Category 1 questions in the discussion board asked faculty how comfortable they were conversing with students; how they facilitated discussions of the course content; how they encouraged discussion among students; how they encouraged communication on the discussion board and how important they considered it.

The Category 2 questions asked faculty how they learned about students by having them use the discussion board; how they persuaded students to trust communications;

how they created the feeling of an online community; and how they got to know their students through the discussion board.

The Category 3 questions asked faculty to describe how they provided positive feedback through the discussion board; to describe how they provided other types of feedback on the discussion board; and to explain how they showed concern for their students using the discussion board.

The second section reports the results from the participants' responses to the second research question. The data was gathered through an open-ended written survey (Part 1), and follow-up interviews (Part 2). I tape recorded and transcribed the follow-up interviews. The transcripts revealed themes and patterns that emerged from the data.

I used qualitative measures in this study to capture the perception and adaptation of the faculty teaching online with regard to teacher immediacy behaviors within the discussion board. The qualitative approach was necessary to understand the perceptions of the faculty teaching online, web-based content because the course instructor has the primary responsibility for creating social presence (Aragon, 2003).

Selection

The institution that was selected is a liberal arts college in the northeastern United States. The school was established over 100 years ago for the purpose of educating women to assume leadership roles in society. Since its inception, the school has evolved and broadened its mission to include serving the poorest communities, domestically and abroad in the spirit of service. Enrollment of students now includes both males and females. The faculty at this institution are proponents of just and ethical relationships and promote a caring personal environment.

The initial population consisted of 22 faculty members who had taught online. Of the 22 asked to participate, 11 (50%) participated in Section 1, the written open-end survey. From the sample group, nine completed the written open-ended survey for Section 2, and four participated in follow-up interviews. The respondents teach in the divisions of Culture and Humanities, Health and Wellness Studies, Human and Social Development, and Science and Mathematics.

I used the Delphi method, the main purpose of which is to "...obtain the most reliable consensus of opinion of a group of experts" (Dalkey and Helmer, 1963, p. 458). Linstone and Turoff (1975) pointed out that the Delphi method could be used with a population of 10 to 50 people. Although 22 participants were invited to participate, only 11 responded with a signed consent form.

The Delphi method served to illuminate instructional strategies used to promote social presence from an expert perspective and the challenges faculty face in the online classroom. In order to determine the participants' experience, they were asked to report the number of online courses taught. To be considered for the study, they would have had taught at least two courses online. All 11 participants passed the selection criteria. The average number of courses taught online for the 11 participants was 20. Two faculty taught fewer than 10 online courses, four taught between 10 and 20, three taught between 25 and 35, and 2 taught more than 40 courses online.

Results

The first research question asked the faculty members how they promoted social presence, consisting of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy, within a

discussion board. The second question asked the faculty how they to met the challenges and limitations of those indicators within the asynchronous discussion board.

The responses were grouped by frequency with a brief analysis of any outliers, or other conditions worth noting. Combined analysis of the three indicators is reported in Chapter V. The complete responses can be found in Appendices A, B and C.

Participants were given the open-ended survey for research question 1, as well as the following written definitions of interactivity, intimacy and immediacy:

Immediacy: The amount of perceived physical and/or psychological closeness between people characterized by the teacher's verbal and non-verbal gestures, such as smiling, nodding, voice inflection, etc.

Intimacy: A sense of connection one feels in a close relationship. The depth of self-disclosure between individuals determines the level of intimacy.

Interaction or Interactivity: The quality and quantity of communication between teacher and student, and students to students.

Section One: Research Question 1

Research question 1 "How do faculty promote social presence which is comprised of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy, within a discussion board?" was designed with three subsequent research questions. The complete responses can be found in Appendix C.

Sub-question Section 1a: How do faculty promote the indicators of interactivity (between learner and instructor; learner and learner; and learner and content) within the context of a discussion board?

Interactivity: Category 1.

Three types of interactions were used, learner to instructor, learner to learner, and learner to content. These three types of interactions determine what the faculty does to promote social presence in the discussion board.

Instructor to Learner: Question 1. Describe your comfortable level conversing with your students in the discussion board.

The main purpose of this first question was to gain an overall sense of how easily faculty were able to communicate within the discussion board. Ten of the eleven respondents indicated they were *very comfortable* or *highly comfortable* conversing in the discussion board, and Respondent D was *fairly comfortable*. Most felt positive about the level of communication, except for Respondent I, who was disappointed with the limited responses from students. This outlier may not have formulated questions in a way that elicited responses from students.

Learner to Content: Question 2. How do you facilitate the discussions on the content of the course?

The main purpose of this question was to ascertain some of the techniques used to generate interactivity with the content of the course. Respondents A, B, and E indicated that they read and responded to every student posting on a daily basis. Respondents D, F, G, H, I, J, and K placed the responsibility on the students to respond to the question posted, and to others. Respondent C found the synchronous system to be more valuable than the asynchronous discussion board.

Clearly the synchronous system, whether face-to-face or a live online or video chat would provide the means for social presence; but defeats the purpose of anytime, anywhere learning.

Learner to Learner: Question 3. How do you facilitate the discussions among students in the course?

The main purpose of this question was to ascertain how the faculty were able to generate discussions between students. Respondents B, C, D, F, I, J, and K included participation in the grade calculations either with a rubric, requiring them to meet online synchronously, and/or through strong encouragement. Respondent H thought there was no need to facilitate student-to-student interaction because it just happened; Respondent G reported that students were “asked” to comment on other’s postings; Respondent A posted comments in the discussion board to generate engagement.

With the exception of Respondent H, all of the faculty members put forth an effort to engage student discussions. Respondent H’s discussion questions might have been worded in a way that stimulated discussion, or the topic was one that naturally generated discussion.

Importance placed on communication: Question 4. Describe the importance you place on communication in the discussion board.

The main purpose of this question was to ascertain if faculty perceived the discussion board to be an important component of the online classroom. All 11 respondents placed a high amount of importance on communications noting, “It’s always the primary component of the online course,” “Communication is a key aspect....” Respondents F, G, H, and J mentioned that the discussion board is either part of, or a significant part of, the final grade. Clearly the respondents perceive communication in the discussion board to be an important aspect of the online classroom.

Sub-question Section 1b: How do faculty promote the indicators of intimacy (trust, personalized communication, self-disclosure, association/familiarity) within the context of the discussion board?

Intimacy: Category 2.

Four indicators were used: trust, personalized communication, self-disclosure, and association/familiarity to determine intimacy in the discussion board.

Familiarity: Question 5. Describe how you are able to form distinct individual impressions of some course participants in the discussion board.

The faculty analyzed the students' use of language, questions, and style of writing. According to Respondent B, "It becomes very apparent very early..." Respondent E said, "This initial sense is not too reliable..." Respondent C added, "I get to know my students much better in online courses than in classroom based lecture course."

I determined that the respondents had to look for clues in their students' written work to formulate impressions of the students, due to the lack of visual clues. Most responded that they come to know their students through their responses on the discussion board, in email, written assignments or other forms of communication.

Personalized communication: Question 6. Describe your communication with individual students.

Most of the personal communication between the faculty and the individual student was via email, telephone, or a combination. A few students came in to meet with the faculty when taking an online course. Respondents B, C, D, E, F, G, I, J, and K cited email as their vehicle for communication; Respondents C, E, I also used the telephone, Respondents E and K met with students when possible, and Respondent C also uses text

chat. Most respondents indicated that communication with an individual student should be handled privately. No one used the discussion board to correspond with an individual student.

Trust: Question 7. How do you foster a feeling of trust in the discussion board?

The question of trust elicited several different responses with the word *respect* and *positive* appearing most frequently. For example, “I make statements encouraging the expression of different ideas and beliefs but always with mutual respect and care”; “I treat everyone with respect”; “...respect, but you may respectfully disagree.” Examples of using the word *positive* are, “...I try to be positive...”; “...I only provide largely positive feedback in public...”; “...I do so in a positive fashion...” Respondent B cited being honest in expressing views, Respondent C mentioned being sensitive to a student’s concerns about privacy, Respondent K removes offensive posts, and Respondent D let students know that there were no wrong or right answers in the discussion board.

Association: Question 8. How do you foster a feeling of an online community?

The main purpose of this question was to ascertain how faculty influenced students to feel connected to a community of learners. Respondent E crafted situations in which students worked together in small groups. Respondents E and F met online in discussion boards called the “coffee house,” some other social area, or in a synchronous chat area. Most respondents said students usually participate in the social areas. Respondents C and D said that they participated in the discussions to keep students on track. Respondent D said, “I foster a feeling of online community by connecting the students’ effort to reply to each other in the forums [discussion boards] to the criteria used to evaluate their online participation.”

Self-disclosure: Question 9. How do you get to know your students in the discussion board?

Two scenarios emerged regarding how faculty got to know the students in the online course. Respondents C, D, H, I, J, and K wrote that they get to know their students by reading their postings and their replies to other students. Respondents B, E, and F wrote that they get to know their students in the introductory discussion forum, or in a cyber cafe. Respondent A corresponds with students via email. Respondent G stated, "It's very hard – but like the traditional classroom, usually the best and the worst stand out."

Getting to know students may take time. One respondent noted that it is very difficult to get to know someone via text, it is easier to rely on visual clues such as body language.

Sub-question Section 1c: How do faculty promote the indicators of immediacy (individualized feedback, personalized exchanges, use of inclusive language, concern for others) within the context of a discussion board?

Immediacy: Category 3.

Four types of indicators were used: individualized feedback, personalized exchanges, use of inclusive language, and concern for others to address question 1c.

Positive Feedback: Question 10. Describe how you provide positive feedback in the discussion board.

Respondents A, B, D, E, F, G, H, I, and K indicated that they provide feedback by praising or showcasing an individual's work in the discussion board for all course participants to view. Respondents B, D, and F indicated that they respond to students collectively as a whole and individually. Respondent C noted indicated the use of

individual email to provide positive feedback, and Respondent J indicated the use of grading as a means to provide feedback. It is clear that positive feedback is an important technique for online courses.

Negative Feedback: Question 11. Describe how you provide negative or constructive feedback in the discussion board.

Respondents A, C, D, F, and K indicated the use of email or face-to-face communication; Respondents B and E claimed that they provide negative or constructive feedback, "...in as diplomatically worded language as possible," and "With as much tact as possible"; respondents A and D indicated that they "sandwich" their negative feedback between positive remarks and email it; Respondent G indicated the use of supplementary questions, such as, "But have you thought about"; and Respondent J indicated the use of grading.

Concern for others: Question 12. Describe how you show concern for your students in the discussion board.

Respondents A, B, C, E, G, and I indicated the use of email and not the discussion board as the vehicle to communicate their concern for students. In the emails, the faculty noted that they use respectful language to express their concerns. Respondents B, D, and K indicated that they encourage the group to become more engaged, Respondent F noted posing "Questions for the Professor," using "Smiles" and "...being there for them and being communicative."

Use of inclusive language: Question 13. Describe how you provide feedback to the group as a whole in the discussion board.

Respondents A, B, and J noted that they post a specific announcement in an area other than the discussion board, as well as a summary of the discussion question in the discussion board. Respondent D, E, G, H, and K indicated that they post an announcement to the group but do not summarize the question. Respondent F indicated that the question is summarized in the discussion board, but does not post a separate announcement. Respondent C indicated that an email is sent to the whole class, and Respondent I, “Through grading and opening up other discussions as the thread evolves.”

Individualized feedback: Question 14. Describe how you would provide timely feedback to your students in the discussion board.

Respondents A and D noted that they provided timely feedback daily; Respondent F indicated that feedback was provided several times per week; Respondent G provides feedback twice per week, and Respondent I indicated that the same deadline that the students have is used. Respondent B replies to “each student’s posting, all of them.”

Responses to this question were varied. While six responded in ways of relation to time, the other five respondents did not mention how often or how timely they provide the feedback. They simply said that they did provide feedback via email, announcements or within the discussion board.

Feedback is an integral part of immediacy. All of the respondents provide some sort of feedback to the entire class as a whole, albeit in different ways. All respondents provided individuals with constructive or negative feedback privately including explanations. Simply applying a letter grade to work may not provide enough feedback, and a letter grade typically does not explain how that grade was deduced unless perhaps a rubric is also provided to students.

Section Two: Research Question Two: Part One

Written definitions of *interactivity*, *intimacy* and *immediacy* were given to the participants:

Immediacy: The amount of perceived physical and/or psychological closeness between people characterized by the teacher's verbal and non-verbal gestures, such as smiling, nodding, voice inflection, etc.

Intimacy: A sense of connection one feels in a close relationship. The depth of self-disclosure between individuals determines the level of intimacy.

Interaction_or_Interactivity: The quality and quantity of communication between teacher and student, and students to students.

Research question 2 "What are faculty doing within the asynchronous discussion board to meet the challenges and limitations of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy?" was presented with three subsequent research questions. The complete responses can be found in Appendix D.

Sub-question Category 1: What are the challenges and limitations in the discussion board for the three indicators of interactivity, intimacy and immediacy?

Interactivity

Respondents B, C, and D answered this question in terms of interactivity among students.

Respondent B said that there is more interactivity among students in online courses, "there is no opportunity for an individual student to sink down in the chair and remain unengaged in the conversation if she/he is to pass an online course. Everyone must respond to the questions I pose and to others in the discussion board conversations...."

Respondent B added, “I check postings and email frequently and respond as soon as possible. Students know that I am paying attention and they feel comfortable knowing they are not alone and that I will get back to them quickly.” Respondent C reported that students are told that they must comment on other students’ comments and sometimes sets up a debate situation. Respondent D said that the quality of responses in the online course is excellent, and “normally don’t limit their contributions.”

Respondents A, E, F and G addressed this question as interactivity between teacher and student. Respondent A indicated that the discussion board is included as an integral component of course content delivery, “I quickly make sure that every student is aware that I am reading their discussion board comments, and that I am, and will continue to be, an active participant in the discussions.” Respondent A noted that, on occasion, audio responses are posted in the discussion board. Respondent E enters the course daily and is available for students. Respondent F said that quantity is key: “if students see an instructor show up regularly and post regularly, they will follow suit.” Respondent G noted that students were typically responded to within 24 hours.

It was clear from the participants’ responses that interaction was taking place among students and between teacher and students, and the participants placed a substantial importance on the discussions.

Intimacy

Respondents B, E and G responded to the question of intimacy in the discussion board in a positive way. Respondent B responded that a separate discussion board was set up for self-introductions and a separate one for interpersonal sharing. Respondent B noted that even personal information or a personal story were included if it will enhance the

discussion. Respondents E and G noted that they establish a context of friendliness, and provide additional help if needed.

Respondent D said, “I don't find any ‘chat’, text, or discussion ‘Intimate’. The whole nature of the web is ‘open’. Email, one on one, this how I meet the challenge. This where I find an Intimate interaction with my students.”

Respondent F said, “In the courses that I teach, intimacy is not usually present (nor do I usually want it to be).”

Intimacy seems to be lacking in the online courses for some of the respondents; however, the literature purports that all three indicators need to be present in order to have substantial social presence online.

Immediacy

Respondent B indicated that postings and email comments were re-read before sending them, “to see if they sound the way I want them to be heard.” Respondent B also noted the use of encouraging language, even when being critical, so that students are motivated. Respondent D indicated that a discussion called “All about Me” was set up. “And it gives me, as an instructor, a psychological closeness with my students. I would hope they feel the same way.” Respondent E, F and G indicated the use emoticons or the word smiles or will type joking. Respondent E also indicated the use of a webcam and recorded message. Respondent F warned of using sarcasm or jokes, “because they can (and usually are) misinterpreted.”

The respondents make a conscious effort to establish a connection with their students, and place a substantial importance on how they respond to students in the discussion board.

Sub-question Category 2: What are the challenges of transferring the indicators of interactivity, intimacy and immediacy from the face-to-face classroom to the discussion board?

Most of the respondents, A, B, C, F, G, cited interaction as something the instructor needed to do often in the online environment. Respondent A said that timely feedback to students, and access and support from the instructor would ensure equal opportunity to succeed when transferring to the online environment. Respondent B also said that the instructor has to respond in a timely manner. Respondent C said that the professor needs to keep in regular contact with students. Respondent F said that interactivity is the most transferrable, as it is important to have frequent contact with students. Respondent G noted that constructive criticism and feedback were provided, “but sensitively, with every word chosen thoughtfully.”

Respondent B addressed intimacy and said, “I reveal what I would reveal to students fairly equally in either setting.” Respondent E said, “The same comments I would make in my f2f class, I make in the online environment.” Respondent F said, “Intimacy has to be worked on very hard if you are trying to make personal connections with students.” Respondent G said, “It means disclosing certain intimacies, but carefully and gradually.”

The respondents seem to struggle with this area of social presence. Intimacy is clearly a challenge in the discussion board.

Respondent C said, “To some extent, the challenges of immediacy cannot be overcome.” Respondent D said that there is a “lack of body language, inability to read

facial expressions and pick up clues that usually say more than words.” Respondent F said, “I don’t think that immediacy is transferrable.”

The respondents cite immediacy as a challenge because it is very difficult to give social cues through text.

Sub-question Category 3: What teaching strategies work best in the discussion board to promote the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy?

Respondent A addressed interactivity and said,

“The teaching strategies that I think work best are the ones that facilitate greater engagement by students of the critical course content. Specifically, regular and consistent feedback that is both positive and constructive is key. In my direct responses to students' postings, I will always make a point of emphasizing what I see as the strengths of their contributions, but in the process, I will also convey to them where I think that they can improve. In this regard, I find that the ‘sandwich’ method of feedback is very effective -- i.e., the method of formulating replies so that constructive criticism is sandwiched between positive remarks. I will also often ask a lot of open-ended questions to keep discussion moving forward, and to keep students thinking about the most important topics and issues addressed in the course.”

Respondent B said, “Rubrics which require minimum quantity and quality of postings on discussion boards within a limited period of time. Frequent encouragement of students to post deeper, more substantial remarks, and to connect what they say to outside resources which broaden the overall conversation.”

Respondent C said that the best strategy is to “require that students comment on and react to one another’s posts; this ensures the kind of interactivity that one gets in a traditional classroom setting.”

Respondent E said, a thread was created to, “Ask the Instructor” so that all students can see the question and respond to the answer. Respondent E indicated that points in the discussion board were assigned for appropriate type and amount of posts, but provides feedback individually via email.

Respondents B, D, E addressed intimacy in the online environment.

Respondent B said, “Forums to encourage personal introductions and forums to encourage non-course-related interpersonal conversations. Affirmative personal responses to student self-introductions.”

Respondent D said, “The best teaching strategy, for me is my ‘All about Me’. The student is presenting information about themselves in a way you can usually pick up emotional clues.” Respondent E said, “I utilize Cyber Café where students and faculty introduce themselves and tell about their educational goals and work experiences, etc.”

Respondents B and F addressed immediacy in the online environment. Respondent B noted that several ways to contact the instructor were provided and that this may provide an avenue for immediacy, such as, email, discussion board, phone and Skype.

Respondent F said, “I think that avoiding things like sarcasm help to promote healthy interactivity. Intimacy really depends on the student—some want greater intimacy than others in the on-line environment, but many times they do not seem to want much sense of the instructor beyond feedback on their assignments.”

Section Two: Research Question 2: Part Two

What are faculty doing within the asynchronous discussion board to meet the challenges and limitations of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy?

Four of the participants agreed to face-to-face follow-up interviews in their workspace, and all of them were recorded. I transcribed the interviews and they are presented in three categories. Category 1 is current challenges in the discussion board; Category 2 is current best practices; and Category 3 is suggestions for improvement to the discussion board.

Analysis of all the discussions is presented in Chapter V. The complete transcripts of the discussions can be found in Appendix E.

Sub-question Category 1: What are the current challenges for you in the discussion board?

Respondent A

“There are two challenges that I see in every online course. First, it is difficult to get students to respond in a deeper level to the content and to each other. I have to keep pushing them to do this. Second, there are what I call “end of week students”; the ones that post after everyone else. I often have to reach out to them to keep up, and they usually get lower grades.”

Respondent B

“More of the undergrads have missing assignments and it varies from course to course. Research class is different hard for them to respond to other learners How-tos not available for students....small videos online for students needed

I just wrote to a student who is dropping a course – sometimes students don't respond.”

Respondent C

“Potential disadvantage of online is the more technologically advanced students will have an advantage over other students. My concern is that some students will take over, they may feel confused and I don't want to alienate them, have been the majority that is not able to technologically keep up. I was a student once, taking course online – remember students feeling oppressed so I've been very conscious of that. I can't see them, I can't see their body language – in chat I say stop, does anyone have a question. Finding a balance is a limitation.”

Respondent D

“One weakness is that one way or another you have to post questions and they respond, what happens frequently, often there are not many takes on a questions so the last students can paraphrase and makes it easier for them. The students are far better in verbal communication than they are in written. The mode of online teaching demands a skill they are not good in. I don't find that students drop out any more than in a face-to-face class. Students think that an online course is an easy course. 7 week or intersession, it is tougher – they think they can get credits for not doing much. It is appealing that they don't have to physically go to the college. Open hours do not work, students will not come online optionally. Putting that component in will strengthen the course. Sometimes there is a student that may be condescending to other students that I have to reach out to. Every now and then someone will say hi, and I don't know the face. In many ways it is

more work than the face-to-face classroom. I have to keep coming up with responses to students.”

Sub-question Category 2: What are your current best practices?

Respondent A

“Teacher to students – post weekly announcements and include a personal announcement to the whole group. Issue progress reports individually several times per semester. First week, respond to everyone then trail off. For students in danger of dropping out, I contact students via phone interviews and/or face to face if possible. Let students know before taking an online course that they need self-discipline and that it will “feel” like more work. Break down the time for them...Class time is discussion board 2 or 3 times per week, the rest is reading and homework. Student to content – I include digital audio and PowerPoint with audio.”

Respondent B

“I post several questions every week, their responses are scholarly, there’s substance, they use citations from the book, and other sources, they have a dialog with other students. Citations are required, questions are from the book or other resources. Respond to other learners, then I monitor the communication. I use Skype and a webcam for out of state – students don’t use the webcam on their end. Audio will work though. They seemed to like it – they feel more connected once they see and hear me. How friendly do you get with students? I give some personal information about my kids or grandkids – I do this to make them feel more comfortable. I joke with them, I use the emoticons so they know I’m joking.

I also invite them to drop by if they are in the area. They drop in every 3rd or 4th week. I also invite them to attend events at our school. Feedback – I give weekly feedback to individuals and to the group. Feedback for week 1...I may mention a particular student who said something important, like showcasing – I highlight one or two students weekly. It is difficult to answer every student in the discussion board. The evaluations of the courses are good. Online has helped many of them, opened up opportunity.”

Respondent C

“I’ve settled on responding to the group, I wait until 11 out of 15 respond. I summarize all the great ideas that are coming out of the discussion and mold it into what I want them to get out of the discussion. The students rarely reply to me, that start quoting me in their replies and start responding to each other again and the discussion goes a bit further. There are the last minute students who wait until I respond. I posted the announcement saying that I don’t get involved until there are 90% I said I base grades on their leadership and initiating more thoughts. And I noticed a change that where it did pick up. In the syllabi I plot out the schedule for each week, depending on the requirements, usually 2 questions per week. Expectation that they have at least done one, doesn’t have to be in that week, but don’t wait until the very end because it’s no longer a discussion. It has to be intelligent, substantive and have a due date. Thematic units may go over a few weeks so they can go back and forth between questions.”

Respondent D

“If online has a virtue, it is this, if a student is in anyway introverted and doesn’t participate in any meaningful way, quasi autonomous, will blossom in an online class. I have seen the same student in 2 different classes and see the difference. I don’t think there is a credible case that online is better because there is something about human contact. I like people to come meet me and many times they have. I don’t have to come to campus, I don’t have to get dressed up. It is a different kind of work.”

Sub-question Category 3: What do you think would improve the discussion board?**Respondent A**

“I would like to record a lecture then podcast it, including other videos.

Also I would like to have virtual office hours.”

Respondent B

Respondent B did not have a response to this question.

Respondent C

“I would like to use Skype and Wimba, I would like to see their faces. I am an advocate of asynchronous, level the playing field so everyone gets the most out of the class. Students have said that they were afraid to take an online class but they said it went well. I would suggest that there should be more standardization. Not that every course should be the same, but there should be a way of organizing things that work best then students will understand and know what to expect – we are all over the map. On the other hand, some online schools are too restrictive. Instructions must be clear in as most detail as possible, keep them busy, smaller to

bigger and give them feedback, and grades so they know how they are doing well before the drop period. Too much work too early, some will never catch up. The goal is to teach them.”

Respondent D

“I’m sure as one gets more sophisticated, there are a number of things that can be done, like have video conferencing lectures. An advantage is that there is no set time – I can see setting a time when everyone comes on at the same time and you can simulate a live classroom. You undercut the virtue of an asynchronous class where there is no concept of a set time, however, meeting live there is an enriched value to doing it that way. It might be that we want to build in, or to mandate, encourage people to build that in – I don’t think it’s a bad thing. Open hours do not work, students will not come online optionally. Putting that component in will strengthen the course.”

Chapter V

DISCUSSION

This chapter gives an overview of the study, highlighting its purpose, the research questions, and the methodology used to conduct the study, and analysis of the findings. Following the discussion of the study findings are implications and recommendations for practice and research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the significance of this study.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if social presence is evident, as perceived by faculty who teach online, how do faculty promote it in discussion boards, the challenges they face, and what seems to work best. The theory of social presence as a conceptual framework was used in this research. The survey was adapted from a Gunawardena and Zittle (1997) survey that measured social presence as a predictor of students' satisfaction in a computer-mediated conferencing environment. The survey was modified to reflect the faculty's perception of social presence in the discussion board. The research questions and sub-questions were as follows:

How do faculty promote social presence which is comprised of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy, within a discussion board?" was presented with three subsequent research questions:

- How do faculty promote the indicators of interactivity (between learner and instructor; learner and learner; and learner and content) within the context of a discussion board?
- How do faculty promote the indicators of intimacy (trust, personalized communication, self-disclosure, association/familiarity) within the context of the discussion board?
- How do faculty promote the indicators of immediacy (individualized feedback, personalized exchanges, use of inclusive language, concern for others) within the context of a discussion board?

What are faculty doing within the asynchronous discussion board to meet the challenges and limitations of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy?

- What are the challenges and limitations in the discussion board for the three indicators of interactivity, intimacy and immediacy?
- What are the challenges of transferring the indicators of interactivity, intimacy and immediacy from the face-to-face classroom to the discussion board?
- What teaching strategies work best in the discussion board to promote the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy?

The interview questions focused on the following questions:

What are the current challenges for you in the discussion board?

What are your current best practices?

What do you think would improve the discussion board?

Respondents were e-mailed a set of open-ended research questions. After all the data was collected, respondents were emailed all the combined responses to read and then

were given the same questions to either change or add to their responses. None of the respondents changed or elaborated on their responses. The second set of questions was then e-mailed to the respondents, asking how they were using the discussion board to meet the challenges and limitations of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy, and best practices. Finally, 4 of the 11 respondents participated in face-to-face interviews.

Results

A discussion of the findings of the study is presented for the three constructs of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy which encompass social presence. The study focused on the discussion board and how the faculty constructed social presence, the challenges they encountered, and best practices.

Researchers (Collins and Murphy, 1997; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997) have suggested that social presence is the degree to which learners perceive each other as real within the context of their mediated communication. If a high degree of social presence exists then high degrees of intimacy, immediacy, and interactivity also exist (Gunawardens & Zittle, 1997; Hackman & Walker, 1990).

Interactivity

Interactivity is an attribute of the technology systems used in distance education (Wagner, 1993). Communication is essential in the learning process, especially in distance learning environments (Moore and Kearsley, 1996).

All of the respondents claimed to be comfortable using the discussion board and included it in grade calculations and some used rubrics for grading. The respondents also placed a high importance on discussion board interaction; however, only 3 of the 11

respondents communicated with students daily. The frequency with which other respondents communicated with students ranged from 48 hours to weekly.

The second round of questionnaires confirmed that the respondents saw interaction as central to learning, but most of the interaction in the discussion board was among students. Faculty communicated with students mainly through e-mail or through announcements on the discussion board. One respondent said that he or she participated in the discussion board with students by responding to every post. One respondent claimed that too much participation was an impediment to student participation. The respondents appeared to make an extra effort to include students who are not engaged; privately contacting students that have personal issues and respecting their privacy. There is apparently more communication in an online class than in a face-to-face class that meets once or twice a week.

The face-to-face interviews revealed that the respondents have discovered ways to maintain communication with students without showing a strong presence in the discussion board. They communicated with students through personal emails, announcements to the entire class after the discussion board ended, and by attaching comments to grades. There was disparity among the responses, however, about how often to communicate with students. The range was from 24 hours to weekly. This is an area for further study for best practices.

In this study, I conclude that there is substantial interactivity in the online courses of the respondents as, Gunawardena and Zittle (1997) Wagner (1997) and Moore and Kearsley (1996) suggest is essential to the learning process.

Intimacy

Wolcott (1994) stated that, “The key to group identity and cohesion is to establish and maintain a rapport between teacher and students, and among the students themselves” (p.147). Wolcott (1994), defines *rapport* as “A function of the perceived closeness among participants, it increases as the perception of closeness (that is, less perceived interpersonal distance), there is more intimacy between individuals” (p. 24).

The respondents were in agreement that personal introductions are important. Most of the respondents appear to form impressions of their students within the first few weeks of class. This is done through reading their postings in the discussion board and getting to know them through the use of their language, sensitivity to sharing information about themselves, and taking note of how engaged they are. Some of the respondents communicate extensively with each student in order to establish trust. Topics of a personal nature are sent to the teacher privately. In forming an online community, faculty provide social areas, a discussion board area for introductions, rules of acceptable conduct, and expect students to respond to other’s postings. Students who already know each other often tend to communicate more. The faculty members do not disclose details of their personal lives with the entire class so as to keep the course professional. They saw a fine line between too much and too little. However, without sharing some information, students may perceive the teacher as “not real” (Short, Williams, and Christie, 1976).

I conclude that there may not be enough intimacy in the online courses to substantiate social presence and this is an area for further study for best practices.

Immediacy

The cognitive theory of constructivism encourages student-centered learning through the use of self-discovery, exploration, and authentic collaborative projects (Stokes, 2005). Although there is research that purports the constructivist approach produces more learning, there is some evidence however, that faculty cannot incorporate instructional technology into their teaching (Twigg, 2003; Willis & Cifuentes, 2002). This statement may have been true in the 2002/2003 academic year; however, when this study was conducted in 2011, faculty seemed to have begun making changes to their teaching methods in the online classroom, especially in terms of interactivity. While some faculty may not be using technology to its full potential, one respondent stated that video conferencing works better than asynchronous discussions. The literature posits that immediacy is an important factor in student satisfaction. Communication between two or more people, seeing or hearing the other person gives the impression that the person is “real” (Collins & Murphy, 1997, Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997), thus closing psychological distance (Wolcott, 1996) and minimizing the feeling of isolation (Mehrabian, 1969; Wiener & Mehrabian, 1968).

Faculty in this study place high importance on communication by providing timely feedback and incorporating emoticons. They carefully choose casual language to close the transactional distance and encourage participation by using grading rubrics in the discussion boards. They avoid the use of sarcasm or jokes because they can be misinterpreted without visual body language. Faculty provide negative or constructive feedback privately by placing it between positive comments. Providing timely feedback to all students had a wide range of responses, from undefined regular intervals, within 24

hours to weekly. I have concluded that although faculty are diligently providing timely feedback, the challenge that cannot be overcome in text-based communication is a person's body language in order to produce the feeling of being "real", as the literature suggests.

Challenges

While the respondents place substantial importance on communicating in the discussion board, sometimes students are not taking full advantage of the discussion board. Finding ways to engage students in their learning seems to also be a challenge. Respondents noted that students respond only superficially to questions, and some students wait until the end of the week to respond. The students that do not respond at all are typically undergraduates.

The lack of visible social cues is a problem for immediacy. Three respondents mentioned immediacy as a challenge in an online text-based course. The respondents claimed that the lack of body language cannot be overcome in text. One respondent stated that the problem could be solved by new technologies that will stream video of the instructor, podcasts, and incorporate their voices into content.

Intimacy is an area that needs further exploration. After analyzing the responses, I determined that the respondents seem not to have understood the questions about intimacy and may have used their own definition not the one provided to them.

Strategies That Work Best

The online discussion board differs from the face-to-face setting by replacing interaction with text. This dynamic makes it more difficult for the professor to display

immediacy behaviors. Strategies that provide immediacy behaviors provide positive and constructive feedback, a space for personal introductions, ways to contact the teacher, and the opportunity to respond to students within 48 hours. Some professors are starting to use pre-recorded audio feedback and webcams. To ensure interactivity, professors use grading rubrics in the discussion board, and they require student-to-student interaction. A strategy for providing intimacy was an online open door policy meaning that the instructor is approachable with any issues students may have.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

Faculty found social presence to be an important factor in online learning. Some faculty have incorporated video conferencing, audio PowerPoints, and podcasting in order to provide immediacy factors in their course. Faculty are finding ways to overcome the limitations of the online text-based discussion board by providing visual cues either synchronously or asynchronously. This may be accomplished with the use of webcams, or pre-recorded videos of demonstrations. Other teaching methods might enhance the other elements of social presence such as video conferencing to improve immediacy.

Several new technologies can enhance social presence in the online classroom. Some of these technologies are, Live Scribe Pen-casts, podcasts of PowerPoint presentations with the instructor's voice over, pre-recorded introduction video of the instructor, live meetings with Adobe Connect. Mobile tablet computers, such as the iPad are recently entering the arena. These teaching strategies could enhance the learning experience and close the psychological and transactional distance, as defined by Wolcott (1996) and Moore (1973), and lessen the students' feelings of isolation, as Mehrabian (1969) and Wiener and Mehrabian (1968) suggest.

Interactivity was also important to most of the respondents; however, the outliers were on both ends of the continuum. One respondent communicates with students daily, the other outlier communicates with students weekly. The rest of the group of respondents communicates with students within 24 to 48 hours. All the respondents required students to communicate with each other.

Of the three indicators, intimacy seemed to be the most elusive. In the educational setting, intimacy means the feeling of closeness, caring, and trust. There is literature written about immediacy (incorporating new technologies), as well as interactivity (how often to communicate); however, there is a small body of research that explores the delicate balance of too little or too much intimacy in the classroom. Pryal (2010), examined intimacy in the university classrooms, especially in the context of gender, sex, and sexuality. She suggests that professors and students constantly battle the intimacy that arises in pedagogical relationships, especially non-White, heterosexual male teachers

Given the lack of responses for the intimacy discussions in this study, I suggest that professors continue to stay behind a wall they figuratively place between themselves and students, probably due to publicized allegations of sexual harassment. Intimacy in pedagogy is often an acknowledged goal among educators. It seems that some intimacy in pedagogy is acceptable, even beneficial, but other kinds are unacceptable, if not criminal. I suggest that figuring out the legal space between these relationships is complicated, and educators are unsure of the line they are told not to cross. Much of the education for professors in the area intimacy comes from the human resources department requiring the attendance in workshops on what not to do, and more recently Title IX on sexual harassment.

Theoretical Significance

The study was based on the concept of social presence that was introduced by Short, Williams, and Christie (1976). Later, some researchers have suggested (Collins and Murphy, 1997; Gunawardena and Zittle, 1997) that Short et al. implied that social presence to mean the degree to which learners perceived each other as “real” within the context of their mediated communication. The constructs of intimacy, immediacy, and interactivity were shown to have a mutual relationship with social presence. A high degree of social presence coexists with high degrees of intimacy, immediacy, and interactivity (Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Hackman & Walker, 1990). Theories of psychological and transactional distance re-emerged in the context of distance education; students felt isolated when the teacher failed to create a learning community . These theories seemed to make sense in the context of social presence.

This study found the presence of interactivity, less immediacy, and little intimacy. Intimacy was defined as a sense of connection one feels in a close relationship. The depth of self-disclosure between individuals determines the level of intimacy. The findings raise other questions. Does this mean online learning can provide affective and cognitive learning even with less immediacy and the absence of intimacy? Do faculty members understand what intimacy means in the classroom? How much intimacy is too much? Is intimacy really necessary to maintain social presence?

This study should also be significant to future researchers who will conduct the study with a larger sample size to gather more information about best practices, especially in the area of intimacy. Trainers who teach faculty to teach online should find this study important because it uncovers factors about social presence in the online classroom. The

trainers may think about incorporating sessions that address the three constructs. Trainers should focus on teaching the teachers how to facilitate an online course that requires more interaction amongst students. Saba and Shearer (1994) found that when instructors were excessively involved in the online learning environment, transactional distance actually increased and learning decreased because the students felt that the course was too rigid.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following areas are advocated for future research that will study social presence in the online classroom.

1. A study needs to be replicated with a larger number of participants.
2. An area for further research is to see if there is a difference between males and females for any of the three indicators of interactivity, intimacy and immediacy.
3. A study should compare technical proficiencies of the sample group.
4. A study should compare any formal training received for teaching online.
5. A study should consider the number of courses taught per semester that may cause overload.

In conclusion, instructors and students are no longer limited to text interaction. Instructors need to close the psychological distance (feeling of geographical separateness) and transactional distance (feeling of disconnectedness) by incorporating new and exciting technologies that promotes interaction among students, and improve teacher immediacy through a live web cam. Closing the transactional distance with increased intimacy (trust, concern and closeness of learners and instructor) needs to also be

promoted while building a constructivist environment of collaboration with lively exchange in an online learning environment.

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Appendix A

Written Response Questionnaire

Written Response Questionnaire

Total number of times you have taught a college course online _____

Academic discipline of courses taught online: _____

Clarification Note: (1-14 are Theory Questions) Open Ended # (OE), Indicator (I)

Questions specifically address the discussion board.

(Interactivity) OE1, Ia

1. Describe your comfortable level conversing with your students in the discussion board.

(Interactivity) OE1, Ic

2. How do you facilitate the discussions on the content of the course?

(Interactivity) OE1, Ib

3. How do you facilitate the discussions between students in the course?

(Interactivity) OE1, Ia

4. Describe the importance you place on communication in the discussion board.

(Intimacy) OE2, Ie

5. Describe how you are able to form distinct individual impressions of some course participants in the discussion board.

(Intimacy) OE2, Ib

6. Describe your communication with individual students.

(Intimacy) OE2, Ia

7. How do you foster a feeling of trust in the discussion board?

(Intimacy) OE2, Id

8. How do you foster a feeling of an online community?
(Intimacy) OE2, Ic
9. How do you get to know your students in the discussion board?
(Immediacy) OE2, Id
10. Describe how you provide positive feedback in the discussion board.
(Immediacy) OE2, Ie
11. Describe how you provide negative or constructive feedback in the discussion board.
(Immediacy) OE2, Ic
12. Describe how you show concern for your students in the discussion board.
(Immediacy) OE2, Ib
13. Describe how you provide feedback to the group as a whole in the discussion board.
(Immediacy) OE2, Ia
14. Describe how you would provide timely feedback to your students in the discussion board.

Appendix B
Interview Questions

Interview Questions

Questions specifically address transferring social presence from the face-to-face classroom to the online classroom.

1. How would you describe “instructor presence” in a face-to-face classroom?
2. How would you describe “instructor presence” in an online classroom?
3. Describe the challenges of transferring social presence from the face-to-face classroom to the web-based classroom.
4. How do you construct your own presence in the online classroom?
5. What instructional strategies do you use to promote instructor presence in your online course?
6. Describe the teaching strategies that work best.
7. How do you sustain instructor presence in your online course over the duration of the course?
8. What do you think would improve the discussion board? This question was added during the face-to-face interview.

Appendix C

Research Question 1 Data

Research Question 1 Data

Total number of times you have taught a college course online ___(average 21)___

Questions specifically address the discussion board.

1. How comfortable are you conversing with your students in the discussion board?
 - A. Very comfortable- I am aware that other students may read the comments—so I do not make them personal
 - B. I feel totally comfortable doing so.
 - C. I don't really "discuss!" on the discussion board. I use this for students to solve problem questions related to the course content, to link to interactive web sites for student activities or expand on the concepts under study. Each student inserts their own "discussion" of the topic or problem under study. If there is a serious error that needs to be addressed, I email that student directly from the Discussion Board and they can reply to it. I am very comfortable with all electronic communication with my students.
 - D. I am fairly comfortable conversing with students in the discussion board; in addition to the forums that I create, I typically will set up a "Questions for the Professor" forum which students are strongly encouraged to use. I find, however, that many students usually prefer to ask me questions in private via email, and that they often prefer to receive feedback that way, as well. It depends, however, on how the Discussion Board has been set up with respect to the outcomes for class participation, and depending on the

course. For instance, I sometimes like to make it a “free forum” for students to engage the material share their thoughts with each other, and in this case, most of my direct communication will be with them collectively, or via email when I communicate with them individually. On the other hand, where I use the discussion board as a means by which to *deliver*, and not merely discuss critical course content, my involvement is much more hands on.

- E. Having a discussion with students online in the discussion board is very comfortable for me. I do it easily and feel positive about the level of communication in both directions.
- F. I am very comfortable in conversing with both undergraduate and graduate students.
- G. High
- H. Very comfortable
- I. I felt very comfortable but was disappointed by limited responses by students.
- J. Very comfortable
- K. I've always been highly comfortable using discussion boards and use them in most of the classes I teach.

2. How do you facilitate the discussions on the content of the course?

- A. I read comments daily—and note some point or other form of contribution from each student—redirect or refocus if necessary-but do not summarize until after the posting deadline.
- B. I respond to each and every student post, including those they write to one another. I also send announcements as needed, and I write individual emails to students when the matter at hand is appropriate to communicate one-on-one.
- C. The major area for discussion for my online course is WIMBA. Where I can use voice as well as text chat. Prior to WIMA I used the Bb virtual classroom for discussion, but that was unavailable for the semester. These I found to be more valuable than the asynchronous form in the Discussion Board.
- D. To facilitate discussions on the content of the course, I typically set up 18 to 20 discussion forum topics on the discussion board, and I require students to participate in a minimum of one forum per week for a grade of B for class participation; (i.e. a minimum of participation in six forums for an accelerated course, and in 14 forums for a full session course)..

Students are informed participation must be substantive and intelligent - it must show that they are genuinely engaging the material – and that this typically requires at least two paragraphs per response. They are also informed that only those who participate and demonstrate leadership in all the forums will receive a grade of A for class participation.

- E. In the first two weeks, I read each posting and respond to most of the original content presented as well as to some of the replies posted by others in the class. After that, I read each posting but I only intervene when someone is going off track or is sharing incorrect information or would benefit from looking at things from a different perspective. I have a separate discussion board site for Questions for [the teacher], which allows for individual discussion on content.
- F. The first assignment in the course is for the student to post an introduction of themselves in a “Cyber Café.” I as the instructor also post an introduction of myself and it contains background on my professional and personal life and hobbies and interests. The students are required to post the same and to respond to other students as well. Each week several discussion questions are posted which pertain to the particular topic in the text and every student is expected to post their initial response and then respond to at least one other learner. A section is also dedicated for current topics of interest and all students are expected to participate and can initiate a discussion as well. These expectations are outlined the first day of class in the syllabus and in a greeting to the class.
- G. Students are required to participate.
- H. I use the Socratic method whereby one question on one topic raises many questions on many topics.
- I. Usually, the discussion begins with a question that specifically relates to the topic of the chapter or content of that week’s work. It is designed as any

open ended question that will need some thought and integration of materials.

- J. Asking questions each week based on the reading assignments.
- K. I set up specific questions cued to topics I feel need further discussion and on which I want students to really ruminate. I spend a lot of time developing open-ended questions that will inspire students' interest and further the objectives of the course.

3. How do you facilitate the discussions among students in the course?

- A. I comment on what another student has said—say why agree/disagree
- B. I require that they respond to each other's posts, and I try to post questions that lend themselves to discussion and debate.
- C. All participants are required to meet with me once a week, usually a Monday or Tuesday evening between 6:30 and 7:30 pm in WIMBA. In an online course a student can feel lonely! By meeting together, the presence of the other participants helps them to feel "Not Alone"! I ask questions of the students and get multiple responses. If I am late or some are early, they talk among themselves. I also require each student to post a summary of themselves in a Discussion called "Who I am." This way I get to know more about each one and they can get to know each other in the same way.
- D. The discussion forums on the discussion board that facilitate engagement of the course content are also typically used to facilitate discussion between students in the course. I inform students that participation in these forums

in form of replies to other students' comments also counts as participation, that such replies are strongly encouraged, and that such participation is required to demonstrate leadership in the forums, (which is part of what is needed in order to earn a grade of A for class participation). I have never been disappointed with the level of such participation – it usually exceeds course requirements, and strong discussion board communities are formed.

- E. In the first two weeks, I read each posting and respond to most of the original content presented as well as to some of the replies posted by others in the class. After that, I read each posting but I only intervene when someone is going off track or is sharing incorrect information or would benefit from looking at things from a different perspective. I have a separate discussion board site with a name such as Coffee House which is intended to allow students to have discussions on their own about non-content related concerns or to share information with one another. This is a non-facilitated site and I do not respond to comments in this area.
- F. The students are encouraged to think and ask critical questions. An online code of etiquette is also posted in the syllabus under a heading called, “Engaging in the Online Environment.” It is clearly outlined and understood in the first day of class online that the students must initiate discussion among themselves as though they are sitting in a classroom. I explain to them that the same rules apply if you're in a traditional classroom or online.

- G. This is hard to do, but I find that if I reply to a student, and then I ask others to join that conversation, that often helps move things along.
 - H. No need. They end up having discussion on their own without my help.
 - I. In their grading rubric, it is stated that for every discussion, they must respond to at least 3 other students' postings.
 - J. Students are asked to comment on a classmate's post and they can chat in Meet and Greet or the Internet Cafe.
 - K. I require students to post a certain number of times a week, spreading their comments throughout the week. I will tell them "two posts need to happen Sunday to Wednesday and two between Thursday and Saturday." I give them examples of excellent posts and tell them that their posts need to be substantive – indicating not just simple agreement or disagreement but furthering some argument. Points are assigned to posts and discussion boards.
4. Describe the importance you place on communication in the discussion board.
- A. Scale of 1-10—ten being the highest—8
 - B. It's always the primary component of the online course.
 - C. Communication is a key aspect of any teaching and learning in an online course. Discussion Board, WIMBA and email are all very important.
 - D. I place a significant amount of importance on communication in the discussion board. The class participation grade of each student is based on the

student's level and quality of such communication. And typically, the class participation grade comprises of 15-20% of the final grade.

- E. Communication on the discussion is of the utmost importance for online classes. This is the site for building the community aspect of the course. It promotes interaction, mutual learning, and the exploration of diverse concepts. Requiring participation in the discussion board means that each person must be an active part of the class. No one can sit silently and just absorb information or let the others do the active work in class. The discussion board conversations also cultivate integration of material from within the course and between various courses for the participants.
- F. Communication in the discussion board is very important and equates between 30 and 50% of the students grade. Several weekly discussion and or current topics are posted and scholarly responses are expected. An "S" is given to the student if all the discussion questions are answered correctly and all parts are answered. If a student decides to answer only one or two of the three questions then no credit is awarded.
- G. High—most courses I teach have at least a 25% part of the grade attached to the discussion.
- H. It accounts for a good portion of the final grade.
- I. It is a priority. Although on-line classes vary in methodology, I firmly believe that there needs to be continual interaction with students to make sure they are gaining the knowledge and grasping the concepts presented.

- J. Students' grades are based on the discussion board 50% and a paper 50%.
During Intersession the discussion board is worth 100% of a student's grade.
 - K. It is one of the most important aspects of the online class, and allows all students to have their say and work out what they think about critical topics.
5. Describe how you are able to form distinct individual impressions of some course participants in the discussion board.
- A. By the degree and focus of responses to the Discussion Topic—how original—how supported—by assigned readings or personal experience
 - B. It becomes very apparent very early from their posts who is engaged in the course, and who is only marginally so. Oftentimes, the best indicator of this is from the depth and quality of the responses they make not to my questions, but to one another.
 - C. I get to know my students much better in online courses than in classroom based lecture courses. This is true for all the course participants. A [lab] course is different from a lecture type class, as there is a great deal of interaction among the students as well as with the instructor and you really get to know all the students. The interaction with the participants in the discussion board is only part of the whole. From their responses to the problem under discussion you can see and "feel" how the student is thinking. The major understanding come from the follow up email, a one on one experience. Some students are very sensitive about others "reading" their

thoughts, so I allow them the option to email me their discussion. I follow up from there.

- D. Individual personalities and distinctive approaches to the discussion forums become readily apparent once students have participated in the first two or three such forums. I will begin to notice individual styles of writing and communication, as well as patterns regarding how particular students prefer to participate. There are those students, for instance, who prefer to be among the first to participate in a forum. Then there are those who like to wait until about half of the class has already participated, and of course, there are those who like to be among the last to participate. There are also students who like to reply to everyone in the forums, and those who prefer to engage in discussion with only a select few, and usually the same people. I also see connections between the content of students' comments in the discussion forums, and the content of their other written assignments and tests. I evaluate participation in the forums in terms of clarity, precision, thoroughness (quantity), and originality (leadership)
- E. Looking at the timing of various responders, whether they are the first out of the gate or the last to post can give me an initial sense of whether the student is eager or reluctant, an extrovert who responds quickly or someone who needs time to formulate a response. This initial sense is not too reliable, however, since students may be responding according to their schedule availability rather than their interest/personal style dictates. Of much more use in getting to know the students is reading the posts and seeing their general

attitude and background knowledge. Their willingness to dig into additional sources and relate them to the material is important in getting to know them as students. I also get to know them by individual emails, the type of questions they ask in the discussion board for that purpose, and through their assignments, both written and visual.

- F. I usually can tell after the first few weeks or postings from individual students. Some students give short answers or reword other student's postings. Other students will be fully engaged and others may not.
- G. This is difficult, but there are usually three categories—below average (students who simply post that they agree or disagree with the discussion, without adding anything substantial), average (students who make an attempt at a response, even if it isn't a fully formed or informed one), and above average (students who clearly understand the material and the assignment, and respond accordingly).
- H. I look at the quantity and quality of the contributions.
- I. From the feedback and participation, I can formulate their grasp of knowledge, their interest and their willingness to do more than the bare minimum. I also can gain information about the student through their questions, but also from their submission of work on time and in the format requested. Adhering to the time table presented also gives me another viewpoint to look at.
- J. Students are graded on how well they answer the questions. Some students are able to digest the material and respond in their own words, others cannot.

K. You can tell a lot about students from their use of language and patterns of interaction. I feel I get to know those of them that participate properly quite well.

6. Describe your communication with individual students.

A. Goal of my communication with individual students in discussion board:

Respectful and focused language—show that I care—and—can help them learn

B. I email individual students when I feel that their responses completely missed the point of the question, or were otherwise inadequate. Of course I communicate with them in this private way, rather than write to them via the Discussion Board, so as not to embarrass them.

C. Basically it is via email. If the student happens to be at her computer, it becomes a text conversation. However in some cases I actually use the telephone, either land line or cell. In WIMBA we have also held more detailed talks. Since students have to check in some time during an hour period, there are opportunities for more individualized communication.

D. I communicate with students in a variety of ways – exhaustive announcements and instructions, extensive comments when graded assignments or tests are returned to the Digital Dropbox, replies and feedback in the discussion forums, and especially individual emails, especially when it comes to any negative feedback that I have for a student. In my view, such feedback should not be shared publicly, and so I make an effort to make sure that it is

communicated privately. However, positive feedback is often shared both privately and publically, especially when it relates to the discussion board.

E. I typically email each student before class starts to tell them where to find material and to welcome them to class. In the first week of class I have an Introduction discussion board in which each student introduces her/himself. I respond to each person and welcome them to class. If the student is not participating early on, I email the person to encourage participation. About midway through the course, I send each student an email summary of their performance to date and the status of her/his grade so far. When a written or visual assignment is completed, I make comments and send them to the student with the grade earned on that assignment. I have in the past held online open office hours but 10% or less of the class took advantage of that opportunity each time, so I have discontinued the practice. Some students will call me and we will talk on the phone. For two courses, I invited the students to meet me in the first two weeks of class. This could be face-to-face if they lived nearby and wished to come in, or via Skype online (I have a camera if they have the same capability or this can be done without visuals), or by phone. No one chose the Skype option. A number of interviews were conducted by phone and several students came in to see me. I have not repeated this attempt.

F. If a student is struggling with navigating online, then sometimes I will meet with them if possible if not I refer them to the help desk. The first day of class, I make available all the help numbers and contact information the

student may need. Sometimes it is necessary for me to send a private email to the student if there is a problem with their posting or I haven't heard from them or missed a few assignments. Almost all communication is done online. Often I send out a mass email to the students advising them of important dates or events.

- G. It depends on the course. Some students e-mail me off-site quite a bit, and others I never hear from except in the context of the course discussion.
- H. It depends upon the student.
- I. My communication is through the comments I make on the discussion board, through individual e-mails, comments on their graded papers and presentations. I have also used the phone for communication.
- J. I am available seven days a week all day via email. Students can also call me 7:30 am-3pm.
- K. I encourage them to interact with me on the discussion boards, via email individually, and in person as well. Many take advantage of all three.

7. How do you foster a feeling of trust in the discussion board?

- A. By addressing the comments- not the commentator.
- B. I encourage people to be honest in expressing their views, while at the same time I try to be as positive and supportive in my comments regarding individual student's work.
- C. Students who are sensitive about others reading their work are allowed to email their responses. Any corrections to student input is done via email

so the posting student is not corrected in front of others. A faculty member needs to be especially sensitive to a student's privacy concerns.

- D. There are at least a few things that I do to foster a feeling of trust in the discussion board. For one thing, and perhaps most importantly, I make sure that students understand that unlike their work in other assignments and tests, their contributions on the discussion board are not evaluated in terms of the “right” or “wrong” answer, but in terms of their engagement of the material – whether they can show me that they have thought about the critical course content, and have something substantive and intelligent to share with everyone. In other words, I make it clear that I am asking them for their own take on the material, and this usually takes considerable pressure off them – they do not worry as much about providing the “wrong answer.” In conjunction with this approach, I also provide feedback that does not involve evaluating their discussion board contributions according to the “right” or “wrong” answer. Instead, I will invite them to consider other points of view and ideas that they have not incorporated as a way to direct their work, and facilitate more substantive contributions. Finally, and as said in my response to question 6, I make sure that students realize that I only provide largely positive feedback in public, and that my negative feedback is confined to private communications with them.
- E. I am careful in how I respond to students. If I need to redirect them or correct them, I do so in as positive a fashion as possible. I make statements

encouraging the expression of different ideas and beliefs but always with mutual respect and care.

- F. By explaining to them that I am here to help them and not to be afraid of online learning and we were all new once. I have office hours as well either online or in person.
- G. Students are not allowed to post anonymously—any post that is considered inappropriate will be removed (honestly, I've only ever had this happen once).
- H. I treat everyone with respect.
- I. Since most students don't realize that only enrolled students have access I do state this to them. Given the course content of some of the classes that I teach, the content actually talks about building trusting relationships which reinforces that concept of "what is said in class, stays in class" and "respect but you may respectfully disagree."
- J. (not sure what you mean by this question)
- K. I don't think most students are mistrustful of online learning. They have grown up online, so mostly I just stay out of the way. If a problem does arise, I take care of it immediately, removing offensive posts, etc.

8. How do you foster a feeling of an online community?

- A. Mainly by summary comments (after the posting deadline) describing consensus-or why we have different perspectives—or how we all learn by

different points of view—and how we build on each other's experience/perspective/focus.

- B. I make it clear from the outset that I don't want to read any personal or unnecessarily harsh comments directed at anyone, and when necessary I write emails to individual students asking them specifically not to write any more such comments.
- C. The best way I found is to have weekly meetings, online with the whole class. This is usually done in WIMBA, where I can have voice chat. Students with audio problems and participate via text chat. Those students who have class on the required class meeting can go online earlier, before class or work. The whole session is recorded so any one missing can keep up with what is going on with all the students.
- D. I foster a feeling of online community by connecting the students' effort to reply to each other in the forums to the criteria used to evaluate their online participation; this encourages them to communicate with each other. Secondly, I will deliberately acknowledge and make reference to the good or provocative ideas voiced by students in the discussions, identifying these students by name, in my communications with the class as a whole. This provides students with recognition within the group that helps them to get to know each other, and it encourages greater participation among them, and communication between them. Finally, I will always use language that makes it clear that the learning enterprise of the course, and especially the effort to reach learning outcomes is a

collective effort that the class as a whole is striving to accomplish through mutual support and encouragement.

- E. The Coffee House discussion board site allows students to do the kind of talking they would do in the corridor during break or before class in a face-to-face setting. They share ideas on how to get materials, etc., but they also ask for prayers from one another, talk about becoming engaged, getting promoted, moving, or events in their families. Students in my online classes must respond to a minimum number of each other's postings and they are encouraged to build on each other's work not just to agree or disagree. One very useful tool which I use online is to divide the whole class into small groups for various projects or discussions. I give each group a name related to the course content and this promotes their small group identity. They develop camaraderie with those with whom they work in these smaller groups.
- F. One of the major points is that online classes are the same as the traditional classes except the only major difference is that online classes are convenient. Students generally have a week to post their work and I am in the course room daily or every other day. I also have a section entitled, "Ask the Instructor." This section is for students to post any question(s) they may have. This forum is open for all to see. Due to the nature of some of the criminal justice classes I teach, I may have a victim of a crime and in that case I encourage them to email me privately and not in an open forum.

- G. The students in some courses have a social area where they can go on-line that is connected to the course. Other times, they do this themselves when they introduce themselves at the beginning of the course (they realize they are taking other courses together, etc.)
- H. By recognizing that everyone has something interesting to say.
- I. In many ways this is difficult. With continuing education students, they seem to be more in touch with the community aspect and they tend to be the ones that engage in discussion more readily. The women's college students are often doing the bare minimum and often rush through the assignments. The women's college student on-line is the most challenging.
- J. This is very difficult and usually comes when students take a few courses together.
- K. Again, this generally happens naturally, because students are used to forming communities in this way. Requiring them to post frequently and substantively ensures that students will become invested. I also make sure each discussion group is neither too large nor too small – eight to twelve students is the perfect size.

9. How do you get to know your students in the discussion board?

- A. Learn about each via direct questions (one-on-one confidential written communication with each student)—and in the Discussion area by the timing of postings/original thoughts/degree of supporting material for a

give comment/perspective—and comments made to other students
(quantity and quality)

- B. I ask each student to briefly identify her/himself in the initial “meet and greet” session of each online course.
- C. By reading their posts.
- D. As stated in my answer to question 5, I become quite familiar with the individual online personalities of the students in the discussion board in a variety of ways. Beyond this, most of the discussion forums that I development require that students strive to relate the course content to their own lives and experiences. In this way, not only do students learn the critical course content better – it becomes more concrete for them – but I learn more about who they are, and where they are coming from in their respective points of view. Finally, in my individual correspondence with students, I will often follow-up on the personal examples that they have provided in their discussions, and this usually leads to learning even more about who they are.
- E. I ask the students to introduce themselves in the first week, much as I frequently do in a face-to-face class. I have email and phone conversations with them and pay attention to their postings.
- F. By either having had them in a traditional class or when they post in the cyber café. As the semester commences you learn a lot from the students as well, their likes and dislikes.

- G. It's very hard—but like the traditional classroom, usually the best and the worst stand out.
- H. By carefully reading what they have to say.
- I. Through reading their responses about the topic and their responses to each other.
- J. Through their responses to classmates' posts and their responses to the questions asked each week.
- K. By reading their posts and responding to them individually as well as on the board, I gain a very strong sense of my students. I am also reading and evaluating other work of theirs of course, too, and that helps.

10. Describe how you provide positive feedback in the discussion board.

- A. By acknowledging insightful comments—Thanking for a rephrasing that helps other understand—or commenting on one student's follow up to another's original post
- B. I do so frequently. I specifically praise students for exceptionally good answers, and very often, at the end of a week's unit, I will mention to the class in general, via an announcement, that I want them to make a special point of reading the posts of particular students whom I name, because their posts were of such excellent caliber.
- C. By using the email option.
- D. I provide positive feedback through both comments to individuals and to the group as a whole, where I will praise both the collective effort, as well

as provide acknowledgement of individual efforts. If I have set up the discussion board to operate as a “free forum” [see my response to question 1], then this feedback is usually provided via class announcements, and by emails to individual students. Otherwise, it is provided on the discussion board itself, but with qualification [I will not make the constructive component of my feedback public]. When I provide positive feedback that also includes constructive feedback, I typically incorporate the “sandwich” and “ABC” methods. The sandwich method involves sandwiching constructive or negative comments between positive comments; in other words, the feedback will begin and end with something positive about the student’s work, and any negative points are provided between these. In this way, the first and last comments that the student reads are encouraging ones. The ABC method, sometimes known as the “Acknowledge, Broaden, and Conclude” method is similar to the sandwich method, but more specific in its guidelines. The feedback should begin with some positive acknowledgements of the student’s work, these points should be broadened upon with the incorporation of any constructive comments, and then the feedback should be concluded with a reassertion of the acknowledgement.

- E. I take note of particularly insightful comments and comment on them.
- F. There are generally two ways this is accomplished: 1) provide feedback to individual students or two) at the end of the assignment I will address the group as a whole. I generally address the whole class. I often under the

assignment section post a different students work every week as a showcase.

- G. I will be very honest with them in terms of telling them that I thought a post was insightful, or particularly observant, or particularly helpful.
- H. By praising them when they say something interesting even if its controversial.
- I. I sometimes will point out a specific comment made by a student as to its pertinence and insight. Often I will specify the student but other times it will be a general comment.
- J. Through grading. I try to grade their posts each week so they know where they stand.
- K. I don't evaluate the posts on the board itself; I participate in the discussion, but I do provide constructive feedback, negative and positive, individually to students via email.

11. Describe how you provide negative or constructive feedback in the discussion board.

- A. Think the key here is—acknowledging the contribution—find something positive, and describing to how to respond better going forward (in the case of brief comments that just agree with others or repeat what has already been said. If the feedback needs to be very critical—then I send a private e-mail to the student.

- B. I go out of my way to be helpful and not critical. I make a special point of correcting students in as diplomatically worded language as possible.
- C. By using the email option. Some times when the point is missed by a number of students, the whole class is emailed my evaluation of the points or the points are expanded to include what their contribution should have contained.
- D. As I have stated in previous answers, negative or constructive feedback is never given publicly, and by itself, but always in private, and sandwiched between positive feedback. This means that I do not provide it directly in the discussion board, but indirectly; I will refer students to follow-up emails that provide them with “more information.” And as described in the answer to question 10, I use the “sandwich” and “ABC” methods..
- E. With as much tact as possible, I indicate errors of fact and give links to correct information in addition to my own comments. When a discussion is going off track, I encourage the students to continue that part of the discussion in the Coffee House discussion board site and get back to the topic at hand for the current topic.
- F. I usually address it as a group and not individual. I will address issues with individual students in a private email sent to them and not for the class to see.
- G. I try to move students toward something else. I often will pose constructive feedback in the form of a question (but have you thought about?)

- H. By telling them when they are wrong and why.
- I. I try not to give negative comments but use constructive by pointing them in another direction, asking them to look at issues from a different perspective, or to give them scenarios to apply their position and then look at the outcomes and consequences.
- J. Through grading.
- K. I don't evaluate the posts on the board itself; I participate in the discussion, but I do provide constructive feedback, negative and positive, individually to students via email.

12. Describe how you show concern for your students in the discussion board.

- A. By respectful language—acknowledging effort and content--and offering to discuss an issue further- via private e-mail or telephone
- B. I strive always to make sure no one is disengaged from the class discussions. I go out of my way to encourage, typically by private email, students who I think are not completely involved, for one reason or another, to become so. I also will sometimes make a special point of commenting, in a praising way if at all possible, at greater-than-usual length on the posts of such students, in the hope of providing them with the confidence and sense of “belonging” that I think might inspire them to get more involved in the course.
- C. By using the emailing them from their post and expressing my concern. Again you need to respect the students' privacy.

- D. I show concern for my students on the discussion board by providing them with immediate and direct access to me [e.g., through the “Questions for the Professor” forum], where they can voice questions and concerns and receive very timely responses and feedback. I also make certain that I follow-up with students immediately when they are not meeting requirements, or if they are unaccustomed to the online format, and I provide them with specific guidelines and advice for how to improve their work. In addition, I provide regular encouragement and praise to those students who do meet requirements and who demonstrate leadership. And finally, I am also quick to intervene on the discussion board if and when any disagreements arise between students, and/or if civility between students begins to erode. Such occurrences are rare, but they need to be dealt with promptly. In this regard, I find that it is important to be both diplomatic and firm.
- E. On the Introduction discussion board, I welcome each student by name and respond to the information they share and show how their comments connect to the course. I have a site to answer their questions as well. Individual concern beyond these areas is done by email on a one-to-one basis rather than on the discussion board. In the Announcements each week I indicate my impressions of the previous week, highlight positive group performance and encourage students to keep at their work and enhance their participation.

- F. Many times students will post something of a personal nature such as if they were a victim of a non-violent crime. If this happens, I will reach out to the student to see if they want to talk about it or share the experience with the class- their option. I may be able to connect them to someone who can assist them. I often sign posting with “Smiles” or “Big Smiles” or add a personal touch. The biggest concern that we can show to our students is by being there for them and being communicative.
- G. I typically don’t do that in the discussion board—if I have concerns I send them by e-mail.
- H. A lot.
- I. When personal information is revealed, I will address it as appropriate. I often will go out of the discussion board and contact student by e-mail or phone if problems arise that should not be handled in an open forum. If appropriate, discussion about a specific concern can be a teachable moment for all.
- J. All posts are accepted even if they aren’t up to par.
- K. I make sure that students know that they are being heard and that problems are solved immediately. Additionally, I post announcements and lectures that are encouraging and relevant to course topics and that reference the insights of the discussion boards.

13. Describe how you provide feedback to the group as a whole in the discussion board.

- A. By providing expectations on the front end—general “To All” comments in terms of redirecting or refocusing –and summary comments after the posting deadline.
- B. At the end of each weekly unit, I always post some summary comments about the work the class has just completed. I also post announcements at the beginning of the course, and as circumstances warrant throughout the duration of the course.
- C. By using the email option. This ensures all the student "get the message"
- D. When I provide feedback to the group as a whole, I usually do so via public announcements that are also sent out as emails, and as independent or non-reply postings in the forums on the discussion board. Such feedback will typically address matters pertaining to general levels and quality of participation, and encourage continued participation, with reminders of deadlines and participation criteria. I will also acknowledge specific contributions of individual students at regular intervals in these group communications.
- E. Feedback to the whole group is done as part of the announcements. Sometimes I will send an email copy of an announcement which contains feedback to all students.
- F. Often I will highlight a discussion board question and provide feedback to the group within the discussion board.

- G. Typically I don't, although if I am particularly impressed, I'll post an announcement on the front page of the course, telling the students that I think that they are doing a great job of discussing ____.
- H. Through announcements or a general e-mail
- I. Through grading and opening up other discussions as the thread evolves.
- J. I send out or post notes and summaries of the week's readings.
- K. Again, I do this in announcements on the announcements page, or in a lecture, rather than on the board. I tell them what I think is going well or could be corrected. But I don't do this right on the discussion board as I do not want to inhibit students.

14. Describe how you would provide timely feedback to your students in the discussion board.

- A. Goal is --By responding on a daily basis—always within 24-48 hours
- B. I always respond to each student's posts, all of them – no matter how brief their comments might be. I also “join in” with my own remarks about each of their comments to one another.
- C. By using the email option, after I finished reading the posting.
- D. I provide timely feedback according to the following guidelines:
 - I will respond within 24 hours to new content in the “Questions for the Professor Forum” and to any email messages
 - I will respond within 24-48 hours when students do not meet specific requirements by the deadlines.

- I will respond within 72-96 hours after major assignments and tests are due with grades and extensive comments.
 - I respond at regular intervals to class participation, increasing the intervals as the conclusion of the course nears.
- E. Announcements, emails, and/or replying to an individual posting.
- F. Timely feedback generally is after everyone has posted and can be several times a week or once a week after everyone has submitted their work.
- G. I truly have to make myself a schedule as if I am going to a regular class. This past semester, I checked into my on-line courses on Mondays, and sometimes on Thursdays as well, if there was a lot of discussion assigned for that week. But I have to schedule myself or it is easy to let the time go by without getting up there often enough.
- H. Through e-mail.
- I. I set time deadlines for the students and try to keep to the same time deadline by which I respond and grade.
- J. Grading done on a weekly basis.
- K. I don't evaluate the posts on the board itself; I participate in the discussion, but I do provide constructive feedback, negative and positive, individually to students via email.

Appendix D

Research Question 2 Data

Research Question 2 Data

Section Two: Research Question Two: Part One

[1]. What are you doing within the asynchronous discussion board to meet the challenges and limitations of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy?

A: There are a number of things that I'm doing within the asynchronous discussion board to meet the challenges and limitations of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, an immediacy. For instance, where I have included the discussion board as an integral component of course content delivery, I quickly make sure that every student is aware that I am reading their discussion board comments, and that I am, and will continue to be, an active participant in the discussions. In this regard, I make my presence known at the outset by directly and substantively responding to all of the posts during the first week, and to at least one-third to one-half of the posts for each week thereafter. And I carefully track my own participation, in addition to that of students, making certain that each and every student in the course is replied to by me at regular intervals. To enhance such interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy, I will also, on occasion, post personalized audio responses to students on the discussion board, or links to existing audio lectures for the course.

B: Interactivity: There is actually more interactivity between individual students and instructor in many online courses. There is no opportunity for an individual student to sink down in the chair and remain unengaged in the conversation if she/he is to pass an online course. Everyone must respond to the questions I pose and to others in the discussion board conversations within a one-week period of

time for each topic. Limiting the time line for responses helps to insure that the comments are part of a dialogue with another person and not just answers to questions on a page.

Intimacy: The initial week of an online course includes a discussion board for self- introductions. I frame this in a way that connects to the course content. In addition, a separate site for interpersonal sharing outside of the course context is on a distinct discussion board in which students can share openly about their own needs or concerns. I include information about myself at various points where a personal story will enhance the lecture notes or the discussion board item.

Immediacy: This is one of the areas which is most difficult in online delivery. I do learn much about students in face-to-face classes by their non-verbal gestures and I know they learn much about me by my facial expressions. However, one way I express these elements to online students is by the tone of my comments. I consciously re-read my postings and email comments before sending them to see if they “sound” the way I want them to be “heard.” I will preface a remark with a comment on a seasonal event, the weather, my good wishes for them, etc. and then include the specific message being communicated. I will use encouraging language, even when being critical, so that I motivate the students to move forward and improve. In addition, I check postings and email frequently and respond as soon as possible. Students know that I am paying attention and they feel comfortable knowing they are not alone and that I will get back to them quickly.

- C: I tell the students that they must comment on/react to other students' posted comments. Sometimes I have set up a "debate" kind of question, assigning some students to take one side of the issue and others the other side – and they must engage one another afterward with their respective points-of-view
- D: Immediacy: "voice inflection " Did not know there was a "Voice" component to any Blackboard tool. I would have used it in my online course, if I knew it was there. Since I am the instructor I cannot respond to how the students feel about the " physical and/or psychological closeness between people." I have great feedback when I used the "Virtual Classroom" . Outside of the professional aspect of the course, I have only used it for "Student Introductions" It is great for me. I call the discussion "All about Me." and it gives me, as an instructor, a " psychological closeness" with my students. I would hope they feel the same way.
- Intimacy: I don't find any "chat," text or discussion "Intimate" The whole nature of the web is "open." Email, one on one, This how I meet the challenge. This where I find an Intimate inter action with my students.
- Interaction or Interactivity: "quality and quantity of communication" is excellent in content areas The students usually provide a quality response to the discussion questions and normally don't limit their contributions.
- E: Interactivity: Making myself available more often to students especially new students. I also enter the course room daily or every other day. When class starts, I'm in several times a day and check emails more often than usual in case someone is having connection or navigational issues.

Immediacy: I like to add the word smiles or will type joking if I am. I often use the webcam and record a message.

Intimacy: In all my classes there was always one who needed their hand held for the first few weeks (via the internet of course) and that's fine and by the second or third course, they are more independent.

F: I think that interaction and interactivity is probably the only one of these that can really be changed much. Quantity is key here—if students see an instructor show up regularly and post regularly, they will follow suit. Quality is difficult to manage since students sometimes give shorter answers than they need to, but again, instructor presence can help draw this out.

In the courses that I teach, intimacy is not usually present (nor do I usually want it to be). Sometimes in a college writing course, students will write papers of a personal nature, but I think that the on-line venue often prevents them from doing this since they don't know their classmates very well. Sometimes a group will develop in the course, particularly if the students have seen each other in other courses.

Immediacy is very difficult—I think that it is probably best avoided in terms of not trying to use sarcasm or jokes in the course, because they can (and usually are) misinterpreted. The use of emoticons can help, and a lot of the courses that I teach now have the smileys as an option when you are responding.

G: Use of emoticons and carefully chosen casual language help “close up” distance and encourage intimacy and interactivity. I make sure to establish a context of

casual friendliness while still covering needed content. I respond to students' concerns quickly (usually within 24 hours), but I do not promise them that I will be able to respond immediately, say within an hour or two, and in fact I make sure that I do not "spoil" them by always answering too soon. Thus they know that I am connected to them and available for interaction but not in a "superhuman" super-immediate way.

[2]. What are the challenges of transferring the indicators of interactivity, intimacy and immediacy from the face-to-face classroom to the discussion board?

A: In my view, the primary challenges involve finding ways to translate how these indicators are met from a synchronous learning format to that of an asynchronous format. In particular, I feel that it is important to ensure that students receive timely feedback when they require it, and that they continue to have direct and readily available access to the instructor's own explanation of the critical course content. An additional challenge involves ensuring fairness in the asynchronous environment when it comes to providing each student with equal access to the critical course content, and most importantly, equal opportunity to succeed in the course by receiving the support that they need from the instructor.

B: For all of these indicators, being bodily present is a great advantage. For immediacy, you just smile, you don't have to remember to let the student know in words that you are pleased or in a generally good mood. Also, since you are together the interaction is immediate. Online, one has to consciously respond and find ways to respond in a timely manner while the concern is still fresh in the

student's experience. Intimacy is similar between student and instructor in online and face-to-face classes. I reveal what I would reveal to students fairly equally in either setting. Interactivity is heightened in online courses because of the necessity for each student to respond. Making sure that I get back to them as needed is important as is developing their skills in interacting with one another in written words of substance rather than in poorly thought through comments.

- C: They are very obvious: one does not actually see and interact with personally with the students enrolled in one's online courses. To some extent, the challenges this poses cannot be overcome – given the way online courses are now conducted - to the point where one could plausibly claim that there is “no difference” between online courses and in-class courses. Eventually, perhaps we will have full videoconferencing capabilities for online courses, and that would go a long way to eliminating the difference between online and in-class dynamics. On the other hand, videoconferencing would require that everyone enrolled in the class “meet” at the same time, thus removing one of the key advantages – from the students' standpoint -of online courses. As it is now, the professor in an online class needs to keep in regular contact with the students on an individual basis, through emails and phone calls and – if feasible – in-person meetings in the professor's on-campus office.
- D: Lack of body language. inability to read facial expressions and pick up clues that usually say more than words.

- E: Some of the challenges are determined by the course evaluation which will enable the professor adjust to the challenges and or needs of his/her students. The same comments I would make in my f2f class, I make in the online environment
- F: I don't think that immediacy is transferrable. Intimacy has to be worked on very hard if you are trying to make personal connections with students, but I find that a lot of them do not expect that. Their ideas of intimacy are typically lowered in the on-line environment. Interaction has to also be worked at, but I think that it is probably the most transferrable of all the factors listed. Simple frequency of contact can help with this.
- G: I do not necessarily think of these indicators as being "transferred" to the online sphere but that they must be created there anew. I am creating, or rather, the class and I are creating together what it means to be intimate or interactive online. This is the challenge -- and the fun -- and the art of it. It means disclosing certain intimacies, but carefully and gradually, and never crossing the line into too much intimacy, which is easy to do. It means providing constructive criticism and feedback, but sensitively, with every word chosen thoughtfully. This is another reason not to respond too quickly to students' work: when interacting via the written word, one must weigh those words extremely carefully and use them judiciously, even gently.

[3]. What teaching strategies work best in the discussion board to promote the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy?

A: The teaching strategies that I think work best are the ones that facilitate greater engagement by students of the critical course content. Specifically, regular and consistent feedback that is both positive and constructive is key. In my direct responses to students' postings, I will always make a point of emphasizing what I see as the strengths of their contributions, but in the process, I will also convey to them where I think that they can improve. In this regard, I find that the "sandwich" method of feedback is very effective -- i.e., the method of formulating replies so that constructive criticism is sandwiched between positive remarks. I will also often ask a lot of open-ended questions to keep discussion moving forward, and to keep students thinking about the most important topics and issues addressed in the course.

B: **Interactivity:** Rubrics which require minimum quantity and quality of postings on discussion boards within a limited period of time. Frequent encouragement of students to post deeper, more substantial remarks, and to connect what they say to outside resources which broaden the overall conversation. **Intimacy:** Forums to encourage personal introductions and forums to encourage non-course-related interpersonal conversations. Affirmative personal responses to student self-introductions. Email responses to particular student situations/concerns.

Immediacy: Quick responses (at the latest within 48 hours). Opportunities for students to contact instructor in more than one way in a large window of available time, e.g., email, discussion board, phone, Skype, etc.

C: I have to say that probably the best strategy is to require that students comment on and react to one another's posts; this ensures the kind of interactivity that one gets in a traditional classroom setting

D: The best teaching strategy, for me is my "All about Me.," The student is presenting information about themselves in a way you can usually pick up emotional clues. My subject matter lends itself to more content and factual discussions, rather than ideas or feelings.

E: I utilize Cyber Café where students and faculty introduce themselves and tell about their educational goals and work experiences, etc.

Ask the Instructor is another thread I use which helps all the students when someone asks a question- it is for all to view and respond.

F: Interactivity—like I said, I think that avoiding things like sarcasm help to promote healthy interactivity. Intimacy really depends on the student—some want greater intimacy than others in the on-line environment, but many times they do not seem to want much sense of the instructor beyond feedback on their assignments. I think that immediacy has to be promoted through instructor presence. Teachers also have to work to ask questions to help draw students out if they are not posting complex responses. They can also point out good responses and hope that other students get the hint!

G: I find it important not to respond immediately or too often or too heavily-handed on the discussion board: to keep things light. There is a place to be more serious in the online lecture. But one must be firm and fair and keep things on track: this requires constant vigilance over the board. The teacher must not shut down

discussion, but cannot permit an environment in which “anything goes” either. Modeling appropriate content and processes for posting can be done during the first week of the class in a “practice” discussion board, which doesn’t “count” but gives everyone an idea of the expectations and practices of that particular class and instructor. I also find it indispensable to assign points quantitatively for appropriate type and amount of posts and give qualitative feedback regarding posts so as to subtly shape the discussion board. This feedback is given individually, off-board, via email.

Appendix E
Research Question 2 Part 2 Data

Section Two: Research Question Two: Part Two

Research question two “What are faculty doing within the asynchronous discussion board to meet the challenges and limitations of the indicators of interactivity, intimacy, and immediacy?”

Four of the participants agreed to follow-up interviews. The interviews were face to face, conducted in the participants’ workspace, and recorded. I transcribed the interviews verbatim and they are presented below. Three questions guided the interviews: What are your current challenges in the discussion board? What are your current best practices? What do you think would improve the discussion board?

Respondent A

Teacher to students – post weekly announcements and include a personal announcement to the whole group.

Issue progress reports individually several times per semester.

First week, respond to everyone then trail off.

For students in danger of dropping out, I contact students via phone interviews and/or face to face if possible.

Let students know before taking an online course that they need self-discipline and that it will “feel” like more work. Break down the time for them...Class time is discussion board 2 or 3 times per week, the rest is reading and homework.

Student to content – I include digital audio and PowerPoint with audio.

There are two challenges that I see in every online course. First, it is difficult to get students to respond in a deeper level to the content and to each other. I have to keep pushing them to do this. Second, there are what I call “end of week students”; the ones that post after everyone else. I often have to reach out to them to keep up, and they usually get lower grades.

I would like to record a lecture then podcast it, including other videos.

Also I would like to have virtual office hours.

Respondent B

I post several questions every week, their responses are scholarly, there’s substance, they use citations from the book, and other sources, and they have a dialog with other students.

Citations are required; questions are from the book or other resources.

Respond to other learners, and then I monitor the communication

I have to sometimes send out reminders

Grading – satisfactory or unsatisfactory - unsatisfactory didn’t answer the question, wrong answer or not sufficient.

More of the undergrads have missing assignments. And varies from course to course.

Research class is different hard for them to respond to other learners.

More success with grads, their work is more scholarly.

How-tos not available for students....small videos online for students needed

I use Skype and a webcam for out of state – students don’t use the webcam on their end.

Audio will work though. They seemed to like it – they feel more connected once they see and hear me.

I give some personal information about my kids or grandkids – I do this to make them feel more comfortable. I joke with them; I use the emoticons so they know I'm joking. I also invite them to drop by if they are in the area. They drop in every 3rd or 4th week. I also invite them to attend events at our school.

Feedback – I give weekly feedback to individuals and to the group. Feedback for week 1...I may mention a particular student who said something important, like showcasing – I highlight one or two students weekly. It is difficult to answer every student in the discussion board.

When I was a student online – it was most difficult to answer other students, student-to-student.

I tell students that it is not technically difficult to do online. It is convenient to do their work when they are free. They have to be focused and disciplined to do the work. I tell them to organize folders in their computer. I give them the instructions in an email. I also offer the helpdesk number too.

The evaluations of the courses are good. Online has helped many of them, opened up opportunity.

I just wrote to a student who is dropping a course – sometimes students don't respond.

I won't assign new work but they need to check their course every 48 hours.

Instructors need to attend the workshops.

Respondent C

Because of the interview and questions, I have thought more about communication and trying new ways. After reading the first round I saw that other teachers are doing other things. Univ of Phoenix said never to respond to every student every time.

Letting students to free form wrestling with the question, I would let them alone and give my thoughts in the question. I tell them that the only time I get involved if there are obscenities or incivility. I leave them alone publicly. Privately I may ask someone to expand or you may have hurt someone's feelings. I was always impressed with how the whole discussion would blossom. I felt left out, and isolated. The students would say how much they loved the discussion. But I was not a part of it.

Then I tried to respond to one person for one response every week. Used the sandwich method, here's what you say well, could have been done another way, and then end with a positive comment. I didn't find it burdensome, but the discussions didn't blossom like the other way. They seemed to be waiting to see what I was going to say. The responses seemed to go down 40-50%. They didn't seem to be as free.

Then I tried to answer every post, I did it for half of the semester. It was so hard to manage. I was clearly taking over, correcting every mistake, praising everything, totally micro-managing. Then I told them I would back off. I told my chair that I didn't like doing it; they seemed to feel I was evaluating everything and she suggested that I back off. They did pick up tentatively at first. The comfort level seemed to increase. Remarks where instructor was too intense.

I've settled on responding to the group, I wait until 11 out of 15 respond. I summarize all the great ideas that are coming out of the discussion and mold it into what I want them to

get out of the discussion. The students rarely reply to me, that start quoting me in there replies and start responding to each other again and the discussion goes a bit further. There are the last minute students who wait until I respond. I posted the announcement saying that I don't get involved until there are 90% I said I base grades on their leadership and initiating more thoughts. And I noticed a change that where it did pick up. In the syllabi I plot out the schedule for each week, depending on the requirements, usually 2 questions per week. Expectation that they have at least done one, doesn't have to be in that week, but don't wait until the very end because it's no longer a discussion. It has to be intelligent, substantive and have a due date. Thematic units may go over a few weeks so they can go back and forth between questions.

Finding a balance is a limitation.

Emails, audio content lectures, sometimes I (audio) explain something to one student, PowerPoints in the discussion forums. Sometimes a little mistake gets bigger and bigger – I can make a clarification to the group posting, and follow up with a PowerPoint (with audio) timed, to explain the line of reasoning.

I have chatted live with students in yahoo – usually in response to similar emails from a couple of students because of a situation that was happening in the discussion forum. I thought about using chat for office hours.

Potential disadvantage of online is the more technologically advanced students will have an advantage over other students. My concern is that some students will take over, they may feel confused and I don't want to alienate them, have been the majority that is not able to technologically keep up.

I was a student once, taking course online – remember students feeling oppressed so I've been very conscious of that. I can't see them, I can't see their body language – in chat I say stop, does anyone have a question.

I would like to use Skype and Wimba, I would like to see their faces. I am an advocate of asynchronous, level the playing field so everyone gets the most out of the class. Students have said that they were afraid to take an online class but they said it went well.

I would suggest that there should be more standardization. Not that every course should be the same, but there should be a way of organizing things that work well and students will understand and know what to expect – we are all over the map. In Univ. of Phoenix it is too restrictive.

Instructions must be clear in as most detail as possible, keep them busy, smaller to bigger and give them feedback, and grades so they know how they are doing well before the drop period. Too much work too early, some will never catch up. The goal is to teach them.

Joking: sometimes, usually not in the discussion forum. If it is related to the content...occasionally.

Respondent D

One weakness is that one way or another you have to post questions and they respond, what happens frequently, often there are not many takes on a question so the last students can paraphrase and makes it easier for them. To make it individual responses negates the purpose of the discussion board. Phrasing the question on a factual question,

you can ask if you think it is a good thing or bad thing. Just so many times you can rehash a question.

The students are far better in verbal communication than they are in written. The mode of online teaching demands a skill they are not good in.

I don't find that students drop out any more than in a face-to-face class.

Tend to draw polar opposites of students. One has a very busy life, they can compartmentalize their work.

Students think that an online course is an easy course. 7 week or intersession, it is tougher – they think they can get credits for not doing much. It is appealing that they don't have to physically go to the college

The online format is such that there are a certain percentage of students think it's easier and are shocked to find out it is hard.

If online has a virtue, it is this, if a student is in anyway introverted and doesn't participate in any meaningful way, quasi autonomous, will blossom in an online class. I have seen the same student in 2 different classes and see the difference. I don't think there is a credible case that online is better because there is something about human contact. I'm sure as one gets more sophisticated, there are a number of things that can be done, like have video conferencing lectures.

An advantage is that there is no set time – I can see setting a time when everyone comes on at the same time and you can simulate a live classroom. You undercut the virtue of an asynchronous class where there is no concept of a set time; however, meeting live there is an enriched value to doing it that way.

It might be that we want to build in, or to mandate, encourage people to build that in – I don't think it's a bad thing. Open hours do not work; students will not come online optionally. Putting that component in will strengthen the course. Pre-recorded materials, the technology must be such that you can start and stop it.

Sometimes there is a student that may be condescending to other students that I have to reach out to.

Joking – no, because I cannot see the person's face, in this mode it can be mistaken for a negative comment.

Faceless, virtually nameless, but God like presence that all the authority that just kinda descend. I like people to come meet me and many times they have. Every now and then someone will say hi, and I don't know the face.

I am totally involved in the discussions. I respond to every post and every reply. I equal every student plus my own, then I make an overall comment. I use stories in the replies, I cannot repeat myself so I have to constantly look for a hook of what the student has written.

In many ways it is more work than the face-to-face classroom. I have to keep coming up with responses to students.

I don't have to come to campus, I don't have to get dressed up. It is a different kind of work...