

# UNDERGRADUATE BUSINESS STUDENTS PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHING PRESENCE IN ONLINE BUSINESS COURSES

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## Abstract

*With the largest portion of online course enrollment being comprised of undergraduate business students, a greater need to understand the impact of Teaching Presence in the online classroom emerged. This case study explored how undergraduate business students perceive Teaching Presence in online business courses, what components of Teaching Presence undergraduate business students find most valuable, and how exemplary Teaching Presence is demonstrated. Research questions were: How do undergraduate business students perceive Teaching Presence in online courses? What Teaching Presence components do undergraduate business students find valuable in online courses? How do exemplary undergraduate online business course faculty demonstrate Teaching Presence in online instruction? Using qualitative research methods, data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, and review of documents and observational data provided by the student-nominated business faculty members. Results expanded the knowledge base of student's perceptions of Teaching Presence in online business courses with an emphasis on course design, facilitation and direct instruction. Additionally, results shaped the Teaching Presence Model Online Business Course Guidelines.*

*Keywords: Teaching presence; Business education; Online education; Higher education; Student perceptions*

Teaching Presence as a theoretical framework serves as a model to explore and understand teaching practices in the areas of design and organization, discourse facilitation and direct instruction. The impact of Teaching Presence has been studied in higher education at the university level, both in terms of its embodiment in practice and its importance to the notion of good teaching (Baker, 2008; Bouras, 2009; Catron, 2012; Feeler, 2012; Tabar-Gaul, 2008). However, studies could not be found on specific instructor attributes and practices of Teaching Presence from the perspective of online undergraduate business students.

Business students are the largest portion of online undergraduate enrollment, with over 25% of total online course enrollment (Clinefelter & Aslanian, 2014), yet there is a lack of understanding in regard to what business students perceive as good teaching in the online learning environment. This is particularly so in the area of Teaching Presence and its components: Design and Organization, Discourse Facilitation and Direct Instruction. A deeper examination of how undergraduate business students perceive Teaching Presence in online courses aids in the development of enhanced instructor practices that can ultimately lead to improved student satisfaction and learning outcomes.

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## **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of this case study was to explore how undergraduate business students perceive Teaching Presence in online business courses, what components of Teaching Presence undergraduate business students find most valuable, and how exemplary Teaching Presence is demonstrated. This study explored the following research questions:

1. How do undergraduate business students perceive Teaching Presence in online courses?
2. What Teaching Presence components (design and organization, discourse facilitation and direct instruction) do undergraduate business students find valuable in online courses?
3. How do exemplary undergraduate online business course faculty demonstrate Teaching Presence in online instruction?

## **Theoretical Framework – Teaching Presence**

The Community of Inquiry Model serves as the larger instructional design model consisting of three emerging components. Together, the three components intersect to develop the educational experience in the online learning environment (Garrison et al., 2000). Teaching Presence is one of the Community of Inquiry Model's three components: Teaching Presence, Social Presence, and Cognitive Presence. These three elements are multidimensional and interdependent (Swan, Garrison, Richardson, 2009). Together, the three components intersect to develop the educational experience.

All aspects of the Community of Inquiry framework are important. However, Teaching Presence was identified as the most significant in the areas of “student’s satisfaction, perceived learning, and sense of community” (Garrison, 2007, p. 67). Teaching Presence precedes and causes social and cognitive presence (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, Archer, 2001; Shea & Bidjerano, 2008). Garrison and Cleveland-Innes (2005) further supported this notion by asserting that Teaching Presence emerges before Social Presence and Cognitive Presence by providing structure through design and organization. Teaching Presence is comprised of three components: (a) Design and Organization: Setting curriculum, designing methods, establishing time parameters, establishing netiquette and utilizing the medium effectively (Anderson, et al., 2001), (b) Discourse Facilitation: Encouraging and prompting student participation, identifying areas agreement, assessing the efficacy of the process, setting a climate for learning, reinforcing student contributions and seeking to reach consensus (Anderson, et al., 2001). Discourse facilitation is essential in the collaborative learning environment (Lobry de Bruyn, 2004), and (c) Direct Instruction: Presenting content and questions, confirming understanding, diagnosing misconceptions, focusing discussions and injecting knowledge (Anderson, et al., 2001).

Several researchers have suggested that Teaching Presence is the most significant component within the Community of Inquiry Framework model (Archibald, 2011; Baker, 2008; Tabar-Gaul, 2008). Baker (2008) found that Teaching Presence was a significant predictor of effective learning, cognition, and motivation. Furthermore, Feeler (2012) found that Teaching Presence influenced active learning, self-direction, and self-teaching.

Previous research suggests that a high level of Teaching Presence is related to student course satisfaction (Bouras, 2009; Catron, 2012) and successful online learning (Tabar-Gaul, 2008), including effective learning, cognition, and motivation (Baker, 2008). Various studies of online Teaching Presence maintained that when greater Teaching Presence was demonstrated, students perceived enhanced learning outcomes (Baker, 2008; Bouras, 2009; Laves, 2010; Tabar-Gaul, 2008). Studies conducted by Swan (2001) and Shea et al., (2003) found that Teaching Presence is directly related to student's reported learning achievement.

### **Background and Role of the Researcher**

The specific research questions were prompted by the researcher's experience working with undergraduate business students enrolled in online courses and teaching online courses at the undergraduate level. The researcher felt that Teaching Presence was a viable issue to explore in order to strengthen the knowledge base regarding quality teaching. A deep desire to determine what signified effective teaching in online courses from the viewpoint of students drove her to explore Teaching Presence.

### **Related Literature**

In order to encourage the development of enhanced instructor practices, understanding quality and good teaching approaches in the online learning environment must be a priority. Teaching Presence as a theoretical framework serves as a model to explore and understand teaching practices in the areas of design and organization, discourse facilitation and direct instruction.

### **Community of Inquiry Model**

Teaching Presence is an integral part of the Community of Inquiry Model. Continued research supports the Community of Inquiry framework as a valuable theoretical tool to further understand causal relationships among Teaching Presence, Social Presence, and Cognitive Presence (Garrison, Cleveland-Innes & Fung, 2010). Various research studies suggested that Teaching Presence is the most significant component within Community of Inquiry Framework model (Archibald, 2011; Baker 2008; Tabar-Gaul, 2008). Teaching Presence is a significant predictor of affective learning, cognition, and motivation (Baker, 2008) and influences students' growth as active learning, self-direction, and

self-teaching (Feeler, 2012). A high perceived level of Teaching Presence had a substantial relationship to student course satisfaction (Alaulamie, 2014; Bouras, 2009; Catron, 2012; Ke, 2010). Additionally, students perceived enhanced learning outcomes when greater Teaching Presence was demonstrated (Baker, 2008; Bouras, 2009; Laves, 2010; Tabar-Gaul, 2008).

Some research suggested that a high level of Teaching Presence is related to student course satisfaction (Alaulamie, 2014; Bouras, 2009; Catron, 2012), successful online learning (Tabar-Gaul, 2008), as well as affective learning, cognition, and motivation (Baker, 2008). Various studies of online Teaching Presence maintain that students perceived enhanced learning outcomes when greater Teaching Presence is demonstrated (Baker, 2008; Bouras, 2009; Laves, 2010; Tabar-Gaul, 2008). Furthermore, Feelers (2012) found that “students perceived themselves as more capable of becoming active and self-directed learners in an environment with strong instructor presence” (p. 168). Students at varying education levels, ranging from undergraduate to graduate students, found Teaching Presence to be important (Archibald, 2011; Catron, 2012; Tabar-Gaul, 2008).

Most studies focused on undergraduate, university-level student populations with varying majors. However, Baker (2008) focused on both graduate and undergraduate students, while Bouras (2009) focused exclusively on graduate level students, and Feeler (2012) focused on community college level students. The studies focused on varying methods, although qualitative research is lacking particularly in the area of detailed student perceptions and specific instructor attributes. None of the studies in the area of Teaching Presence focused solely on undergraduate business students.

### **Design and Organization**

Multiple studies were conducted on effective design and organization attributes (Bouras, 2009; Spiro, 2011). Spiro (2011) stated that “good course design is essential to an online course because it provides students with the necessary support to navigate successfully” (p. 174). Additionally, it is important to have multiple channels for student-instructor communication (Spiro, 2011). Bouras (2009) pointed out that interaction built into the curriculum design through timely feedback and approachability increased the perception of student learning and course satisfaction. Hayden (2014) identified course design as an instructor’s first priority through the organization and selection of course resources. Instructors also pointed to the need to consider and emphasize course composition (Hayden, 2014).

### **Discourse Facilitation**

Research studies regarding the dimension of facilitation within Teaching Presence identified three common themes: overall facilitation abilities of the

instructor, support and guidance in discussion forums, and perceived connection with the course instructor (Hall, 2013; Lave, 2010; Lazarevic, 2011; Ruhlandt, 2010). Tabar-Gaul (2008) further supported the importance of facilitation by suggesting that effective online facilitation through regular interactions with their instructors was very important in students' overall success in a course. Furthermore, Archibald (2011) suggested that instructors should work to facilitate collaboration among their students to ensure meaningful learning in the online classroom.

### **Direct Instruction**

Several research studies supported the importance of Direct Instruction within the Teaching Presence Model (Antonacci, 2011; Bartruff, 2009; Catron, 2012; Laves, 2010; Spiro, 2011). Direct Instruction demonstrates the instructor's authority as a subject matter expert (Spiro, 2011). There are a variety of ways that instructors demonstrate Direct Instruction, such as instructor-led synchronous chat sessions, assignment feedback, and additional resource postings (Laves, 2010; Spiro, 2011). Another Direct Instruction example includes responding to technical concerns (Jinks, 2009). In addition, varying sources of technology can be used for direct instruction, such as videos, podcasts, wikis and Google documents (Laves, 2010).

### **Teaching Presence Scale**

The Teaching Presence Scale was designed to measure Teaching Presence in the areas of Design and Organization, Discourse Facilitation, and Direct Instruction, as well as serve as a common survey instrument to measure learners' sense of Teaching Presence in their online courses (Shea, Li, Swan & Pickett, 2005). The Teaching Presence Scale is a 17-question questionnaire (derived from the Community of Inquiry Framework) that is designed to measure Teaching Presence using six items for Design and Organization, six items for Discourse Facilitation, and five items for Direct Instruction (Shea et al., 2005). This serves as a common survey instrument to measure learners' sense of Teaching Presence in their online courses (Shea et al., 2005, p. 70). Additionally, the Teaching Presence Scale can assist faculty in identifying what drives students and what matters most to them in an online learning environment.

### **Teaching Presence Qualitative Research**

Bouras (2009) identified a need to study teaching pedagogy and successful teaching activities in the area of Teaching Presence through more qualitative research. Tabar-Gaul (2008) suggested additional research on Teaching Presence through exploring strategies that contribute to student success in online classrooms and identifying the most effective online facilitation skills and methods that best equipped the instructor with facilitation proficiency. Spiro (2011) further

supported the need for additional qualitative research on the three components of Teaching Presence, indicating that additional qualitative studies were needed to gain more in-depth data comparing faculty perceptions with student perceptions.

In general, research on Teaching Presence suggested that more qualitative research is needed in order to explore this area more fully and provide more insight into this concept. Several studies used qualitative research as a way to further verify quantitative data (Archibald, 2011; Catron, 2012; Laves, 2010; Lazarevic, 2011; Sprio, 2011; Tabar-Gaul, 2008). Bartruff, (2009), Feeler (2012) and Hayden (2014) conducted studies using qualitative research and emphasized the need for additional studies building upon their findings. Additionally, Baker (2008), Jinks (2009) and Laves (2009) supported the assertion that qualitative data in relation to Teaching Presence is an opportunity to further the research in a productive manner.

## **Methodology**

Qualitative research design was used to explore the research problem and study the particular population (Creswell, 2013). Identifying the problem and seeking to understand was the first step in conducting this qualitative research study. This drove data results with thick description, questioning, and interpretation (Merriam, 2009). Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, and by reviewing documents and observational data provided by the student-nominated business faculty members. Interviews were conducted over the phone, resulting in audio recording. The recordings were uploaded into NVivo 10, transcribed via the TranscribeMe transcription service and returned to NVivo 10 for coding. Documents and observation data were uploaded and stored as Memos in NVivo for review.

## **Research Setting**

The study was conducted at a public four-year university located in the Midwest with 5,820 total students (full-time students 4,284 and part-time students 1,518). The student population was composed of 58% females and 42% males. Additionally, the age demographic as of fall 2014 was: age 24 and younger – 70%; age 25 and above – 30%. At the research location, the typical online course followed a traditional 16-week, semester-long schedule, and the courses were divided into weekly modules. Online sections had a limit of 25 students per section. All online courses used Blackboard Learn as the Learning Management System. The faculty participants taught courses within the Bachelor of Science in Business Administration (BSBA) program. Each faculty member had control over the content of the courses. However, all online classes shared some common features such as Announcements, Course Home, Meet Your Instructor, Student Resources and My Grades. Institutional Research Board approval was obtained before the study began.

## Participants

Participants consisted of 20 business students and 3 student-nominated online business faculty. There were both male and female students, and they were all seeking a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration (BSBA). Student participants consisted of freshman, sophomore, junior and senior students enrolled in at least one online business course during the Fall 2015 semester at the research location. The academic level representation of the student participants was based on proportional sampling guided by enrollment by class standing level. Criteria for student selection was: (a) the student was enrolled in at least one online business course at the research location, (b) the student's enrollment consisted of at least one for-credit three-hour course, and (c) the student was a degree-seeking business student. Purposeful selection was applied to undergraduate business students enrolled in at least one online business course and resulted in three freshmen, three sophomores, six juniors, and eight seniors.

## Faculty Selection Criteria

The 20 student participants interviewed were asked to name business courses and the course faculty that they perceived as demonstrating Teaching Presence in online instruction, based on the three components of Teaching Presence. The researcher compiled a list of the noted courses and faculty. The researcher selected the three most-named faculty and conducted in-depth interviews with the student-nominated exemplary faculty. All faculty interviewed were full-time faculty members, although adjunct faculty members were named several times during the student interviews.

## Data Collection and Analysis

This study used interviews, observations, and documentation in the data collection process. Upon the conclusion of the semi-structured interviews, the interview recordings were transcribed. After being transcribed, the data was entered into a qualitative software program, NVivo 10. The transcript data was verified using member checks for confirming transcription information (Stake, 2005) which confirmed the themes.

Course documents provided by the exemplary faculty were used to help further explore the successful demonstration of Teaching Presence by detailing the activities and actions taken by the identified exemplary faculty. Teaching Evaluations were provided by the exemplary faculty to support the interview data presented. Focusing on student participants' perceptions and student-nominated exemplary faculty practices and viewpoints provided a broad picture.

Additionally, the researcher was granted access to the faculty members' online course Blackboard Learn sites. While access was not allowed to email correspondence or grades, the researcher could view announcements from the instructor, course units, courses syllabi, course lectures, course documents, course



rubrics, course discussion forums, and instructor profiles. For each course, observational data and documentation was screen captured using Snipping Tool and uploaded into NVivo for review.

### **Interview Protocols**

Two interview protocols were developed: (a) student interview protocol, and (b) exemplary faculty interview protocol. Select questions from the Teaching Presence Scale were used in the student and faculty interview protocols and were incorporated for the purpose of guiding the semi-structured interviews. The interviewer's main job during the process included focusing on the specific line of inquiry as determined by the study protocol, presenting the interview questions in a conversational, unbiased manner and collecting unique information and interpretations held by the participant being interviewed (Stake, 2010; Yin, 2011).

### **Observations**

Although interviews were the primary method of data collection, observational data was also recorded. Observation data is used to further triangulate findings and further support interview findings (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, observational data was used to further illustrate specific behaviors within the online learning environment and provide context by sharing firsthand accounts of the student-nominated exemplary courses. Observational data was presented in the form of discussion posts, announcements and recordings provided by the exemplary faculty participants.

### **Documentation**

Documents included faculty documents, pictures and physical objects that related to the research study (Merriam, 2009). Examples of documents were online course content and materials, as well as teaching evaluations provided by the exemplary faculty participants. Documents used were in the form of course content and materials, while observational data was collected in the form of discussion posts, emails, announcements and gradebook comments provided by the faculty participants. A benefit of documents was that they were already produced and were not altered in any way for the research study.

### **Data Coding and Analysis**

Pattern coding developed by Miles & Huberman (2013) was used. This process assisted the researcher in compiling interview and document materials into meaningful and confined units of analysis. This active analysis process paved the way for the development of common themes when the researcher was engaged in the coding process. Additionally, ideas and reactions developed freely throughout the research process, allowing the researcher to observe themes as they progressed (Miles & Huberman, 2013).



### Trustworthiness of the Research

By using multiple forms of data collection researchers are able to gain a broader view and utilize a variety of perspectives (Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2009). One of the most important points noted regarding the use of multiple forms of data is that the researcher can remove a level of bias from the research. Triangulating data from student and student-nominated instructor interviews, course documentation, course observation, and Teaching Evaluations determined the reliability of emergent themes.

### Ethical Considerations

Students and faculty participated in a completely voluntary manner and had the option to be removed from the study at any time. Additionally, they had the option to forego answering questions. The researcher took caution to maintain confidentiality for the students and the faculty participants. All participants were assured that her/his statements would be confidential.

The researcher took precautions to uphold participant confidentiality by emphasizing voluntary participation, housing recordings and transcripts in NVivo and deleting the audio files from the researcher's phone. The researcher's fingerprint was the only fingerprint that could log in to the computer that housed NVivo. These precautions provided sufficient protection for the research subjects.

## Results

Research question one asked, *How do undergraduate business students perceive Teaching Presence in online courses?* Based on the evidence gathered, three themes were identified: Direct Instruction, Discourse Facilitation, and Design and Organization.

### Direct Instruction

*Confirm Understanding* was by far the most important element of the Direct Instruction theme for students when discussing their perceptions of Teaching Presence. The Confirm Understanding element referred to providing explanatory responses in the form of explanation and feedback that assisted student learning. This included direct feedback and addressing student's questions and concerns in order to confirm their understanding. It was found that the confirmation of student understanding was an important aspect of students' perceptions of Teaching Presence for four reasons:

- (a) Students needed to know that their instructor was present and available to answer questions and explain expectations. Students expressed concern and discouragement regarding certain instructors who simply provided course details on the first day of the semester and then only provided limited communication until the final week of the course. There was a clear contrast in instructor availability when

discussing students' perceptions of Teaching Presence and the way instructors accomplished the confirmation of student understanding.

- (b) Instructor reassurance through interaction influenced student perceptions of Teaching Presence. Through student-initiated question responsiveness and student-specific feedback, students felt a greater connection to their instructor. The act of responsiveness reassured students that they were more than a student number in class.
- (c) Instructor-driven communication prompted Teaching Presence. Instructors that encouraged questions and willingly sought out opportunities to reinforce student understanding were frequently mentioned as being exemplary when discussing Teaching Presence. Students valued instructors who demonstrated their availability to address questions by reaching out to students, rather than passively communicating with students in a reactive manner.
- (d) Students valued specific assignment feedback. Authentic learning experiences were fostered through individualized student feedback. Student-nominated exemplary online business course instructors stressed the importance of consistency in student feedback, as well as providing pinpointed areas that students needed to review or correct.

### **Discourse Facilitation**

*Drawing in Participants, Prompting Discussion* was the most important component of the Discourse Facilitation theme. Drawing in Participants, Prompting Discussion was accomplished through instructor involvement and the prompting of student involvement for the purpose of engaging in productive dialog, and was important for two key reasons:

- (a) Teaching Presence was apparent through instructor participation in course discussions and assisted in establishing a positive learning environment. Previous research suggested that effective online facilitation through regular interactions with their instructors was very important in students' overall success in a course (Tabar-Gaul, 2008). They desired authentic learning experiences in the online environment. Typically, in a traditional classroom, the course instructor sets the tone for discussions and actively participates. This should be consistently replicated in online business courses. All three of the student-nominated exemplary online business course instructors were active participants in the discussions provided in their online courses.
- (b) Extra support and guidance was provided by instructors in discussion forums. Students expressed that discussion forums served as an additional opportunity to connect with their course instructors and verify understanding. It was mentioned that instructor involvement in online course discussions assisted in providing student guidance.

## Design and Organization

*Designing Methods* was the most important component of the Design and Organization theme when discussing online business student's perceptions of teaching presence. Designing Methods referred to providing clear instructions regarding the completion of course learning activities. It was found that Designing Methods was important for two key reasons:

- (a) Student perceptions of Teaching Presence were influenced by the level of detail and effectiveness of communication provided by online business course instructors. Designing Methods are based around the delivery of instructions for the completion of course learning activities. One student noted that the instructions tell them what the instructor expects of them. Therefore, adequate detail demonstrated varying levels of instructor presence in online business courses.
- (b) The availability of online video lectures personalized the instruction process and created presence from the students' perspective. This was of particular importance when students were working through complex or difficult business materials. All three of the student-nominated exemplary online business course instructors provided a varying amount of video lectures in their online courses. This further demonstrated the level of importance of video lectures to online business students.

Research question two asked, *What Teaching Presence components (design and organization, discourse facilitation and direct instruction) do undergraduate business students find valuable in online courses?* Based on interview findings from both online business students the conclusions and discussion are presented in the following order: Design and Organization, Discourse Facilitation and Direct Instruction, based on their order of importance to students.

## Design and Organization

Designing Methods and Establishing Time Parameters were the most important components of the Design and Organization theme for students when discussing what components of Teaching Presence that they found most valuable. Designing Methods referred to providing clear instructions regarding the completion of course learning activities. Establishing Time Parameters referred to communicating important due dates and establishing time frames for learning activities that assisted students with keeping pace in a course.

## Designing Methods

It was found that Designing Methods was important for three key reasons:

- (a) Students needed specific learning activity requirement information. Clear and detailed expectations mattered a great deal to students when discussing Teaching Presence. Some students expressed displeasure

at the lack of course requirement information provided in the course syllabus. However, they stressed the need for very clear explanations regarding the requirement expectations through detailed information.

- (b) Video lectures were a valued aspect of Design and Organization. Again, students indicated that online video lectures that provided a clear demonstration of what the instructor expected were an important attribute of Design and Organization.
- (c) Clear expectations stated at the course outset were valued by students. Students valued consistency in learning activity expectations and the clear location of items within their online courses. The act of providing a detailed explanation in written directions and video lectures, coupled with consistent course learning activity arrangement throughout the semester, set exemplary courses apart when discussing design and organization. This was further supported by Catron (2012), who found that clear communication of course topics and communication of course goals was a highly rated element of quality online teaching and learning.

### **Establishing Time Parameters**

It was found that Establishing Time Parameters was important for two key reasons:

- (a) A full course schedule was desired on the first day of the course. Students utilized course calendars as part of their total organizational strategy. Students noted that they referred to the course schedules when they were not logged in to their course in Blackboard Learn. Course schedules served as a valuable supplemental item that students used when they were away from the course, as well.
- (b) Instructor reminders and announcements further established time parameters. Instructors discussed how reminders and announcements played a role in student time management. The use of reminders and announcements, coupled with the information provided in the course schedule, provided an extra layer of consistency and notification for time management purposes.

### **Discourse Facilitation**

Setting Climate for Learning was the most important component of the Discourse Facilitation for Teaching Presence for undergraduate business students. Setting Climate for Learning referred to the encouragement of the exploration of new ideas. It was found that Setting Climate for Learning was important for one key reason: students valued facilitation in the form of instructor encouragement and prompting of exploration. This was accomplished by explaining course materials in a new way, by providing supplemental materials to students, and

by asking students follow-up questions to direct their personal examination of a topic. Students noted that being asked to dig deeper and share more than just their opinion allowed for greater content application.

### **Direct Instruction**

Confirm Understanding was the most important element of the Direct Instruction theme for students when discussing what components of Teaching Presence. The Confirm Understanding element referred to explanation and feedback that assisted student learning. This included direct feedback and addressing students' questions and concerns in order to confirm their understanding. It was found that the confirmation of student understanding was an important aspect of the Direct Instruction theme for two reasons:

- (a) Students wanted a *lifeline* in the form of instructor reassurance in order to know if they were on the right track or not and in order to be able to meet the expectations of the required learning activities. Students wanted to feel that they were not alone in the online environment. Particularly with complex business topics, students searched for reassurance and validation of their academic knowledge. Through question responsiveness and information provided by the instructor that pointed students in the right direction, students felt reassured that their instructor was active in their learning experience and that they were valued for who they were as learners.
- (b) Feedback fostered student understanding. Student-nominated exemplary online business course instructors detailed how the feedback process can empower students to build confidence in order to figure out answers themselves. Additionally, students voiced the need to know how and why they did not fulfill assignment requirements. Productive feedback enhanced understanding, while a lack of feedback caused confusion and discouragement.

Research question three asked, *How do exemplary undergraduate online business course faculty demonstrate Teaching Presence in online instruction?* This question sought to identify how exemplary online business course faculty demonstrated Teaching Presence. Based on interview findings, the conclusions and discussion are in the following order: Design and Organization, Discourse Facilitation and Direct Instruction.

### **Design and Organization**

Establishing Time Parameters and Utilizing the Medium Effectively were the most important components of the Design and Organization theme for faculty interviews when discussing how they demonstrated Teaching Presence. Establishing Time Parameters referred to communicating important due dates and

establishing time frames for learning activities that assisted students with keeping pace in a course, and Utilizing Medium Effectively was accomplished through the effective use of Blackboard Learn. It was found that Establishing Time Parameters was important for one key reason: Exemplary instructors communicated time parameter information frequently and early. The faculty interviewed discussed their continued persistence in assisting students with adequate planning for course deadlines. Student-nominated exemplary online business course instructors provided ample notice of course requirement due dates in order to assist students with time management. Utilizing Medium Effectively was important for one key reason: Teaching presence can be demonstrated through effective use of the medium. The consistency of the course layout in Blackboard Learn played a vital role in demonstrating that the course instructor was deliberate and engaged in the course design and was thoughtful about the student experience.

### **Discourse Facilitation**

Assessing the Efficacy of the Process and Drawing in Participants, Prompting Discussion were the most important components of the Discourse Facilitation theme in the demonstration of Teaching Presence. Assessing the Efficacy of the Process in the Teaching Presence Model refers to the course instructor's assistance in keeping participants on-task in a way that assisted student learning. Drawing in Participants, Prompting Discussion was accomplished through instructor involvement and the prompting of student involvement to engage in productive dialog. Assessing the Efficacy of the Process was important for one key reason: Presenting information in an effective manner assisted students with task management. Instructors are charged with establishing the overall climate for learning within their course (Catron, 2012). Students did not see the behind-the-scenes work that happened in order to achieve efficiency in an online course. However, the student-nominated exemplary online business course instructors understood that they were solely tasked with this action and that their approach prompted or dissuaded students in task completion.

It was found that Drawing in Participants, Prompting Discussion was important for three key reasons:

- (a) Exemplary course instructors understood that some students needed specific directives in order to actively participate. The demonstration of a high level of Teaching Presence involved course engagement. Part of course engagement by the instructor is evaluating what prompts or dissuades participation. In the case of discussions in online business courses, the act of setting specific date requirements for initial discussion posts was viewed as a participation prompt.
- (b) Instructors that demonstrated a high level of teaching presence were thoughtful about discussion development in an effort to prompt engagement. The faculty members that were interviewed placed a

great deal of emphasis on the process of crafting worthwhile discussion questions. Examples included the use of real-life experience or situations, case study scenarios, and discussions that paralleled the material being addressed in the course assignments.

- (c) Instructors that demonstrated a high level of Teaching Presence were deliberate about their own engagement in course discussions. One instructor used the *monkey-see-monkey-do* idiom to describe her stance on participation in course discussion. Additionally, she stressed the importance of showing students that she was active in the course. Student feedback provided on the student-nominated exemplary online business course instructor's Teaching Evaluations focused heavily on instructor interaction and the instructor's expectation of the business students to participate and interact.

### **Direct Instruction**

Confirm Understanding was by far the most important element of the Direct Instruction theme for faculty when discussing the demonstration of Teaching Presence in online business courses. The Confirm Understanding element referred to providing explanatory responses in the form of explanation and feedback that assisted student learning. This included direct feedback and addressing student questions and concerns in order to confirm their understanding. It was found that the confirmation of student understanding was important for one key reason: instructors that demonstrated a high level of Teaching Presence in online business courses provided specific feedback. Students valued feedback that was developed to confirm their understanding and provided detail that enabled students to move forward in a successful manner.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the three themes, the researcher developed Teaching Presence Model Online Business Course Guidelines.

### **Course Guidelines for Design and Organization**

Communication of clear learning activity instructions with consistent course learning activity arrangement should be used throughout the semester. The level of detail and effectiveness of communication provided for course learning activities provided by online business course instructors influenced student's perceptions of Teaching Presence. Instructors should evaluate learning activity instruction frequently through the eyes of the students enrolled in their course.

Provide integrated video lectures that describe course unit requirements and learning activity instructions. Students favored video lectures that addressed and explained course concepts that outlined important course requirements. Lazarevic (2011) noted that the use of video-based communication prompted greater



reception to the instructor's facilitation efforts throughout the course. As a result, video lectures can bring about a stronger impression of instructor Teaching Presence within online business courses.

Distribute a clear, detailed course calendar on the first day of the course. Instructors should also use the course calendar as a guide for announcement communication. Students favored this multi-layered approach in communication when discussing their perceptions of Teaching Presence. The act of providing a detailed course calendar and coupling this resource with reminders and announcements provides students with another form of interaction with the course instructor and establishes known time parameters.

### **Course Guidelines for Discourse Facilitation**

Serve as an active facilitator in online course discussions. Archibald (2011) concluded that the facilitator was essential in the progress of the discussion forums by presenting questions, providing guidance and answers, as well as providing additional resources. Instructors must find ways to let students know that they are active participants by asking questions that drive deeper learning and greater shared meaning that adds value to course discussions.

Develop well-crafted discussion questions that are based on real-life examples, case study scenarios and discussions that parallel the material being addressed in the course assignments. Offer opportunities and avenues for students to discover shared meaning in discussions in order to create an authentic exchange. Utilize a supplementary discussion forum to address questions. Let the discussion forum serve as an additional resource for connection. This creates an increased focus on personalized learning and further addresses students' individual needs (Johnson, Adams, Becker, Cummins, Estrada, Freeman, and Hall, 2016).

Provide specific directives regarding how to participate in course discussions in order to prompt engagement and keep students on task. Catron (2012) found that timely feedback, clear communication of course topics and communication of course goals were the highest rated items when researching the quality of online teaching and learning. Providing specific directives can serve as a way to establish time parameters and communicate course goals.

### **Course Guidelines for Direct Instruction**

Convey a responsive, multifaceted approach to instructor-student interaction. Instructor responsiveness to student communication reassured students that their instructor was active in their learning experience. It is important to have multiple channels for student-instructor communication (Spiro, 2011). Actively prompt student-instructor interaction. Students voiced their gratefulness to instructors that sought out opportunities to reinforce student understanding and encouraged questions to confirm understanding. Bouras (2009) pointed out that instructor approachability increased the perception of student learning and course satisfaction.

Identify and address student comprehension struggles. Misconceptions are identified and understanding is confirmed through direct instruction (Bartruff) 2009. This enhances Teaching Presence by demonstrating that the instructor has a desire to help students and is paying attention to their progress. Offer feedback that guides student understanding of a topic and enables students to move forward in a successful manner.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

Future research is needed to examine how instructor attributes, such as prior online teaching experience, technical background, and communication styles influence Teaching Presence. Knowledge of these attributes could help instructors provide an enhanced online course experience and drive additional instructor training in these areas. In addition, conducting another qualitative study at a different research location to examine how online students in a different environment perceive Teaching Presence would broaden the scope of research.

### **Conclusion**

As universities continue their efforts and ongoing commitment to providing quality distance education offerings to students, results and recommendations presented can be used by instructors and administrators to improve teaching pedagogy, facilitate enhanced online instruction and serve as a guide for developing online business courses. The additional knowledge base on the three components of Teaching Presence (Design and Organization, Discourse Facilitation and Direct Instruction) provided a better understanding of how exemplary Teaching Presence is demonstrated. Finally, the research findings presented shaped the Teaching Presence Model Online Business Course Guidelines for online business course instructors.

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