MERRILLS, J. MARIA SWEENEY, Ph.D. Factors Affecting Nontraditional African American Students' Participation in Online World Literature Classes. (2010) Directed by Dr. Jewell E. Cooper. 175 pp.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how communication preferences, learning preferences, and perceptions about online learning affect nontraditional African American students' participation in online world literature courses at a historically Black university (HBCU) in the southeastern United States. An instrumental case study was the research design used. Data were collected from individual interviews of participants and non-participatory observations of Blackboard course shells and analyzed through content analysis (Babbie, 2003). Chen's Learner-to-Learner Transactional Distance, Learner-to-Content Transactional Distance, and Learner-to-Interface Transactional Distance theory (2001), along with Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance (1996) informed the data analysis. Analysis occurred in two stages. Within-case analysis was used to understand the experiences of online learning with individual participants. Later, a cross-case analysis was used "to build abstractions across cases" (Merriam, 1998, p. 195) as well as to compare participants' experiences to ascertain a grander view of participation of African American nontraditional students in online world literature classes.

The findings of the study explained nontraditional African American student preferences for frequent oral communication among students, preferably face-to-face. In addition, students wished to make oral contact with online instructors; however, they desired to have the instructor to communicate with them via email. In addition, findings

also revealed how African American students could often be overwhelmed with long reading requirements. Their preferences were to have content condensed for learning. They also preferred to have study guides which highlighted key information to which one's focus should be placed. Furthermore, students preferred to work and learn in groups. In order to enhance their enjoyment and participation in the course, participants preferred to make connections with subject matter, topics, and peers. For the most part, participants were drawn to online learning for the convenience, though their learning preferences were not often met in the online learning environment. While many participants found learning to be accessible and convenient through online courses, many of them were frustrated by slow response and feedback by online instructors and technical problems which may have occurred due to lack of savvy with online learning or Blackboard technicalities. Implications for higher education administrators, university professors, and students as related to online learning are provided.

FACTORS AFFECTING NONTRADITIONAL AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS'

PARTICIPATION IN ONLINE WORLD LITERATURE CLASSES

by

J. Maria Sweeney Merrills

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor Of Philosophy

Greensboro
2010

Approved by

Dr. Jewell Cooper_____
Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of

The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair   Dr. Jewell Cooper

Committee Members   Dr. Ceola Ross Baber

Dr. Nora Bird

Dr. Kathleen Casey

October 26, 2010
Date of Acceptance by Committee

October 26, 2010
Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

God, I thank you for giving me the strength to endure and bestowing me with the ability despite all of the hardships and obstacles. When I look back on it all, I know that it was You who was with me through it all

This dissertation is dedicated to all the people that I love. To my husband, Darren, I am truly and richly blessed. Thanks for being a truly supportive husband, helping with the kids without complaint, and believing in me and the process when I did not. To my parents, John and Mary Sweeney, words cannot explain my gratitude for your support and sacrifice to step in with the children, encourage, and listen when I needed it the most. This degree is for both of you. I could never repay your with all of the diamonds in Africa for your loving support. God has truly blessed me with beautiful parents and I am so thankful. To my sister, Dr. Lethia Jackson, thanks for the heads up and sharing your experiences through your doctoral process in order to help me with mine. To my big brother, Tony Sweeney, thanks for being a loving and protective brother. You don't know how much I needed your reminder that the three letters, PhD, will always be a part of the dissertation that gets read, even if the rest is not. To my brother, Noel Sweeney, thank you for all of your giving, help, kind heartedness, and celebration of my efforts. You're a true blessing in my life. To my children, Lydia (age 6), Julian (age 4), and Olivia (age 11 months), thanks for letting mom work on the dissertation and understanding that I worked so hard in order to buy you McDonald's and pay for your higher education. You all are the heart that I carry outside of myself. To my best friends Tiffany Draughn and Dr.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Transacted through a computer, online learning, also referred to as e-learning, web-based instruction, or computer-based training, is defined as a form of distance education—education in which the student is not at the physical location of the main campus where courses are being taken (Barbour & Reeves, 2009). Sixty-six percent of two-to-four year colleges offer online courses (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2008). Four and six-tenths million students were reported to have taken at least one online class in the fall of 2008, indicating a growth of 17 percent which exceeds the 1.2 percent growth of the student population in higher education (NCES, 2009). In fact, it appears that the future is now, for "web-based learning [or online learning] has been predicted to be the future of all types of distance learning" (Lu, Yu, & Liu, 2003, p. 497). By 2014, 22 million students will take courses online (Ambient Insight, as cited in Nagel, 2009). Though 5.14 million will take courses face-to-face, 3.5 million will take courses solely online and 18.65 million will take at least some classes online (Nagel, 2009).

The increased use of online learning in colleges and universities has some of its beginnings in the $400 billion dollar business of higher education (Smith, 2010). Specifically, for-profit colleges and universities are making the accessibility of post-secondary education to students who were normally excluded from traditional pathways of acquiring an education beyond high school a reality now more than ever (Kolowich,

2009). With the establishment of these online institutions of higher education, more nontraditional students can acquire degrees through billions of federal financial aid dollars which can be available to them. Given that these students have to continue to work and take care of families and other responsibilities of living, online learning allows them to earn degrees in various professional disciplines, some of which are most lucrative in today's economy. Since these institutions acquire funding via financial aid through the federal government (Smith, 2010), and provide greater access for students who were considered by some to be vulnerable financially, constrained due to lack of time, and deemed questionable in their academic readiness in taking such an educational leap, traditional colleges and universities realized the needs that such a provision of higher education met for adult learners. Therefore, more colleges and universities across the United States started offering online courses and degree programs for their students as well.

As a former university instructor of online courses, I immediately saw the need to offer online courses since accessibility to higher education was a concern; however, I became more interested in how adult learners were actually using the technology in their classes. Because many of my students were both traditional and nontraditional, I was especially struck by the low numbers of African American students who were taking online courses. Further, I was even more curious about nontraditional students' usage of technology since some of those students did not grow up in a digital age.

Considering my teaching context being a historically Black university, I was familiar with the oral tradition that is a strong component of African American culture

(Boone, 2003) and communication. Therefore, I knew that the spoken word is not the primary communication format in online courses. Additionally, from my experience teaching, I found many of my African American students enjoyed working collaboratively. Though, the collaborative learning model is often difficult, if non-existent, in many online courses. After all, online learning tends to be oftentimes individualistic and isolated (Vanderpool, 2009). Too, African Americans tend to prefer teacher immediacy (White, 1992), which is often not as achievable in online courses. All in all, I questioned if there was too much distance in distance learning and if such a communication format excluded learners from diverse backgrounds, including lower socioeconomic status communities.

More specifically, I seriously wondered, within this new frontier of accessibility to higher education, who is actually being left behind. With the newness of technology and how to navigate its various mechanisms, I found myself questioning if my nontraditional students, those who did not grow up in the digital age, were being excluded from acquiring a preparatory knowledge base about computers and how they are used as a main vehicle for college course delivery. I also wondered if these students could afford the technology, such as computers, Internet connections, Broadband connections, and software, required to participate in online learning. In addition to this potential kind of exclusion, I wondered about the impact of them not having the social capital or network to even know that online courses were available and further, what their benefits and disadvantages were so that they could make more informed decisions about taking online versus face-to-face courses.

While I understood that "everything is politically and economically motivated" (J. Cooper, Personal Communication, March 25, 2005), I clearly surmised that the growth of online learning is a result of the changing economy and technological advances. Nonetheless, there are many advantages that online learning offers students, teachers, and schools (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008) that would also make it enticing to nontraditional learners. A major benefit of online learning for students includes 24-hour access to virtual classrooms and flexible schedules, allowing students to learn around their many responsibilities. Also, online learning students enjoy the ability to access course materials such as syllabi, notes from students, research tools, and interactive instruction. Moreover, online students also have the benefit of communicating with other students around the world through e-mail, discussion boards, and chats. Another benefit extends to students with physical challenges who are able to earn college credit without physically having to navigate a campus (Crow, 2008).

Students are not the only members of the university who benefit from online learning; instructors reap many of the benefits as well (Barcelona, 2009). Some instructors prefer web-based courses because it may reduce workloads through automatic scoring of tests and require less time on mundane tasks like copying and distributing course information. In addition, pre-developed and standardized courses offer teachers less preparation time for classes they may teach frequently. Likewise, adjunct instructors, in particular, enjoy the benefits of teaching online because it allows them the ability to work for multiple universities without travel (Holstead, Spradlin, Plucker, & Indiana University, 2008). Also, online instructors benefit from online learning management

systems such as Blackboard and WebCT's ability to keep excellent records of discussion boards, grades, and e-mails (Holstead et al., 2008). Just like students, online instructors are able to connect to faculty members all over the world, many of whom they would not otherwise have interactions within traditional settings.

Just as some students and instructors benefit from online learning, institutions also benefit from offering online courses. Universities and colleges offering online courses can remove the physical boundaries of their campuses and appeal to larger numbers of students and diverse-student populations by offering a wider variety of courses and sections (Barcelona, 2009). Additionally, whether institutions are public or private, online colleges are eligible for government dollars through financial aid, as well as subsidized and unsubsidized student loans (www.allonlineschools.com, 2006-2009). In addition, many online institutions financially benefit from corporations' educational-reimbursement plans that pay workers for professional development. Due to time constraints and other responsibilities, many of these workers elect to enhance their careers through online courses (Barcelona, 2009). As a result, online colleges and universities can be highly profitable (Smith, 2010).

With all of the benefits that online learning offers to various entities and members of academia, web-based instruction may appear to be the pedagogical solution to issues such as access to learning, information acquisition, course communication, classroom management, and space. However, online learning has its disadvantages for students, instructors, and administrators as well. For instance, learning online takes a great deal of self discipline and time management skills. Online learning students are often balancing

work and family obligations, and they may find it difficult to manage their own time (Vanderpool, 2009). In addition, students may also find it difficult to use the technology, depending on their experiences with learning platforms and technology in general (Vanderpool, 2009). Furthermore, some students report feeling alienated from peers and the instructors as direct face-to-face contact is not involved and teachers are often not available to answer questions instantly when students may prefer to have them answered (Vanderpool, 2009).

Similarly, instructors may also report disadvantages to web-based courses. In face-to-face environments, teachers are able to watch facial expressions and body language to determine if students understand concepts or not; however, in online courses, a teacher may not know if students do not comprehend unless the student tells her/him (Hill, 2008). Also, instructors of online courses often report that they must prepare more for online classes than face-to-face classes (Gudea, 2008). Furthermore, some instructors do not receive the training needed to feel comfortable teaching online (Gudea, 2008).

Administrators, like students and teachers, also report disadvantages with online learning. One disadvantage for administrators is affording the technology to support trends with online learning (Parry, 2009). Schools may also find it difficult to locate the resources to provide student and instructor training needed to complete courses successfully. In addition, schools may find it difficult to fund technical support staff who may assist teachers and students with their computer needs (Parry, 2009).

On the surface, online learning could appear to be an educational utopia, seemingly offering access to all by solving traditional educational issues dealing with

course communication, classroom management, and information acquisition. On one hand, online learning could be seen as a great equalizer for many; however, on the other hand, it is also considered to be a great divider. The disparity between different groups who have access to computer technology was coined as the *Digital Divide* by Amy Harmon and Jonathan Weber, two writers from the *L.A. Times* (Servon, 2002). The Digital Divide describes the differences which exist between those who have access to technology and those who do not (Block, 2010). The popularity of the term grew in the mid-nineties with the Clinton-Gore administration (Servon, 2002).

Today, defining the gap is quite complex. Access to computers only scratches the surface of problems with the Digital Divide (Hargittai, 2010). Access commonly implies one's ability to go online at home and does not take into account one's ability to use the Internet at work or school (Hargittai, 2010). In fact, some groups have access at one point and lose it at another. While the Clinton administration's U.S. National Telecommunications and Information Administration clearly defined the Digital Divide based on groups who had access and those who did not, the gap does not solely depend on one's ability to get to a computer (Warschauer, 2003).

Given this information, the digital divide is a misnomer that should be called digital inequality because there are no clear haves and have-nots (Warschauer, 2004). It is important to note that while digital inequality is similar to economic inequality; it is not equivalent to it (DiMaggio, Hargittai, Celeste, & Shafer, 2001). Terming the issue as digital inequality would encompass more of the issues surrounding computer usage: content, language, education, literacy, community, and social resources and not just one's

ability to acquire access. Causes of digital inequality are complicated and often intertwined between ways of access, race, education, gender, and age (DiMaggio et al., 2001). Therefore, digital inequality is included in this study because communication and learning materials were delivered in ways that were documented throughout the research literature to be preferred by ethnic majority or European American students (Warschauer, 2003). The students about whom I was interested are nontraditional African American undergraduate students.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework which guided this study is one created by Chen (2001). Chen's (2001) study expands upon Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance (1996). In order to fully explore Chen's (2001) theory, Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance (1996) must be explained first. Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance (1996) is a foundational distance learning theory (Woods & Baker, 2004) which explains the potential for transactional distance between teachers and learners in a course. Transactional distance is the psychological and communication space that exists between teachers and learners in both traditional face-to-face classes and distance education courses (Moore, 1996). Because there is an obvious physical separation between teachers and learners in distance education courses, the potential for transactional distance is much greater than traditional face-to-face courses.

As one may or may not expect, the transactional distance between the student and the instructor is not absolute, but it is based on the perception of the teacher and learner (Moore, 1996). Perceptions of transactional distance are shaped by the structure of the

distance learning course, the interaction between the student and learner, and the degree of self-directedness of the learner. Moore (1996) succinctly refers to these three variables as dialogue, structure, and learner autonomy in his theory.

According to Moore (1996), these three variables intertwine and contribute to the perceived distance between the teacher and learner in a distance education course. The first area of Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance centers on dialogue. Moore defines dialogue as the positive, constructive communication that exists when the teacher gives instruction and the learner responds. The two kinds of dialogue in a distance education course include one-way and two-way. An example of a one-way format would be a television program used for instruction. In instructional television programming, the dialogue is one-way because the student does not have the opportunity to interrupt the program and engage in a response. One-way programming such as instructional television is considered to be highly structured. Moore considers highly structured courses as classes that already anticipate the needs and concerns of students. Highly structured courses often provide pre-developed, standardized course materials at the beginning of the course. If distance education is highly structured and dialogue is non-existent, then the transactional distance between teacher and learner is sizable.

The other kind of dialogue that could surface in distance education course is two-way dialogue (Moore, 1996). Two-way communication can be synchronous or asynchronous (Chen, 2001). An example of two-way dialogue could be a discussion board offered through an online learning platform such as Blackboard. Optimally, the teacher would provide the instruction, and the students would respond. The students'

ability to respond to the teacher through discussion posts makes the dialogue two-way. Other examples of two-way communication are e-mails, synchronous chats, and synchronous class sessions. If a distance education course allows for two-way discussion, the students would have the ability to mold the course. Two-way communication courses are often considered to have low structure. Moore defines low-structure courses as classes in which students construct and shape the development of the course (Moore, 1996). If a distance education course is less structured, then transactional distance between the student and the teacher is small.

The last area of Moore's Theory of Transaction Distance is learner autonomy. Moore (1996) defines learner autonomy as a student who can complete and understand tasks without emotionally depending on the instructor. Moore's theory concludes that the more structure a course has the more learner autonomy the students must have. In contrast, the less structure that a distance learning course possesses, the less autonomous a learner must be.

In summary, Moore's (1996) theory discusses how dialogue, structure, and learner autonomy contribute to perceived distance in distance education courses. The more dialogue there is, the less distance there is between the learner and educator. In contrast, the more structured an online class is, the more distance there is between the student and teacher. In other words, highly structured courses which include inflexible syllabi, assignments, instructions, and questions and answers would minimize the need for communication between the instructor and learner. As such, the more structured the

class is, the more autonomous the learner should be and thus, the more distance there is between student and learner.

While Moore's (1996) Theory of Transactional Distance focuses on synchronous courses or courses in which the teacher and learner communicate at the same time, Chen's theory is more suitable for online learning because it focuses on asynchronous learning. Chen's (2001b) research about perceived distances in distance education courses focuses on asynchronous courses—those in which the learner's and professor's communication does not occur at the same time. In my dissertation study, the online world literature course was taught asynchronously, making Chen's (2001b) extension of Moore's (1996) Theory of Transactional Distance is a better theoretical framework to employ.

More so, Chen's (2001b) extension of Moore's (1996) Theory of Transactional Distance focuses on courses which occur via the World Wide Web and by video-conferencing. As such, Chen's (2001a) definitions of distance, structure, and learner autonomy are more fitting because they contain additional dimensions not included in Moore's (1996) Theory of Transactional Distance. Chen's (2001a) definition of dialogue contains three dimensions, while structure and learner autonomy contains two dimensions each. Unlike Moore (1996) who considered dialogue only as it related to positive communication between teacher and learner, Chen's (2001a) explanation of perceived distance based on dialogue accounted for communication which can transact in three ways: (a) in class through discussions (a kind of dialogue that can be seen in discussion threads online); (b) out of class by electronic communication where learners and the

professor can communicate through emails and text messages; and (c) out of class through face-to-face interaction, a form of communication that is likely to occur when students engage in conversation with peers or the professor in person.

In addition, Chen (2001a) also found that perceived distance in structure may be influenced by both course organization and course delivery which can be traditional or dynamic. Traditional organization would include the professor's posting of syllabi, course objectives, assignments, and assessments (2001a) in rigid or flexible ways. Furthermore, Chen also reported how delivery of course information can be dynamic and includes open discussions, lectures, and other activities designed to foster learning or it can be rigid. He discussed how low rigidity in delivery was significant to increased discussions, though the rigidity of course organization had no influence.

While Chen (2001a) echoes Moore's (1996) definition of learner autonomy as the learner's ability to work independently of classmates and the professor, Chen's definition also includes interdependence as a form of learner autonomy. Interdependence refers to team work or collaborative learning which is the acceptance of one's need to collaborate with others (Boud, 1988; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Garland (1994) supported the aforementioned definition of interdependence as autonomous when he stated how autonomous learners are able to find resources, and set goals, but they can also recognize a need for support when required.

Furthermore, Chen (2001a) also found that there were actually four different dimensions of transactional distance which go beyond Moore's (1996) focus on teacher and learner communication. According to Chen, the four dimensions of transactional

distance are as follows: (a) Learner Instructor Transactional Distance which relates to students' perception of positive communication between the professor and learner; (b) Learner to Learner Transactional Distance which relates to how other students positively communicate and connect with each other; (c) Learner Content Transactional Distance which relates to how students comprehend course content like lectures, quizzes, and assignments; and (d) Learner Interface Transactional distance which includes the ease of use in terms of navigating platforms, taking quizzes, and conducting discussions.

Positive communication in Learner Instructor Transactional Distance is reflected in four ways: (a) learners understand concepts and theories presented by instructor; (b) learners agree with the feedback and comments posted by the instructor; (c) learners find the teacher accessible; and (d) learners perceive the overall quality of the interaction between the learner and the teacher as positive. Similarly, perceived distance in Learner to Learner Transactional Distance is also revealed in four ways: (a) learners understand perspectives and ideas presented by other learners; (b) learners agree with comments and feedback posted by other students; (c) learners find other students accessible; and (d) learners perceive overall interaction among students as one of quality.

Chen (2001a) discussed the two other indicators in perceived distance as learner content transactional distance and learner interface transactional distance. Less perceived distance occurs in learner content transactional distance when learners understand theories, concepts, and perspectives in the course. In addition, less distance is perceived when learners feel that their needs are met with materials, objectives, and overall learning. There is lower transactional distance when learners perceive delivery systems as

user friendly, meaning they are able to navigate the course, upload assignments, and successfully submit assessments (Chen, 2001b).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) is to examine how communication preferences, learning preferences, and perceptions about online learning affect nontraditional African American students in their participation in online world literature courses at a Historically Black College and University (HBCU) in the southeastern United States.

Research Questions

The overarching question in this study is: How do communication and learning preferences, along with perceptions about online learning, of nontraditional African American students affect their participation in online world literature courses at a southeastern HBCU? Supporting this overarching question are the following specific questions:

1. How do nontraditional African American students attending a southeastern HBCU perceive online learning?

2. How do nontraditional African American students attending a southeastern HBCU perceive face-to-face learning?

3. How do nontraditional African American students attending a southeastern HBCU describe their communication preferences?

4. How do nontraditional African American students attending a southeastern HBCU describe their learning preferences?

5. How easily do nontraditional African American students navigate around the Blackboard platform?

6. How do nontraditional African American students perceive online content like quizzes, tests, discussion boards, and assignments?

7. How do communication and learning preferences and perceptions about online learning affect nontraditional African American students' participation in online literature courses at this southeastern HBCU?

Definition of Key Terms

African American Communication: A dynamic, expressive, and intense speech pattern which usually involves frequent interaction between the speaker and active listener (Daniel & Smitherman, 1989; Foster, 2002; Holtgraves & Dulin, 1994; Rovai, Gallien, & Wighting, 2005).

Cognitive Style: Cognitive style refers to "a distinct and consistent way for an individual to encode, store, and perform" (Atkinson, 2004, p. 663). Witikin and Goodenough (1977) describe cognitive style as the way one thinks or processes information. According to Witkin, Moore, Goodenough, and Cox (1977), cognitive style can fall into one or two categories: field independent or field dependent. While field independent learners are analytical and prefer to work autonomously, field dependent learners prefer to work concretely and collaboratively.

Culture: Culture is the communication patterns, values, beliefs, and aesthetic standards passed from one generation to the next (Parillo, 2003, as cited in Rovai et al., 2005); it influences how members see the world (Adler, 2001, as cited in Rovai et al.,

2005). Goodenough (1981) explains how language is key to learning: "Culture is not the material artifacts or observed traditions; rather, it is 'what is learned,' the things one needs to know in order to meet the standards of others" (p. 50). Goodenough (1981) also adds, "Public culture is not taken as a given simply to be described; [rather it] . . . takes it as phenomenon to be explained" (p. 59).

Digital Inequality: Digital inequality is unequal usage of computer technology which can be related to such factors as course content, language usage, educational background, literacy proficiency, community agency, and availability of social resources. It is not just one's ability to access technology. Causes of digital inequality are further complicated and often intertwined between ways of access, race, education, gender, and age (DiMaggio et al., 2001).

Face-to-Face Learning: Learning which takes place when both the instructor and student are present in the same space, at the same time, live and not virtual (McConnel, 2000).

HBCU: Historically Black Colleges and Universities are institutions of higher learning formed before 1964 in order to meet the educational needs of Black students (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Learning Preferences: According to Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences, there are many ways in which individuals may learn. Gardner cites visual, auditory, and kinesthetic as a few examples of the many intelligences in which learners may prefer to utilize to gain knowledge (Gardner, Howard, & Moran, 2006). While visual learners must

see to learn, auditory learners must hear; kinesthetic learners must physically manipulate objects to learn.

Nontraditional Students: The definition of a nontraditional student varies and can include any one of the below listed characteristics: (NCES, 2002, as cited in AARCO, 2009).

1. Did not enter college during the same year of high school graduation.

2. Works full time while attending college part or full-time.

3. Is financially independent from a legal guardian.

4. Has children.

5. Is a single parent.

6. Has a General Educational Development for high school equivalency rather than a high school diploma.

Perceptions of Online Learning: In this study, the term refers to how nontraditional students view their past, present, and/or future experiences with online learning. Further, perceptions are meanings one gives to his/her experiences.

For this study, nontraditional students were placed into two categories: Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants as defined by Prensky (2001). According to Prensky, digital natives were born into the digital world, but technology entered the lives of digital immigrants later in life. Because personal computers became popular in the early eighties, any student born in the early 1980s will be considered a digital native; any student born earlier than the 1980s will be considered a digital immigrant.

Limitations of the Study

According to Stake (1995), an instrumental case study is to identify factors that function to influence the central phenomenon of the study. The purpose of this study was to identify factors that affected nontraditional African American students' participation in online world literature classes at a southeastern HBCU. This study has several limitations. A major limitation is that it focuses on a single southeastern HBCU. As such, findings from the study may not be applicable to all universities. In addition, all participants in the study were instructed by a single instructor within two sections of the world literature class at this HBCU. One of the sections was completely online with the other section being a blended course—one that combines both face-to-face and online instructional modes of delivery. Therefore, findings do not represent the experiences of all online students at this particular southeastern HBCU. Finally, as Creswell (2003) advises, "the findings could be subject to other interpretations" (p. 149). Thus, the interpretations of the findings of this study will be left to the individual reader.

Significance of the Study

This study has the potential to impact administrators, researchers, instructors, and students. First of all, this study has the potential to aid administrators because knowledge gained about the student populations' preferences in online learning could increase African American participation in online courses which is imperative to the future growth of this southeastern HBCU as well as to all institutions of higher education. In fact, African Americans comprise 82 percent of the population of this southeastern minority-serving institution, and at the time of the study the university offered four online degrees.

Because distance education administrators are aiming to increase the number of online courses, discovering factors that may improve African American participation in online courses is imperative to the future success and growth of the institution.

Furthermore, researchers would also benefit from this study because it would expand knowledge about transactional distance. To date, neither Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance (1996) nor Chen's (2001) has ever been examined through an African American cultural lens. Applying both transactional distance theories to African American students who attend an HBCU could shed valuable light on beneficial teacher-to-student, student-to-student, student- to-content, and student-to-interface relationships in online environments.

In addition, online instructors at the location of the study will benefit from hearing the voices of African American student attendees. Knowing about communication and learning preferences along with perceptions of online learning of nontraditional African American students at this southeastern HBCU will help instructors create courses which meet students' communication and learning preferences. Designing online courses that students prefer could optimize learning and foster positive learning experiences for both online instructors and students.

Finally, African American students attending this southeastern HBCU would benefit from this study. If instructors incorporated communication, learning preferences, and preferable online curriculums in the content of their courses and in their program areas, it could increase nontraditional African American student participation. Additionally, nontraditional African American students attending this southeastern

HBCU could also benefit from the study as well. Engaging students in online learning could potentially assist them in becoming more competitive in a global economy. This study has the capability of identifying key factors needed to encourage enrollment of nontraditional African American students from diverse backgrounds in online courses, thereby allowing students to remain competitive at a time where more emphasis is being placed on technology.

Summary

This chapter provided an introduction to the research study. The introduction covered information about the growing boom of online learning, its advantages and disadvantages, and the digital inequality which may be experienced by students in institutions of higher education. I also shared my rationale for completing the study. In addition, this chapter also discussed the theoretical framework, the purpose of the study, and the research questions explored. Definitions of key terms are provided as well as limitations and the significance of the study are explained.

Chapter II presents reviews related literature on adult learning theory, ways in which African Americans learn, influences on digital inequality, as well as other related studies about culture and online learning.

Chapter III describes the research methodology and includes data collection procedures, analysis, role of researcher, and trustworthiness.

Chapter IV discusses the findings from the analysis of the data. Chapter V provides further discussion of the implications for policy and practice.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature as it relates to the research topic and overarching research question. This chapter is organized into four sections. The first section discusses adult learning theory including instructional practices best suited for adult learners. The second section is divided into the following subsections: influence of culture on communication and learning; African American speech and dialogue; and African American learning styles. The third section of this chapter focuses on digital inequality as related to race, ways of access, time of use, locations of exposure, historically Black colleges and universities, and age. The final section reviews research studies related to culture and online learning

Adult Learning Theory

As a whole, andragogy is an adult learning theory that supports the premise that adults must be educated differently than children (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). In contrast to children, adults need to understand why they are learning, learn from errors, take responsibility for their own learning, learn in ways which will help them personally, focus on problem solving, and be motivated internally (Cranton, 1992; Knowles et al., 1998). Further, Cantor (1992) made several assumptions based on this theory that includes the notions that: (a) adults need to be shown respect; (b) adults are autonomous

and self-directed; (c) adults are goal-oriented; (d) adults are relevancy oriented (problem centered) —they need to know why they are learning something; (e) adults are practical and problem-solvers; and (f) adults have accumulated life experiences and knowledge from their work. In other words, "andragogy means that instruction for adults needs to focus more on the process and less on the content being taught (Kearsley, n.d). Moreover, when andragogy is applied culturally, race, class, and gender are important factors in academics (Imel, 2001). When ethnic and gender minority adult students learn, it is important for them to share their life experiences with the class, be sensitive to individual differences, learn in culturally relevant ways, and form relationships with their peers (Imel, 2001).

Kolb (1984) is well-known for his learning style theory as related to adults. According to Kolb, learning styles can be seen on a continuum that falls within a four-stage learning cycle. In Stage One, one has to have a concrete experience or be involved in a new experience. In Stage Two, through the concrete experience one has reflective observations through watching others or developing observations about the experience. In Stage Three, the Stage Two observations are assimilated into abstract conceptualizations. In other words, one begins to create theories to explain observations and produce implications for action. In Stage Four, through active experimentation, one actively tests out their theories to solve problems and thus make decisions. Kolb's learning styles were made more concrete for instructional use by Hartman (1995). Instructional strategies that respond to the concrete experiencer are laboratories, field work, observations or trigger films. For the reflective observer, use of logs, journals or brainstorming are most

appropriate. Providing for the abstract conceptualizer, lectures, papers, and analogies are great sources to encourage maximum participation. The active experimenter responds well to simulations, case studies, and homework.

Brookfield (1995) explored four major adult learning processes. First of all, adult learners desire to take control of their learning; it is self-directed. They do so by setting up their own goals, by searching for resources that will assist them in meeting their goals, by deciding on learning styles that will best suite them in completing their tasks, and by evaluating their process. Secondly, critical reflection is a process of learning how adults think contextually and critically. Third, experiential learning can be maximized by adult teachers using their adult students' experiences within their teaching. Finally, learning to learn is not just for the present; it is for the purpose of lifelong learning.

Influence of Culture on Communication and Learning

Culture is the communication patterns, values, beliefs, and aesthetic standards passed from one generation to the next (Parillo, 2003, as cited in Rovai et al., 2005); it influences how its members see the world (Adler, 2001, as cited in Rovai et al., 2005). Therefore, if culture has such an impact on how members view the world around them, it can also be surmised that culture can be an influential factor in how one learns (Shade, 1989). It is important, however, to recognize that not all scholars give credence to culture's impact on learning. Many researchers believe that culture has nothing to do with learning and performance (Rovai et al., 2005). Further, these researchers believe that students have their own individual ways of learning that have nothing to do with culture.

Scholars who subscribe to this school of thought posit that students, regardless of culture, must meet the demands set by the instructor if they desire to succeed.

In contrast, scholars who study cultural relevance in teaching have different opinions about the importance of culture and learning. Theorists like Geneva Gay (2006) and Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) believe that culture influences how one communicates in the classroom and has an important impact on how members of a culture may perform academically. In fact, scholars like Ogbu (1999) demonstrated how every culture has its own language and code. Singer (1987) agreed when he said, "Language is the manifestation-verbal or otherwise of the perceptions, attitudes, values, beliefs and disbelief systems that the group holds" (as cited in Gay, 2006, p. 5). Therefore culture, due to its influences on communication, is significant to teaching and learning (Collis, 1999).

Further, studies demonstrated that communication patterns could be a key contributor to the disparities in achievement between Black and White students (Johnson, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Rovai et al., 2005). These disparities exist not only in K-12 education, but also all the way to graduate schools (Rovai et al., 2005) and in online learning as well (Korgen, Odell, & Schumacher, 2001). When students do not speak the language of the dominant culture, they can be left behind academically.

African American Speech and Dialogue

Generally speaking, Black speech is emotionally intense, expressive, dynamic and demonstrative in comparison to Europeans' (Holtgraves & Duline, 1994; Kochman & Neuliep, 2002, as cited in Rovai et al., 2005; Walker, 2003). African Americans need

teacher immediacy, signs that the teacher shows attentiveness, liking, closeness and engagement (Boykin, 1983). In other words, they prefer for their teachers to speak directly to them when in a classroom situation. Boykin (1983) stated that they also need nonverbal immediacy like smiles, eye contact, and movement around the classroom. Most HBCU professors' teaching styles include dominating the classroom with challenging, yet nurturing highly rhetorical communication and using analogies to create realistic situations (Boykin, 1986), perhaps another way in responding to the need of their students for teacher immediacy

In addition, African Americans have unique speech patterns. One speech pattern used by African Americans is call and response. It is an important speech pattern found in African American dialogue (Daniel & Smitherman, 1989; Foster, 2002). Call and response is the "African derived communication process of spontaneous verbal and nonverbal interaction between speaker and listener in that all of the speakers "calls" are punctuated by expressive 'responses' from the listener" (Boone, 2003, p. 104). Further, call and response functions as an encouragement to the speaker and fosters community. More specifically, famous educators like Marva Collins use call and response to produce high performing African American students (Boone, 2003). In addition, call and response is also used in college settings with African American professors where the majority of students are African American. When used in the classroom, it is used to demonstrate students' understanding that the classroom is a community. It helps students unite in the classroom community (Kochman, 1983, as cited in Boone, 2003). Thus, the student becomes a part of the class by showing his unique view and connections to the group.

African American Learning Styles

Generally speaking, Litzinger and Osif (1992) define learning styles as "the different ways in which children and adults think and learn" (1992, p. 73). Each person develops a preferred and consistent set of behaviors or approaches to learning. Cognition, or how one acquires knowledge must be considered. Additionally, conceptualization or how one processes information is equally as important. People's motivation, the way they make decisions, the values they have, as well as their emotional preferences also influence and help to define their learning styles. In addition, according to Cassidy (2004), how one learns is improved if one is taught based on one's learning style. According to White (1992), African Americans in general are high context learners who are field-dependent, meaning they prefer the teacher to disseminate knowledge. The cultural learning style of many African American students requires collaborative learning. In other words, African Americans like to work in groups as opposed to working individually. In addition, African Americans prefer to learn concepts that are "real" as opposed to abstract (White, 1992). They need to know how a concept or situation has real impact in one's life. In contrast, people from European backgrounds tend to be field independent learners who prefer cognitive styles that allow them to construct their own knowledge (Morse, 2003). European Americans tend to prefer to learn through individual achievement in competitive atmospheres that are self-regulated, a factor that contributes to their field independence (Shealey, Lue, Brooks, & McCray, 2005; White, 1992).

Boykin (1983) reiterated that African Americans learn more in environments that not only have affect, but in ones that are harmonious, involve cooperation, and include a strong sense of community. In fact, African Americans learn less in competitive, highly stratified environments (Boykin, 1983). Other confirmations of the importance of the social component to African American learning come from Gallien and Peterson (2004) who reported how African American learners take on personable approaches to learning rather than independent and analytical means. Further, Anderson and Adams (1992) echoed similar findings as they reported how African American students have "competence in cooperation, performance, visual perception, symbolic expression, narrative, and are less comfortable when they must complete tasks which require independence, or verbal skills" (p. 21). In contrast, European Americans tend to prefer to learn through individual achievement in competitive atmospheres that are self-regulated, a factor that contributes to their field independence (Shealey et al., 2005; White, 1992).

Adding to the body of research about African American learning styles, Ibarra (2001) shared how African Americans are global learners who find it difficult to separate parts from the whole. Instead, African Americans flourish in learning environments which have defined goals and reinforcement, allow for observational approaches like a reliance on examples, and avoid negative criticisms which often negatively affect African American learners. Too, the importance of the learning styles or preferences among African American learners is further corroborated in the Duncan and Barber-Freeman (2008) study. While studying the learning preferences of graduate students attending an HBCU, the researchers discovered how learning communities were key to the educational

success of African American students. When African American students in their study learned in communities, they earned higher grades, improved writing skills, increased communication skills, and formed life-long friendships with peers (Duncan & Barber-Freeman, 2008).

Digital Inequality

Digital inequality is unequal usage of computer technology which can be related to such factors as course content, language usage, educational background, literacy proficiency, community agency, and availability of social resources. It is not just one's ability to access technology. Causes of digital inequality are further complicated and often intertwined between ways of access, race, education, gender, and age (DiMaggio et al., 2001). Additionally, Digital inequality is a complex issue which includes ways of access, time of usage, locations of exposure, education and economic status, and age of use. Often these subtopics of the issue are intertwined making the digital puzzle difficult to solve.

Ways of Access

Studies revealed that how one accesses the Internet may influence how one benefits from Internet usage. For instance, Broadband users report broader uses and reap more advantages than dial-up users (Horrigan & Rainie, 2002). According to the Pew Internet & American Life Project's *The Broadband Difference* (2002), broadband users are more likely to be creators and managers of content online, satisfy their queries online, complete job searches, product research, and get news online. John Horrigan's (2009) study revealed how 63 percent of adult users access the Internet through Broadband,

despite price increases in Broadband connections and the recession. The largest growth was reported among senior citizens and low income Americans. Unlike other groups, African Americans had their second year of below average growth. In 2008, 43 percent of African Americans reported use of Broadband compared to a mere 46 percent in 2009. Only 7 percent of Americans do not use Broadband. Factors affecting their non-use included price, need of use, and availability in their area. The Pew Internet Survey (Jones & Fox, 2009) and Horrigan (2009) of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), revealed how household education levels and economic statuses are key factors of Internet usage in American households. For example, older African American households with higher levels of education and income are more likely to have Broadband access (Jones & Fox, Survey, 2009)

Time of Use

Though users of Broadband may report more advanced uses of the Internet, neither access through Broadband nor dial-up negate digital inequality. Gant, Turner-Lee, Li, and Miller (2010) remind the public that use does not necessarily equate to equal use. In fact, one factor that Gant et al. (2010) wanted the public to take into consideration is time of use. They found that groups who have used the Internet longer have been able to maximize more benefits from it such as social networking and online banking. Since African Americans who use the Internet tend to be younger, Whites have at least a ten-year advantage of use and are able to enjoy more complex usage. Hargiatti (2010) echoed the similar findings, reporting that Whites use the Internet in more advanced ways.

Locations of Exposure

Adding another piece to the digital puzzle is the fact that a user's exposure to computers and Internet in K-12 education does not necessarily negate the existence of digital inequality. A little over six years ago, there were huge gaps in computer use and access due to economics. In high poverty schools, nine students shared one computer, but in low-poverty schools, only six students shared a computer (Warschauer, 2003). While there was one computer for every 5.3 students in high poverty communities, there was a computer for every 4.9 students in low poverty communities (2004). Now, these gaps have nearly diminished due to government funding which provided over two billion dollars for telecommunication and Internet access at schools, allowing impoverished schools to purchase more computers and greatly increase Internet access (Warschauer, 2010).

Despite these technological improvements in elementary and secondary schools, home usage has more of an impact on digital inequality than K-12 school access (Zhao, Lu, Huang, & Wang, 2010). In other words, a student's home use, directly impacts his college performance. When students enter colleges, they bring their experiences and preferences with them. Zhao et al. (2010) found that students who learned about computer usage from parents at home had a greater impact on student Internet efficacy in college more than earlier school usage, even if household usage was nonacademic in nature. In addition, students with prior Internet home usage reported better overall academic performances in the college years.

While digital inequality can stem from usage in households; it also can spawn from institutions of higher learning as well. Fok, Hartman, and Zee (2008) contend that gaps in access and uses are definitely found across college campuses. In the early part of the millennium, African Americans were at an extreme disadvantage in use in higher education. As early as 2002, William H. Gray, III, President and CEO of the United Negro College Fund reported how the digital divide in higher education was greater than the divide in households. Eight years ago, Gray reported that there was a 45 percent gap between White American households and African American households, along with a 72 percent gap between United Negro College Fund (UNCF) students who own computers and higher education institution (HEI) students (Armstrong, 2002). These gaps still exist today. Hawkins and Rudy (2008) found that on private college campuses, students reported owning more computers than on public college campuses with fewer resources and lower degrees. There are still over 30 percent of student college populations who do not own computers at all (Hawkins & Rudy, 2008).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Online Learning

As one would expect, the gaps on college campuses directly impacts online learning. The student population at HBCUs is shown to have a higher percentage of first generation, low income, and underprepared students (Ukoha & Buzzetto-More, as cited in Buzeeto-Moore, 2008). Warschauer (2010) noted that those who benefit from online learning often exclude ethnic minorities and groups from lower socioeconomic backgrounds due to financial constraints and diversity in learning preferences. Furthermore, Buzzetto-More (2008) indicate that though HBCUs have the same

infrastructure and programs as predominately White institutions (PWI), attitudes about technology are different on HBCU campuses. While less than 25 percent of HBCU faculty and students bring laptops to campus, Whites at PWIs transport laptops at significantly higher rates (Buzetto-Moore, 2008).

Even within school systems, divides and inequality exist among online students. In her study which focused on five HBCUs and one other ethnic minority serving institution in North Carolina, Price (2009) found that Whites were more likely to participate in distance education. While Whites constituted 73.3 percent of distance education courses, African Americans made up 17.7 percent of the distance education population, though 34.5 percent were willing to participate (Price, 2009). Moreover, students at HBCUs took far less distance education courses than at nonminority institutions.

Age

Horrigan (2010) cited that young African Americans, 30 and younger, are much more likely to have Internet access. Prensky (2001) also showed how the younger generation is much more likely to embrace emergent technologies. Gaps in technology usage are much more likely to be found with older generations.

More specifically, Prensky (2001) narrowed computer users into two groups: digital natives and digital immigrants. Using language immigrants as an analogy, Prensky discussed how computer use is much easier for digital natives than digital immigrants. According to Prensky, digital natives are born into the digital world. As a result, they think differently and process information much faster than digital immigrant users.

Prensky (2001) goes on to say that digital natives enjoy multitasking and parallel processing, prefer graphs over text, and prefer hyperlinks and instant gratification. Unlike digital immigrants, digital natives enjoy "games" over "serious work." (p. 2).

On the other hand, digital immigrants were not born into the digital age, but technologies were adopted later in their lives (Prensky, 2001). As a result, digital immigrants prefer traditional means of processing information and cannot process information as quickly as digital natives. For example, digital immigrants prefer to print the information and bring people into the office as opposed to sending an email. In addition, digital immigrants may even call e-mail recipients by phone to insure that they received the e-mail.

Differences in how different generations prefer to use technology have been delineated even further by a Sydney Jones and Susannah Fox in a Pew Internet & American Life Project Memo (2009). In this memo, Jones and Fox (2009) showed how various generations—Generation Y (1977-1990), Generation X (1965-1976), Young Boomers (1955-1964), Older Boomer (1946-1954), the Silent Generation (1937-1945), and the GI Generation (1936 and earlier) are using the Internet. Generation Y uses the internet for entertainment purposes and communication with friends (Jones & Fox, 2009). Many from Generation Y play games online, explore virtual worlds, watch videos, and download music. They enjoy blogging, social networking, and sending instant messages. Generation X uses the Internet to shop, bank, e-mail, and research. Young Boomers, Older Boomers, and the Silent Generation send and receive e-mail information; however,

the GI Generation uses the Internet to look for health information more than any other group (Jones & Fox, 2009).

Nevertheless, a digital divide may still be present among youth because one cannot take for granted that digital natives' desire and know how in using new technologies in education (Kennedy, Krause, Judd, Churchward, & Gray, 2008). Using a group of students in Australia, Kennedy et al. (2008) learned that many digital natives were still not savvy with technology's use in education. One example that the researchers cited was the use of Podcasts for learning. Though many educators were very excited about their students' abilities to use podcasts to listen to lectures, the authors noted how some students were not able to download MP3 files into their computers and still others did not own memory sticks. Hargiatti (2001) discovered that youth from more privileged backgrounds were able to use the Web in more advanced ways with more activities.

African Americans' Online Usage

When the term digital divide was defined eight years ago, African Americans were found to use technology significantly less than Whites (Jackson, Ervin, Gardner, & Schmidt, 2001). Now it appears that African Americans are making huge progress in their use of technology as a vehicle of learning. In fact, the FCC's October-November 2009 survey found that African Americans are online more than Whites. While 19 percent is the national average for daily Internet use, African Americans' rate is 29 percent (Horrigan, 2009). Furthermore, African Americans are the most active mobile Internet users (Horrigan, 2009). While the national average of mobile Internet use is 32 percent, African Americans' average is 48 percent. In addition, African Americans are

the largest users of Twitter, a social networking site which allows users to send up to 140 character messages, representing 25 percent of its population (Frazier, 2010). In summary, African Americans are narrowly behind Whites in overall Internet access (Jones & Fox, 2009). While Whites are at a 59 percent usage rate, African Americans are at 49 percent (Jones & Fox, 2009).

The FCC reports that African Americans are more likely to take a class online for credit, 37 percent versus the 26 percent national average (Horrigan, 2009). The nation's largest university, the University of Phoenix (Horrigan, 2009), an online for-profit institution of higher learning, reported that 30 percent of its 420,700-member student population is African American. Shockingly, online usage for for-profit universities like the University of Phoenix, Strayer, Kaplan, Capella, and Walden grant more PhDs to African Americans than HBCUs (Hall, 2010). Even still, one cannot ignore the ironies of African American's technology use. On one hand, African Americans are well-represented in online courses at for-profit online schools (Hall, 2010); however, when it comes to HBCUs, African Americans take far less distance education courses (Price, 2009). Price's (2009) dissertation concerning distance education courses and minority-serving institutions in North Carolina revealed that African Americans are slightly more likely to enroll in online courses than Whites though technological infrastructure constraints at HBCUs often inhibit them from doing so.

Studies Related to Culture and Online Learning

According to a recent review of the literature by Uzner (2009), there have been over 27 studies, two of which were dissertations, which focused on culture and distance

learning in asynchronous learning networks (ALNs). While twelve of these studies were qualitative, seven were quantitative, and eight used mixed-methods. The majority of the studies involved international students as participants. In fact, many of the studies focused on Asians and their perceptions about and uses of technology in global distance education courses. Overall, Uzner's (2009) review of the literature revealed how culture is important to online learning and that effective online courses must take into account cultural issues, language, and needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

Uzner's (2009) review also echoed the conclusions of Chisholm (1998) and McLoughlin (2001), two of a handful of researchers that I found who have studied online learning and African Americans. Similar to Uzner's (2009) review of the literature about culture and distance education, Chisholm (1998) and McLoughlin (2001) supported the idea that African American culture must be taken into account when designing and teaching online courses.

More recently, Okumba, Walker, Hu, and Watson (2010) conducted research on students' attitudes toward online learning. Through the administration of the Online Tutoring Attitudes Scale administered to 124 African American student participants from a positive youth development program, the researchers found that African American students had positive attitudes about computers, but they lacked self-confidence and experienced anxiety during online learning. In addition, Flowers, Moore, and Flowers (2008) cited how the greater the number of distance education courses African American students took, the more they enjoyed online learning. Another study concerning African American students' experiences in online learning was completed by Rovai et al. (2005).

Their research findings indicated that African American graduate students posted little on discussion boards compared to Whites in graduate classes because they needed auditory and visual communication threads.

Finally, while there have been a number of online courses offered at American colleges and universities with research studies related to them being conducted by various researchers, Flowers et al. (2008) acknowledged the limitations of this research. For example, much of the research has not focused on African American college students. In fact, Rovai and Ponton (2005) concurred that there is very little research or information that exists concerning how African American students experience and perceive online learning.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to review the literature and theories that relate to the research study I conducted. The first section included a review of adult learning theory. Following this review, considerations of culture on communication and learning, with particular attention to African American speech and dialogue as well as African American learning styles were discussed. Since the study related to nontraditional students' participation in online learning, ways of access, time of use, locations of exposure, education and economic status—specifically through the environment of HBCUs and online learning, as well as age were shared within the overarching topic of digital inequality. Additionally, within this chapter, African Americans' online usage was also explored. Finally, studies related to culture and online learning were highlighted.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This chapter begins with an explanation of the qualitative methodology that was chosen for this study—the instrumental case study. The first section provides a description of the study's research design. The next section includes a description of the context of the study and its participants, followed by a description of the data collection and data analysis procedures. The role of the researcher is also addressed. Finally, I explain the establishment of trustworthiness.

Design of the Study

The specific qualitative methodology chosen for this study is the instrumental case study. Stake (1995) wrote that "the case is a specific, complex, functioning thing" and "an integrated system" (p. 2). Additionally, "the use of case study is to understand something else" (p. 3). Relating to my study, I sought to understand how communication and learning preferences, along with perceptions about online learning affected nontraditional African American students' participation in online world literature classes. The bounded system was 10 nontraditional students who were enrolled in two online world literature classes. The fact that these nontraditional students attended the same HBCU also binds the case. Finally, case study methodology was chosen because it gives

focused attention to the question of what can be specifically gleaned from a specific case (Stake, 2005).

Because I sought to examine the participation of African American nontraditional students in online world literature classes at a southeastern HBCU, the actual case is of secondary interest; however, it plays what Stake (2005) calls a "supportive role" (p. 445) and aids in our understanding of something else. Nonetheless, case study methodology requires that the case is examined thoroughly, with its contexts viewed with careful scrutiny, and its day-to-day activities detailed. Cases can be interpreted as typical or not; though, the case is not dependent on its typicality.

Important to case study design are the following elements: (a) the nature of the case, particularly its activity and functioning; (b) its historical background; (c) its physical setting; (d) other contexts, such as economic, political, legal, and aesthetic; (e) other cases through which this case is recognized; and (f) those informants through whom the case can be known (Stouffer, 1941, as cited in Stake, 2005). I was able to study the activity and functioning of two online world literature courses. Additionally, I became privy to the historical background of online learning and implementation on the campus of the particular HBCU where the study took place. I also considered how digital inequality, influenced by economic, political, and social forces, the participation of the nontraditional students who participated in the study. This study is unique in that there is a dearth of research literature about how African American students experience distance education environments (Rovai & Ponton, 2005). Therefore, this study can potentially add to the body of research on students' experiences with online learning at colleges and

universities. Most importantly, this study is pertinent because it amplifies the voices of nontraditional African American students, a marginalized and often silenced group of people within the scholarly research.

Context of the Study

At the time of the study, approximately 6,000 students attended this HBCU which is located in the southeast region of the United States. Around 5,500 undergraduates and 450 graduate students called this institution their academic home. Forty-five hundred attendees are African American, 711 are White, 17 are American Indian, 38 are Asian, 65 are Hispanic, and 131 races are unknown (University Website, 2009). Each year, the highest degree awarding program is a science affiliated profession making this southeastern HBCU one of the largest degree-producing institutions in the state in this aforementioned field. Overall, the institution offers approximately, 50 baccalaureate degrees, one post baccalaureate certificate, nine Master's degrees, two post baccalaureate certificates, and one add-on teaching licensure (University Website, 2009). Roughly, 86 percent of the university's undergraduates receive financial aid (University Website, 2009).

According to the institution's 2007-2008 statistical information (2009), there are approximately 500 distance learning students. This southeastern HBCU is one of the few campuses in its state in which all campus facilities offer wireless network connections (University Website, 2009). Distance learning includes both online and face-to-face programs. While students who participate in the online program take all of their classes solely online, those participating in the face-to-face distance learning programs meet at

off campus sites, view videos, watch lectures televised through cable television and participate in tech-assisted instruction through both the Internet, telecommunications, and other media. Currently, there are four online programs. In addition, there are also four off campus distance learning programs in a science-related field and education. At the time of the study, there was no campus data showing how many distance learning students solely participate in online learning vs. other distance education courses.

Small numbers of general education courses are offered online. Though both distance and non-distance learning students are able to participate in online learning, non-distance learning students are not able to participate in courses with Evening Weekend (EW), Web-Assisted (WA); or Web Course (WC) section identifications. Non-distance learning students can participate in courses that end with section numbers like W1, W2, or W3. In the spring of 2009, six world literature courses were offered online. Two of the six were available to be taken by students who were not distant learning students.

The online learning platform at this southeastern HBCU is Blackboard. Through this platform, students are able to chat synchronously (speak in real time) with other students, participate in discussion threads where students may discuss specified topics asynchronously, take learning assessments, upload homework through a digital dropbox, watch videos, and link to other sites on the World Wide Web to gain further information about specific topics and subject matters. Instructors are free to design the course including multimedia or text. In addition, instructors may upload supplemental reading materials and include discussion threads or not.

Description of the Online World Literature Classes

Both online world literature classes referred to in this study were taught by the same instructor. One of the classes was exclusively online, and the other was blended, meaning the course was delivered both face-to-face and online. Both classes contained a link that allowed students to watch filmed portions of Euripedes' play *Medea*; however, all other assignments required the students to read and respond online in text- based format. None of the assignments allowed the students to work in groups online; although, there was a face-to-face group activity in the blended version of the course. Furthermore, there were no online chats available in the online portion of either course. It is important to note that course information, assignments, announcements, and quizzes were easily accessible to students as they were made available, clearly named, and located in links on the course's main page. Though there was no central location like a thread or virtual office made available online where students could ask questions, the professor did provide her email, phone number, and office hours for students in the online version of the syllabus. In addition, students were provided with the instructor's online help desk number via the online syllabus should they have had technical difficulties. Furthermore, a course tutorial was not provided online nor was there any indication that live tutorial sessions were offered on campus.

As a result of the online and blended nature of the courses, the instructor had different assignments and expectations in each course. In the exclusively online version of the course, the instructor had six discussion questions. Students had to respond to the initial post in each discussion question and reply to at least two other students with at

least 100 words in each response. In addition, the online course had four sets of study questions, one for each of the four required readings in the course, two examinations, two essays, and one final exam as graded requirements. In addition, the instructor provided character guides and summary plots for one of the four works. In contrast, the blended course contained two analytical essays, one presentation completed and presented by a group, two multiple choices exams, and 11 discussion questions. Related to the discussion questions, students were expected to post an initial response of at least 100 words and reply to at least one other classmate's response.

Participants

The participants for this study included 10 nontraditional African American students participating in online world literature classes at this southeastern HBCU. Nontraditional students were selected for this study because of the growing numbers of adult learners in institutions of higher education. In addition, at this time nontraditional students are offered more selections of online courses than traditional students at this southeastern HBCU. Five of the nontraditional students who were at sophomore level or above are also digital natives. Another five were sophomore level students or above but are digital immigrants. Participants were selected through convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is a way of selecting participants based on their availability and desire to participate (Creswell, 2005). By interviewing both the students who are digital natives and those who are digital immigrants, I was able to explain how communication, learning preferences, and learning styles affected African American students' participation in online literature classes in a comparative manner.

Furthermore, I focused this study on participants in world literature courses as opposed to other disciplines because it is a subject matter about which I am familiar and because world literature courses can only be taken at the sophomore level or above which had a plethora of advantages when I conducted the study. These advantages included the following: (a) World literature students are mostly sophomores who have already had one year of academic life behind them. At this point they had adapted to college life and had accomplished a measure of success in order to return to the university; (b) These students would have already completed freshman composition and would be able to express opinions and ideas that I needed for them to complete in written form, if not in person; (c) World literature, like freshman composition, is a required course that all students must complete before finishing general college; and (d) I had taught world literature both face-to-face and online, so I was familiar with the learning objectives and methodologies that must be used to teach the course in both traditional and online formats.

Opening the study to other disciplines would have been difficult to level the selection pool for the study. Offerings for online general education courses are limited (University Website, 2009). In addition, students may place out of math courses and are not required to take any if their academic major does not require further mathematics study. So far, only two math courses are offered online at this HBCU. In addition, students have a plethora of different electives in history and social sciences which make it difficult to locate a course in which all students are required to participate in while also having the option of taking them online. Unlike all of the other disciplines on campus, the English department at this HBCU comes in contact with every student before s/he

graduates. Six world literature courses were offered during spring 2009 (University Website, 2009). By remaining in one discipline, I could adhere to time and resource constraints as well as avoid errors in research.

With UNCG Institutional Research Board clearance, I sought permission from online world literature faculty members to solicit student volunteers who fit the aforementioned criteria to participate in the student. In addition, I engaged in snowball sampling as well in that I asked participants whom they knew could possibly participate in the study. I sought faculty members who taught world literature online and asked them to solicit student-volunteers for the study. In addition, I engaged in snowballing by asking participants whom they knew who might want to participate in order to gain participants for the study whom I may not have known about before the project began (Creswell, 2005).

There were 10 participants in the study. The participants represented four different generational categories: Older Boomer, Younger Boomer, Generation X and Generation Y. More specifically, five participants are members of Generation X, which means they were born between 1965 and 1976. Three of the participants are members of Generation Y, born anywhere from 1977 to 1990. Both the Older Boomer and Young Boomer generations had one participant each. An Older Boomer is someone who is born between 1946 and 1954; a Young Boomer is someone who is born between 1955 and 1964. While eight of the participants were born in rural settings in the southeastern part of the United States, only two hailed from urban settings in the northeastern part of the country. Nine of the participants were female and only one was male. Pseudonyms were

used to protect participants' identities. As such, this study referred to the participants as follows: Shannon, Mariah, Angel, Tenille, Sheila, Badesha, Amy, Joshua, India, and Jasmin.

Shannon

Already retired from a 30-year career in the insurance industry, Shannon was an older boomer born in the southeastern part of the United States when she entered the HBCU featured in this study. Married for the second time, she has three adult children and is the grandmother to nine. With the intent of fulfilling a lifelong dream of becoming an elementary school teacher, the world literature class was Shannon's first online course attempt. Her desire was to take the class face-to-face, but when she discovered the class was full, she unenthusiastically signed up for the online version of it. Because computers were not a household item in her youth, she did not consider herself to be technologically savvy. In fact, she recalled using Disk Operating Systems (DOS) computers in the 1970s when such technology "was not smart . . . [they] were a dignified version of a typewriter" (PI, 5-10-10).

Mariah

On the other hand, Mariah, a member of Generation Y and born in an urban setting in the northeastern United States, is a single mother of two small children and was planning to attend law school fulltime in the upcoming school term at a predominantly White institution (PWI) in the southeastern United States. She was determined to focus on entertainment law. Given the generation of her birth, she grew up in the digital age and recalled having a desktop computer at home; however, she remembered her energies

focused on outside play rather than computers at that time. She admitted to not really using computers until she was in high school. Like most of her peers from Generation Y, she enjoyed text messaging, Facebook, and email. Ironically, she admitted a distrust of technology. She preferred to get information out of the library instead of online and never wanted to handle any money online especially related to shopping or banking. In addition, none of her law school coursework would be conducted online because she believed "some things you just need face-to-face" (PI, 5/10/10). Interestingly, she intentionally signed up for the online world literature class. Mariah had taken at least two other courses online at this institution before the study and felt rather comfortable doing so.

Angel

A Generation X member born and raised in the southeastern part of the United States, Angel is a married woman who is the biological mother of one child, and the stepmother to four children. Her biological son is college-aged; the ages of the stepchildren are unknown. At the time of the study, she was an active member of her community and a leader in her church. She did not have a computer at home until she was in her mid-20s and remembered purchasing it as a result of a discount program her job was offering. The current recession brought Angel back to school to pursue her Bachelor's degree. After her former job was outsourced, she found herself competing for jobs with others who had more education than she had with an Associate's degree. Her plans are to pursue a degree in Interdisciplinary Studies. Angel initially signed up and had one day of world literature class face-to-face. However, she found getting off from

work, finding parking on campus, and making it to class in a timely manner was too stressful. As a result, she enrolled in the online version of the course. She admitted feeling reluctant about technology. "I know that we're in a technology age, so I had better go ahead and embrace it, but I could live without it" (PI, 5/10/10). Angel remembered taking three or four online classes at the community college where she earned her Associate's degree.

Tenille

Tenille is also a member of Generation X. She, too, was born and raised in rural southeastern United States. She had an Associate's degree in nursing, served in the military, and had attended another four-year degree granting institution before attending the southeastern HBCU in the study. Tenille recalled gaining experience with computers at a previous university and more heavily in the military, though she did not have access or use of computers growing up. More recently, Tenille loved technology and viewed it as a means to improve her life. She planned to enroll in an online Master of Science in Nursing (MSN) program after graduating from college. She enjoyed sending text messages, using a navigation system, using cell phones, and banking online. She enrolled into the online world literature class as a result of her love of technology. She looked forward to taking some online Spanish classes for personal interest during the summer of the study. "I use technology just to better myself," she added (PI, 5/11/10).

Shelia

Sheila is a member of Generation X who hailed from the southeastern region of the United States, too. She has been a nurse for over 15 years, has two adult daughters,

and a few grandchildren. After graduation, she hoped to enter a public PWI to pursue a

Master's in Nurse Midwifery. Delivery of this program would be in a total online format.

She, like Tenille, is a big fan of technology. A fanatic Smartphone user, she shopped,

researched information, and accessed her appointments through her mobile phone. She

enjoyed information that was centrally located and easily accessible. Further, she

admitted that computer use is key to her career in nursing. She recollected that the only

technology she recalled using while growing up was the television. Her use of computers

began in 1983 while she was a business major. She had taken over 10 online classes since

2008. Like Tenille and Mariah, she intentionally took the online section of the world

literature class.

Badesha

Badesha is a young boomer from the rural southeastern part of the United States.

She is a retired member of the military and a single parent of one adult daughter. Though

she did not use computers growing up because they were not yet popular, she gained her

experience with technology in her 20s through her involvement with the military. As a

family advocate, she currently worked on computers, too. In her opinion, technology has

both pros and cons. On the one hand, she found that it is helpful in taking distance

education classes, but on the other hand, she was taken aback by technology's abilities

to prevent young people from learning basic, foundational mathematics skills. In other

words, she preferred that people learn how to add mentally instead of depending on a

calculator to do it for them. Even with this opinion, she also wanted to take the online

world literature class. She summed up technology's use as "a good thing, if used appropriately" (PI, 5/12/10).

Amy

A member of Generation X, Amy has a four children ranging in ages from mid-teens to two-years-old. She is a self-proclaimed Muslim who had a desire to become a family and marriage therapist. Born and raised in Brooklyn, New York, she was one of the two participants from urban northeastern United States. Amy moved to the South about ten years ago because of the "beautiful skies and slow pace" (PI, 5/12/10). Though she was quite excited about technology, taking world literature online was her second choice due to the unavailability of face- to-face world literature classes. Though personal computers were up-and-coming in her youth, she did not gain experience with computers until 1988 when she worked at a documentation center. Amy said that "taking courses online . . . helps me manage my family, my household" (PI, 5/12/10). At the time of the study, she kept an online blog and was developing a program online.

Joshua

The only male participant in the study, 27-year-old Joshua is single and has no children. Classified as a nontraditional student because he is financially independent from him parents, he hailed from the rural southeastern region of the United States. Joshua had little dealings with computers in his early youth because of the low income status of his family; however, he enjoyed playing Nintendo and Super Nintendo at his home. Joshua recounted taking an information management systems course in high school. Like most in his generation, he was excited about technology and enjoyed MySpace and Facebook.

Though he did not own a laptop, desktop, or Smartphone, taking world literature online was his first choice. He recalled using the university library to complete assignments for the online World Literature course. Amazed at the new technology to which he was being exposed, he stated, "well you know when you go to the library and everything else, you see new gadgets being used. Well, I'm just enjoying the new technology being brought about nowadays" (PI, 5/12/10).

India

India is also part of Generation Y. Like Joshua, India is single with no children. Taking a year off after high school graduation made India's university classification as a nontraditional student. Unlike the other participants who took world literature online, India was part of a blended world literature course, in which the class sometimes met face-to-face while the other part was online. In addition, India was part of the Honors Program where she engaged with a community of other honors students. They all lived in the same housing unit and took general college courses together. She did not own a computer at home but did own Sega Genesis and a Nintendo gaming system. Her first experiences with computers were in school beginning at the age of nine or 10 when she received computerized math and reading tutorials. Currently, she paid bills, budgeted money, watched videos, and sent and received text-messages through her Apple Iphone. She, like the other participants, had taken other online courses. In India's opinion, ". . . as it [technology] expands, life gets easier and makes everything simpler" (PI, 5/14/10).

Jasmin

Jasmin, the final participant, is a member of Generation X. At the time of the study, she was a married mother of two teenagers. She had completed an Associate's Degree in Biotechnology and aspired to receive her four-year-degree because she was unable to find work. Born and raised in the same southeastern town of the HBCU in this study, she thought technology made life easier; she also admitted being tired of seeing her teenagers' use of online social networks, cell phones, and text messaging. Ironically, she used, though not daily, all functions of technology, too, through cell phone use, texting, online banking, and online social networking. Jasmin was a unique participant because she used computers while growing up to help her mom who was a self-employed tax accountant. She recalled, "I would go to the office and with her. And she had the computer before Windows came out. I used to type in all the codes and do DOS and all that" (PI, 5/14/10). With her previous technology experience, she gladly enrolled in the online world literature course. The participants were categorized by their digital generation, age generation, nontraditional student descriptors, and geographic affiliation (see Table 1).

<div align="center">

Data Collection Procedures

</div>

To best understand nontraditional African American students' participation in online courses, I used multiple forms of data. I created interview and observation protocols for the purpose of conducting one one-on-one interview that featured open-ended questions with each participant. I also observed archives of participants' online world literature courses to determine the extent of their class participation.

Table 1

Participant Biographies

Participant	Digital Generation	Generation	Nontraditional Status (as noted below)	Geographical affiliation
Shannon	Digital Immigrant	Older Boomer	1,3,4,	rural
Mariah	Digital Native	Generation Y	3,4,5	urban
Angel	Digital Immigrant	Generation X	2,3,4,	rural
Tenille	Digital Immigrant	Generation X	2, 3, 4	rural
Sheila	Digital Immigrant	Generation X	2,3,4	rural
Badesha	Digital Immigrant	Young Boomer	2,3,4,5	rural
Amy	Digital Immigrant	Generation X	2,3,4,5	urban
Joshua	Digital Native	Generation Y	1, 2, 3	rural
India	Digital Native	Generation Y	1	rural
Jasmin	Digital Immigrant	Generation X	1,2,3,4	rural

Note. 1 = Did not enter college during the same year of high school graduation

2 = Works full time while attending college part or full-time.

3 = Is financially independent from a legal guardian.

4 = Has children.

5 = Is a single parent.

6 = Has a General Educational Development for high school equivalency rather than a high school diploma.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted by asking participant questions and then recording their responses (Creswell, 2005). In fact, interviews are one of the most important sources of information in case studies (Yin, 2003b). The advantages of interviews are that they provide important information that cannot be gathered through observation (Creswell 2005). Furthermore, because specific questions will be asked, the interviewer gains better control of the information gathered (Creswell 2005). The disadvantages of the interview, however, are that as the researcher, information will be presented through my lens (2005). As such, researchers can never be quite sure if the interviewee is only reporting what the research may want to hear (2005).

Interviews were conducted via face-to-face and/or via telephone with each participant at a pre-determined time upon which they agreed. For some of the participants who lived near the university, the face-to-face interviews worked well. However, for those who resided a substantial distance from the university, the telephone interview was preferred by them. In addition, because my participants were nontraditional students who had to balance work, school, and family, the telephone interview was most beneficial for them. I fully recognized that the telephone interview would cause me to lose the ability to make observations about non-verbal language. Nevertheless, 10 face-to-face and/or telephone interviews took place. All interviews were later audio-taped and then transcribed. The interview protocol for students can be found in Appendix A.

Observations

Observations are a means to gather information by watching the participants at a particular site (Creswell, 2005). The advantages of observations are that information is gathered first-hand by the researcher; although, the disadvantages of observations are that entry into observation may be difficult (2005). I conducted non-participatory observations of Blackboard course shells of the online and blended world literature courses. These observations of the course took place after the course ended. Based on questions in the observation protocol, I gathered and noted data about each student's online participation and class assignment entries. The observation protocol for both online courses can be found in Appendix B. See Table 2 for an alignment of the research question with data sources.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data were analyzed by interpreting content, a method which may reveal social behavior and study the communication process (Babbie, 2003). Content for this study came from participant interviewees and observations of Blackboard shells. After the interviews were transcribed and the participants' coursework was observed in Blackboard archives, I coded the information in order to look for similarities. Though subjective, coding is a process by which parts of the transcript are labeled and themes or similarities of discussion are sought (Creswell, 2007). Coding the data transpired in three phases: (a) reading the data; (b) organizing the data into categories; (c) selecting themes based on responses and observations.

Table 2

Alignment of Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Questions	Data Sources
How do nontraditional African American students attending this southeastern Historically Black College and University perceive online learning?	Student Interviews and Observations of online courses.
How do African American students attending this southeastern HBCU perceive face to face learning?	Student Interviews
How do nontraditional African American students attending this southeastern Historically Black College and University describe their communication preferences?	Student Interviews
How do nontraditional African American students attending this southeastern Historically Black College and University describe their learning preferences?	Student Interviews
How easily do nontraditional African American students navigate around the Blackboard platform?	Student Interview, Observations of online courses.
How do nontraditional African American students perceive online content like quizzes, tests, discussion boards, and assignments?	Student Interviews: Observations of online courses.
How does communication and learning preferences along with perceptions about online learning affect nontraditional African American students' participation in online world literature courses?	Student Interviews, Observation of online courses.

After all of the interviews and observations had been completed and read, I placed each research question as its own file in Microsoft Word. Then, each participant was given a color and his/her entire transcript was electronically highlighted using the assigned color. Anytime a participant's response related to a research question, the response was electronically cut and pasted under the appropriate research question. This process was repeated for each participant. After sections of the appropriate content had been placed under the specific research question, the data for the research question were read again. Each piece of data was then given a name or phrase which represented its potential category. After a series of categories had been assigned, another Microsoft file was created which included the data organized by categories. The categories and the data subsets were then read repeatedly. If categories were similar in nature, the data were merged and formed into a single category. These categories were then analyzed and formed into themes.

Four themes emerged based on the research data: (a) "Hit Somebody Up": Communication Among Classmates, Students and the Professor; (b) Shorten, Condense, and Learning in Different Ways: Handling Reading, Studying for Tests, and Multiple Ways of Learning; (c) Relationships that Foster Course Interest: Connecting to Subject Matter, Content, and Peers Online; and (d) Impatience is a Virtue: The Benefits and Disadvantages of Online Learning.

The "Hit Somebody Up": Communication Among Classmates, Students and Professor them was generated by the following data which were reoccurring comments by the participants: professor's communications to them; participants' communications to

the professor, communications to the class; their need to know what the instructor wanted, asking the professor questions, need for high level of interaction from instructors; desire for quick turnaround for concerns and assignments. These data signaled participants' need for a high frequency of communication from and with classmates and the professor.

The theme "Shorten, Condense, and Leaning in Different Ways": Handling Reading, Studying for Tests, and Multiple Ways of Learning, was generated by repeated comments about the following: a desire not read too much information in the discussion posts, frequency of posting depending on students' time, studying for tests using study guides, preferences for learning in groups, multiple modes of learning, and condensing reading assignments.

The theme, "Relationships that Foster Course Interest": Connecting to Subject Matter, Content, and Peers Online emerged after participants were noted as repeatedly conveying the following: preference for information that pertains to real life, working with students from similar backgrounds, desiring to read interesting posts, reading posts based on similarity of thoughts.

The data from the theme "Impatience is a Virtue": The Benefits and Disadvantages of Online Learning emerged from their interviews when they spoke about the advantages of online learning which included: ease in working with family; ease in working with technology; the importance of time in managing coursework; ease of course testing, viewing grades; keeping records, and allowing them to take more classes. Participants also noted the disadvantages of online learning, too: technology issues,

needs for tutorials, disadvantages of travel, needs for self motivation, and needs for

student interaction. From this data, the importance of convenience to participants was

also noted.

Role of the Researcher

My role in the research was that of a non-participatory interviewer and observer

throughout the study. I conducted interviews and observations without altering the

experience of the participants online or in interviews. This method of research was

important because it allowed the participants to tell their past, present, and future

experiences within a "specific context" (Creswell, 2005, p. 477). In other words, the

participant rendered knowledge about the phenomenon and not the researcher (Creswell,

2005). However, subjectivity and objectivity co-mingle in studies, which could it difficult

for the researcher to be truly objective when conducting research (Peshkin, 2000).

"To be forthcoming and honest about how we work as researchers is to develop

reflective awareness that I believe contributes to enhancing the quality of our interpretive

acts" (Peshkin, 2000, as cited in Creswell, 2005, p. 9). Therefore, disclosing my biases

was a key component to discussing my role as a researcher. The subjectivities that I

disclose include the fact that I am an African American woman who taught online

courses at this southeastern historically Black university. I also have an agenda that

includes my desire to use the information that I obtain to improve my own online

teaching with the purpose of elevating the academic outlook and the marketability aspects

of African American students who will someday be looking for jobs in the workforce.

The audience may view my study as a means of "drumming up business" for the university and myself. However, my intent as an African American woman and African American instructor rests in my personal desire to see that African Americans are not left-behind and that online learning has equal access, use, and opportunity for all, thus minimizing the effects of digital inequality. In addition, as an educator, I have a desire to see African Americans excel academically and financially in a world where the use of technology is ever increasing. Studies show how online learning is growing (NCES, 2009). In fact, 20 percent of all students enrolled in higher education programs are studying online. Online enrollment is nearly nine times greater than the overall higher education population (Allen, 2008).

In addition, at the time of the study, I was not participating as a teacher of an online course at this southeastern university. As a past instructor at this location, there could have potentially been some problems with teacher-student conflict, particularly with me having power over them as a previous instructor. I addressed this dilemma by selecting students whom I never taught. World literature is the final phase of courses offered in the English department that all students are required to participate. It is also the highest level course that I taught. This knowledge would have hopefully put students at ease and allowed them to be honest in their responses and provided even more credibility to my study.

Trustworthiness of the Study

A common criticism directed at qualitative research is that it fails the canons of reliability and validity. Validating a study means that researchers have a method to assure

accuracy of the study (Creswell, 2005). "Validating deals with the notion that what you say you have observed is in fact what really happened. In the final analysis, validating is always the truth" (Shank, 2002, as cited in Anafra, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p. 92).

Yin (2003b) contended that using multiple sources of data, establishing a chain of evidence, and having a draft of case study reports reviewed by key informants are necessary to ensure accuracy of a study. Creswell and Miller (2002) elected to refer to eight verifications to assure accuracy of a study (a) prolonged engagement and persistent observation, (b) triangulation, (c) peer review order briefing, (d) negative case analysis, and (e) clarifying researcher and external audits (as cited Anafra, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p. 30). Therefore, Creswell (1998) encouraged researchers to have a least two of the eight verification procedures. I heeded to Creswell and Miller's (2002) and Yin's (2003a) advice in that I selected two methods to verify accuracy—triangulation and member checking.

Triangulation "is a process of corroborating evidence from different individual types of data or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research" (Creswell, 2005, p. 252). "Triangulation puts the researcher in a frame of mind to regard his or her own material critically, to test it, to identify its weakness, to identify where to test further doing something different" (Fielding & Fielding, 1986, as cited in Anafara Brown, & Mangione , 2002, p. 24). I read through the typed transcripts of my interviews extensively and repeatedly. I looked for consistent themes and patterns that continuously emerged from multiple participants. Furthermore, I used my analysis of observations of Blackboard course shells to triangulate the individual interviews.

Member checking was conducted as well. The study's participants read through their transcript and hand-typed responses to ensure that the words were those intended by them. This method ensured that the participants guide the research as opposed to the researcher, which is one of the guiding principles of qualitative research. In addition, I used other methods to assure validity:

Being forthcoming about my biases allowed me to be honest in my efforts to conduct good research. "To be forthcoming and honest about how we work as researchers is to develop reflective awareness that I believe contributes to enhancing the quality of our interpretive acts" (Peshkin, 2000, as cited in Creswell, 2005, p. 9). Disclosing biases is a key component to building audience confidence. I openly acknowledged my subjectivites. The subjectivities that I disclosed included the fact that I am an African American woman who taught online courses at this southeastern historically Black college and University. I also admitted that I did and still do have an agenda that includes my desire to use this information that I obtain to improve my own online teaching and elevate the academic and financial outlook for African American students.

Finally, I selected participants with whom I had never taught. By doing so, I diffused the power differential that could have been experienced by the participants. Selecting such participants also provided evidence of good research.

In sum, validating findings in qualitative research is often a difficult matter for those who prefer quantitative research because the very nature of qualitative research is subjective (Yin, 2003b). The methods used to increase audience confidentiality included triangulation of research, member checking, and disclosure of biases. As such, this

elevated the trustworthiness of the study and hopefully aided in the credibility of the study's interpretations and findings.

Summary

The overarching question in this study was: How do communication and learning preferences, along with perceptions about online learning, of nontraditional African American students, affect their participation in online world literature courses at a southeastern HBCU? Through the use of instrumental case study methodology, I collected data about the participants' participation in the online course by conducting interviews with 10 nontraditional world literature students and examining through non-participatory observation their online world literature Blackboard course shells. Content analysis was used to determine how communication preferences, learning preferences, and perceptions about online learning affect these students' participation in an online world literature course. The role of the researcher and trustworthiness of the study are also discussed.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine how communication preferences, learning preferences, and perceptions about online learning affect non-traditional African American students of in their participation in online world literature courses at an HBCU in the southeastern United States. This chapter presents the findings of the study. The findings are presented based on themes which emerged from 10 participants through cross case analyses of the interviews and course observations. Consequently, findings were based on personal interviews, which will be identified as (PI, the month, day, and year); and observations of the online course, which will be identified as (OC, the month, day, and year).

"Hit Me Up": Contact with Classmates, Students, and the Professor

"Hit Me Up" is a slang expression used to ask another to get in contact with you. This communication can take place by telephone, email, text message, or on social networking sites. In this theme, participants discuss their preferences for communicating with classmates and the professor.

Classmates

Participants expressed a desire to communicate via two-way communication. While six participants said that they preferred face-to-face communication with classmates, three of the six said they would also prefer to communicate via telephone if

face-to-face communication was not possible. Two participants preferred to communicate

by phone; and only two reported their desire for text-based communication. For Sheila,

face-to-face communication is a way to talk openly and get an immediate response. She

said, "Well, I'm not a big phone person, but I would rather talk to them face-to-face and

just having open dialogue and be able to speak openly and then get some response back"

(PI, 5/13/10). For Amy, face-to-face communication means being able to pick up

nonverbal cues. She admitted to participating in instant messaging and social networking

to communicate with other students, though face-to face-communication was her

preference:

> I am instant messaging, blogging and using Facebook to talk to people.
> Sometimes I dislike that. I have a Blackberry to where I can get the information,
> and I can just hold on and listen and listen and listen as I'm in a rush. But you
> know with face-to-face, I can see the person talking and I can see what they're
> saying and if they're taking it the right way or the wrong way. I can see what kind
> of signals are being used. And sometimes when you're online, if you're putting
> things on paper, it may not come out the same way as if you would say it. When
> you're typing or you're texting, you can't really be communicative, but I guess
> the best way for me is face-to-face. (PI, 5/12/10)

Joshua discussed his desire to communicate with students face-to-face. He talked

about communicating with students beyond the classroom subject matter and wanted to

know what other students could tell him about finding jobs. He said, "If I am networking,

I prefer face-to-face" (PI, 5/12/10). Related to classroom communication, specifically the

chat feature in Blackboard, he still expressed a desire to talk to students face-to-face

chiefly based on his unfamiliarity with other formats. He stated, "I would prefer face-to-

face. I can't really say yes to the other one [the online chat]. I'm not knowledgeable about

the tool" (PI, 5/12/10). Indications of Joshua's preference for face-to-face communication can be identified in his participation in the online world literature course. Out of all the participants in the study, he was the only one who had no posts in the discussion board, though he completed all of his course assignments (OC, 6/20/10).

For some students, communication was not always black or white. Though students may have a primary preference for face-to-face communication, sometimes they adapted to the popular communication tools used by classmates. For example, Shannon, who ultimately liked to communicate face-to-face in order to interpret body language, recalled working with students on a project and spoke about her aversion to text messaging:

> They texted and that drove me crazy. I thought, 'Why don't you just pick up the phone?' I learned how to text. I'd rather talk than text, but it's okay. I mean it's not my preference. I prefer face-to-face which is really somewhat better. I like to share the interaction by looking at facial expressions. I want to know the body language of the interaction because I'm very much hands-on. I just prefer face-to-face. (PI, 5/10/10)

Jasmine also indicated a desire to communicate via telephone as a general communication preference. She also wanted to talk, "on the phone or in person" (PI, 5/14/10) in her daily life as well as in classroom settings; however, when speaking with her peers she preferred face-to-face dialogue.

Like Jasmin, Badesha was another participant who preferred telephone communication at times and face-to-face communication at other times. She discussed her desire to meet with students face-to face in order to communicate. She said, "I like to do person-to-person or telephonic not the e-mail, not discussion boards. I like to just talk

in person or telephone" (PI, 5/12/10). Interestingly, Badesha discussed a preference to meet with students one-on-one even if taking a class online. She spoke about her desire to be with other students in small groups. She went on to say, "Even if the class is online, people can exchange phone numbers and get together in a small group especially if they live in the same area" (PI, 5/12/00).

Students who preferred telephone communication valued social interaction, too. Tenille spoke about her preference for talking during breaks and reaching people outside of the classroom setting. She said, "I like talking by phone especially during the breaks, and I like exchanging numbers and cell phone numbers so we can talk outside the classroom setting" (PI, 5/11/10). Out of all the participants, Tenille was the most communicative in the discussion thread. Her postings were three times the course average (OC, 7/10/10).

Mariah also wanted to talk on the phone with students. She recalled her dislike of Elluminate, an online tool which allowed the professor in an online psychology course to verbally communicate with students. To her, its use lacked the level of interaction she desired. For Mariah, class would have been better had it been conducted over the phone. She recalled,

> I wanted talk by phone. In one class, we used Elluminate, and I hate it. Only one person can talk to the screen. Well, that's really not interactive, if only one person can talk. I prefer telephone live session where everybody could call a certain number and everybody could just talk. I want it [communication] to be more real-time. I hate Elluminate. It was used once a month and was really a mess. (PI, 5/10/10)

Mariah further discussed how Elluminate had many technical problems, often freezing and kicking students off the system. She also felt that writing in text-based format was too time consuming. Because Mariah is a member of Generation Y and many members of her generation like texting, when discussed textual means of communication, she responded that "I don't want to write to them at all. I wanted to talk to them in standard English. No text messages or instant messages should be allowed in the classroom. It takes too much time" (PI, 5/10/10). Mariah's aversion to text based communication was also seen in course observations. Often her posts to discussion threads failed to meet the length requirement as indicated in the syllabus. In addition, her postings seemed rushed and inattentive, often lacking proper spelling or punctuation (OC, 7/10/10).

There were only two students who preferred text-based communication. It was no surprise when India, the youngest participant and member of Generation Y, succinctly said, "My preference is to text message" (PI, 5/14/10). She also said that she preferred to talk to classmates via the discussion board on Blackboard which is also another text-based form of communication. Interestingly, her preference for text-based communication was not indicated in her actual participation in the course. Though India took the world literature course as a blended learning class, she only completed four of the 11 discussion threads required by the instructor (OC, 6/28/10).

For Angel, the other student who preferred text-based communication, email is her preferred method because she can set her own schedule. She said, "I liked the online e-mail in Blackboard. I liked the idea that I could work at midnight or six o'clock in the

morning and that I can set my own schedule" (PI, 5/10/10). Additionally, Angel admitted

to using both texting and email to communicate with students:

> E-mail works best for me. One time I worked on a project, we had to e-mail each
> other, but we realized that that didn't work best. So we sent each other each
> other's telephone numbers, and we started texting each other. But sometimes we
> would text saying, 'Hey, check your e-mail. There is some information on there
> you need.' It worked, and one of the students even had her school e-mail
> forwarded to her Blackberry. But before that I would just check my phone
> periodically. But it was a really good alternative. (PI, 5/10/10)

Getting a High Off of Student Interaction and Support

Nine participants in the study said that they needed a high level of interaction

from classmates. Ninety percent of participants described a fantastic class as one that

gave them the ability to interact with students. More specifically, Mariah said, "I love to

interact with people" (PI, 5/10/10). In fact, Tenille described the role of the student in

online courses as completing assignments and supplemental reading, as well as

interacting with others. She said online students should,

> definitely read the assigned material. And to get an even better grade, they need to
> read some outside materials and submit the materials on time. And when there's
> an assignment, they need to interact with other students, exchange ideas and
> opinions on the topic. (PI, 5/11/10)

To Shannon, student participation determined the success of the class. She said,

> I think the students played a major role as students. They make the class. Without
> student participation, the class wouldn't be a good class. We had a lot of
> interaction and a lot of people were serious. I got that through the work that they
> did. I could tell that they were serious. (PI, 5/10/10)

Not only is the participation of students key to making a good class, but contributions that students make to each other was also important, too. Shannon explained,

> I feel as though that my participation was very active. I reached out to other classmates. [I] commented on other classmates and commented on their assignments, especially things that really touched me that I was able to relate to. Even when assignments were a little challenging, I felt comfortable reaching out to classmates. 'What do you think about this? How did you interpret this? What you think about this or whatever.' (PI, 5/10/10)

Because Blackboard does not indicate to whom students email, it is unclear whether emails were sent to students or the professor. Nevertheless, Shannon sent the most emails (15) via Blackboard than any other participant (OC, 8/08/10).

Valuing others' contributions was important aspect of effective classes, too. To India, students "get along and openly communicate with each other. They listen to each other's opinions and are able to bounce off of each other's ideas. They listen and they participate" (PI, 5/10/10). Angel, too, valued the insights of her classmates. She admitted that even through email, she depended on classmates to help her understand how to complete assignments. She explained,

> I use e-mails quite a bit. I use e-mails and I had a group projects in one of my classes. So sometimes I would talk to other students and ask them to read my e-mail. I would ask them, 'Hey have you seen the assignment? Did you understand the assignment?' Or something like that. (PI, 5/10/10)

According to the non-participatory observations that I made Blackboard, none of India's emails were sent via Blackboard (OC, 9/10/10). Perhaps many of India's email messages were sent via private accounts outside of the Blackboard shell.

Just like Angel, Amy also depended on her classmates for help with her coursework. She

discussed how classmates were key to helping other students when a student is not able to

come to class:

> I really talk with other classmates. I usually share my phone number with them
> and give them that information so that just in case something happens and you're
> not able to come to class, we will be able to share the answers.

Mariah found communicating with other students is important when professors are

nonresponsive. She discussed how it was the student's role to be there for each other in

order to provide information about assignments:

> You'd actually have to use Blackboard and you ought to talk to one another on
> the discussion board and ask each other about the assignment because a lot of
> instructors don't give feedback that quickly. It helps to ask of the student or hit
> somebody up on Facebook and ask questions about the class. (PI, 5/10/10)

Open, interactive communication was a major desire for participants. So much so

that when they mentioned ways to design a perfect online course, it always included a

way for students to gather and share. Amy said,

> A great class is one in which the student and the professor are organized and
> communicate freely, and everyone will participate and be honest and share. I
> mean, I really enjoy classes, whether it's online where people are free to
> communicate freely. I think that's a good and ideal class.

Badesha echoed Amy's sentiment. In her design of a perfect online class, she said that

she would be sure to have some kind of chat feature. She explained that "I know I would

have the interactive discussion with my students online. I would have a chat room

available once a week so they could go and have discussions" (PI, 5/12/10). Tenille also

had a desire for more classroom interaction online. She said with all of the technological

advances that she wished classes could emulate a face-to-face meeting by use of Skype, a

technology which would allow for students to see and hear the professor and each other.

> I wish they would do it with Skype. So maybe like one day you could make it the class and you still want to hear the teacher and the interaction from the other students. You could at least do it with Skype or something like that. I'd love for that day to come. (PI, 5/11/10)

Efforts of participants in the study were categorized as active, meaning that they

completed all tests, discussion boards, and other assignments; lurker, meaning that they

completed most assignments including discussion boards and tests; and nonparticipant,

meaning they completed none of the assignments in the online course. Interestingly in my

observation of the course, I noted how four of the participants were active participants in

the course (Angel, Sheiva, Badesha, and Jasmin), six were lurkers (Shannon, Mariah,

Tenille, Amy, Joshua, and India), and none of them were nonparticipants (OC, 6/6/10).

A chart which indicates each student's participation in the course is located below

in Table 3. It is important to note that the number of emails indicated did not differentiate

between communication among students to students or to the professor. In addition, the

number of emails represented only the number of emails sent through the Blackboard

course shell and does not indicate the number of emails which may have been sent from

campus or personal email accounts. Furthermore, India's name contains an asterisk

because she was the student who took world literature as a blended course; therefore, her

posting requirements were different from the other nine participants.

Table 3

Course Participation

Participant	Participant Type	Discussion Board Posts out of Six Discussion Board Threads	Login Hits	Emails from Blackboard	Discussion Board (DB) or Assignments (A) Missing
Shannon	Lurker	17	436	15	1 DB
Mariah	Lurker	10	481	7	2 DB; 2A
Angel	Active	23	787	5	None
Tenille	Lurker	58	334	3	1DB; 2A
Sheiva	Active	17	479	0	None
Badesha	Active	17	720	0	None
Amy	Lurker	2	113	0	4DB
Joshua	Lurker	0	286	3	6DB
*India	Lurker	*4	*251	0	7DB
Jasmin	Active	19	782	3	None

Note: Active Participant: Completes all assignments as indicated on the course syllabus
Lurkers: Completes some of the assignments as indicated in the course syllabus
Nonparticipants: Completes none of the assignments as indicated on the syllabus.

Teacher Immediacy: Professors and Communication

The need for communication is not only important among students, but it is also important among the professor and students. Interestingly, participants had different preferences for communicating with the professor depending on who initiated the communication. When professors needed to communicate with students, six participants said they preferred that the instructor contact them by email; three preferred face-to-face communication, and one preferred phone communication. However, when students initiated the communication, four participants preferred to call, three desired face-to-face communication; two wanted text, and one was indifferent. The professor for the online world literature class documented the major source of her correspondence to students. She wrote,

> Because one of the main methods of communication in this course is through email, you must know how to send and retrieve messages from your _____ (school name acronym) email account. Students who do not respond to my emails run the risk of being dropped from the course, so please check your email several times a week. (OC, 6/6/10)

Interestingly, the need for interaction for students often went beyond a desire for a high level of communication with other students. Seven participants also wanted a high level of communication from the professor as well. There were over 21 announcements by the online world literature professor; however, the instructor did not participate in any of the six online discussions (OC, 6/6/10). Her level of participation was noted in the syllabus. She wrote, "I will not participate in all of the discussions, but I may 'drop-in' from time to time, especially if I need to 'referee' a discussion" (OC, 6/6/2010). Also

documented in the syllabus were six hours of on-campus office hours, and an additional

hour of online office hours (OC, 6/6/10).

For Tenille, an instructor's involvement early in the online course is important to

helping students learn online. She discussed how the instructor could help students avoid

frustrations when working online. More definitive instruction was needed for her to

succeed in the online learning environment. In referring to posting essays and

communicating about the course online process, she cautioned,

> Instructors at the beginning of the class need to make sure and need to get that understanding on how to help students understand how they are to post the essay. And that students understand how to get in contact with the instructor if there is a problem. They should basically communicate early on about the online process. I remember this one online class that I took; it was a traditional class, but we were meeting online. So I wanted it to look like a face-to-face class and the teacher just said okay go to Blackboard, but a lot of us did not know how to do that. And it was because they had not been exposed to it yet. I think is very important is to make sure that everyone understands the process. When I first started taking online classes this summer—like the password, I thought was the same as what I had for e-mail, and I had get help from the Help Desk a few times just until I got the hang of it. The first few weeks, I think, you know that there should be an attempt to seek out the students. The instructor should find out if they've (their students) ever had online class before and find out what their needs are. Even if it was a phone call to say, 'I know you signed up for my class, I want to make sure you know how to post material.' Or they could even send it to e-mail giving students detailed information on how to access the site and submit things properly. And I think that would help just throughout the semester, just on how things are done. (PI, 5/11/10)

Tenille also added how a professor's frequent participation could have increased her

quality of responses to the discussion board in the course. She said, "She did say that

from time to time she would come in and try to moderate. But I didn't see it at all. I think

my answers would've been more thorough (giggles) had she given me more feedback"

(PI, 5/11/10).

Like Tenille, Joshua also saw a connection between the teacher's involvement in

the discussion as related to how students performed in the course. To him, a professor's

connection to her students could help students gain interest in the subject matter, even if

the student is not motivated in learning the material. Perhaps, the professor's more direct,

intentional interaction with individual students could enhance the student's learning. He

reiterated:

> . . . a professor should reach out to her students. Not only to just teach the subject,
> but also be able to grasp where their students are at. They should not only make
> the learning experience a great learning experience, but at the same time even if
> students don't have interest in it, they can provide some interest to it. (PI, 5/12/10)

In other words, the professor should model the motivation in learning the subject that the

students should have.

Like Tenille and Jemaine, Angel also found that communication with the

professor created interest in the course. She talked about the importance of dialogue in

creating a supportive and lively classroom environment:

> They would be supportive. There will be open dialogue. I've taken classes where
> the teacher does lectures, and I get bored really quickly. I like it when we're
> engaged so much with the teacher, but we're engage with one another, too. (PI,
> 5/11/10)

Angel also discussed how a professor's participation in an online environment helped to recreate the experience of learning in a traditional classroom. As such, she said she wanted to see a great level of participation from her instructor:

> I wish the instructor would've participated more in the discussion more. For me, personally, I think there should be more interaction even though it is an online course. I would like for it to be like it was in the classroom. One of my instructors had a chat, and I wish she would have made it available in the afternoon and also have some in the evening. But just something so you could ask questions. I always felt like I didn't get something. (PI, 5/10/10)

For India, the level of interaction by the online world literature teacher was pertinent to her enjoyment of the course. India discussed how the professor's involvement helped to establish her as an authority and also helped students communicate openly:

> She was very good. She interacted with us enough to where we could grasp her being our instructor and grasp what she was trying to say. She also gave us the freedom to express ourselves. (PI, 5/14/10)

To Jasmin, the professor's involvement in the course indicated how she felt about teaching and that she genuinely cared about her students. When she described a really good class, she said of professors:

> They ask questions, you can ask questions, and they answer them and they're willing to help you. And they're interesting, and they don't read thing out of the book. I can tell they enjoy what they teach that not one of those teachers have a 'I got mine, you get yours' attitude. And a lot of them, they have a personality, and they interact with the students. (PI, 5/14/10)

Badesha agreed when she said that the interaction with the instructor is necessary to affirm students' efforts about their progress in the course:

I think the accessibility to the instructor—to be able to ask questions and get a response back makes a good class. There would be online chats so you would be able to be online. There would be office hours online. They ought to have office time so that you could just chat where in one could enter into conversation to ask questions. To make sure you're going in the right direction. (PI, 5/12/10)

Sheila talked about how she wanted to know that the instructor had actually read her comments in the discussion board. She wanted to know that the professor valued her participation and did not just make posts without knowing the students' opinions about discussion topics. Like Angel, Sheila perceived that doing so would emulate traditional classrooms. She said that she wanted instructors to communicate with students online in similar ways to face-to-face instruction:

I'm looking at the post by the instructor. I'm looking to see that they have actually read some of the posts that the students have put in the discussion board instead of just putting down what they think and just disregarding what the student has put down. Because if it was a traditional classroom setting, the responses by the instructor will be based on what the students are saying. So, I would expect the same thing of the post that the instructors are making an online. (PI, 5/13/10)

Most importantly, Sheila talked about how open communication was vital to fostering a good learning environment. She discussed how slow responses and a sense that instructors did not welcome questions can ruin student morale. In describing an excellent class, she said,

I would have the ability to be honest. If there's some sort of problem in the class, I should be able to tell the instructor what the problem is and get a response back from her. I've found that some instructors online, either they haven't responded in a timely manner and then I have a couple of online instructors where we're made to feel that if you asked a couple questions then, you did not have the right to ask. They made you feel bad about asking that question. (PI, 5/13/10)

Sheila further explained how the instructor's unwillingness to accommodate student questions could have been detrimental to student performance. She said:

> It's mostly a tone issue. You can tell by the way that they responded they did not appreciate you asking that question and that your asking could be a problem. It may be something you need for a particular assignment right then, but they may take a long time responding. That [teacher response time] can make a difference between you passing or failing an assignment. (PI, 5/13/10)

Outside of the interaction, six participants discussed how the success of the course hinged around the professor's ability to communicate specifically. As such, participants said that they wanted the instructor to provide a detailed syllabus and communicate clear expectations about course assignments. Therefore, the professors' planning and presentation of the material were important to students' perceptions about the quality and enjoyment of the course. The syllabus for the online course contained important due dates for assignments and exams along with grade weights for assignments (OC, 6/06/10).

Amy said that the role of the instructor in an online course is a big responsibility because the professor's organization was a major means of facilitating students' learning:

> The instructors are very important when you're online. How a person is organized, if this person is going be clear with the information, if they can communicate and respond in timely manner and things like that are very important. It is a big responsibility when you're online instructor. (PI, 5/12/10)

In order to meet the professor's expectations, Sheila emphasized the importance of the professor's syllabus, active participation, and clear presentation of course assignments in order for things to run smoothly for students and the instructor. She explained:

> They need to have a clear syllabus and outline, be expected to respond back in a timely manner to the students, and to be available to answer questions that may be asked, and have stuff in a clear manner. They should have everything up there to know what was expected of me, but if it is not presented in a clear manner, and I'm confused it will make things harder on everybody. (PI, 5/13/10)

Sheila further added how the instructor's preparation is pertinent to good classes. She reiterated, "What would make the class for me is you're getting the information that you need in order to be able to function, so you're not only getting information from the instructor, but you're getting feedback" (PI, 5/10/10).

Furthermore, the professor's preparation was important to online students because students needed clear instructions to complete assignments. Sheila commented on the role of students being hinged around the expectations of the instructor.

> I want them to do what is expected of them as the assignments are due and the dates are out. They need to meet the deadlines when they're supposed to and to just participate in the discussion board and to just do what is being asked of them.

Tenille also indicated how the student's role is to meet the instructor's expectations. In her description of the role of the student, she said students were to:

> Basically making sure they know what the syllabus is, and that they understand what the teacher is using to grade the assignment. 'So what did she expect for an < A> type paper? Just what is she looking for in terms of being knowledgeable about what the instructor's expectations are?' [Students] are to turn in the course work on time, or be on time, and make as many classes as possible.

India also agreed when she said that instructors should have a structured way of presenting information. According to her, instructors should "present the information in an organized format, not just one topic here in another topic there" (PI, 5/14/10).

Similarly, Jasmin also highlighted the importance of instructor clarity. She said

instructors should "be available to the student and put as much information up there as

possible and be as specific as they can about what students should do because some of

them can be kind of vague" (PI, 5/14/10).

When the online world literature instructor did not place the contents of an exam

which required students to create a fairytale on the syllabus, it caused Badesha to be

concerned about her abilities to meet the deadline for submission. Badesha admitted that

she was not confident in her abilities in creative writing. When discussing her perception

of the reading and writing assignments in the world literature class, she said,

> Everything was ok except for the fairytale because I like science and math, so the idea that I had to write a fairytale really threw me off. That really wasn't on the syllabus. I could've prepared myself if I would have known that it was on the syllabus. I could've done some research on how to write it and been more proactive. I like to read the syllabus ahead of time to know what needs to be in on time. (PI, 5/12/10)

Confidence in their abilities to meet the instructor's expectations was very

important for participants. Five participants indicated a need for samples and quick

feedback on assignments so that they could submit exactly what the teacher wanted.

Grades for discussions, papers, and tests were posted in early April (OC, 6/06/10). Joshua

wanted to get a better understanding of the professor's expectations. He said that it would

have been nice to get samples well-written assignments from the online world literature

instructor like he did in another course:

> Sometimes I want the instructor to post an example from the material. I don't know whether this instructor from this class posted examples. I mean, she just

gave instructions. I have had another class where the instructors gave examples and what not, but I didn't see any for this class. This class was more instructions. We just follow the instructions, and that was it. (PI, 5/12/10)

Joshua also mentioned how it would have also been helpful to meeting expectations if the instructor would have provided summaries capturing key ideas expressed by students in the discussion thread. He said instructors could have given "maybe their own thoughts and comments about the discussion. To give you a before and after summary of key points in the discussion thread would have really helped me to know what I needed to learn" (PI, 5/12/10).

Shannon said that she wanted to understand exactly what the instructor wanted in order to complete course assignment well. She was quite definitive in what she wanted as explained below:

> Number one is truly understanding what the assignment is, asking what the instructor or the professor really wants and what the outcome should look like. Once I do that, once I have that detail, I could research a particular topic or subject, whatever. Once I do that I am able to do the research, massage it, and pull it all together. (PI, 5/10/10)

Angel recollected about an essay that she submitted in her online world literature class in early February; however, she did not receive her grade until the end of the session. She admitted to being unsure about her use of the Modern Language Association (MLA) referencing format, and had wanted to use the feedback to make the necessary changes for her next essay. She shared her frustration by saying:

> I know for me my first essay was in February, and I didn't hear anything [about the final grade] until April. But to me, mid-March would have been better, at the

latest four weeks. So I'm just saying that's the most amount of time that I needed so that I can apply the feedback to my next essay versus I've done three essays and have not gotten back any feedback. Then I get the grade that indicates that I'm missing MLA formatting. (PI, 5/10/10)

Angel also noted how the timely scheduling of feedback may have helped her to avoid writing incorrectly on future assignments. She also said clear expectations, even if through a post in the discussion thread, may have helped students understand the professor's expectations and reinforced learning:

I did three essays in literature, and I haven't gotten any feedback on any of them yet for the whole semester. So I really wanted to know how I did and she e-mailed me back and said that I made an <A> grade, but I want feedback. If I'd been struggling, I would have been so disappointed to have made a bad grade after the semester is over and having been told your writing style wasn't this or that. Give us some feedback based off of what is working. If people are writing and everybody does poorly then you get a discussion thread saying this is what I saw in the writing in order to give some reinforcement to ensure that everybody is grasping what the expectations are. Just don't send me an e-mail with a general grade. This kind of stuff does tend to run together after a while. (PI, 5/10/10)

Sheila also echoed a similar concern to Angel's about the scheduling of feedback. She, too, expected to receive her grades for assignments in a timely manner:

She waited until basically the last part of the class in order to grade papers and everything. I did not know what my grades were until right before the end of the session. That can be a problem. Instructors should make sure that they grade assignments in on time. (PI, 5/13/10)

Tenille also discussed how timely feedback would include a one week turnaround. She said,

So if you turn in an assignment so like a week. You should not have to wait for the end of the term or the end of the semester to find out how you are doing in class. It shouldn't take longer than a week to turn it back in to it you. If they can do it in a few days, that's great, longer than a week, I think is a bit much. (PI, 5/11/10)

She added how good courses are based on good teaching:

It is one in which the teacher is very knowledgeable about the subject. She has an open discussion type format with different topics is kind of laid back teacher. She is on time with grading, and we get good feedback on what to do to improve the work that has been turned in. (PI, 5/11/10)

"Shorten, Condense, and Learning in Different Ways": Handling Reading, Studying for Tests, and Acknowledging Multiple Ways of Learning

Within this second theme, participants describe their preferences for smaller amounts of reading and their desire for study notes and group collaboration.

Reading and Course Preparation

Study questions for each the literature readings were provided for all of the readings which were: *Medea, The Epic of Son Jara, Canterbury Tales*, and *Othello* (OC, 5/06/10). In addition, a breakdown of characters through a study guide was provided for the *The Epic of Son Jara* (OC, 5/06/10). Tenille summarized her expectations of the instructor when she captured the requirements of reading in a course. She defined good courses as ones with manageable amounts of reading:

Good classes are ones that don't require a large amount of reading, a moderate amount, but not a large amount. It would be just enough to get you familiar with the material into thinking and not to the point where you got to have extended hours and hours every week just reading. (PI, 5/11/10)

Tenille was not the only participant who had concerns about the reading; in fact, six

participants in the study noted their challenges with reading in the online world literature

class. Jasmin thought that there was too much reading in the online world literature

course. She said her preconceived notion about world literature was that "I thought it was

a bunch of reading. So that's about it. I just knew I had to do a bunch of reading" (PI,

5/12/10). The amount of reading was not the only problem with the texts students

discussed; another reading challenge that one participant mentioned was comprehension

of the reading. Shannon found that she had problems understanding the reading, too,

especially when the texts were written in non-Western styles or old English. She

explained,

> There were some challenges with the language. Trying to interpret the old
> language and what the author was trying to come across. I could read something
> and read it and I don't know exactly what they're saying. You just can read
> something, but you can't get it right away. (PI, 5/10/10)

Five participants who communicated concerns about the course reading discussed

narrowing information as a way they found helpful in understanding the text. Sheila

added how she attempted to condense the reading in order to respond on the discussion

board. She noted, "I tried to condense information as much as possible because

sometimes the reading assignments can be kind of lengthy, and I try to read in advance

and then try to condense what I read in order to respond" (PI, 5/14/10). Sheila further

added how study guides helped her prepare for exams. In preparing for a recent exam she

said,

> I usually keep the information that is given before me and then the assignment that the information has do with the exam. I make sure that I keep the information together and then review that. I study that to prepare for exam, and I'll make sure that I'll go over any study guides that the instructor has given us and then I'll just review any assignments in the study guide and go over them to prepare for an exam.

India also echoed Jasmin's and Sheila's concern about the amount of reading. Like Shannon, she, too, was concerned about the reading's complexity. When thinking about the expectations of the course, she said she thought the world literature class would include "reading a lot of stories from different parts of the world" (PI, 5/14/10). One way India was able to handle the reading requirement was to rely on PowerPoint slides to prepare for exams. She said, "I look back over tests and especially if the teacher has PowerPoint, I look back at the PowerPoint for important facts and information in order to study" (PI, 5/10/10).

Angel also confirmed Jasmin's, Sheila's, and India's perceptions about the amount or reading required in world literature to be true. She discussed how she was often overwhelmed by the reading expectations when combined with her other courses: She remembered that she

> just read all the stuff and sometimes I was just overwhelmed with how much reading there was . . . It was so much required that it could be overwhelming, and then I got to read this and then in another class I got five chapters to read and then I would be like WOW! (PI, 5/12/10)

Because of the amount of reading, Angel spoke about ways that helped her to understand it. She discussed how a "breakdown" through study guides and notes was a way for her to successfully understand, *The Epic of Son Jara*, an African work written in dialect and

proverb with multiple characters. Angel added how course "cheat sheets" were

particularly helpful to her as a busy nontraditional student:

> So I'm thinking about the story *Son Jara*. She [the instructor] got a lot of
> questions from students to the point that she gave us some cheat sheets. So she
> really just gave us a good breakdown on who the characters were. It was
> something to help ensure that we got the information. We are nontraditional
> students, and sometimes the learning curves are a little greater. And we just don't
> have enough time as a traditional student would have. So giving us resources
> again and just assuring that we're grasping the material and not just saying,
> 'Okay, here's your syllabus for the session. Let me know if you have any
> questions.' (PI, 5/10/10)

Faced with challenging and lengthy reading in her studies was not new to Angel. She

faced similar problems with reading in her psychology class. Angel recalled how

PowerPoint slides allowed her to know what information to place her focus:

> The discussion was okay in my psychology class, but my teacher provided a
> PowerPoint overview for every chapter so I can follow along with the PowerPoint
> as I was reading the textbook. To me it was like, 'Hey, these are the things you
> need to make sure that you are familiar with.' Some of the chapters could have so
> much material, and I just wondered, 'do I need to know this or do I need to know
> that?' It just really helped me to know the things that I need to focus on. This
> would have been great in the online world literature class. (PI, 5/10/10).

Similar to Angel, Joshua also mentioned how he needed to have course highlights

of information when he prepared for exams. Joshua said to prepare for tests he would,

"Have to flip through a couple pages of it [the reading] and jot down what I could" (PI,

5/12/10). His process of "flipping" through pages and jotting down "what he could" in

order to study for exams implied his sense of being overwhelmed with the reading

material. Just like Angel, he would have preferred to have had the information condensed

in order to focus on what needed to be learned. He further added,

> Well, I usually go over my old tests and quizzes. If the professor would give a
> study guide, I would hope that she would give a study guide so that we know
> what will be on the test and what was assigned. I just prefer study guides to be
> honest with you. (PI, 5/13/10)

In related sense, Amy also noted the length of the reading as a problem for her in

world literature. So much so, that she wished that there was a class when all one did was

read. She said, "Yeah, I think it was a lot of reading. I think that the world lit class should

really be a class in the class where all you do is read" (PI, 5/12/10). Just like many of the

aforementioned participants, she, too, must have a means to narrow the text when

preparing for coursework. She also said she used PowerPoint when she wrote papers, too.

She explained, "When I get ready for a test, and I just go back over my notes and my

PowerPoint and review, I basically do the same thing when I'm getting ready to write a

paper" (PI, 5/12/10). Amy further added how she kept PowerPoint notes in an accordion

file to help her when she wrote papers:

> Well, what works best for me is I get one of those accordion folders. As I get
> information like a PowerPoint presentation, I print it off. And I'll keep it in order
> to have a notebook. So I can take plenty of notes, and because when I'm working
> on a paper, I like to look back and see how I should put things together. (PI,
> 5/12/10)

"The Professor is not the Only Way to Learn World Literature":

Multiple Pathways of Learning

All ten participants discussed how they had multiple ways of learning. In fact, none of them indicated having a single preference for gaining knowledge. Instead, all of them have multiple preferences which overlap and can include any combination of visual, auditory, tactile, constructivist, and social modes of learning. The online world literature course included six text-based discussion boards, a video link to a segment of *Medea*, two written essays, and two exams, one of which was multiple choice, the other a project which required a creation of a fairytale (OC, 5/06/10).

Though study guides and PowerPoint presentations were essential to six participants, when it came to understanding the reading and preparing for tests, multimedia links were also key to understanding the text. Amy shared how having audio-visual components to the online-world literature course helped her to understand her reading of Euripedes' *Medea:*

> I learn best when I'm hearing and taking notes. I like to hear it, see it, and write it. I know those three work really good. I know I retain a lot more information. I really enjoyed looking at *Medea*. Not only do we get to read that story, we get to actually see a portion of that play. It really helped me to understand the play and just seeing the actors really broadened the relevance to the story. (PI, 5/12/10)

While participants noted multiple learning preferences, six of them mentioned a preference for learning in smaller groups. Similar to Jasmin, India also described how visual material helped her to learn in classes. She remembered a great class as one "that is visual, something that [the student] can see and connect with as well as have the visual

aspect" (PI, 5/14/10). In addition, India also indicated a need to work with other students

when she prepared course assignments. She enjoyed working with other students in a

group. India commented, "I probably want to work with other students where we are next

to a computer in a group, where I can get and share information" (PI, 5/14/10). Angel

also said her learning was augmented when she included other class members. She

discussed how she desired to apply knowledge and work in in-class group assignments so

that she could showcase knowledge. She stated,

> I enjoyed the group discussions online for online classes and in a classroom setting. I enjoy the same thing with the group discussions with dialogue and group assignments in class and not out of class, something where you're applying what you learn for 30 minutes of class, and maybe working together 30 minutes of class, and then presenting what we learn. (PI, 5/10/10)

Similar to Angel, Joshua talked about how group work helped him learn from other

students:

> You share your viewpoint of the story or whatever the assignment . . . But if the workload is by yourself when you're able to share that teamwork, man! It creates a great learning experience and you get to see other people's thoughts and viewpoints and opinions on things and stuff. So just bringing the team together as a whole makes a good class. (PI, 5/12/10)

In addition to learning from and within the group, Joshua considered himself to be a

visual and auditory learner. He discussed how hearing and seeing information is

particularly important in courses he found difficult:

> I have multiple ways I'd like to learn. I'd like to see it. Sometimes I need to hear it from the professor especially as far as world lit because sometimes the stories are really hard to interpret. I mean as far as in terms of reading between the lines

with certain things especially with the *Epic of Son Jara.* It is very important to be
able to see and hear additional information. (PI, 5/12/10)

He also enjoyed constructing knowledge because it gave him the ability to feature his

unique talent. He shared how he did well on a project in which students were to create a

fairytale and place it on the discussion board. He said, "I think I did very well on my

PowerPoint presentation which was a fairytale. . . . I have a creative thinking box on my

head" (PI, 5/12/2010).

Similarly, Mariah also enjoyed assignments which allowed her to build on her

knowledge. She discussed how completion of assignments that required students to create

their own knowledge using technology would be an optimal way for her to complete

tasks. She envisioned how constructivist activities as a group could help ease the work

load on students. She talked about how creating a video with class members worked well

with students who were participatory:

> So, let's say there's something in the news. And you have to do a video, make it
> into a video clip and put it in action to show the positive or negative of the news.
> In a group project, you don't have to do as much work in class. And I don't like
> lazy people who don't pull their weight in class, but I do like the interaction, (PI,
> 5/10/10)

Lack of interest in completion of assignments is evidenced in the fact that Mariah, along

with Tenille, was one of two participants who failed to submit two major assignments

outside of discussion threads (OC, 8/28/10).

Though Tenille is a self-described auditory learner, she noted the benefits of

learning collaboratively:

In groups, we can talk about the assignment. We can give our opinion on how we want the project to be done. If it is a group project, we can give each other pointers. For example, in this class that I had, I wasn't familiar with PowerPoint slides. I did not know how to create a diagram, and I wasn't familiar with that so it was good to get pointers in my group. Just basically being able to get pointers from other classmates over the best way to go about the assignment was good. (PI, 5/11/10)

In addition to learning in groups, Tenille also discussed how hearing information from

the professor and taking notes was essential for learning:

I like to have the instructor verbally tell me what they want for the assignments, and I'll take my own notes. I like lectures; I like mostly lecture . . . To get more information from them [lectures], I like to take my own notes. I like the lecture style. (PI, 5/11/10)

Though the lecture style was preferred, Tenille also noted how good classes must go

beyond lecture if learning is to transpire. Tenille believed that "teachers would do more

than just lecture. Once in a while they would bring a video clip in or have a guest

speaker" (PI, 5/11/2010). In Tenille's point of view, multimedia is another key

component to learning. She shared how video links in her online world literature class

helped her to understand the reading:

There were a couple times she had some video links which were very interesting. And I liked the video links. It took me by surprise; it was a nice touch. In the literature course there was a lot of reading, but she also submitted links to help [students] understand the material. So, I liked a variety. It helped to keep the class interesting. It wasn't strictly reading. It was a nice little variety. (PI, 511/10)

In addition to being a social learner, Shannon also considered herself to be a

constructivist learner. She talked about how using a group project instead of a test would

allay her test anxiety, yet still allow her to construct knowledge: "I want something I can touch and feel or whatever, so I can retain it," she said (PI, 5/10/10). She further added:

> My main challenge in going back to school at my age is memorization. I find it difficult to learn this way in particular. It is not a strong suit for me. A perfect environment is to give me something I can sink my teeth into. I am very visual. Give me a group project or something to do. Let me discover what it is I need to learn. It tends to stay with me longer if I'm the one that's actually doing the research as opposed to learning. I want to discover. You know what I mean? I like having a way to construct my own knowledge and possibly in a controlled setting because I know the curriculum and objectives, learning outcomes, and the syllabus. . . .When we get to the point where I need to the take a test and memorize stuff, I get really nervous . . . I know I have a certain time limit, and I know it's [time] constantly on my mind. I do pretty well, but I would prefer not to do that. Give me a group project or something. (PI, 5/10/10)

Shannon also talked about discussion threads and how it helped her learn more than just about her own opinions. She explained how discussions were her important to her learning:

> [I like] discussion because I welcome and I learn from other people's point of view, the different perspectives on a topic or issue. That's what I love. You learn something not only about yourself. I think it was awesome. We covered a lot of material, analyzing and learning what other people's thoughts and opinions were and how we responded to certain topics or subjects. I really learned a lot. (PI, 5/10/10)

Though not all participants indicated a desire to work in groups, two of the participants implied the need for interaction from classmates in order to learn. For Badesha, learning transpired in a blended environment. She described an excellent classroom setting as one that is "probably a blended class, probably some online, and

some in the classroom. Then you would just have a better opportunity to maybe ask some of questions [if needed]" (PI, 5/12/10).

Though not stated explicitly in the above quotation, Badesha implied a need for not only visual information, but verbal and nonverbal interaction which is more likely to take place in live classroom settings. Like Badesha, Jasmin, also an independent learner, discussed a need for the face-to-face classroom. Though she considered herself to be a visual learner, she admitted that her learning preferences hinge around the courses that she took. She noted how she needed verbal and nonverbal cues to learn as well. Despite these preferences, Jasmin indicated how her schedule superseded her desire to have her learning preferences met. She said, "It depends on the class. Some classes, I know I'm a visual learner. Some classes, I know I need to be in there with the teacher. But most the time is how it fits into my schedule" (PI, 5/14/00).

<div align="center">

"Relationships that Foster Course Interest":

Connecting to Subject Matter, Topics, and Classmates

</div>

This section discusses many of the participants' need to make connections to the subject matter, topics, or classmates in order to fully participate in the course. Participants described how building these relationships helped them to contribute more in the online course.

Subject Matter and Topics

Another theme that emerged from the data analysis was the students' desire to connect to the subject matter, topics, or to other classmates in order to enjoy online courses and fully participate. Seven participants mentioned that a connection to the

subject matter, topics within the course, or making connections with others students contributed to their enjoyment and level of participation in the online world literature course. While all the members of Generation Y mentioned a need to connect to the subject matter and topics being discussed, members of older generations emphasized the importance of connecting to and with classmates.

First of all, all three members of Generation Y mentioned a need to connect to topics and the subject matter in order to enjoy and fully participate in the course. Mariah, a member of Generation Y, admitted that good classes begin with the subject matter itself. She admitted to being more likely to read required assignments if she had interest in the course subject. She said, "It [reading] depends on the topic. If it's boring I am less likely to read it. If it is interesting I am more times more likely to read it" (PI, 5/10/10). Mariah further added how her interest in the topic also determined her level of participation on the discussion board. She said, "It really depends on the topic. If it is something that interests me then yeah; but it is something I'm not interested in then no. I read the first line and not the rest to decide whether I'm going to read it" (PI, 5/12/10).

Similar to Mariah, Iris, the youngest member of Generation Y, also stated how her course participation is determined based on her level of interest in the topic being discussed. She said: "If I feel a gumption, then I will respond to it, especially if it [the subject] is something that I'm passionate about. I will respond to the topic" (PI, 5/14/10). Joshua, the only male participant and one of three members of Generation Y discussed a need to be able to use information learned in courses outside of class. He said he liked courses that had "information that is actually informative [and] that you actually can use

outside of the classroom" (PI, 5/12/10). Out of all of the works that he read for the online

world literature class, the ones that he enjoyed most were the ones that he could relate to

real life. He discussed, "I did like some of them. The ones that were really good related to

life experience like *Medea* and *Othello*" (PI, 5/12/10).

Classmates

For members of older generations, participants' satisfaction with the course is

developed through personal connections with peers. Like members of Generation Y,

Tenille stated how she must not only be interested in the topic being discussed but that

she also must relate to her classmates. She added how her participation in the course

would have increased if topics were more interesting and if she could relate to

classmates: "If they posted something really interesting. I would've posted something

back. I would have done a little bit more back-and-forth than what I did" (PI, 5/11/10).

Her process for responding to discussion posts was determined by how similar students'

views were to her own. She added, "I would comment on them, and I will find someone

who I had a similarity with, then I would post. I would say, 'hey I agree' and then I

would comment on it" (PI, 5/11/10).

For Shannon, an older boomer and the oldest participant in the study, satisfaction

would be gained by working with peers who are around her age. Shannon said working in

similar age learning communities would foster class satisfaction. She said,

> I know you probably cannot do this because it would probably be discriminatory,
> but it would be nice to set up the work for people of the same age group, made up
> of the same age group for like-minded [people]. . . . But you know, working with
> younger people can drag everyone down because everyone doesn't participate and
> that drives me crazy. (PI, 5/10/10)

Similarly, Angel felt that she could relate to comments made by students who shared her years and experience:

> I could just relate to nontraditional students in conversations online. You can be in a class and in a discussion with traditional students, but their minds are just so vastly different. [It] is easier to engage in a conversation when you feel like you can relate to that person. So I did start to pick and choose who I would respond to because it's easier respond to someone who did a good, thorough post instead of to someone who posted one sentence—even though we had a minimal word requirement. (PI, 5/10/10)

Sheila shared the same sentiments as Shannon and Angel. She, too, wanted to connect to students who were older. She felt that mature students took learning seriously. When she described her process for posting discussions to other students, she said,

> I look through the majority of them, and it sometimes is going to depend on how the person responded if it seems like they have the same kind of thought process I do. Or it looks like they prepared their responses then that's the one I'm drawn to. . . . It looks like they respond just so they can respond. I try to shy away from those a little bit more. Or if it looks like someone who prepared as much, then those are the ones that I'll usually respond to. (PI, 5/13/10)

"Impatience is a Virtue": Advantages and Disadvantages of Online Learning

Advantages of Learning Online

All of the participants spoke about the convenience of learning online as an influential factor affecting their desire to register in the online world literature course. In fact, six participants took world literature online purposefully; three had to take the course online because face-to-face courses were filled; and one participated in online learning because the Honors section of world literature was taught as a blended course.

Nine participants were women. Three out of nine women discussed how the flexibility of being able to take courses online while juggling numerous responsibilities of motherhood as key to their registration in an online course. According to Mariah, who is a member of Generation X and a single mother of two children under five, "it's just easier, especially when you have children" (PI, 5/10/10). Tenille, a member of Generation X and a busy mother of two small children, echoed Mariah's sentiments. She added the convenience of working around her community involvement and the freedoms from the hassle and expense of securing babysitters as a benefit to online learning. She said,

> Just the convenience of being able to take the class. It fit into my schedule; it was just really convenient taking it online. Like it fits into school, church, and work. I didn't have to find a babysitter to watch the kids and all that. (PI, 5/11/10)

Sheila, a member of Generation X and a grandmother, also spoke of the convenience of online learning based on her ability to complete her womanly responsibilities, too. She also added the benefits to her career and life in general:

> The convenience of being able to take classes online by me working, being a wife, mom and a grandmom (pause), the convenience of being able to take classes online has allowed me to accomplish things career-wise that I wanted to accomplish. For me, personally, in terms of my responsibilities and what I have to do, I think it's perfect for a nontraditional student who wants to further their education, but yet still participate. (PI, 5/13/10)

Though three participants discussed how online learning helped them juggle the responsibilities of work, school, and family, three other participants spoke about the flexibility, record keeping, and reduction in stress which accompanied online learning.

Jasmin, also a working mother, spoke about the way online courses allowed her to fit all of her coursework into her schedule. She said online learning "fits into my schedule and doesn't conflict with my other classes. Because I have lab classes, it is hard to get classes that fit my schedule. So I try to take classes online when I can" (PI, 5/14/10).

Likewise for the only male participant and member of generation Y, Joshua, who is single with no children, stated that online courses allowed him to take an 18-hour course load and still maintain a desired average:

> Well, I just wanted to work at a certain pace. I was taking a certain amount of hours and it was really overboard for me. To have an ability to take the online class was convenient for me. It would be better off for me so that I could make the grade that will be acceptable to me. (PI, 5/12/10)

In addition, Joshua added how he found the flexibility of the coursework allowed him ample time to complete assignments. He recalled:

> I know she [the professor] gave us enough time to get our assignments done. She gave us room to work at our own pace. There is more flexibility . . . So let's say an essay—is due at the end of May. The assignment is posted today and you might have to May 28. It gives you time to read it, read the subject, consider your other classes and have time to summarize and meet up with other students to be familiar with the other people's view point. (PI, 5/12/10)

Shannon also discussed the flexibility of online learning. The oldest participant, Shannon, initially wanted to take world literature face-to-face but found those sections closed. Though she reluctantly enrolled in the online version, one aspect that she grew to love about online learning was the flexibility:

I love it because you got your syllabus up front. You knew your time frame. You can manage your time accordingly. You knew what you need to do and when. I didn't have a problem with it. From the online perspective that is the way to go because you have unlimited access. You don't just have class at certain time and not be there from a certain time. . . . If you really want to be online, you have 24-hour access. Everybody has equal access. You may have something to do. You have a lot of flexibility. (PI, 5/10/10)

Like Joshua and Shannon, Amy also discussed how she found online learning as a timesaver:

I think it's a wonderful thing. I think is a great resource to help people. It can help people further their education because of the time constraints. I think is great to be at the four o'clock in the morning and be working on your class work. And maybe have the rest of the day to do the other things that you need to take care of. So I think this is a wonderful opportunity. I think in the future [online learning] may be something that we use a lot more of. (PI, 5/12/10)

In addition to flexibility, Amy also mentioned how one of the benefits of online learning was her ability to maintain course records:

Yes I can go back into my biology class and been able to use some information related to another class to take like that. So I hope it stays like that. Okay, so sometimes in the course of time, you don't have time to just download everything on your flash drive. It is great that I can go on my computer and just pull up information. And you know, sometimes I'll have my flash drive on me. I think that that is just an excellent resource that you have to carry a bunch of books is just really all right there. It is just really awesome. (Amy, PI, 5/12/10)

India, who is from Generation Y and single with no children, also discussed the benefits of online learning. She related it to record keeping. She said, "The convenience is the ability to look up the information and maintain the information from my professors" (PI, 5/14/10).

Angel added a new advantage to taking online courses when she talked about how online learning helped her to reduce additional stress in her life. Attempting to take the course face-to-face, Angel soon dropped it after she realized that taking world literature face-to-face would have been too much of a hassle:

> Actually when I got started this semester, I went in to take one class of face-to-face and the other three I wanted to take online. I opted to take one of the classroom courses. I wanted the camaraderie experience interacting with the students, be face-to-face with the teacher. But after one day of class I realized it was just too taxing for me to try to get off for work and make it to class even though I get off at five o'clock. I am not an hourly employee. So I don't punch a clock; I am a salaried employee. So even though I get off at five o'clock, it's very rarely that I leave at five o'clock. And I was pressed just to get to my first class, and it started at six o'clock and I work 10 minutes from . . . campus. I work downtown, so I thought with this was my first day and some days it would had taken time to try to find a parking space. I knew it was going to just add stress, and even more stress with me trying to balance the day and go back to school. This was just going to be hard to try to get to campus so I thought well, well, I'll just go ahead and take all of my classes online. It would afford me more flexibility with not having to worry about how to get to class and still being able to do my homework at seven o'clock at night, at 10 o'clock at night, whatever it took to get the work done. (PI, 5/10/10)

Another benefit to online learning was the ability to use technology and have a virtual class at one's fingertips. In fact, four of the participants discussed how the course design made learning easier. Shannon, the participant who had never taken an online course before, discussed the ease of getting assignments and interacting with other students.

> They make it easy. Basically, they put a link out there to do the assignment and it is relatively simple, even for someone who is not technologically savvy. I think it is probably one of the best that I have been exposed to taking classes in the past. Just the level of interaction online let me know that there is a whole new world

out there. And I was like blown away; and they make it easy, very easy. (PI, 5/10/10)

Those who considered themselves to be knowledgeable about computers had similar remarks to Shannon's. Sheila reported having no problems with Blackboard. She said, "I haven't had any problems navigating around Blackboard. I'm fortunate to be pretty computer-literate" (PI, 5/13/10). Echoing Sheila' findings, Badesha considered Blackboard to be, "[an] excellent tool to use and have" (PI, 5/12/10).

In addition to having used the technology easily, two participants in the study found materials needed for class to be readily available. India, who took the world literature class partially online and partially face-to-face talked about the benefit of having everything one needs on a computer screen. She said,

> It is very beneficial . . . Well, I think it is when you have information that you can look at. It just helps me learn because it's right there. Like if you are looking in front of a computer screen and you are on the computer, it just makes it easy for you to do your work in the first place. And if you don't understand something you have the ability to go to another website and look it up. (PI, 5/14/10)

Shannon also liked the quick access to online information. Shannon discussed how online links helped her explore additional information, see videos of some reading assignments, and study:

> There were links to different sites. You could actually see like *Medea*, at least certain segments of it. . . . There was also information . . . to learn about the author. . . . There was this online website, like a study guide . . . It has a lot of information there. (PI, 5/10/10)

Three participants also talked about the ease of online testing. Shannon, the oldest

participant of the study, discussed how e-learning allowed her to use her textbook while

taking tests. Having the textbook while she took tests alleviated some of her test anxiety:

> It is better to be familiar with the material and still be able to use the resources in your book then if you work a full time job and you have to memorize all of this is stuff and go to the classroom and take a test. (PI, 5/10/10)

Angel echoed Shannon's perceptions and shared how online testing helped lessen test

anxiety:

> I always struggle with test taking and memorization so that will probably be my biggest fear, even at just 40. Sometimes I don't remember what the conversation was 30 minutes ago let alone try to study and remember all the stuff I've done. . . . Well [online] I just don't panic as much when it's exam time, when the book is right there . . . [T]o use your book, you really can apply what you've learned. I like being able to have my book there as my security blanket. (PI, 5/10/10)

For Angel, the thought of getting an education without having to memorize information

for a test was her second draw to online learning:

> Flexibility was the first draw. And the second was that even though I had taken classes before at _____ [name of a local community college], I wasn't aware of the demands and requirements for studying online. And I thought well, you know, it's just a lot easier to take the test online. It is better to be familiar with the material and still be able to use the resources in your book than if you work a full time job and you have to memorize all of this is stuff and going to the classroom and take a test. (PI, 5/10/10)

Another benefit to access one participant relayed was the access to the professor.

Jasmin found that the process of contacting the professor is made easier online. Jasmin

said, "So I got into my classes online, and I can communicate with the teacher by e-

mail. So you don't have to try to run her down and fit into her schedule and go when they're in the office" (PI, 5/14/10).

For two participants, the ease of access extended to their perception that online learning provided easy college credit for courses. Not all the students limited their discussion about online learning to world literature. For example, Angel recalled a psychology class she wanted to take face-to-face but later enrolled in online:

> When I was about take a psychology class face-to-face with the syllabus that he handed out, I thought that there was no way that I could do that. And then when I went online, the course was up to 80 to 85 percent of what we were expected to do face-to-face. The same class. (PI, 5/10/10)

Mariah also found online coursework less demanding. She admitted to taking world literature due to a lack of interest in the subject matter and for quick credit. She said, "It is just stuff that I'm not into it [world literature]. I take it online because it was convenient, quick, and I had to and I will . . . I wouldn't have to go to the school" (PI, 5/10/10).

All ten participants reported various advantages to taking online learning. Badesha summed up the advantages of online learning quite nicely when she said, "What gave me the desire to learn online was the convenience of it. There was more convenience than anything" (PI, 5/12/10).

Disadvantages of Online Learning

While all participants discussed ways the online learning was convenient, students also reported disadvantages to such learning. Some of the complaints about online learning that participants discussed were technical issues with Blackboard, need for

tutorials, accessibility issues, disadvantages of independent learning, and the lack of

quality interaction between classmates.

Though five participants described online technology as easy to use, five other

participants also reported having technical difficulties. India was one of them:

> Sometimes the Blackboard doesn't work one day, and some days it would just
> crash. And you know it's hard to work and is hard especially if you are taking a
> test or something. (PI, 5/14/10)

Amy also recalled problems in online learning in another course. She discussed her

difficulty with completing essays in her psychology class due to technical issues:

> There were too many problems on my last final in my psychology class and we
> were doing essays. So I had to do the same essay about four or five times. . . . If it
> freezes, it's just very frustrating to have to do the same type essay over and over
> again. It might come out better, but it's just frustrating. (PI, 5/12/10)

Amy also reported problems with tests. She added,

> I'll take the test and then I'll just check and see what my grade is. Sometimes the
> test, you can put answers in and go back. And you'll find that the test had not
> taken your answers, and then you'll have to ask to contact the teacher and let them
> know and to see whether the test has graded your answers correctly. . . . I have
> and that happen quite a few times. Even when you try to save your answers, you
> can go back and you can look at your scores it will say, 'No response' so that I
> have to put another response there. (PI, 5/12/10)

Sheila talked about being able to retake due to technical difficulties before her brother's

funeral. She described the following technical issues:

> Last September, I actually lost my brother and the day before I had to go to his
> funeral, my computer froze. So I went to a friend's house and took it [the test]

there. And I try to schedule my time to allow time for something happening that way. That would give me enough time to do that. I didn't want to use my loss as an excuse and actually didn't do as well. I did contact the instructor and she reset the test for me and let me take it again. (PI, 5/13/10)

In addition to working around technical problems outside of their control, five participants also discussed trouble navigating Blackboard. Amy described students' frustrations. She said, "In something like that [online course] with some people, they don't know how to utilize the discussion board or the dropbox too and things of that nature." (PI, 5/12/10). Tenille also said there was there was a need for a tutorial on Blackboard. She recalled a course she took face-to-face and the teacher assumed all the students knew how to complete and access assignments online. She also remembered her first online course. She said,

> The teacher just said okay go to blackboard. A lot of students needed to know how to do that. And it was because they had not been exposed to it yet. I think is very important to make sure that everyone understands the process. When I first started taking online classes this summer like the password I thought was the same as what I had for e-mail, and I had to get help desk a few times just until I got the hang of it. (PI, 5/11/10)

Three of the participants were neither aware of the features of Blackboard nor how to use them properly. Joshua shared how he did not feel that he knew everything he needed to know about Blackboard. He said,

> And there was something that I just didn't know about—like email. I don't know whether I should have the browser like I should have. I checked the assignments to do or view my grades and I can check the assignments that are due, things of that nature. I did not know it had a chat too or an e-mail, and there were some tools that were missing out as well. They were not missing. I just was not familiar

with Blackboard. I didn't know about these things. I probably would've been able to utilize them. (PI, 5/12/10)

Shannon recalled not being sure how to take an online test her first time testing online:

> The first test, I didn't know what to expect and I think she did say it was going to be multiple choice. It was the first-ever I had done in online. I was antsy. 'What if I push the wrong button?' Some of the test you can see all of the questions. In some regions, you could only see them one at a time. (5/10/10)

India also relayed some trepidation with using Blackboard. She discussed how trial and error and other students helped her learn how to navigate the system. India said, "At first it was difficult to understand which tab to press and where to find what information. I learned through other students and trial and error" (PI, 5/14/10).

Because online learning transpires via the Internet, two students discussed how access could have been an issue. For Tenille, a busy working mother, her travel to New York almost prevented her from submitting assignments in a timely matter. She recalled how she always submitted her assignment but was almost not able to during one incident:

> I did all the tests and the essay. A couple of them may have been like an hour later but a lot of them I did wait until the last minute to submit them. I remember one time I was in New York, and I was trying to post to this class and the people I was visiting they had a computer and I was able to submit it, but I just barely got it in. (PI, 5/11/10)

For Joshua, lack of computer ownership caused him to rush through a test. Often working from the campus library, Joshua discussed getting confused about library hours one day.

> There was one issue when they changed the hours one time, and I had to rush to a test. I made my worst grade over. It is because I was rushing, trying to meet the

time limit that was required. And so they [the library] changed the hours over the weekend. So that was really my fault because I was not knowledgeable about the time. (PI, 5/12/10)

Another disadvantage two students discussed was the greater need to be self motivated online. She described the difference between face-to face and online courses as follows:

> In an online class you're looking at more of an honor system and in an online class you have to be a lot more motivated. You have to be self-motivated because it is easy to procrastinate and to say that you will do this in a little bit. But in a classroom, you're right there in front of the instructor and they can see what you're doing more and see your learning paces more. But in online, you're going to have to do that yourself. (PI, 5/13/10)

Sheila also added the demands of being a working adult are not always remembered in online class. She continued,

> I just want to make it clear and make it to the instructors that we do have working families and things like that. And I think from my experience, some instructors forget about that. Sometimes it takes away the convenience from having the online experience. (PI, 5/13/10)

Similarly, India also found that demands were greater for online students. In her opinion, online learning is more difficult than face-to-face learning:

> I think face-to-face learning, just based on what my friends say is a little less disciplined as far as actually like reading the work. You go to class, you just talk about it and you can pretty much catch on to what the reading was talking about. But in online classroom, you have to read the information or else you look like a complete idiot on the assignment. (PI, 5/14/10)

Angela echoed Sheila's and India' perception about the independent learning which

comes along with online learning. She found students have be self starters when taking

classes online. She commented:

> But with the online class you have to be more independent. When you're online, you just have different teachers that teach differently. Some are more active, some are not. Some of them would just give your assignment and expect it to be there. Some will give you the assignments and elaborate on the information. (PI, 5/12/10)

In addition to the need to be a self starter, three other participants discussed how they felt

online learning was not interactive enough. When Amy compared the online version of

world literature to the face-to face-version her sister took, she found the face-to-face

version much more interactive. In fact, Amy wished she would have taken the class face-

to face in order to have greater accessibility to the instructor:

> My sister actually took the same class in the classroom, and I think that she might have had a better experience. I just think I should've taken the class in the classroom setting because online you can ask a question and there is a delay in getting a response back. If I had the teacher right there, she could have explained and given more detailed information [immediately]. (PI, 5/12/10)

Though she recognized that interaction with students can vary depending on the course,

she talked about how students do not have camaraderie like they would in traditional

classroom environments:

> I've had a lot of different experiences online interacting with students. It just depends. Some people talk a lot. Some people are short and to the point. I think sometimes in online learning you just don't get as close as you do in the class from other students. (PI, 5/12/10)

Joshua also believed that interaction is greater in classrooms. He talked about how the

level of participation would have increased face- to-face due to the professor's presence:

> To be honest about this, I think I would've gotten more from the subject. I say that to say that we would've been able to raise our hands and ask questions in person. Online nothing is visible and in person and that is the difference. So we're able to get a great response from the professor and we can get people's thoughts and everything in the classroom. (PI, 5/12/10)

India also echoed Amy's and India' opinion that online classes are less interactive.

Having taken other online classes besides world literature, India found that some online

teachers were not as involved as her professor for her class:

> My professors, well before my world lit class, I just saw them as the people that put the assignment up, never really getting involved. Now, my impressions are that there are online instructors who can teach the course like you're in a face-to-face class. Other online classes were pretty much like, 'You all need to read this pages and do these pages.' In the discussions, they wouldn't post anything about the discussion. That was to say, 'This is what you need to talk about and that was it.' They would give you the assignment and then give us our grade. (PI, 5/14/10)

CHAPTER V

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this instrumental case study was to examine how communication preferences, learning preferences, and perceptions about online learning affect nontraditional African American students in their participation in online world literature courses at an HBCU in the southeastern United States. The research questions used in this study were as follows:

1. How do nontraditional African American students attending a southeastern HBCU perceive online learning?

2. How do nontraditional African American students attending a southeastern HBCU perceive face-to-face learning?

3. How do nontraditional African American students attending a southeastern HBCU describe their communication preferences?

4. How do nontraditional African American students attending a southeastern HBCU describe their learning preferences?

5. How easily do nontraditional African American students navigate around the Blackboard platform?

6. How do nontraditional African American students perceive online content like quizzes, tests, discussion boards, and assignments?

7. How do communication and learning preferences and perceptions about online learning affect nontraditional African American students' participation in online literature courses at this southeastern HBCU?

In this final section of the dissertation, I will discuss how the literature review and the research findings relate by answering the eight research questions in the study. In addition, I will also share implications and suggestions for further research.

Research Question 1: How do nontraditional African American students attending a southeastern HBCU perceive online learning?

While the participants had many opinions about online learning, their perceptions about this learning format can be captured best through the advantages and disadvantages they experienced. All of the participants revealed how online learning was advantageous to them. Because eight out of the 10 were working mothers, all eight discussed advantages which surrounded the ability to save time and have flexibility while managing the numerous responsibilities of family, work, and community involvement. Four other participants, who also included the only male in the study, spoke about how online learning allowed them to complete school work based on their schedules. Two commented about how online learning allowed them to take more courses.

Another benefit to online learning participants discussed was its ability to help with record keeping. Two participants discussed how records helped them to scaffold knowledge in and outside of courses. In addition, four other participants spoke about how they found accessing classroom materials and assignments easy. They enjoyed the ability

to have class at their fingertips. For example, India admitted that online classes help her learn "because it's right there" (PI, 5/14/10).

In addition, seven of the participants discussed how online learning was less demanding than face-to-face classes for a variety of reasons. For one participant, taking courses online helped to eliminate additional stress in her life because she did not have to drive to campus, find parking, and make it to class at a set time. Another participant found contacting the professor through the platform's email device easier than meeting her in an office on campus. Still another student mentioned the ease of interacting with classmates. Three of the participants found that the ability to use one's textbook while testing made taking tests easier online. Two other participants spoke about how getting course credit was quicker and easier than face-to-face courses because the amount of assignments was often reduced. In other words, there were fewer assignments in this online course than there would have been in one that was face-to-face.

Many of the advantages that the participants discussed also appeared in the literature. Puzziferro and Shelton (2008) noted that a major cause of the growth of online learning was the students' ability to get 24-hour access to classes, work around adult responsibilities, gain easy access to course materials, and interact with students. Though the research also discussed students' ability to communicate with other students from various locations and eliminate the boundaries if one should have physical limitations, the participants in this study did not comment on these advantages (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008; Crow, 2008). In addition, the literature I surveyed did not reveal advantages of online learning for students who may have test anxiety nor does it support the notion that

online courses are less demanding. In contrast to participants' opinions of online learning as less demanding, research states how one must be self- motivated and an independent learner to excel in online courses (Vanderpool, 2009). Furthermore, Chen (2001) also discussed how students must be autonomous in highly structured online courses. Moreover, interdependence is a form of autonomy in Chen's theory.

Just as all of the participants commented about the advantages of online learning, they also voiced the disadvantages of such learning as well. All of them addressed issues with technology. For five of the participants, Blackboard sometimes failed to function. At times, Blackboard would freeze during testing or failed to record answers. Five participants also noted their inexperience with using the technology and how they needed tutorials about its use. Two of the students recounted access issues related to physical mobility and personal access to a computer outside of the university.

Additionally, six participants also discussed how they felt learning online was more difficult than in face-to -face classes. Three discussed how learners are more independent online and therefore needed to be self motivated. Three other participants also discussed how learning was not as interactive as the classroom. Specifically, one of the three spoke to how there was not a sense of camaraderie online like there is in traditional classroom environments. According to Angela, "you have to be more independent" (PI, 5/12/10). A few commented on how there was a lack of instructor presence online and others also discussed a desire for more precise instructions and more expedient feedback by the instructor on assignments and questions made by the students.

The disadvantages participants' stated of online learning concurred with the literature. Participants' comments about the self discipline required in online learning, difficulties with use of online learning platforms, and the alienation they felt in working with instructors and other students resonated with the literature (Vanderpool, 2009). In addition, students' perceptions of the lack of positive communication online concurred with Chen's (2001a) findings about perceived distances and Moore's (1996) Theory of Transactional Distance. In the theory, Moore stated how students often will perceive that there is a great distance in courses where they lack positive communication with each other. As an extension, Chen (2001a) discussed how distance in dialogue can occur based online discussions, via email, and face-to-face. Participants indicated a void in communication in all three of Chen's dimensions of positive dialogue. In other words, participants said that they wanted more discussion with peers and the professor both in-class and out-of-class, though this did not occur in the online world literature course. Essentially, they want to "hit [them] up."

In addition, Chen's (2001a) research about Leaner Interface Transactional Distance also concurred with the participant voices. Chen (2001a) cited how learners' perceptions of user-friendliness of operation systems and ease of ability to navigate around course platforms minimized perceived distance. Because most of the participants experienced difficulties using Blackboard, there were feelings of disconnection and isolation in the online world literature course.

Research Question 2: How do nontraditional African American students attending a southeastern HBCU perceive face-to-face learning?

For eight of the ten participants, face-to-face instruction remained the model for which great classes are based. Three out of eight saw traditional classes as the model for teaching and learning had originally wanted to take world literature courses face-to-face because of the level of interaction and sense of camaraderie with classmates. Two other participants wanted discussion boards to mimic face-to-face instruction. Some participants felt that their learning and experiences would have been better if they had taken world literature face-to face. Still another shared that when she really wanted to learn a subject she would take the class face-to-face in order to ask the instructor questions and get immediate feedback.

Eight out of 10 participants said that the positive aspects of face-to-face learning included a higher level of interaction by students and teachers. According to these participants, high levels of interaction by students helped to create camaraderie among them. In addition, a high level of interaction by the instructor helped to increase more responses by students and heightened teacher immediacy. According to research literature, high levels of interaction by teachers and students are preferred by African American students (Holtgraves, Duline, & Kochman, 1994; Neuliep, 2002, as cited in Rovai et al., 2005). Face-to-face instructions allow African American students to use call and response, which is a preferred African American speech pattern. Furthermore, Boykin (1986) added how students are accustomed to the highly rhetorical speech patterns of faculty at HBCUs. Nonverbal cues like smiles, gestures, and movement are also a part of the culture in HBCU classrooms (Boykin, 1986). Walker (2003) found forms of dynamic speech like rappin', stylin', signifyin', and call and response as

important to African American communication as well. In addition, Duncan and Barber-Freeman's (2008) research supported the positive effects of collaborative learning on African American college students. Carson (2009) echoed these findings when he shared how African American students excel in higher education when they are allowed to work as a collective. Chen (2001a) also supported the importance of out-of-class communication as an important dimension that could minimize perceived distance in online courses.

In contrast, some participants also discussed the disadvantages of face-to-face instruction. Two participants spoke about the need to memorize information for testing in face-to face classes. Another participant found the lecture approach used in face-to face classes to be boring. Yet, another student talked about how face-to-face courses often require more group projects, which she did not like (Jasmin). Dominance by a few in classroom discussion was also noted as a disadvantage to face-to-face classes.

These findings corroborated what the findings noted before. Contrary to participants' views, online learning is often viewed as more difficult in comparison to face-to-face instruction (Vanderpool, 2009). However, the research literature supported one participant's view that lectures would be considered disengaging by African-American students. According to the literature, African Americans tend to prefer teacher immediacy and prefer close contact with instructors who move about the classroom, show eye contact and engage the student in call and response (Boykin, 1983). Accessibility, one of Chen's (2001a) four dimensions to minimizing teacher learner

transactional distance, and immediacy are key factors which can are found to minimize

perceive transactional distance (Chen, 2001a).

Research Question 3: How do nontraditional African American students attending a

southeastern HBCU describe their communication preferences?

Participants in the study talked about various preferences when communicating

with classmates and the professor. Overall, their preference for communicating with

classmates included lively two-way communication. While six out of 10 participants

preferred face-to-face communication with classmates, three of the six said they would

communicate via telephone if face-to-face interaction were not possible. Two more

preferred telephone communication with classmates; and two others preferred text-based

communication with other students. Those who preferred to communicate with

classmates face-to-face mentioned their ability to talk openly and get an immediate

response. Others who preferred face-to-face communication noted their ability to pick up

on nonverbal communication cues. One participant, in particular, who wanted to talk to

students in person indicated a desire to bond beyond classroom topics; however, a lack of

knowledge about communication tools online was cited as a difficulty in making this

interchange happen.

While some participants preferred face-to-face communication, they also wanted

to use the telephone. Text messages were used by some of the students though a few of

them preferred talking directly to classmates instead of texting them. Connecting with

students through face-to-face communication included the desire to speak with each other

during class breaks. This kind of person-to-person interaction was preferred even over the use of Elluminate because only the teacher could talk.

It is important to note here the differences in communication preferences of participants who are members of different generations. For example, on one hand, one Generation Y member-participant, preferred text messaging. This preference is characteristic of the descriptions of Generation Y members (Prensky, 2001). Perhaps, this participant felt that texting is a quicker and less intrusive form of communication. However, two other Generation Y member-participants did not prefer texting but wanted to communicate face-to-face. On the other hand, a member-participant of Generation X preferred to communicate via email of its flexibility in her communication with others and allowed her to communicate around her schedule. Other members of Generation X wanted face-to-face or telephone communication. Therefore, one cannot generalize that members of certain generations have the same needs or preferences (Hargittai, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2008).

The participants' communication preferences concurred with the literature. Most said they preferred verbal forms of communication. This need for speech is documented in the literature which found that compared to other cultural styles of speech, African American speech is emotionally intense, expressive, dynamic, and demonstrative in comparison to Europeans' (Holtgraves & Dulin, 1994; Kochman & Neuliep, 2002, as cited in Rovai et al., 2005; Walters, 2003). Many of the participants noted that they wanted speech in order to have interactive experiences. Interestingly, six out of ten participants said that they wanted to communicate in person in order to have an

interactive experience, form communities, and pick up on nonverbal cues. The desire for face-to-face communication supported the literature's discussion about the African American call and response speech patterns which is only applicable in live settings (Daniel & Smitherman, 1989; Foster, 2002; Walter 2003). Call and response allows the communicators to encourage dialogue and assures that the listener is indeed listening. In addition, call and response also allows for bonding among students allowing them to share their unique voice while connecting to the group (Kochman, 1983, as cited in Boone, 2003; Walter, 2003). The importance of being heard and feelings of belonging are key factors in culturally relevant andragogy (Imel, 2001). Imel (2001) reported the benefits of allowing adult ethnic-minority students to share their life experiences and form relationships with peers.

When it comes to communicating with the professor, communication preferences depended on who initiated the conversation and the environment of the communication. When students initiated the conversation, four out of 10 preferred to do so by telephone; three out of 10 preferred to do so face-to face; two out of 10 preferred text-based communications, and one was indifferent. When the professor initiated the conversation, six out of 10 preferred the professor to do so via email, three out of 10 preferred face-to-face, and one out of 10 preferred phone. However, when in the actual online course, eight out of participants expected a high level of communication from the instructor. These participants explained how the professor's interaction in the course was important to increasing students' participation, improving students' interest in the subject matter, recreating traditional classroom learning environments, fostering enjoyment in learning,

expressing care and concern about her students, and communicating clear expectations so that students can meet the professor's expectations.

Overall, when students initiated the conversation with the professor, seven out of 10 preferred to do so orally; while two were in writing, and one was indifferent. However, when professors wanted to initiate the conversation, six participants preferred text-based communication, and four preferred verbal communication. This double standard of sorts is not explained in the literature I reviewed. Nonetheless, a possible explanation of the students' preference for a verbal initiation of conversation could include the students' desire for quick feedback to questions and concerns which may go undetected if done via text. Professors' slow responses to students' questions are a disadvantage to online learning (Vanderpool, 2009).

The participants' desire for the professor to contact students via email is more complex to explain. Since participants' perceptions were that text-based communication was not as interactive as verbal communication, there may be an attempt to keep the teacher at a distance. This may be more comfortable to students who view the teacher as an authority figure. Furthermore, participants may also view written communication as more official, thus allowing them a record of information, which the literature reveals is important to students (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2008).

Nontraditional African American participants' desire for a high level of communication with the professor within the online course is not as puzzling as their preference for written communication from the professor. Research literature documented the need for a high level of communication among the professor and African American

students (Boykin, 1983). In classroom settings, African Americans need teacher immediacy, signs that the teacher shows attentiveness, liking, closeness and engagement; they also need nonverbal immediacy like smiles, eye contact, and movement around the classroom (Boykin, 1983, as cited in Rovai et al., 2005). Most HBCU professors' teaching styles include dominating the classroom with challenging, yet nurturing, highly rhetorical communication and using analogies to create realistic situations (Boykin, 1986). In online settings, the signs that the teacher is showing attentiveness like eye contact and movement are not yet possible, though smiles are through emoticons or special textual symbols which connote emotions like :->, which denotes a happy face, or :-<, which indicates a sad face.

Because online learning is fairly new, there is no literature that I was able to find which explored the role of written discussion by professors as it relates to communication preferences of African Americans. Boone (2003) noted how highly effective African American educators like Marva Collins use call and response in their classrooms. Many of the participants spoke about their preferences for the professor's highly interactive communication as it related to traditional classroom settings. Nonetheless, Sheila (PI, 5/13/10) and Angel (PI, 5/10/10) both said that a higher level of participation from the professor on discussion threads and commenting on students' responses gave them the impression that they were in a classroom setting. Chen (2001a) also echoed students' voices as he found that distances are often minimized between the teacher and the learner when overall communication is perceived as positive and teachers are accessible.

Five participants also expressed their preference for a highly detailed syllabus, clearly articulated assignments, and quick feedback on assignments. Participants indicated that detailed syllabi, course assignments, and expedient feedback on assignments helped them to meet the teacher's expectations. After all, African Americans tend to flourish in learning environments which have defined goals and subsequent reinforcement (Ibarra, 2001). In addition, the participants' desire for a high level of structure in the course may be an attempt for them to reduce the amount of contact that they have with the teacher. According to Moore's Theory of Transactional Distance (1996), the more structured the class, the more distance there lies between the teacher and students. Thus, if the syllabus is highly detailed and course assignments are clearly explained, the students would have no need to communicate with the teacher to ask questions. This, in turn, could help students avoid slow responses from instructors about questions and submitted assignments which are a major disadvantage of online learning that many participants discussed. Unlike Moore (1996), Chen (2001a) found no significant difference in perceived distance when courses are rigidly structured. In other words, just because the participants wanted rigid structure in the online world literature course, it may not indicate a preference to create distance between the learner and the professor. In fact, this desire may indicate that African American participants want to learn autonomously, something about which Chen (2001a) would concur. In fact, Chen (2001a) believed that students are autonomous learners even if they elect to collaborate with others on assignments.

Research Question 4: How do nontraditional African American students attending a southeastern HBCU describe their learning preferences?

Shorter reading assignments was a learning preference they specifically stated. Six out of 10 participants expressed their concerns about comprehending and completing lengthy reading assignments. These participants discussed how assigned reading was overwhelming and made it difficult to complete assignments. In order to process information, participants had to determine ways to reduce the content in order to participate in the class. To do so, they had to rely on PowerPoint slides, study guides, and "cheat sheets" provided by the instructor. These shortened versions of the readings helped students to focus on what the instructor felt were key concepts in the reading. The literature also supports African American participants' dependency on the professor to supply students with specific notes about what should be learned. The literature revealed how African Americans prefer the professor to disseminate knowledge (White, 1992). While this could be spoken knowledge, it could also be referred to as written knowledge, too.

Furthermore, the literature substantiated the participants' perceptions about text-based information. While text-based information may be a preference for some White learners, the literature corroborated how reading in print may not be the preferred mode of learning for some African Americans. In fact, Warschauer (2003) discussed how many cultures around the world do not learn as well from print, but rather storytelling, song, chanting, and dance (Warschauer, 2003). Specifically, African American culture is embedded in the oral tradition (Cismas, 2010). Boone (2003) discussed how famous

educators like Marva Collins used call and response to produce high performing African American students. With recognition of this knowledge, the literature also recognized how placing heavy emphasis on writing and reading in a course may unjustly put some cultures that have other preferred modes of learning at a disadvantage in online courses (Warschauer, 2003).

Moreover, participants said that they had multiple and overlapping modes of learning. Preferences ranged from visual, auditory, tactile, constructivist, and social but excluded reading and writing. Six out of 10 participants discussed how they also preferred to learn in groups. Participants who preferred working in groups talked about how groups enhanced social connections to other students, augmented learning, helped to reduce individual workloads, and encouraged knowledge about others. The participants' preference for learning in groups corroborated the literature as it indicated African Americans' preference for collaborative learning. Learning collectively is also found to be beneficial to African American college students (Carson, 2003; Imel, 2001; Duncan & Barber-Freeman, 2008). According to research literature, African Americans are field dependent learners who prefer to learn in groups (Shealey et al., 2005; White, 1992). According to Chen (2001a), their preferences for teamwork are reflective of the nature of the global economy and also form of learner autonomy. Only three out of 10 participants indicated a preference for constructing their own knowledge. No doubt, African Americans do construct their own knowledge. In fact, African American students are constructing their own knowledge constantly. Many of the participants' favorite assignment in the course was constructing a fairy tale, which is a constructivist activity.

Though the construction involved in the activity was implicit, they may not have had the language to reference constructivism as a learning preference. In addition, though research indicated that African Americans prefer to learn through "real life situations" as opposed to abstract information (White, 1992), only one out of 10 participants mentioned a desire for situated learning. The importance situated learning or learning based on real life situations is noted a key factor is educating adult learners (Knowles et al., 1998).

Research Question 5: How easily do nontraditional African American students navigate around the Blackboard platform?

While five out of 10 participants found Blackboard easy to navigate, five also discussed how navigating around Blackboard required tutorials. Participants who found Blackboard's navigation easy discussed how Blackboard it was an excellent tool to have for class in general. Three other participants noted how blackboard made accessing assignments easy. Those who had trouble with Blackboard state the following reasons for their difficulty: (a) did not know how to enter into the platform; (b) did not know which buttons to push for tests; (c) were not aware of all of Blackboard's tools; (d) did not know where to find information; and (e) did not have consistent locations for assignments from one online course to another and often found Blackboard to crash and freeze during testing. These findings supported the literature which found that students who are not familiar with technology may experience problems navigating online courses (Vanderpool, 2009). Chen (2001a) also indicated how the user-friendliness and one's ability to access and submit assignment online were important dimensions in eliminating perceived distance in online learning.

Research Question 6: How do nontraditional African American students perceive online content like quizzes, tests, discussion boards, and assignments?

Students had various perceptions of the online quizzes, tests, discussion boards, and assignments. Though there were no online quizzes, there were two online tests. Furthermore, participants had a choice of taking their final exam online or on-campus. Three of the participants mentioned their appreciation for online multiple choice exams. These participants discussed how online tests helped them avoid stress and memorization as they were able to use their textbooks during testing. One test required students to create a fairytale and post it on the discussion board for other classmates to read. Eight of 10 participants enjoyed this assignment because it allowed them to use their creativity and allowed them to see what other classmates created. The two participants who did not enjoy the assignments did not consider themselves to be creative students. One of the two was taken aback because the details of the assignments were not fully detailed on the syllabus.

Participants also had various perceptions of the discussion board. While four participants completed all discussions, six missed participating in at least one discussion thread. Regardless if they fully participated in all of the discussion threads or not, eight out of 10 participants thought that the discussion board was in need of improvement. Three of them wanted better quality discussions. They felt that being grouped with similar students in their same maturity level could have contributed to more profound discussions and ones with minimal grammatical errors and more thought. Four of the participants who posted minimally said that they wished that the instructor were more

involved in the discussion. Another participant said that discussion boards were mainly busy work that contributed little if any to her learning. In addition, most participants viewed the discussion boards as additional reading. When responding to students, they often indicated their ways of avoiding reading many of the other students' responses. Their selection process for responding to participants consisted of replying to the person who was at the top of the thread, finding participants who did not have any responses, looking for students with minimum content, and completing only the bare minimum of what was assigned by the instructor. Two students even indicated that they would not like to participate in the discussion thread at all.

The lack of appeal of the discussion board for African American students was noted by Rovai et al. (2005). In their study, Whites posted twice as many discussion boards as African American students. Similarly, Tynes, Giang, and Thompson (2008) also found how ethnic minorities did not discuss as much in online and offline discussions like their European American classes. The African American students in that study mentioned their sense of being overwhelmed with written words in the discussion board and their desire for auditory communication or visual images. This could very well be the case for participants in my study; several of the participants discussed their aversion to large amounts of written text. The other assignments included for the class consisted of two essays. Eight out of 10 participants mentioned a need for more examples of finished products and instructions from the instructor. They also desired more expedient feedback on assignments in order to make improvements in future writings. Vanderpool (2009) states similar finding. Chen (2001a) also noted how perceived

distance can occur if positive communication between the teacher and learner do not occur. He found that if students do not understand the concepts presented by the instructor that distance can occur.

Research Question 7: How do communication and learning preferences and perceptions about online learning affect nontraditional African American students' participation in online literature courses at this southeastern HBCU based on their ages, socioeconomic status, and geographical background?

The participants represented four different generational categories: Older Boomer, Younger Boomer, Generation X and Generation Y. Five of the participants are members of Generation X, which means they were born between 1965 and 1976. Members of Generation X discussed their need for high levels of participation from both students and the professor. Their preferences for modes of communication varied. In general, most of them preferred some form of oral communication with classmates. Two preferred telephone conversations and two of them preferred face- to-face conversations. Only one member of Generation X preferred email when it came to communication with other students. In addition, members of Generation X also preferred that professors contact them by email. Only one member of Generation X indicated a preference for face-to-face communication from the professor. When it comes to initiating the communication to the professor, most members of Generation X preferred to do so verbally. While two of the members preferred face-to-face, two of them preferred telephone contact with the professor. Only one member of Generation desired to initiate conversation with the professor via email.

The next largest generation in the study was Generation Y, those born between 1977 and 1990. The participants from Generation Y also said that they wanted a large amount of interaction from students and the teacher. Interestingly, their preferred mode of communication between students varied and did not indicate a pattern. While one member of Generation Y preferred to meet with students face-to-face, another wanted to talk by phone, and still another preferred to use text messaging. However, their preferred way to receive communication from the professor was via email as all of the members had this preference. In addition, all of the members of Generation Y preferred verbal contact with the professor. While two preferred facet-to-face interaction when initiating communication, one of them preferred to contact the instructor by telephone.

There was only one Older Boomer, born between 1946 and 1954, who participated in the study. All of her means of communicating to students and professors involved oral communication. While she preferred to communicate with students face-to-face, she also preferred to initiate and receive communication from the professor by phone. Likewise, there was only one Young Boomer, born between 1955 and 1964, in the study. She preferred to communicate with students face-to-face; however, she preferred email communication with the instructor regardless of who initiated the conversation.

In terms of socioeconomic status and gender, nine of the participants hailed from middle class backgrounds as indicated by self report. In addition, nine of the participants were also female. Because of the homogeneity of the participants' class and gender, no pattern emerged which emerged concerning communication preferences in this group. Only one participant in the study was male. In addition, he was the only participant who

indicated financial hardship. He mentioned growing up economically challenged and at the time of the study, he did not own a computer or a laptop. The mode of communication this participant preferred was face-to-face in conversations with classmates and to the professor, but he used email when engaged in conversations from and with the professor.

The majority of the participants indicated a desire to learn in smaller groups. Often overwhelmed by the amount and complexity of the reading, these participants indicated a need for study guides provided by the instructor and a preference for working in groups to aid with their learning of the subject matter. In addition, participants indicated various modes of learning. None of the participants had a single mode of learning; rather, all of them had preferences which combined any combination of visual, auditory, multimedia, social, and constructivist means. For members of Generation X, three out of five members indicated a preference for the use of multimedia to enhance learning. Members of Generation X also indicated various modalities of learning. Four out of five members indicated a need to learn in social settings. While two out of five preferred to learn in groups, two others preferred to learn from their classmates. Two considered themselves auditory learners, while one expressed a need to learn visually. Only one other member of Generation X considered herself to be a social learner.

The trends with Generation Y are somewhat different than Generation X. All three participants in generation Y said that they preferred to learn in groups. Two out of three said that they preferred to construct their own knowledge. In addition two out of three members of Generation Y considered themselves to be visual learners. Only one

considered herself to need auditory or multimedia modes for learning. While the Older

Boomer considered herself to be a constructivist learner who indicated a preference for

learning in groups, learning from others, and the desire for auditory and visual stimuli,

the Younger Boomer indicated a preference for auditory and multimedia when learning.

Because there was diversity in learning preferences and the majority of

participants were women, there was no single trend in learning that emerged. The one

male participant who also indicated economic struggles said that he preferred working in

groups along with visual, auditory, and constructivist modes of learning.

The literature that I reviewed supported African American's preferences for

learning in groups (Boykin, 1983; Carson, 2009; Duncan & Barber-Freeman, 2008). In

addition, literature also revealed how African American's may have a preference for

audio-and visual material to aid in their learning (Rovai et al., 2005). Oddly, the literature

that I reviewed does not take into account the diversity of learning preferences among

members of the African American community nor does the literature that I reviewed

suggest that members of the African American community may have more than one

preference for learning as participants in this study indicated.

Perceptions about online learning varied from one generation to the next. Two out

of five members of Generation X wanted to initially take their course face-to-face but

ended up taking it online due to traditional class availability and the stresses of balancing

work with taking courses face-to-face. All five of the participants in Generation X

indicated that they wanted more interaction by online instructors and four of them wanted

more interaction with other students. In addition, these members of Generation X had

problems with Blackboard navigation and technical problems with tests freezing. All of the participants from this generation found online learning a convenient way to get credit for courses. However, their preferences for two-way auditory communication and the diversity of their learning preferences often went unmet in online learning courses. As a result, online courses are a means to an end, though their standards of best learning and teaching are often based on traditional classroom teaching practices.

Unlike Generation X, Generation Y's perception of online learning varied. Out of the three members of Generation Y, two of them purposefully enrolled in online learning. One of the members of Generation Y was part of a blended course in an Honors program. She was unaware of the online portion of the course until she attended her first class. Unlike the other two members of Generation Y, she found the interaction among the teachers and the professor highly interactive. Her perception of the online learning experience was different because her class members were already part of a learning community who travelled together, cohabited in the same dormitory, and took other general education courses together. While two of the members of Generation Y reported technical issues in the online course, one member did not. Of the three participants in Generation Y, only the participant taking the blended course seems to enjoy her online learning experience. Interestingly, African American students are documented to perform better and enjoy blended/hybrid courses more than fully online courses (Cooper, 2008). Another Generation Y member admitted to taking online courses as a means for quick credit; similarly the other participant took courses online to juggle a heavier coursework

schedule. Like the members of Generation X, members of Generation Y expressed how real learning and teaching take place in traditional classrooms.

Of the older members in the class, the Younger Boomer took online courses intentionally; however, the Older Boomer wanted to take her world literature class face-to-face. Both members expressed their appreciation for the flexibility of learning online. While the Younger Boomer reported no problems with Blackboard, the Older Boomer had difficulties navigating Blackboard initially. The Older Boomer also reported her surprise in the level of interaction that took place in online courses and was satisfied with it. In contrast, the Younger Boomer thought that the level of interaction among students and professor could increase. Like Generation X and Y, their preferences for live two-way communication were not met online, nor was the Older Boomer's desire for group work. However, the lack of group projects was an attractive part of online learning for the Younger Boomer.

Though Prensky (2001) categorizes students' experiences and preferences about technology based upon their generation, Hargittai (2010) and Kennedy et al. (2008) suggest that one cannot make assumptions about students' experiences or preferences in learning with technology based on their age alone, just as participants in this study represent various generations and technological experiences and preferences revealed and a plethora of skills and technology preferences. In fact, students' preferences and abilities concerning online learning may be more so connected to socioeconomic background, parental education, gender, race, and types of technology usage just as the participants in this study discussed (Hargittai, 2010; Kennedy et al., 2008).

In conclusion, eight participants juggled career, family and education. As a result of their many responsibilities, they had a desire to get things done. Taking online courses presented them the ability to get credit for courses without the hassles of meeting for class at a specific time or place. Though many of their preferred communication and learning preferences required high levels of personal interaction which normally transpired in face-to-face classes, participants took online courses solely for the convenience and flexibility.

<div align="center">**Implications**</div>

Implications of this study may be divided into three categories: administrative practices, classroom practices and future research. The discussion about these three categories follows:

Implications for Administrative Practices

Many of the participants reported a lack of use of computers in their youth; therefore, for them to optimally use many of the features in Blackboard was problematic. Some students were not aware of all of the features of Blackboard; and some students were not aware of the "consequences" of pushing certain buttons. Administrators must be willing to include a "how to" session as an orientation to all students. In addition, administrators may also consider adding tutorials in all online courses which would allow students to be privy to self-service knowledge about navigating the course.

Several participants discussed how Blackboard tests would often freeze and sometimes would not save submitted answers. These difficulties could be caused by students' lack of savvy about online testing which could be minimized with tutorials. In

addition, these difficulties may be a result of low bandwidths that are only capable of servicing a certain number of students at one time; if this is the cause of testing difficulties, administrators should ensure proper amounts of bandwidth and other technologies in order to service online learners.

Participants discussed their perceptions of the lack of interaction among students and the professor. There were over 55 students in a single section of the online world literature course in this study (OC, 6/06/10) to which nine of the students were enrolled; however, there were 14 students in the blended Honors world literature course, (OC, 06/06/10). Nevertheless, there was also only one professor, and she did not have the aid of any assistants for either sections. The course with 55 participants was nearly three times as many students as would be placed in a non-lecture course on campus. Due to the novelty of online learning for both the professor and students and the additional questions that may arise from novice users, it is highly recommended that online course size have a limitation just as face-to-face courses do. Limitations in the number of enrolled students may allow professors time to entertain students' questions promptly and maximize discussion among professors and students. This limitation of student enrollment could, in turn, enhance and maximize the online-learning experience.

Participants often wanted verbal-two way communication among students and the professor. Some students expressed a desire to work with classmates in groups and actually see or lay their eyes on professors and students to pickup nonverbal cues. Though the ability to accommodate this preference in an online learning environment may not have existed as little as three years ago, it is quite available today. In my

observation of the online course, I noticed verbal email and discussion board features as well as multimedia applications like Elluminate which could have honored this preference for students; however, most of the features were listed as disabled by administrators. Because the literature supports how African-American students tend to prefer call and response speech patterns, it is imperative that administrators enable these features and educate professors on its use so that African American students, in particular, who prefer and learn by audio-visual stimuli may optimize their online learning experience.

Finally, administrators need to stay abreast of new technologies and also educate the faculty on their uses. While audiovisual-based tools were available in the class, most of them were disabled from teacher use. If teachers were aware and trained on these tools, they would be in a better position to make use of them in their classes.

Implications for Classroom Practices

Because research reveals that African American students prefer speech over written text, professors should try to use as many online tools which allow for speech as possible. Professors could take advantage of voice-enabled email, voice-enabled discussion boards, podcasts, audibly enhanced PowerPoint, and video blogs. Using voiced enhanced tools in the course could maximize learning in the course.

Participants also noted a need to learn from peers either individually or in groups. This desire for social learning practices was also indicated in the literature as African American students tend to learn best in groups. Professors of African American students are therefore encouraged to have students engage in assignments which would allow

students to work collaboratively. It is important to note that while many of the participants discussed their desire to work together, they disliked having one's grade depend on group efforts. In other words, students like the option of figuring out work as a group without it having to be a group project per se. Professors who teach online courses may accomplish this by forming learning groups, enabling group discussions, and making use of asynchronous online chats.

Many participants also discussed a need for immediate feedback and quick responses to questions. This, too, was noted in the literature as slow responses by instructors were referenced as a disadvantage to online learning. Professors of online courses must recognize that due to the lack of human contact in online courses, quick responses to questions and assignments are vital to students' success. Professors should answer questions from students within a reasonable time frame as indicated on their syllabus and also return assignments within a reasonable time period so that students may apply feedback to upcoming assignments. In addition, professors may find that forming a virtual question thread, which would allow students to post questions and receive answers visible to all, may help address general concerns and issues more quickly. In addition, an asynchronous or synchronous chat may also help students receive more timely responses to questions.

Though the discussion thread is often the only means of "having class" in many online courses, many participants' interviews and my observations of the course indicated that they did not take discussions seriously. First of all, most participants failed to participate in all of the discussions. Furthermore, many participants admitted to

purposefully posting minimally and found ways to avoid reading other students'

responses. One participant also described discussion threads as busy work where learning

did not take place at all. Often discussion threads are conducted via text; however, the

research literature and the study's participants acknowledged that African Americans

communication preference is often based on auditory ability. Furthermore, both the

research literature and the study's participants noted how African Americans have a

preference for professors to disseminate knowledge. Many participants said that they

would like for professors to summarize key information needed to be learned in

discussions. They also discussed their preference for study guides. As such, professors

may wish to consider articulating learning objectives in each discussion thread. They may

also wish to think of other creative ways to "have class" online other than typical

discussion threads.

Last but not least, professors should continue to create very detailed syllabi and

delineate clear expectations of assignments. Nontraditional online learners need this

detailed, definitive document to plan and manage the multitude of demands on their lives.

In addition, it also helps students to meet the expectations of the professor where their

assignments are concerned.

Implications for Further Research

Based on the analysis and conclusions of this instrumental case study,

implications arise for future research study. Because it is not clear whether the findings in

this study related solely to the 10 African American participants in the study or related to

other nontraditional online participants from other minority groups, I recommend future

studies of other ethnic minorities such as Latinos, Asians, and American Indians. Perhaps preferences articulated in this study may apply to other online learners from other ethnic minority groups.

Only one participant in the study was a male. Therefore, many of the perceptions about learning, communicating, and online learning were articulated from an African American female point of view. It would be interesting to hear the voices of more African-American males who participate in online learning courses. Information from this study, as well as future studies that highlight on gender may help to broaden the knowledge about African American male achievement.

It would also be helpful to have a comparable study of an online course at a HBCU where learning and assignments were completed based on audio-visual modes instead of textual modes. Additionally, it would be interesting to see if this mode of teaching and learning would supply them with the kind of interaction and call and response speech patterns the participants mentioned as a preference. Such a study could help to provide a clearer focus on best online teaching practices at HBCUs.

In addition, because the study focused on one HBCU in the southeastern part of the United States, one cannot be sure whether the findings of the study relate to all HBCUS. As a result, future studies concerning learning preferences for students at nontraditional African American students at other HBCUs in diverse parts of the United States should also be conducted. This research may help to corroborate or negate the findings of this study.

Furthermore, one cannot be sure whether the findings about nontraditional African American students attending a southeastern HBCU would relate to nontraditional African American students at PWI. As such, a study focusing on African American learning preferences at PWI should also be conducted.

In addition, nine of the participants in this study were from middle class backgrounds. Only one participant in this study was from an economically-challenged background. In addition, no participants in the study were from upper class backgrounds. Because there was not enough representation from other socioeconomic classes, a future study focusing on various socioeconomic classes may help to shed more light on learning preferences of African Americans from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds.

Because of the novelty of online learning, much of the focus on online learners rests with ethnic majority instead of ethnic minority learners in general. More quantitative and qualitative research needs to be completed about African American online learners. As more and more K-12 schools incorporate online learning into their curriculums, it is important that achievement gaps do not widen due to online learning and communication preferences.

Additional research should also focus on equity issues in online learning. As student loans are now controlled by the government instead of the private sector, online schools who often grant more graduate degrees to African Americans than HBCUs are now under continuous scrutiny for issuing the largest amounts of financial aid loans and also having the largest default rates in comparison to brick and mortar schools. As early as 2014, the government may refuse financial aid to students who attend some for-profit

online schools. Should this occur, how will this impact nontraditional African American students who attend online for-profit institutions? Who will then serve the needs of these students? Will HBCUs and PWIs have the knowledge and finances to educate African American students according to their learning and communication preferences online? Or will these African American students continue to experience digital inequality?

Summary

Nontraditional African American participants in this study had various preferences to communication and learning and various perceptions about online learning. As a whole, participants indicated a preference for live auditory two-way communication and frequent interaction among students and the professor. When it came to learning, participants preferred various modalities. Though text was often the main form of gaining knowledge in the course, multimedia and constructivist activities were also included. The majority of participants discussed their sense of being overwhelmed by the length and complexity of the reading. As a result, many participants indicated a preference for professors to highlight essential information through study guides and a desire to give and receive help from other students through social and group interaction. While online learning helped these busy adults complete their college educations while balancing work and family, their preferences for two-way auditory communication and frequent verbal interaction implied that online learning was a means to an end rather than an enriching alternative to traditional classroom instruction. While a few of the participants found the online learning experience adequate or beyond, most of them mentioned a need for more interaction among students and the professor. They also

desired the professor to respond to questions and provide feedback to assignments more expeditiously. Therefore, in order to create online courses which appeal to nontraditional African American communication and learning preferences, administrators and professors must create more audio-visual content and assignments, as well as allow students a means by which to learn collaboratively.

REFERENCES

AARCO Consulting. (2009). Changing demographics: why nontraditional students should matter to enrollment managers and what they can do to attract them. *Providing Best Practice Solutions for Higher Education.* Retrieved on March 12, from http://consulting.aacrao.org/2009/02/27/changing-demographics-why-nontraditional-students-should-matter-to-enrollment-managers-and-what-they-can-do-to-attract-them/.

Allen, I. E., & Seaman, J. (2008). *Staying the course: Online education in the United States, 2008.* Needham, MA: The Sloan Consortium.

All Online Schools: Your Guide to Education and Training. (2006-2009). *Financial aid for an online education: Innovative ways to finance your education.* Retrieved April 29, 2009, from http://www.allonlineschools.com/online-education-resource-center/finance.

Anafara, V., Brown, K. M., & Mangione, T. L. (2002). Qualitative analysis on stage: Making the research process more public. *Educational Researcher, 31*(7), 28-38.

Anderson, J. A., & Adams, M. (1992). Acknowledging the learning styles of diverse student populations: Implications for instructional design. In L. Border & N. Chism (Eds.), *Teaching for diversity* (pp. 19-33). San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Aniebonam, M. (2000). *Effective distance learning methods as a curriculum delivery tool in diverse university environments: A case of traditional vs. historical black college and universities.* Retrieved February 09, 2005, from http://scholar.google.com/scholar?hl=en&lr=caache:nx6XRJTz52kj:www.mgt.waikato.com.

Arnone, M. (2002). Historically black colleges grapple with online education. *Chronicle of Higher Education, 58*(30), 27-29.

Armstrong, B. (2002). *A virtual assessment of historically black colleges and universities.* Technical Report: Public Administration Program, Applied Research Projects, Texas State University.

Atkinson, S. (2004). A comparison of pupil learning and achievement in computer aided learning and traditionally taught situations with special reference to cognitive style and gender issues. *Educational Psychology, 24*(5), 659-679.

Babbie, E. R. (2003). *The practice of social research* (10th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Thompson Publishing.

Barbour, M. K., & Reeves, T. C. (2009). The reality of virtual schools: A review of the literature. *Computers and Education, 52*(2), 402-416.

Barcelona, R. (2009). Pressing the Online Learning Advantage: Commitment, Content, and Community. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education, 57*(3), 193-197. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Beldarrain, Y. (2006). Distance education trends: integrating new technologies to foster student interaction and collaboration. *Distance Education, 27*(2), 139-153.

Bennett, C. I. (2002). *Comprehensive multicultural education: Theory and practice* (5th ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Billings, G. L. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Education Research Journal, 32*(3), 465-491.

Block, J. (2010). Distance education and the digital divide: An academic perspective. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 13*(1). Retrieved from ERIC database.

Boone, P. (2003). When the "Amen Corner" comes to class: An examination of the pedagogical and cultural impact of call-response communication in the black college classroom. *Communication Education, 52*(3-4), 212-229. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Boud, D. (1988). Moving toward student autonomy. In D. Boud (Ed.), *Developing student autonomy in learning* (2nd ed., pp. 17-39). London: Kogan.

Bourne, J., Moore, J., & Sener, J. (2006). Increasing access in online higher education [Electronic version]. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 10*(3). Retrieved May 03, 2007, from http://www.sloanc.org/publications/jaln/v10n3/v10n3_1bourne.asp.

Boykin, W (1986). The triple quandary and the schooling of Afro-American children. In U. Neisser (Ed.), *The school achievement of minority children: New perspectives* (pp. 57-91). Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum.

Boykin, A. W. (1983). The academic performance of Afro-American children. In J. Spence (Ed.), *Achievement and achievement motives* (pp. 221-271). San Francisco: W. Freeman.

Brookfield, S. (1995). *Adult learning: An overview.* Retrieved May 15, 2010, from http://nlu.nl.edu/academics/cas/ace/facultypapers/StephenBrookfield_Adult Learning.cfm.

Buzzetto-More, N. A. (2008). Student perceptions of various e-learning components. *Interdisciplinary Journal of E-Learning and Learning Objects, 4,* 113-135.

Cantor, J. A. (1992). *Delivering instruction to adult learners.* Toronto, Ontario; Middletown, OH: Wall & Emerson.

Carson, L. (2009). "I am because we are": Collectivism as a foundational characteristic of African American college student identity and academic achievement. *Social Psychology of Education: An International Journal, 12*(3), 327-344. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Casey, K. (1995-1996). The new narrative research in education. In *Review of research in education* (pp. 211-254). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Cassidy, S. (2004). Learning styles: An overview of theories, models, and measures. *Educational Psychology, 24,* 419-444.

Cavin, A. (2000). Mind the gap: The digital divide as the civil rights issue of the new millennium. *Multimedia Schools, 7*(1), 56-58.

Chen, Y. J. (2001a). Dimensions of transactional distance in the world wide web learning environment: A factor analysis. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 32*(4), 459-70. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Chen, Y. J. (2001b). Transactional distance in World Wide Web learning environments. *Innovations in Education & Teaching International, 35*(4), 327-358.

Chisholm, I. (1998). Six elements for technology integration in multicultural Classrooms [Electronic version]. *Journal of Information Technology for Teacher Education, 7*(2). Retrieved October 25, 2006, from http://taylorandfrancis.metapress.com/ media/n9a4ujrxlg7uk0tumeqm/contributions/u/ t/4/2/ut4228x064r66321.pdf.

Cismas, S. C. (2010). *The impact of American culture on other cultures: Language and cultural identity.* In Proceedings of the 9th WSEAS International Conference on Artificial Intelligence, Knowledge Engineering and Data Bases. University of Cambridge UK, WSEAS Press.

Cohen, E. G., & Lotan, R. A. (2004). Equity in heterogeneous classrooms. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2nd ed., pp. 736-752). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cranton, P. (1992). Working with adult learners. Toronto: Wall & Emerson.

Creswell, J. W. (2005). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research method: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Crow, K. (2008). Four types of disabilities: Their impact on online learning. *TechTrends: Linking Research and Practice to Improve Learning, 52*(1), 51-55. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Coleman, S. (2005). *Becoming an online instructor: What are the benefits of teaching online?* Retrieved February 22, 2005, from http://www.worldwidelearn.com/ education- articles/benefits-of-teaching-online.htm.

Collis, B. (1999). Designing for differences: Cultural issues in the design of the WWW based course-support sites. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 30*(3), 201-215.

Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishers.

Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. (2002). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice, 39*(3), 124-130.

Daniel, J. L., & Smitherman, G. (1989). How I got over: Communication dynamics in the Black community. In D. Carbaugh (Ed.), *Cultural communication and intercultural contact.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Dede, C. (2008). Theoretical perspectives influencing the use of information technology in teaching and learning. In J. Voogt & G. Knezek (Eds.), *International handbook of information technology in primary and secondary education* (pp. 43-62). New York: Springer.

DiMaggio, P., Hargittai, E., Celeste, C., & Shafer, S. (2001). *From unequal access to differentiated use: A literature review and agenda for research on digital inequality.* Retrieved November 10, 2006, from http://www.eszter.com/research/ pubs/dimaggio-etal-digitalinequality.pdf.

Duncan, B., & Barber-Freeman, P. (2008). A Model for Establishing Learning Communities at a HBCU in Graduate Classes. *Journal of Negro Education, 77*(3), 241-249. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Fazzarro, D. E. (1999). Motivating African-American youth in technology education. *Tech Directions, 59*(1), 25-27.

Fazarro, D., & Stevens, A. (2004). Topography of learning style preferences of undergraduate students in industrial technology and engineering programs at historically Black and predominantly White institutions. *Journal of Industrial Teacher Education, 41*(3), 5-30.

Felders, R. M. (2004). *Learning styles.* Retrieved May 1, 2005, from http://www.ncsu.edu/felder-public/learning-styles.html.

Fok, L., Hartman, S., & Zee, S. M. L. (2008). An examination or minority students' perceptions of Blackboard pre and post the Hurricane Katrina. Retrieved June 9, 2010, from http://www.coastal.edu/business/cbj/pdfs/articles/spring2008/ fok_et_al.pdf.

Foster, M., & ERIC Clearinghouse on Languages and Linguistics. (2002). *Using call-and-response to facilitate language mastery and literacy acquisition among African American students.* ERIC Digest. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Fox, O. (2005). Diversity in online teaching: when culture and online education conflict. *Home Health Care Management & Practice, 17*(4). Retrieved on November 15, 2006, from www.//hhc.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/17/4/342.

Flowers, L., Moore, III, J., & Flowers, L. O. (2008). *African American student satisfaction with distance education courses.* Retrieved October 12, 2010 from https://secure.studentaffairs.com/ejournal/Winter_2008/ AfricanAmericanStudents.pdf .

Frazier, E. (2010). *African Americans find home in the Twitterverse. Study: 25 percent of U.S. Twitter users are black, nearly twice the population percentage.* HeraldOnline. Retrieved June 6, 2010, from http://www.charlotteobserver.com/ 2010/05/15/1437076/african-americans-find-home- in.html.

Gallien, L. B., Jr., & Peterson, M. S. (2004). *Instructing and mentoring the African American college student: Strategies for success in higher education.* Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Gaide, S. (2004). Best practices for helping students complete online degree programs. *Distance Education Report, 8*(20), 8.

Gant, J., Turner-Lee, N., Li, Y., & Miller, J. (2010). *National minority broadband adoption: Comparative trends in adoption, acceptance and use.* Retrieved June 6, 2010, from http://www.jointcenter.org/index.php/content/download/2991/18931/file/MTI_BROADBAND_REPORT_WEB.pdf.

Gardner, H., & Moran, S. (2006). The science of multiple intelligences theory: A response to Lynn Waterhouse. *Educational Psychologist, 41*(4), 227-232.

Garland, M. R. (1994). The adult need for "personal control" provides a cogent guiding concept for distance education. *Journal of Distance Education, 9*(1), 45-59.

Gay, G. (2004). Curriculum theory and multicultural education: Social class and schooling. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2nd ed., pp. 30-49). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gay, G. (2006). Connections between classroom management and culturally responsive teaching. In C. M. Evertson & C. S. Weinstein (Eds.), *Handbook of classroom management: Research, practice, and contemporary issues* (pp. 343-370). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Goodenough, W. H. (1981). *Culture, language, and society* (2nd ed.). Melno Park, CA: Benjamin/Cummings.

Gudea,. (2008). *Expectations and demands in online teaching: Practical experiences*. Hershey, PA: Idea Group.

Griffin, F. W., & Anderton-Lewis, L. (1998). Enhancing connections between students and instructors: African-American students' use of computer-mediated communication. *Business Communication Quarterly, 61*(2), 9-19.

Hall, J. (2010). *African American doctoral students at for-profit colleges and universities: A Critical Race Theory exploration.* Unpublished Dissertation, North Carolina State University.

Hargittai, E. (2010). Digital na(t)ives? Variation in Internet skills and uses among members of the 'Net Generation.' *Sociological Inquiry, 80*(1), 92-113. Indianapolis: Wiley Periodicals.

Hargittai, E., & Walejko, G. (2008). The participation divide: Content creation and sharing in the digital age. *Information, Communication & Society, 11*(2), 239-256.

Hawkins, B., Rudy, J., & EDUCAUSE. (2008). *EDUCAUSE core data service: Fiscal year 2007 summary report.* Retrieved from ERIC database.

Holstead, M., Spradlin, T., Plucker, J., & Indiana University. (2008). Promises and pitfalls of virtual education in the United States and Indiana. *Education Policy Brief, 6*(6), Center for Evaluation and Education Policy, Indiana University. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Holtgraves, T., & Dulin J. (1994). The Muhammad Ali effect: Differences between African Americans and European Americans in their perceptions of a truthful bragger. *Language and Communication, 14,* 275-285.

Horrigan, J. B. (2010). *Broadband adoption and use in America.* Federal Communications Commission.

Harvey, D. (2002). A new technology-first framework for the future design of online learning. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 3*(1), 59-63.

Hill, M. (2008). Teachers sound off on benefits and disadvantages of teaching online courses. *Memphis Business Journal.* Retrieved June 15, 2009, from http://memphis.bizjournals.com/memphis/stories/2008/07/28/focus2.html.

Hinton, J. (Dec, 2008). Positive thinking. *Winston Salem Journal.* Retrieved on March 16, 2008 form http://www2.journalnow.com/content/2008/dec/20/positive-thinking-University Website-graduates-arent-worrying-ab/news/.

Hollins, E. R., King, J. E., & Hayman, W. C. (1994). *Teaching diverse populations: Formulating a knowledge base.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Horrigan, J. (2009). *Home broadband adoption.* Pew Internet and American Life Project. Retrieved June 12, 2009, from http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2009/10-Home-Broadband-Adoption-2009.aspx.

Horrigan, J., & Raine, L. (2002). *The broadband difference: How online behavior changes with high-speed Internet connections.* Pew Internet and American Life Project. Retrieved June 10, 2009, from http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2002/The-Broadband-Difference-How online-behavior-changes-with-highspeed-Internet-connections.aspx.

Huang, H. (2002). Toward constructivism for adult learners in online learning environments. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 33*(1), 27-37. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Hudson, A. (2010). Measuring the impact of cultural diversity on desired mobile reference services. *Reference Services Review, 38*(2), 299-308.

Ibarra, R. A. (2001). *Beyond affirmative action: Refraining the context of higher education.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Ikpa, V. (2000). *Strategies for developing and managing online courses.* Retrieved April 14, 2010, from http://144.162.197.250/ITCmembersOnly/Essay12200.pdf.

Imel, S. (2001). *Adult learners in postsecondary education*. Practice Application Brief No. 17. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Jackson, L. A., Ervin, K. S., Gardner, P. D., & Schmitt, N. (2001). The racial digital divide: Motivational, affective, and cognitive correlates of Internet use. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology, 31,* 2019-2046.

Johnson, R. S. (2002). *Using data to close the achievement gap: How to measure equity in our schools.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Johnson, S., & Aargon, S. (2002). An instructional strategy framework for online learning environments. New Direction for Adult and Continuing Education, 100, 31-43.

Jones, E. (2000). *Characterizing the digital divide among historically black colleges and universities.* Retrieved November 20, 2002, from http://www.explorests.univ.edu/tsuaol/primeron.htm.

Jones, S., & Fox, S. (2009). *Generations online in 2009.* Pew Internet Project Memo. Retrieved June 19, 2009 from http://www.pewinternet.org/~/media/Files/Reports/2009/PIP_Generations_2009.pdf.

Kearsley, G. (n.d.). *Androgogy—Adult learning.* Retrieved June 3, 2010 from http://www.west.net/~ger/Orientation/andragogy.html.

Kennedy, G., Krause, K., Judd, T., Churchward, A., & Gray, K. (2008). *First year students' experiences with technology: Are they really digital natives?* Melbourne, Australia: University of Melbourne. Retrieved April 10, 2007, from http://www.bmu.unimelb.edu.au/research/munatives/natives_report2006.rtf.

Korgen, K., Odell, P., & Schumacher, P. (2006). Internet use among college students: Are there differences by race/ethnicity? *Electronic Journal of Sociology, 2*(2). Retrieved on February 24, 2008 from http://epe.lacbac.gc.ca/100/201/300/ejofsociology/2001/v05n03/content/vol005.003/korgen.html.

Knapp, M. S., & Woolverton, S. (2004). Social class and schooling. In J. A. Banks & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research in multicultural education* (2nd ed., pp. 656-678). San Fransico: Jossey-Bass.

Knowles, M., Holton, E., & Swanson, R. (1998). *The adult learner: The definitive classic in adult education and human resource development* (5th ed.). Retrieved from ERIC database.

Kvasny, L. (2002). *A conceptual framework for examining digital inequality.* Eighth Americas Conference Information Systems, 1798-1805.

Kolowich, S. (2009). Recession may drive more adult students to take online classes. *Chronicle of Higher Education, 55*(19), A11. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Korgen, K., Odell, P., & Schumacher, P. (2001). Internet use among college students: Are there differences by race/ethnicity? *Electronic Journal of Sociology, 2*(2). Retrieved February 7, 2007, from http://epe.lacbac.gc.ca/100/201/300/ ejofsociology/2001/v05n03/content/vol005.003/korgen.html.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). *From the achievement gap to the education debt: Understanding achievement in U.S. schools.* American Educational Research Association presidential address, San Francisco. Retrieved December 14, 2006, from http://www.cmcgc.com/Media/WMP/260407/49_010_files/Default.htm.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). Race still matters: Critical race theory in education. In M. Apple, W. Au, & L. A. Gandin (Eds.), *The Routledge international handbook of critical education* (pp. 110-122). New York and London: Routledge.

Lenhart, A., Madden, M., & Hitlin, P. (2005). *Teens and technology: Youth are leading the transition to a fully wired and mobile nation.* Pew Internet and American Life Project.

LeCompte, M. D., & Schensul, J. J. (1999). Paradigms for thinking about ethnographic research. In M. D. Lecompte J. J. Schensul (Eds.), Designing and Conducting ethnographic research (pp. 41-61). Walnut Creek, CA: Alfamira Press.

Lilu, Y., & Ginter, D. (1999). *Cognitive styles and distance education.* Retrieved April 27, 2005, from http://www.wesga.edu/~distance/liu23.html.

Litzinger, M. E., & Bonnie, O. (1993). Accommodating diverse learning styles: Designing instructor for electronic information sources. In L. Shirato (Ed.), *What is good instruction? Library instruction for the 90s.* Ann Arbor, MI: Pierian Press.

Lu, L., Yu, C.-S., Liu, C. (2003). Learning style, learning patterns, and learning performance in a Web CT-based MIS course. *Information & Manangement, 40,* 497-507.

McConnell, D. (2000) Implementing computer supported cooperative learning. London: Kogan Page Limited.

MacDonald, C. (2008). The more the world changes the more the education system remains the same: Addressing the need to use emerging technologies to enhance online learning communities. In K. McFerrin et al. (Eds.), *Proceedings of Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference 2008* (pp. 3047-3054). Chesapeake, VA: AACE.

McDougal, S. (2009). "Break It Down": One of the Cultural and Stylist Instructional Preferences of Black Males. *Journal of Negro Education, 78*(4), 432-440. Retrieved from ERIC database.

McLoughlin, C. (2001). Inclusivity and alignment: principles of pedagogy, task, and assessment design for effective cross-cultural online learning. *Distance Education, 22*(1), 7-29.

McGee, P. (2002).Web-based learning design: Planning for diversity. *USDLA Journal, 16*(2). Retrieved October 25, 2005, from http://www.usdla.org/html/journal/ MAR02_Issue/article03.html.

McGrath, V. (2009). Reviewing the evidence on how adult students learn: An examination of Knowles' model of andragogy. *Adult Learner: The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education,* 99-110. Retrieved from ERIC database.

McKee, T. (2010). *Thirty years of distance education: Personal reflections.* Retrieved June 9, 2010, from http://74.125.155.132/scholar?q=cache:aJETcbTgME8J: scholar.google.com/+Thirty+years+of+distance+education:+Personal+reflections &hl=en&assdt=40000000000.

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study application in education.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass

Merriam, S. B. & Associates. (2002). Qualitative research in practice: Examples of discussion and analysis. San Fransisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Mertens, D. M. (1998). *Research methods in education and psychology: Integrating diversity with quantitative and qualitative approaches* (pp. 6-23). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Middleton, L., & Chambers, V. (2010). Approaching digital equity: Is WiFi the great leveler? *Information Technology and People, 23*(1), 4-22.

Moore, M. (1996). Theory of transactional distance. In D. Keegen (Ed.), *Theoretical principals of distance education* (pp. 22-38). New York: Routledge.

Morse, K. (2003). Does one size fit all? Exploring asynchronous learning in a multicultural environment. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 7*(1), 37-55

Murray, T. (2003). *Power and relationship in online teaching and learning.* Retrieved November 10, 2006, from www.education.duq.edu/institutes/pdf/papers2003/ murray.

Nagel, D. (2009). *Most college students to take classes online by 2014.* Retrieved June 6, 2010, from http://campustechnology.com/articles/2009/10/28/most-college-students-to-take-classes-online-by-2014.aspx.

Nasseh, B. (1997). *A brief history of distance education.* Retrieved November 12, 2006, from http://www.seniornet.org/edu/art/history.html.

National Association for Equal Opportunity in Higher Education. (2008). *The state of America's black colleges 2008: Expanding access, ensuring success, promoting global competitiveness.* Silver Spring, MD: Beckham Publications Group, Inc.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2001). *Post secondary education quick information system.* U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved April 25, 2005, from http://nces.ed.gov/survey/peqis/publications/2003017.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2006-2007). Distance education at degree granting post secondary institutions. U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved July 17, 2006, from http://nces.ed.gov/survey/peqis/publications/2003017.

National Center for Education Statistics (2008). *Distance education at degree-granting postsecondary institutions: 2006-07.* U.S. Department of education. Retrieved May 25, 2009, from http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2009044.

National Center for Education Statistics. (2009). *Digest of education statistics: 2009.* U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved February 19, 2010, from http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d09/ch_3.asp.

Newell, T (2000). The global digital divide and its effect on women scientist worldwide. *AWIS Magazine, 29*(4). Retieved February 22, 2008 from http://www.climate.montana.edu/diversity/global digital divide.doc.

Ogbu, J. U. (1999). Beyond language: Ebonics, proper English, and identity in a Black American speech community. *American Educational Research Journal, 36*(2), 147-182.

Okapala, A., & Okapala, C. (1991). Faculty adoption of education technologies in higher learning. *Journal of Instructional Psychology, 24*(4), 262-268.

Okumba, T., Walker, K., Hu, X., & Watson, A. (2010). An exploration of African American students' attitudes toward online learning. *Urban Education.* doi: 10.1177/0042085910377516

Orapin, D., Gray, D., & Williams, M. (2007). Transactional distance theory applied when designing international accounting online courses. *The Texas Journal of Distance Learning [Online Serial], 4*(1), 13-24.

Orbe, M. (1994). "Remember, it's always Whites' ball": Descriptions of African American male communication. *Communication Quarterly, 42*(3), 287-300. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Parry, M. (2009). Online Education: Growing, but Painfully. Chronicle of Higher Education, 55(38). Retrieved from ERIC database.

Pearson, T. (1998). Falling behind: A technology crisis facing minority students. Retrieved October 5, 2002, from http://www.cise.ufl.edu/tpearson.htm.

Peshkin, A. (2000). The nature of interpretation in qualitative research. *Educational Researcher, 29*(9), 5-9.

Pew Internet and American Life Project. (2008). *The lives of teens and their technology.* Retrieved July 24, 2010, from http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2008/Writing-Technology-and-Teens/04-The-Lives-of-Teens-and-Their-Technology/03-Teens-go-online-from-a-wide-range-of-locations.aspx?r=1.

Prensky, M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants. *On the Horizon, 9*(5). Retrieved June 15, 2005 from http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants - Part1.pdf.

Price, M. A. (2009). *Are distance education programs at historically minority institutions in the University of North Carolina System mission or market driven? An empirical and qualitative study.* Dissertation. North Carolina State University.

Puzziferro, M., & Shelton, K. (2008). A model for developing high-quality online courses: Integrating a systems approach with learning theory. *Journal of*

Asynchronous Learning Networks, 12(3-4), 119-136. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Reigeluth, C. M. (1999). What is instructional design theory and how is it changing? In C. M. Reigeluth (Ed.), *Instructional design theories and models: A new paradigm of instructional theory* (pp. 5-29). Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Reiser, R. (2001). A history of instructional design and technology: part II: A history of instructional design. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 49*(2), 57-67.

Roach, R. (2002, April 29). Johnson C. Smith among yahoos top wired schools. *Black Issues in Higher Education, 19*(4), 40.

Rovai, A. P., Gallien, L. B., Jr., & Wighting, M. (2005). Cultural and interpersonal factors affecting African American academic performance in higher education: A review and synthesis of research and literature. *The Journal of Negro Education.* Retrieved August 3, 2007, from http://libproxy.encg.edu:2074/pqdlink?index= 3&did=992506141$SRChMode=3&sid=3Fmt=3.

Rovai, A. P., & Ponton, M. K. (2005). An examination of sense of classroom community and learning among African American and Caucasian graduate students. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 9*(3), 77-92.

Saint, N. (2010). *Why Is Twitter more popular with Black people than White people?* Retrieved June 6, 2010, from http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search? q=cache:FWpwCU-_kosJ:www.businessinsider.com/twitter-study-results-2010- 4+African+Americans+and+Twitter&cd=9&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us.

Schlossberg, N. K., Lynch, A. Q., & Chickering, A. W. (1989). Improving higher education for adults. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Schran, T. H. (2006). *Conceptualizing and proposing qualitative research.* Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Servon, L. (2002). Bridging the digital divide: Technology, community, and public policy. London: Blackwell Publishers.

Shealey, M., Lue, M., Brooks, M., & McCray, E. (2005). Examining the legacy of "Brown": The impact on special education and teacher practice. *Remedial and Special Education, 26*(2), 113-121. Retrieved from ERIC database.

Sleeter, C., & Delgado Bernal, D. (2004). Critical pedagogy, critical race theory, and antiracist education: Implications for multicultural education. In J. A. Banks & C.

A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research multicultural education* (2nd ed., pp. 240-260). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sloan Consortium. (2009). *Learning on demand: Online education in the United States.* Needham, MA: Author.

Smith, M. (2010). *Frontline: College, Inc.* Retrieved June 15, 2010, from http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/collegeinc/view/.

Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case research.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In. N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 443-66). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Telg, R., & Connor, L. (1997). *Evolving communication to inform and educate.* Retrieved February 24, 2008, from http://www.ag.auburn.edu/auxiliary/nsdl/sctcsa/ Proceedings/1997/Telg.pdf.

Trower, C., & Chait, R. P. (2002, March-April). Faculty diversity. *Harvard Magazine.* March-April 2002. Retrieved on December 04, 2006, from http://www-harvard-magazine.com/online/030218.html.

Tynes, B. M, Giang, M. T, & Thompson, G. T. (2008, August). *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 11*(4), 459-465. doi:10.1089/cpb.2007.0085

University of North Carolina: A 16-campus university. (2003). *The University of North Carolina institutional profiles 2003-2004.* Retrieved June 20, 2006, from http://www.ga.unc.edu/UNC_Schools/profiles/current/.

U. S. Census Report. (2003). U.S. Census Bureau. Retrieved February 6, 2007, from http://www.census.gov/prod/2005pubs/p23-208.pdf .

U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2008). Distance Education at Degree-Granting Postsecondary Institutions: 2006-07.

U.S. Department of Commerce. (2000). *Falling through the net: Toward digital inclusion.* Retrieved February 19, 2002 from http://www.ntia.doc.gov/ntiahome/ fttn00/contents00.html. Washington, DC: National Telecommunications and Information Administration.

United Negro College Fund. (2007). *Our member colleges.* Retrieved April 09, 2006, from http://www.uncf.org/members/aboutHBCU.asp.

Uzner, S. (2009). Questions of culture in distance learning: A research review. *The International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, 10*(3).

Vanderpool, L. (2009). *Factors that determine the success among traditional and nontraditional students in online education.* Ed.D. dissertation, Union University, United States—Tennessee. Retrieved June 6, 2010, from Dissertations & Theses: Full Text. (Publication No. AAT 3364083)

Walker, F. R. (2003). An Afrocentric rhetorical analysis of Johnnie Cochran's closing argument in the O. J. Simpson trial. In R. L. Jackson & E. B. Richardson (Eds.), *Understanding African American rhetoric: Classical origins to contemporary innovations* (pp. 245-262). New York: Routledge.

Warschauer, M. (2001). Online communication. In R. Carter & D. Nunan (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages* (pp. 207-212). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Warschauer, M. (2003). *Technology and social inclusion: Rethinking the digital divide.* Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Warschauer, M., & Matuchniak, T. (2010). New technology and digital worlds: Analyzing evidence of equity in access, use, and outcomes. *Review of Research in Education, 34*(1), 179-225.

Witkin, H. A., Moore, C. A., Goodenough, D. R., & Cox, P. W. (1977). Field-dependent and field-independent cognitive styles and their educational implications. *Review of Educational Research, 47,* 1-64.

Woods, R. H., & Baker, J. D. (2004). Interaction and immediacy in online learning. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, 5*(2). Retrieved December 17, 2005, from http://www.irrodl.org/content/v5.2/woods-baker.html.

White, S. (1992). *Factors that contribute to learning differences among African American and Caucasian students.* (ERIC Document No. ED374177)

Wyss, R. (2002). *Field independent/dependent learning styles and L2 acquisition.* Retrieved May 03, 2005, from http://www.eltnewsletter.com/back/June2002/art1022002.html.

Yang, Y., & Cornelius, L. (2005). Preparing instructors for quality online instruction. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 3*(1). Retrieved February 22, 2008, from http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/spring81/yang81.htm.

Yin, R. (2003a). *Applications of case study research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yin, R. (2003b). *Case study research* (3rd ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publishing.

Zhao, L., Lu, Y., Huang, W, & Wang, Q. (2010). *Internet inequality: The relationship between high school students' Internet use in different location and their Internet self-efficacy.* Retrieved June 9, 2010, from http://www.sciencedirect.com/ science?_ob=ArticleURL&_udi=B6VCJ-5046M4R-3&_user=10&_coverDate= 12%2F31%2F2010&_rdoc=1&_fmt=high&_orig=search&_origin=search&_sort =d&_docanchor=&view=c&_rerunOrigin=scholar.google&_acct=C000050221& _version=1&_urlVersion=0&_userid=10&md5=ce8c875cde88ab95830ee0c1c08c ebea&searchtype=a.

APPENDIX A

INDIVIDUAL STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date _____   Interviewee _____

Tape no:_____

Online World Literature I Instructor: _____

1. Tell me a little about yourself.

A) Which of any of the following applies to you?

- Did not enter college the same year of high school graduation

- Works full time while attending college part or full-time

- Is financially independent from a legal guardian

- Has children

- Is a single parent

- Has a General Educational Development for high school equivalency

B) To which generation do you belong?

- Generation Y (1977-1990)

- Generation X (1965-1976)

- Young Boomers (1955-1964)

- Older Boomer (1946-1954)

- Silent Generation (1937-1945)

- GI Generation (1936 and below)

C) If you are a part of Generation Y, what year were you born?

2. What has given you or not given you a desire to learn online?

- How would you describe the way you feel about technology?

- How do you use technology outside of the classroom?

- How did you use technology growing up?

3. How would you describe a great class?

- What role does the instructor play in the course?

- How would you interact with other classmates?

- What role would students play in the class?

4. How do you prefer to learn?

- Describe the optimal environment you would like to prepare course assignment?

- What is your process for preparing an assignment?

- What is your process for studying for an exam?

5. Tell me how you perceive your participation online?

- How would you describe the way you participate in discussion threads?

- How would you describe the way you participate in assessments (tests, quizzes, essays).

- How would you describe the way you participate in other online classroom activities?

- How would you describe your process in reading and replying to threads by classmates?

- How would you describe your process in reading and replying to threads by the instructor?

- How often do you prefer to read posts by classmates?

- How often do you prefer to read posts by the instructor?

- How often do you prefer to respond to posts by classmates?

- How often do you prefer to respond to posts by instructors?

6. How would you describe a world literature class?

- What role does the instructor play in the course?

- What role do the students play in the course?

- What is your perception about how face to face World Literature I classes are taught

- What are your perceptions about the writing and reading requirements in class?

7. What are your perceptions of online learning?

- What are your perceptions about the role of the instructor in the class?

- What are your perceptions about the role of the instructor?

- What are your perceptions about how students' interact with others students online?

- What are your perceptions about the role of students in online course?

8. What are your communication preferences?

- How do you prefer to communicate in class?

- How do you prefer to communicate with classmates?

- How do you prefer to communicate with your teachers?

- What are your preferences for your teacher's style of communication?

9. How would you describe your ability to navigate around the blackboard platform?

10. How do you describe your abilities to complete quizzes, tests, discussion boards, and assignments online?

APPENDIX B

OBSERVATIONS IN WORLD LITERATURE ONLINE CLASSES

Date: _____

Tape No: _____

Student: _____

Teacher: _____

Online Course/Section: _____

1. What kind of participant is the student?

   a. How many posts to the discussion thread does the student make?

   b. How often does the student log into the course shell?

   c. Does the student attend chats if available (live or archived)?

   d. Does the student complete all of her assignments?

   e. Does the student ask the teacher questions?

   f. Does the student ask other student questions via e-mail or through the course shell?

2. How does the student meet the teacher's requirements, as listed on the syllabus, for posts to discussion threads, assessments, and other online activities?

   a. Does the student meet the teacher's requirements for discussion thread posts always, sometimes or never?

b. Does the student meet teacher's requirement for completing assessments always, sometimes, or never.

c. Does the student meet the teacher's requirements for other online activities always, sometimes, or never.

3. Is the course layout user friendly?

a. How are course information, assignments, announcements, and quizzes made available to students?

b. Where are course information, assignments, announcements, and quizzes located?

c. Is there a central location online for students to ask questions to the professor?

d. Is there a number listed in a central location for technical support?

e. Is there a platform tutorial for students use in the course?

4. Does the course appeal to various learning styles?

a. Are course materials presented in text, audio, and/or visual format?

b. Are students allowed to work in groups on assignments or alone?

c. Do students complete assignments through text, audio, and or visual format?

d. If chats are available, are they in text, audio, and or visual format?

5. How do students communicate with other students in the course?

a. How often do they post discussion boards?

    b. Is there an informal chat platform in the course for student communication?

    c. Do they e-mail each other through the course platform?

6. How are students able to communicate with the instructor?

    a. Is there a virtual office available in the course platform?

    b. Do students respond to instructor interaction in the discussion thread?

    c. How long does it take for students to respond to instructor's prompts or instructor participation?

APPENDIX C

DATA ANALYSIS CHART: DATA POINT THEMES

	Themes	Categories	Units/ Data Indicators	Data Frequency N= (n) number of participants responses to data points
Communication Preferences	Hit Somebody Up: Communication Among Classmates, Students and the Professor	Frequent Communication With Peers	Preferred Oral Communication With Peers "Well, I'm not a big phone person, but I would rather talk to them face-to-face and just having open dialogue and be able to speak openly and then get some response back" (PI, 5/13/10). "I really talk with other classmates. I usually share my phone number with them and give them that information so that just in case something happens and you're not able to come to class, we will be able to share the answers" (PI, 5/12/10).	Communication with peers (8) Face to face (6) Telephonic (2)
		Availability of the Instructor	Students Prefer a lot of contact with the professor: "I wish the instructor would've participated more in the discussion more. For me, personally, I think there should be more interaction even though it is an online course. I would like for it to be like it was in the classroom. One of my instructors had a chat, and I wish she would have made it available in the afternoon and also have some in the	Oral communication to professor (7) Telephonic (4) Face to face (3)

	Themes	Categories	Units/ Data Indicators	Data Frequency N= (n) number of participants responses to data points
			evening. But just something so you could ask questions. I always felt like I didn't get something" (PI, 5/10/10).	
		Teacher Immediacy	Frequent Communication From the Professor "I think the accessibility to the instructor—to be able to ask questions and get a response back makes a good class. There would be online chats so you would be able to be online. There would be office hours online. They ought to have office time so that you could just chat where in one could enter into conversation to ask questions. To make sure you're going in the right direction" (PI, 5/12/10).	An email from the professor (6) Hear from the professor (5)
Learning Preferences	Shorten, Condense, and Learning in Different Ways: Handling Reading, Studying for Tests, and Multiple Ways of Learning	Shorten Reading	Reading "I just read all the stuff and sometimes I was just overwhelmed with how much reading there was . . . It was so much required that it could be overwhelming, and then I got to read this and then in another class I got five chapters to read and then I would be like WOW" (PI, 5/10/10).	Reading challenging (6) Break down reading into smaller components in order to eliminate overwhelm. (5)

	Themes	Categories	Units/ Data Indicators	Data Frequency N= (n) number of participants responses to data points
		Group Work	Preparation of assignments "I enjoyed the group discussions online for online classes and in a classroom setting. I enjoy the same thing with the group discussions with dialogue and group assignments in class and not out of class, something where you're applying what you learn for 30 minutes of class, and maybe working together 30 minutes of class, and then presenting what we learn" (PI, 5/10/10).	Prepare assignments in groups. (6)
		Multiple Modes of Learning	Learning Modes A participant described an excellent classroom setting as one that is "probably a blended class, probably some online, and some in the classroom. Then you would just have a better opportunity to maybe ask some questions [if needed]" (PI, 5/12/10).	Various ways of learning (audio, visual, multimedia, social (10)
		Study Guides	Studying for Exams "When I get ready for a test, and I just go back over my notes and my PowerPoint and review, I basically do the same thing when I'm getting ready to write a paper" (PI, 5/12/10).	Instructor to prepare study guides for tests and exams. (5)
	Relationships that Foster Course Interest: Connecting to Subject Matter, Content, and Peers Online;	Generation Y Relates to the Subject and topics	Generation Y Needs to Connect Subject and topics "It [reading] depends on the topic. If it's boring I	Subject and Topics: Generation Y (3/3)

	Themes	Categories	Units/ Data Indicators	Data Frequency N= (n) number of participants responses to data points
			am less likely to read it. If it is interesting I am more times more likely to read it" (PI, 5/10/10).	
		Older Generations relate to classmates	Older Generations need to connect to classmates "I look through the majority of them, and it sometimes is going to depend on how the person responded if it seems like they have the same kind of thought process I do. Or it looks like they prepared their responses then that's the one I'm drawn to. . . . It looks like they respond just so they can respond. I try to shy away from those a little bit more. Or if it looks like someone who prepared as much, then those are the ones that I'll usually respond to" (PI, 5/13/10).	Relating to classmates enjoy learning and fully participate in the course: Older Generations (4/7)
Perceptions about Online Learning	Impatience is a Virtue: The Benefits and Disadvantages of Online Learning	Advantages of Online Learning	Convenience "Well, I just wanted to work at a certain pace. I was taking a certain amount of hours and it was really overboard for me. To have an ability to take the online class was convenient for me. It would be better off for me so that I could make the grade that will be acceptable to me" (PI, 5/12/10).	Convenience of online learning (10) Most participants find online learning to be easy in terms of usability (5).
		Disadvantages	Inconvenience "In an online class you're looking at more of an honor system and in an online class you have to be a lot more motivated. You have to be self-motivated	Slow responses to questions by online instructors and slow feedback on assignments. (6) Computer freezes and their lack of familiarity with

	Themes	Categories	Units/ Data Indicators	Data Frequency N= (n) number of participants responses to data points
			because it is easy to procrastinate and to say that you will do this in a little bit. But in a classroom, you're right there in front of the instructor and they can see what you're doing more and see your learning paces more. But in online, you're going to have to do that yourself" (PI, 5/13/10).	online learning tools. (5)

APPENDIX D

CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO

<u>THIS IS A TEMPLATE FOR THE LONG FORM FOR OBTAINING INFORMED CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH. IT MUST BE ADAPTED TO INCLUDE ALL OF THE INFORMATION REQUIRED FOR INFORMED CONSENT. IF AN ITEM IS NOT APPROPRIATE FOR THE STUDY, PLEASE DELETE IT FROM THE FORM.</u>

CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG FORM

Project Title: Nontraditional African American Students' preferences in Online Learning at a Southeastern Historically Black College and University (HBCU)

Project Director: <u>Juanita Merrills</u>

Participant's Name: <u>   </u>

What is the study about?

The purpose of this study is to explain how communication preferences, learning preferences, and perceptions about online learning affect non-traditional African American students of various ages, class, and geographical backgrounds in their participation in online world literature courses at an Historically Black College and University in the southeastern United States.

.

Why are you asking me?

The participants for this study will include 10 nontraditional African American students participating in online world literature classes at this southeastern Historically Black College and University.. Nontraditional students are selected for this study because of the growing numbers of adult learners. In addition, at this time nontraditional students are offered more selections of online courses than traditional students at this southeastern Historically Black College and University .

What will you ask me to do if I agree to be in the study?

The data collection for this proposed study will include the following: 1) Individual interviews; 2) Observations of online classes; 3) Observation of online platforms. During this study, I will conduct a one-on-one private interview via email, telephone conversation, or face to face. In the interview, you will answer open-ended questions. I will also view your activity in the course. This may occur after the course is completed and will have no bearing on your grade. The interview will take only one hour to one hour and a half of your time.

Is there any audio/video recording?

Yes, your interview will be recorded and later transcribed. Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, your confidentiality for things you say on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape.

What are the dangers to me?

Because a pseudonym will be used in lieu of your name, interviews will be one-on-one and private, and participation will not influence your grade in the studied course, there is no risk to you.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG at (336) 256-1482. Questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Jewell Cooper who may be contacted at (336) 334-3438 or jecooper@uncg.edu.

Are there any benefits to me for taking part in this research study?

Engaging in this study could potentially assist you in becoming more competitive in a global economy. This study has the capability of identifying key factors needed to encourage enrollment

of nontraditional African American students from diverse backgrounds in online courses, thereby allowing you to remain competitive at a time where more emphasis is being placed on technology.

Are there any benefits to society as a result of me taking part in this research?

The finding of the study will inform educational institutions about how to meet the needs of nontraditional African American learners. This will help to ensure that the needs of diverse populations are being met online.

Will I get paid for being in the study? Will it cost me anything?

Students who participate and complete the study will receive a $25.00 gift card. The card will be mailed to you after the study is completed. There will be no cost to you as the participant.

How will you keep my information confidential?

All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. All data will be kept in my home office in a locked file and a security locked computer.

Absolute confidentiality of data provided through the Internet cannot be guaranteed due to the limited protections of Internet access. Please be sure to close your browser when finished so no one will be able to see what you have been doing.

What if I want to leave the study?

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time, without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

What about new information/changes in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

Voluntary Consent by Participant:

By signing this consent form you are agreeing that you read, or it has been read to you, and you fully understand the contents of this document and are openly willing consent to take part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are 18 years of age or older and are agreeing to participate, or have the individual specified above as a participant participate, in this study described to you by Juanita Merrills.

Signature: _____ Date: _____