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A Systematic Approach to Design of Distance Graduate Management Programmes

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A Systematic Approach to Design of

Distance Graduate Management Programmes

With reference to Tourism and Hospitality Management

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Declaration

I certify that this thesis which I now submit for examination for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others, save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Abstract

This study describes the systematic creation, application and evaluation of a comprehensive framework for the design of distance graduate programmes, the goal of which is to inform decision-making for sustainable curricula that suit the growing demand for flexible learning options. A wide range of challenges face educators, and existing models appear to be insufficient to guide such endeavours. Successful distance learning is rooted in the values of the institution and requires a significant amount of organizational support, needs assessment of stakeholders, strategic planning, implementation and evaluation.

This first international study of distance masters degree programmes in Tourism and Hospitality Management (T&HM) employs an exploratory mixed method research design in a comprehensive investigation of the interrelated elements that contextualize and are part of the distance graduate curriculum. Director interviews and online surveys of alumni contribute insights into the graduate distance learning experience. A short case study within an Irish higher education institution pilots the draft framework; triangulating data by adding the perspective of traditional instructors transitioning into a blended learning format.

This study provides a robust curriculum model linking new findings and rich eclectic sources that can assist distance programme planners in the selection of technology-enhanced approaches to meet the unique needs and interests of learners while balancing change. Extending the academic plan of Stark and Lattuca (1997, 2009), this timely study offers a design framework to formatively stimulate quality interaction, foster high-level thinking and motivate both learners and instructors in a student-centred paradigm. Holistic design, not technology alone, opens the way to enhancing flexibility and programme competitiveness and resilience in a borderless academic community.

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Abbreviations used in this thesis

AI	Appreciative Inquiry
AMTA	Accelerated Masters of Tourism Administration
CHRIE	Council on Hotel, Restaurant and Institutional Education
CLA	Collegiate Learning Assessment
DIT	The Dublin Institute of Technology
ECTS	European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
F2F	Face-to-face
GWU	The George Washington University
HE	Higher Education
HEA	Higher Education Authority
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications, Ireland
PD	Programme Director
QA	Quality Assurance
QMU	Queen Margaret University
RQ	Research Question
T&HM	Tourism and Hospitality Management
TDT	Transactional Distance Theory
TedQual	Tourism Education Quality
UNWTO	United Nation's World Tourism Organisation
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

The last ten years have seen dramatic increases in the demand for distance learning options and the technology and variety of formats that enable its delivery. Recent national surveys in the United States show that three-quarters of institutions report that the economic downturn has increased demand for distance courses and programs (I. E. Allen & Seaman, 2010a). European reports spanning the European Higher Educational arena state that flexibility towards learner needs is the key to success (Zarka, 2010). Providing educational access for a tide of lifelong learners in the post-industrial 'Knowledge Economy' is fundamental to underpinning an inclusive society (Department of Enterprise Trade and Innovation, 2002; European Commission, 2008).

Educators are thus charged to provide flexible programmes by modifying and reconceptualizing graduate education as a distance experience. For such distance programmes to occur in places or at times most convenient for the learners, Kearsley (2000) pointed out over a decade ago, that special instructional design, special course development techniques, special electronic communication and special organizational and administrative arrangements must be factored into the equation. A litany of marginal successes or distance programmes that have proven unsuccessful from an educational or cost effective perspective over the years (Rovai & Downey, 2010) is the evidence that the curriculum development 'equation' has often missed the mark and that success is reserved for programmes with curricula

designed with the learners and the entire distance learning environment in mind (Chaney, Chaney, & Eddy, 2010).

In response, this thesis contributes to the improvement of design of distance graduate management programmes through the systematic development of a comprehensive curriculum framework. This research also pays particular attention to the application in the field of Tourism and Hospitality Management (T&HM). This introduction provides an overview of the research study, its objectives, background, context, conceptual basis and research methodologies. A summary is presented of the key issues and drivers of change that must be considered in the development of a comprehensive curriculum framework for distance graduate management masters degree programmes.

1.1.2 Background to the Study

This researcher is a member of the academic staff of The George Washington University (GWU). GWU, a leading center for tourism education in the United States, is recognised as a Centre for Tourism Education and Research by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation. Its Master of Tourism Administration degree programme is the oldest tourism masters degree in the Americas; founded 35 years ago. The university was the first in the United States to offer a distance graduate tourism degree through the Accelerated Master of Tourism Administration (AMTA) programme.

As a member of the AMTA programme team, the researcher has invaluable access to evolving curriculum design, learning and assessment methods and student perception of experience. This position affords personal interaction with faculty,

students and alumni and led to a developing interest in the whole area of distance education and the particular needs of staff and students associated with such graduate programmes. This interest has grown over the years and now finds expression in this research thesis.

After joining the Ph.D. programme at the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism at the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT), and with reading and research into international distance masters programmes underway, an opportunity arose within DIT to participate and apply the study's proposed curriculum guidelines in a pilot programme initiative. The one-year Add-on programme for 4th year undergraduates (Level 8) envisions transitioning from traditional on-campus into a combination online and face-to-face learning format, but is challenged with decisions of how to adjust to a new blended educational paradigm that integrates web-based components. The dilemma typifies the situation of many strong traditional on-campus programmes who also wonder how to increase programme flexibility while preserving the value-added attributes of the institutional culture and of the individual teacher in a distance format.

The case study adds an invaluable perspective and emphasis on the collaborative planning approach to distance course and programme design. Instructors focus on resolving teaching and learning strategies and their practical concerns about procedures, developing materials and transitioning on-campus teaching experts into distance learning facilitators and designers. Through the deconstruction and analysis of their own programme, they discover team, student and programme strengths to build on and emphasize, identify their culture-based values and prioritize their own pedagogical needs. Since the characteristics of the

Add-on and distance masters learners are well-matched in terms of being non-traditional, goal-oriented and diverse students, the case provided a suitable testing ground for exploring the teaching and learning concerns that instructors face in redesigning for distance delivery. Understanding the Add-on programme's curriculum development needs contributes to refining the proposed framework by gaining the perspective of the instructors and how good design can leverage their passion for their profession and support their skill development.

The nature of the research rests within the broad area of educational enquiry. The area of knowledge being advanced by this study is education-based research, which endeavours to inform educational judgments and decisions through critical enquiry. It is values-based research whose focus is primarily conceptual, but whose observations and themes are illustrated through application that should have immediate relevance to educators, researchers and policy-makers to improve educational action (Bassey, 2000b). This study builds on curriculum design theory, distance education and graduate management education.

Much of educational research is initiated to solve problems that arise in practice and to construct design principles that can inform solutions (McPherson & Nunes, 2004). This thesis explores and synthesizes a number of themes toward that end. The core of the study centres on developing a systematic approach to a values and theory-based curriculum framework for higher education (HE) that is user-friendly enough for practitioners and broad enough to assist academics and interested parties in designing distance learning programmes at the graduate level with particular reference to the T&HM sector. It draws together curriculum theory, graduate education and distance education. This thesis is structured around these

themes and these areas are explored in depth as the research unfolds. Figure 1-1 depicts the relationship of the curriculum framework within the context of educational enquiry and the basic curricular entities.

Figure 1-1: Educational research context
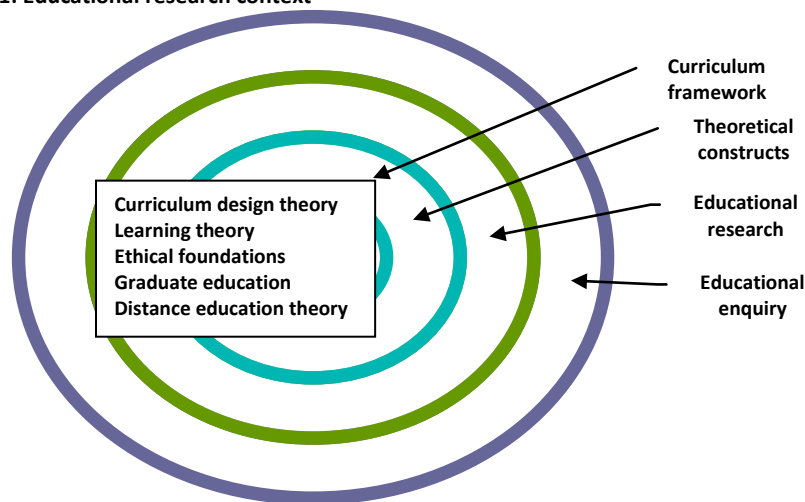
1.2   *Rationale*

Distance learning programmes can play a key role for learners in removing barriers of access and participation in education systems and providing an alternative to traditional campus-bound programmes. As national and international priorities focus on the increasing demand for a highly qualified, adaptable workforce for an innovation-driven, post-industrial economy, enhancing human capital and employability for fiscal and social health is seen as a necessity, not a luxury (Commission of the European Communities, 2008). The European Union predicts that the trend of rising qualifications and competency requirements is due to an anticipated 75% of jobs in 2020 shifting to the competitive service sector (Cedefop, 2008). The major push for broadening of skills is partially a consequence of technological changes as employers seek transversal key competencies such as problem-solving, digital literacy, self-management and communication skills

(Commission of the European Communities, 2008; Evans, Haughey, & Murphy, 2008; R. Garrison & Anderson, 2000; Gaskell, Mills, & Tait, 2009). HE institutions are increasing and diversifying their programme offerings with online and blended programmes to meet demand and remain relevant (APLU, 2009; European Commission, 2008).

Internationally distance higher education is moving from the periphery to the forefront of many educational reform efforts and gaining widespread significance with increasing enrolment. Distance education continues to grow at rates far in excess of the total HE student population (I. E. Allen & Seaman, 2010b; USGAO, 2007). The potential of technology to free knowledge from the locally produced to boundary-less availability in an array of flexible formats combines with graduate education aims to develop learners who are able to think critically, have a global perspective, embrace diversity and make business decisions with humanity in mind (Johns Hopkins University, 2010). Achieving such higher-order learning outcomes in a distance learning environment requires the curriculum team to take a broad design perspective and to map new tools and resources in a framework underpinned by theoretically consistent approaches and best practices to student-centred pedagogy (Conole, Dyke, Oliver, & Seale, 2004; Duffy & Kirkley, 2004). Developing distance education curricula with the highest possible standards is more important now than ever. Recent federal investigations in the U.S. exposed fraudulent and exploitative practices by certain for-profit distance education organisations (GAO, 2010; Keller, 2010) putting intense scrutiny on the quality of distance education. Scholars say that unifying theoretical models are generally

lacking in distance education studies (Covington, Petherbridge, & Warren, 2005; Eastman & Swift, 2001; Zawacki-Richter, 2009).

Studies suggest that one of the most likely threats to the success of distance education is a poorly designed, poorly managed programme (Hays, 2008; Rovai & Downey, 2010). Many of the early distance programmes adopted an unsystematic "build it and they will come" approach that resulted in more failures than successes (Johnson, 2010; NEA, 2002). Assumptions about curriculum were made that did not produce sustainable programmes or satisfactory results for students (NEA, 2002). Effective use of new technologies that facilitates understanding for learners to adapt and contextualize information, requires more than just replicating the traditional classroom and centres on a radical reconsideration of a clearly articulated learning and teaching design process (Conole & Culver, 2010).

In practice, pockets of good practice and innovation have been the norm and there is little consensus on how to best to organise distance programmes (K. C. Green, 2009; Kolowich, 2009). The common problem of repetition of mistakes is the result of not learning from past innovation (Conole & Culver, 2010). Having a systematic method of programme design is the best strategy for eliminating the reactive effects that "knee-jerk" or "bolted on" implementation of curriculum parts or technology can result in (Merisotis, 2000). "Technoskeptics" note that decision-making built on short-term or limited data can compromise resources, student experience and purposeful development progress (A. B. Collins, 2006; Njenga & Fourie, 2010). A national survey of public and private nonprofit colleges in the U.S. documents this pervasive weakness reporting that 45% of online programmes reorganised their management in the last two years and 52% anticipate a reshuffling

within the next two years (K. C. Green, 2009; Kolowich, 2009). Historically distance education was not research-driven, but rather application-driven, and continuing enquiry and scholarship remains a development priority (DeVary, 2008; Shive & Jegede, 2001). Educators need a broad curriculum framework based on international comparative research on distance learning systems to design effective programmes (Zawacki-Richter, 2009).

To summarize the problem, the unprecedented demand for broadly educated and highly qualified workers is increasing and distance graduate education provides a technology-enhanced solution for learners to access education at their convenience over their lifetimes. For the global tourism sector, the role of online tourism education is considered one of the top ten issues for 2011 (Fesenmaier, 2010). Distance learning, a rapidly growing enterprise, needs further research to develop a 'big picture' curricular design process to ensure more consistent quality distance programmes for diversifying learning environments and non-traditional students. The current research in this area appears to be weak and would benefit by having a process that enables pedagogic and technological change and adjustment for the future. HE programmes internationally have been slow adopters, but having a theory and research-driven comprehensive, flexible curriculum framework will be a necessity for laying a solid foundation for graduate education in a digital world (Bandele, Owolabi, Akinwamide, & Oke, 2009). These conflicting conditions together constitute the environment behind the problem at the focal point of this study.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this study is the creation of a comprehensive, integrated curriculum framework to improve the design of distance graduate management programmes and contribute to their quality, consistency and sustainability.

1.4 Research Questions

In consideration of the multiple problems identified, this study's design is based on answering the following research questions that outline a systematic approach.

Step One: Creation of a Curriculum Framework

In Step One, Creation of a curriculum framework, the literature surrounding the dimensions of the objectives of the study and the first two RQs are reviewed and discussed. Additionally, the first set of data is collected: drawn from secondary sources, identifying the existing accredited distance T&HM graduate degree programmes and comparatively examining their pedagogical and technological characteristics in terms of distance learning theory. This step concludes by proposing a draft curriculum framework.

RQ 1. What key elements should a curriculum framework for distance graduate education include in terms of: educational philosophy, curriculum content, emphasis, learning strategies/pedagogy and evaluation approaches?

RQ 2. What are the pedagogical and technical dimensions of existing accredited Tourism and Hospitality Management graduate degree programmes – 100% online and blended?

Step Two: Towards the Development of a Curriculum Framework

Building on the output from Step One, Step Two extends the triangulation approach through primary data from three sample groups who experience distance education from different perspectives: Distance graduate programme directors, alumni and a programme team of instructors who are transitioning their on-campus programme to include distance components.

RQ 3.   How do programme directors and students perceive the learning experience of their distance programmes?

RQ 4.   In the context of developing a curriculum framework, what are the practical implications of implementation that need to be considered?

Step Three: Refinement of the Curriculum Framework

Step Three integrates the strengths from relevant theory, literature and new data and systematically refines the curriculum framework.

RQ 5.   How can evaluation of existing curriculum models, the imperatives of the drivers of change and field testing, inform and lead to the development of a more dynamic, comprehensive model for graduate distance education?

RQ 5a. How do existing curriculum frameworks for distance graduate tourism and hospitality management programmes compare to this proposed framework? Are there indications of need for change?

RQ 5b. What are the implications for the new curriculum model?

1.5   *Definition of Terms*

The following terms are operationally defined for the purposes of this study:

Curriculum

A curriculum is defined as the whole educational experience that is packaged as a degree programme. Its constituent parts include modules or courses, which in turn may be specified as a series of syllabi or course contents (John Tribe, 2002). Curriculum includes a loosely ordered set of goals founded on

values, objectives and actions for learning and teaching towards those goals and system of evaluation. It is a multi-dimensional living system with an active acceptance of change as a normal variable in educational planning that includes a set of standards, resources, and assessments used in instruction. (Raudenbush, Rowan, & Cheong, 1993; Seel, 2004; Stark & Lattuca, 1997; Wiles, 2009). The concept of curriculum is further defined in Section 3.2, *Towards a curriculum framework*.

<div align="center">

Curriculum Framework

</div>

Curriculum framework refers to the entire plan for student academic development including purpose, student experience, evaluation and adjustment. It is a model that outlines a theory and research-driven systematic planning process that can assist educators in the development of a comprehensive, flexible design for a degree programme.

<div align="center">

Distance education

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Based on the definitions proposed by Keegan (1996), Moore and Kearsley (1996) and updated by the Sloan Consortium (I. E. Allen & Seaman, 2010a), distance education and distance learning, terms often used interchangeably, is defined as planned learning that takes place with the instructor and the learner being in separate places, conducted primarily online and involves an educational organisation for organising and preparing learning materials and providing student support. UNESCO (2010) adds that it is the centrality of the learner's experience and achievement using a wide spectrum of technologies that defines distance learning.

The two major forms of distance education are: *Online,* in which at least 80% of the course content is delivered online and *Blended* (sometimes called hybrid), in which 30 to 80% of the course content is delivered online and the remainder of instruction is face-to-face (I. E. Allen & Seaman, 2010b).

Postgraduate education

Postgraduate education refers to any education that an individual might undertake after earning an undergraduate or bachelor degree. In North America, this level is generally referred to as graduate school.

1.6   Significance of the Study

Developed through systematic research-based methodology, this study envisions, applies and evaluates a dynamic, holistic curriculum framework for distance graduate programmes. It will assist educators to better understand the process of designing graduate distance education programmes. The research advances our understanding of implementation of curriculum design theory, distance learning and graduate education and introduces a new concept for distance curriculum design that will improve the sustainability of programmes in a competitive environment.

The research findings provided in this study adds new knowledge to the process of designing and/or developing graduate distance learning programmes with the assistance of a curriculum framework. The framework will give a design team a much-needed means to prioritize trade-offs between pedagogy and new technological resources available to them (J. B. Arbaugh & B. L. Rau, 2007).

This framework includes a range of elements: programme aims, philosophy, roles of the learners and educators, curriculum content, teaching and learning strategies, as well as addressing the uniqueness that each distance education programme should enhance. This will help educators make informed decisions that strengthen programme identity; a factor for motivating learners and instructors and a marketing advantage (Ren, Kraut, & Kiesler, 2007).

This research provides, for the first time, a review and analysis of existing online graduate programmes in T&HM at the masters degree level on an international scale. This is significant for T&HM education research. For an industry that cites accessible education as a critical success factor (Boisevert, 2000), little attention has been paid to the role that web-based education already plays in the T&HM learning sphere (Braun & Hollick, 2006; Cantoni, Kalbaska, & Inversini, 2009; Sigala, 2002). The programmes are comparatively evaluated using learning theory to interpret programme characteristics to provide designers and potential learners a way to judge their degree of flexibility.

This study is designed to maximize the completeness of the data by including perspectives of the prime stakeholders in T&HM higher education: learners, instructors and directors. A representative sample of distance masters degree programmes in T&HM provides data from both directors and programme graduates, while the third dimension is completed by interactive research with a local programme seeking to design inaugural distance programming. This study is unique in its scope and international nature.

The curriculum framework provided in this study broadens our understanding of traditional curricular models to propose a more dynamic model of

curriculum design tailored to the needs of graduate distance education in a changing environment. Earlier research focusing on graduate curriculum issues cite the importance of expanding the international dimension, adopting an integrated approach, moving away from a faculty-driven perspective and focusing on the planning process (Porter & McKibbin, 1988). Addressing these priorities feature prominently in this study's data collection design and literature review, as they are especially important in designing effective distance programmes.

This framework extends traditional models by encompassing the entire planning, implementation and review process for a distance programme and includes features that rest outside of a strictly academic framework. The value-added aspects are practical key issues drawn from the findings pertaining to the distance learner and the sustainability of a dynamic programme. The practical implications of implementing, operationalising and managing such a framework are explored. This research reveals the need for strong leadership that encourages experimentation and revision through inclusive and transparent digital feedback channels. The nature of technology-mediated programmes is one of change. This framework provides a guide for programme leaders to balance innovation fashions with enduring socially responsible values and instruction design.

This research provides a means for graduate distance education programmes to be designed and/or developed more effectively at a time when opening up opportunities for more potential students worldwide can, in some cases, be the means for their intellectual and socio-economic emancipation (Olakulein & Ojo, 2006). It assists in improving and enhancing the quality and sustainability of such programmes while assisting in a strategic use of resources.

This research assists in building the capacity to extend graduate education in a distance delivery format to students who are primarily off-campus. In the process, indirectly, this research assists in improving and increasing the stock of human capital and globally aware citizens available to manage tourism-related enterprises worldwide. The cross-disciplinary nature of tourism and hospitality studies and the concept-driven approach to curriculum content also increases the potential to generalise these research findings within graduate and distance education and contribute to advancing these areas. Additionally, a design model that results in the effective planning and organisation required for distance learning is a process that can benefit the design of any graduate education programme as many studies state that designing for distance is more demanding pedagogically (Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006).

In summary, this research is a timely and relevant addition to understanding an increasingly important area of graduate education and an approach to the design of curricula to meet growing needs and respond to external demands. This research is an important contribution for those engaged in the design process and supports consistent quality within sustainable programmes.

1.7   Description of the Chapters

The following chapters outline the remainder of this study:

Chapter Two: A review of the literature begins the systematic research process described as Step One: *Creation of a curriculum framework*. In addressing RQ 1 this chapter discusses the theoretical constructs and theories that underpin this study to determine the key elements of a curriculum framework. This chapter

presents a substantial review of the literature that influences curriculum design. Literature surrounding the HE environment and graduate and distance education is also reviewed. The literature contributes conceptual and theoretical paradigms that focus the research design strategy. This chapter concludes with a proposed curriculum model.

Chapter Three delineates the research methodology for this study. A sequential-phase exploratory mixed method design and case study methodology is applied to this study to provide the new data needed to answer the research questions and contribute to new knowledge. It provides a detailed account of the design of this study including the research paradigm, the sampled population, instrumentation, data collection, analysis and threats to validity. This chapter addresses RQ2 through identification and analysis of the pedagogical and technological features of the existing distance masters degree programmes in T&HM in three world regions.

Chapter Four: This first part of Step Two: *Towards the development of a curriculum framework* presents and analyses data from T&HM international distance programme directors' interviews and graduates' online surveys. This data addresses RQ 3's enquiry of h*ow programme directors and students perceive the learning experience of their distance programmes*.

Chapter Five: The second part of the primary data is a small pilot field test with the DIT one-year Add-on programme in the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism. Programme course documents are reviewed to provide an historical context and programme meetings, interaction and interviews with the programme team members are analyzed thematically in relation to the curriculum framework.

This evaluative research portrays the practical curriculum framework issues involved in the adoption of a distance or blended learning delivery format from the perspective of the teachers/programme design team and sheds light on RQ 4 *"In the context of developing a curriculum framework, what are the practical implications of implementation that need to be considered?"*, thus completing Step Two: *Towards the development of a curriculum framework*.

Chapter Six: Discussion. This final Step Three, *Refinement of the curriculum framework*, discusses the new findings, theoretical underpinning and drivers of change in terms of the final three research questions to refine the framework. Implications from the evaluation of the findings are synthesized in a revised final curriculum framework.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions and recommendations for further research in this area of study are presented.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This study seeks to develop a systematic approach to the effective design for distance graduate programmes within higher education (HE) with specific reference to Tourism and Hospitality Management (T&HM). The literature that supports this endeavour is reviewed in this chapter. A holistic, integrated curriculum framework provides a means by which educational institutions can specify and replicate effective design in the midst of changing contexts. Situational factors are radically changing the conceptualization of graduate programmes (Bruininks, Keeney, & Thorp, 2010; Lattuca & Stark, 2009) and tertiary education can expect even greater acceleration of challenges and opportunities to come (Morrison & Young, 2009). As societal and technological advances link HE ever closer with national and global concerns, changes in the delivery of HE are also taking place (Lattuca & Stark, 2009).

Studies collectively suggest that programme goals, intended learning outcomes and accreditation between online and classroom-based courses are similar (Arbaugh et al., 2009), but this chapter will reveal that there are key design consideration differences, such as achieving quality student and teacher interaction in the distance learning process and the responsiveness to external and internal influences. The tendency in HE is to view uncomfortable change with alarm and the past with appreciation. With reflection on the underpinning theory, practice and issues affecting HE, perhaps fears and academic leadership can instead be the needed stimulus for action and a foundation for new wisdom (Kerr, 2001).

This chapter reviews the nature and key characteristics of three primary areas of literature: Curriculum in higher education, Graduate education and Distance education. Through the characteristics of the seven fundamental curriculum elements identified by Dillon (2009), the salient literature of the three areas is critically evaluated and discussed. This structure is adopted to comprehensively build understanding of the key elements needed to answer this study's main question "How can a systematic approach to the effective design of distance graduate education programmes be developed?" Figure 2-1 illustrates the areas reviewed to establish the research base for development of a model for distance graduate curriculum design and the relationship of the framework to the literature.

Figure 2-1: Areas of literature reviewed
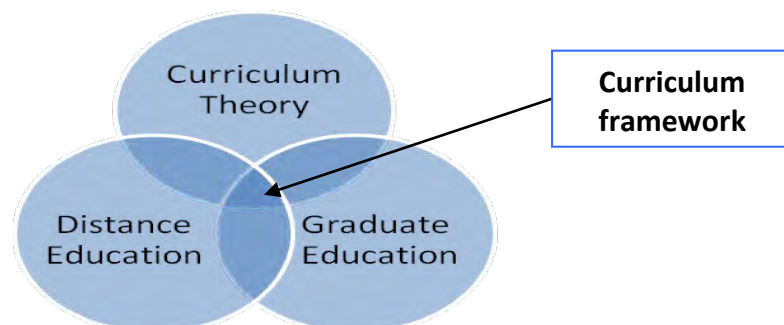
The proposed curriculum framework will form the guidelines for the primary research chapters to follow. It furthers the work of researchers and practitioners in the field of distance curriculum development in HE and offers potential application to T&HM graduate education. The proposed curriculum framework synthesizes literature across multiple disciplines forming an adaptable guide for designing dynamic programmes with greater consistency of quality and improved graduate learning outcomes and a useful path for an accreditation review process (HEA, 2008).

In subsequent chapters of this study the proposed framework is comparatively analysed in the light of new data collected from existing distance graduate programmes in T&HM in three global regions. Recognizing that the literature specific to the development of distance graduate programmes for T&HM is very limited (Cantoni, Kalbaska, & Inversini, 2009), this study seeks to address this deficiency. A case study with an Irish T&HM programme transitioning to distance formats provides an opportunity to evaluate how elements of the framework will work "in the field". This step validates the research with needed authenticity of application and feedback (Conole, Oliver, & Harvey, 2000).

2.2 *Towards a Curriculum Framework*

The central purpose of academic activity is the discovery of knowledge through research and its dissemination through its curriculum (Kerr, 1994a). This section explores the essential nature of a curriculum framework and why it is important, now more than ever, to the function of higher education. Derived from relevant theory, models and current practice, an overview is presented of the role a curriculum framework plays in HE and its inherently useful characteristics.

The concept of *curriculum* is subject to interpretation and reflects various, often divergent, approaches by scholars and practitioners (Oliva, 1997; Ornstein & Hunkins, 2009; Stenhouse, 1975). Schwab, whose seminal theories of "the Practical" (1969) ruptured contemporary curriculum discourse, delineates the dimensions of curriculum as follows:

> Curriculum is what is successfully conveyed to differing degrees to different students, by committed teachers using appropriate materials and actions, of legitimated bodies of knowledge, skill, taste, and propensity to act and react,

which are chosen for instruction after serious reflection and communal decision by representatives of those involved in the teaching of a specified group of students who are known to the decision makers (Schwab, 1983).

Today, it is likely that educators would emphasize that the curriculum is a multi-dimensional living system with an active acceptance of change as a normal variable in planning (Wiles, 2009). In truth, dependence on a narrow definition may not be as satisfying to educators as a discussion of what they really want to know:

- "What are the things that make up curriculum?

- What are we supposed to do about these things?"(Dillon, 2009)

This study asks these questions. The study's first research question seeks to identify the elements needed in a curriculum framework for distance graduate education. The subsequent research questions lay the groundwork for answering what educators should do and how they should think "about these things", which is the practical application of the curriculum model or framework.

There are as many approaches to curriculum design as there are contradictory perspectives (Pinar, 2003), but the curriculum framework concept can help convert an unstructured task into one that is more structured and, thus, potentially more easily solved (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). It is the means by which institutions and their disciplinary programmes express and implement their comprehensive educational aspirations (Hodgkinson & Holland, 2002). The dynamic curriculum framework encourages contextual adaptation where educators can develop learning and change strategies, such as coherence, active learning and consideration of student goals (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). It links the both the goals and educational environment with processes that provide a means to control educational quality with traceable steps and criteria against which performance will

be evaluated (EAQAHE, 2005). On one level the framework is an invaluable asset for alleviating the anxiety stimulated by programme review cycles, at a greater level, a curriculum framework can support whole-institution reform (J. W. Pellegrino, 2006).

At once, both theoretical and immensely practical, the framework is layered and highly eclectic. The many inputs that may influence curricular development of a programme are channelled, sorted, and choice-making is made manageable by connecting with curriculum theory (Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 2003). The degree programme's internal and external quality standards, educational aims and desired graduate outcomes are at the heart of this enterprise and act as catalysts for designing learning strategies and determining emphasis (W. Green, Hammer, & Star, 2009). These choices are enveloped by the framework's foundational educational philosophy that grounds and stabilizes a programme with a powerful moral strength (DePauw, 2009). This same set of embedded values brings a mature social consciousness to content and teaching approaches that sets the stage for learning to critically apply knowledge to complex situations at the graduate level.

For the practice of distance education, the framework provides a means for designers to prioritize trade-offs between pedagogy and new technological resources available to them (J. B. Arbaugh & B. L. Rau, 2007) and a place to collaborate on a vision of how information communication technology can improve teaching and learning (J. C. Moore, 2004). Educators developing programmes without a comprehensive and dynamic curriculum framework do so at great risk to the sustainability of the programme that can result in serious weaknesses as

summarized by the Irish Universities Association (IUA) as follows (Irish Universities Association, 2005):

- A focus on pursuing a fixed curriculum with little choice or flexibility, traditional, large-group teaching lectures, minimal adoption of educational and elearning technology;

- Curriculum unable to keep pace with new interdisciplinary areas of study underpinning key areas of innovation;

- Little opportunity to broaden education beyond the core subject areas, leaving students ill-prepared for challenges of change encountered in a rapidly evolving society; and

- Limited opportunities for the development of teamwork skills.

There is growing recognition that business-as-usual can consign HE to gradual decline (European Commission, 2010) and that responsive graduate programmes more in touch with current thinking are needed (Brint, 2008). Research shows that the more traditional forms of teaching no longer meet the increasing expectations for students in terms of access and preferences (Bates, 1995; K. C. Green, 2009; Owsten, 1997)

The role of the curriculum framework is, therefore, to underpin and assist flexible programme building. In its totality, the curriculum framework acknowledges and expresses the unique culture of an institution's conceptualization of HE in a dynamic, yet cohesive form (Bruner, 1996). It nurtures diversity and creativity in a harmonizing frame. Cohesiveness increases the potential synergies of the elements and combats the predisposition to fragmentation, which undermines effectiveness and overall satisfaction of experience (Duffey, 1980). This concept forms the basis

for exploring the development of a comprehensive curriculum framework that will serve educators well in the design of future distance graduate programmes.

In a systematic process of teasing out the elements and organisation of distance graduate curriculum, questions about the nature and practice of curriculum in general lie within the following domains, shown in Table 2-1:

Table 2-1: Curriculum framework domains

Components	e.g. Ethos, instructional design, content, students, teachers and staff, resources, ICT media
Conditions	e.g. Environmental conditions, attitudes, leadership, faculty training, educational policies
Processes	e.g. Organisation and implementation, curriculum delivery modes, communication, applied theory, assessment, evaluation
Outcomes	e.g. Programme goals, masters degree level competencies, quality flexible educational experience, meeting student needs

(Boyatzis & Saatcioglu, 2008; NAIRTL, 2009)

The answers cannot be arrived at in a vacuum, thus a framework of contextualized questions becomes the ultimate reference for making curriculum choice or change (Schwab, 1983; Stone, 2009). The framework provides a means to incorporate new ideas or environmental changes without disrupting the balance (J. Biggs, 1996). The final model, ultimately, is determined by the requirements, strengths and limitations of the actual circumstances of practice.

Identifying the Framework Elements

Designing the framework requires great scope and depth of consideration of the related elements that make up its wholeness because it represents the cumulative, negotiated work of all stakeholders associated with the institution and/or its programme. A comprehensive learning plan can be developed through a

series of decisions about the elements that make up the curriculum (Lattuca & Stark, 2009), thus the first step, as the first research question for this study asks, is to find out 'What key elements should a curriculum framework include…?'.

Curriculum models proposing means for identifying curriculum elements have evolved over the decades. A brief review of these models in the literature systematically charts a way to identifying the elements. Categorizing elements helps clarify discussion and outlines the scope and complexity of the educational environment (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). Based on Clark Kerr's 'pillars' (1977), five curriculum elements form the basic aspects of the practice and continuing discussions within graduate HE, and they are as follows:

1. Purpose, e.g. educational intent, philosophy, key principles of procedure
2. Content, e.g. selection, scope and sequence of subject matter, organisation and approaches to subject matter

3. Teaching and learning strategies, e.g. theoretical constructs for learning, instructional design, media for learning, assessment processes

4. Learners, e.g. their educational and instructional needs, experience and social context

5. Evaluation and Adjustment, e.g. approaches to balance and quality

Figure 2-2: Pillars of curriculum design from Kerr (1977)
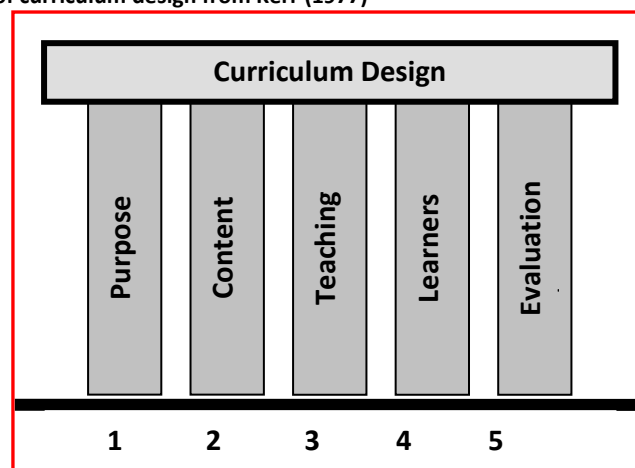
Kerr was undoubtedly influenced by Ralph Tyler's (1949) seminal "objectives model"; perhaps the most well known example of prescriptive curriculum. Labelled a behaviourist approach because its premise is that 'what is learned can be measured', his curriculum questions about the nature of the learner, of society and of subject knowledge formed the standard to which other models are still compared (A. V. Kelly, 1999; Marsh & Willis, 2007; McNeil, 2006). By some counts, this generic 'rationale' for design has been interpreted in at least 80 different models (Ball, 2006; Coffield, Moseley, Hall, & Ecclestone, 2004). Some theorists emphasize specific areas according to practice, e.g. (Ball, 2006; Keengwe, Onchwari, & Onchwari, 2009; Salmon, 2000b; Tsai, 2009), or by their philosophical orientation e.g. (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970; Schwab, 1983; Skilbeck, 1976; Tanner & Tanner, 2007). The advantage of Tyler's innovative curriculum design was its generalizability to any subject or discipline, but its shortcoming is that the objectives present a narrow perception of student outcomes; not sufficient for a student-centered approach.

Process Model

The objectives model lost favour as the growing field of cognitive sciences introduced psychology and new qualitative research tools that could measure constructs overlooked by behaviourists, such as motivation and attitudes (Alessi & Trollip, 2001; Davies, 2006; Hartwig, 2009). Bloom's taxonomy (1956) broadened the conceptualization of higher order learning outcomes to include affective (attitudes) and psychomotor (Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, 1990) development along with cognitive development. A process curriculum was designed, not as an outline to be followed, but an 'empirical proposal to be tested' (Stenhouse, 1975) incorporating more complex cognitive learning outcomes than before. Knight

(2001) contends that the importance of the model was the value-added emphasis on coherence of the elements.

Recent Thinking on Curricular Design

Currently the notion of curriculum extends design integration as a key feature (L. Dee Fink, 2007; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998, 2005). The transformative "big idea" is a design strategy that serves a student-centered learning environment by unifying the interaction of situational factors such as supercomplex paradigms and value systems, while focusing on developing understanding and meaning (Ronald Barnett, Parry, & Coate, 2001; Coate, 2009; Parker, 2003). The situational model opens a way to apply milieu to the design process (Reynolds & Skilbeck, 1976; Skilbeck, 1984).

A situational model generally starts with a thorough analysis of the context of the desired results, establishes acceptable evidence, and a plan for assessment or a thorough consideration of the learners, content, resources or evaluation data (Schwab, 1983; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998, 2005). Stark and Lattuca's (2009; , 1997; , 1998; , 1990; , 1987) situational model grew from the work of Paul Dressel (Dressel, 1980; Dressel & Marcus, 1982) and focuses on developing a broad curriculum framework or 'academic plan' that strikes a balance between generic and fit-for-purpose curriculum elements, emphasizing development of competency-based learning outcomes and professional attitudes required for graduate management education. These dimensions are reflected in the original 1997 Stark and Lattuca model that are summarized in Figure 2-3.

Figure 2-3: Academic plan elements from Stark and Lattuca, 1997
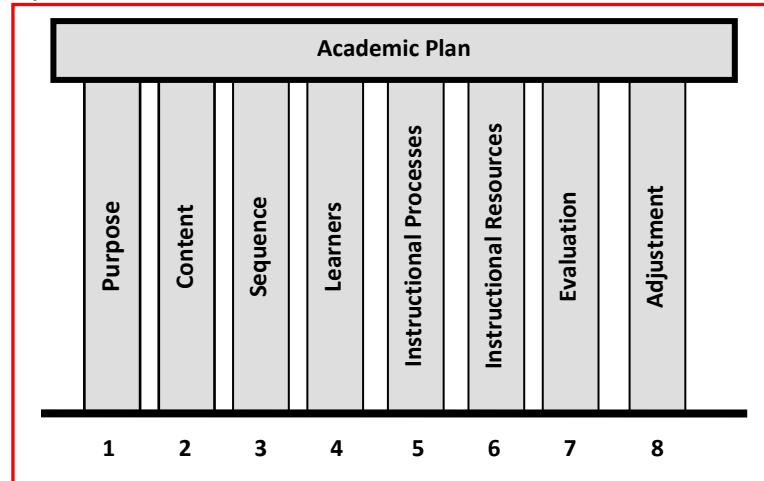
This set of elements does not capture how the design emphasis of a distance learning environment may differ from face-to-face programs. Context-specific web-based learning conceptual frameworks include Benbunan-Fich's (2002) discussion of the objectivist/constructivist continuum. Empirical studies present the advantages of blended models in business education, but are restricted to examining narrow aspects of educational technology (Balotsky & Christensen, 2004; Miliszewska, 2007; K. Walker, 2003). Alavi and Leidner's (2001) seminal work in technology-mediated learning research proposed building on the assumption that learning outcomes are the product of ICT, instructional strategies and psychological processes. Extending that framework and others (Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz, 2003; Piccoli, Ahmad, & Ives, 2001; Sharda et al., 2004), Wan et al (2007) put more focus on the primary participants: students and teachers, and suggest co-creation of learning design, an idea with potential in Web 2.0 environments. Further emphasis on the interactivity of online learners and relationship between student/teacher and course and effect of sense of community in a process model is proposed by Lear et al (2010). A theoretical model by Siragusa and Dixon (2005) has a similar emphasis, but also included structure, feedback and motivation. Hollenbeck, Zinkhan and French (2005)

provide a rare tested model of online MBA experience that focuses on the importance of a programme coordinator, who ensures proper communication in the planning process, high interaction between students and faculty and implementation of the assessment process.

There does not appear to be a model in the literature that encompasses the needed elements for this study, whose critical criteria for developing a framework is accommodating the deep and pervasive structural changes within distance graduate management education (Eckel, Hill, & M., 1998). The emphasis on integrated contextual factors makes the situational model a solid foundation; however there may be circumstances where other constructivist models are equally suitable.

What questions have to be answered to create the proper conditions? Dillon observes that there may be some futility in isolating a static set of answers for a framework that aspires to be as flexible as the changing distance education environment. A more practical method may be to consider the universal set of seven generic 'questions of curriculum' suggested by Dillon (2009) in the context of distance graduate education. These areas of consideration and implicit paired questions frame the identification process of the key elements from each of the domains reviewed in this chapter and are summarized in Table 2-2:

Table 2-2: The questions of curriculum from Dillon (2009)

1.	**Aim or vision**	*Why?* All questions of educational purpose, goals and aspirations are included in this question of educational philosophy, which usually is placed first in a set of components.
2.	**Milieu or environment**	All questions of time and place, of circumstance, conditions, environment from classroom to greater society are included in this element.
3.	**Subject or content**	*What* are the characteristics of the subject matter? *What* should be taught to whom in which circumstance?
4.	**Activity**	This is the question of means, methods and actions. *How* should a student act? *How* should a teacher act? How

		should a student and teacher interact? *How* should learning activities be organised?
5.	**Teacher or curriculum designer**	*Who* includes all possible questions about the teacher, e.g. training, role, personality, support.
6.	**Learner**	Who teaches whom? *Whom* includes all possible questions about the learner: such as characteristics, needs, learning characteristics and what things about the learner need to be taken into educational account.
7.	**Result**	When the interaction of student and teacher is complete, what are the results? Has the student/programme achieved its goals? How can this be determined? What will the educated graduate look like in terms of behavioural or cognitive changes?

Establishing the essential questions or conditions around the key elements provides a systematic approach to flexible curriculum design (Dillon, 2009). Dillon does not imply that the elements/questions form a linear process, but rather, the actions of practice and review establish order and refines thinking. Identifying the key attributes for distance graduate programmes using this scheme of the seven elements will suggest a set of fundamental decision categories which, in fact, will be the dynamic core of the curriculum model. This structure was built from a greater understanding of the nature of graduate and distance education "what it can do, what is particularly worth doing and what it is particularly suited to do" (Passmore, 1980, p. 40).The curriculum elements are organised around the perceived needs and characteristics in this context. Figure 2-4 shows the relationship of the basic elements, with emphasis on areas that most differentiate distance graduate curriculum from other HE curriculum frameworks.

Figure 2-4: Relationship of the seven curricular elements
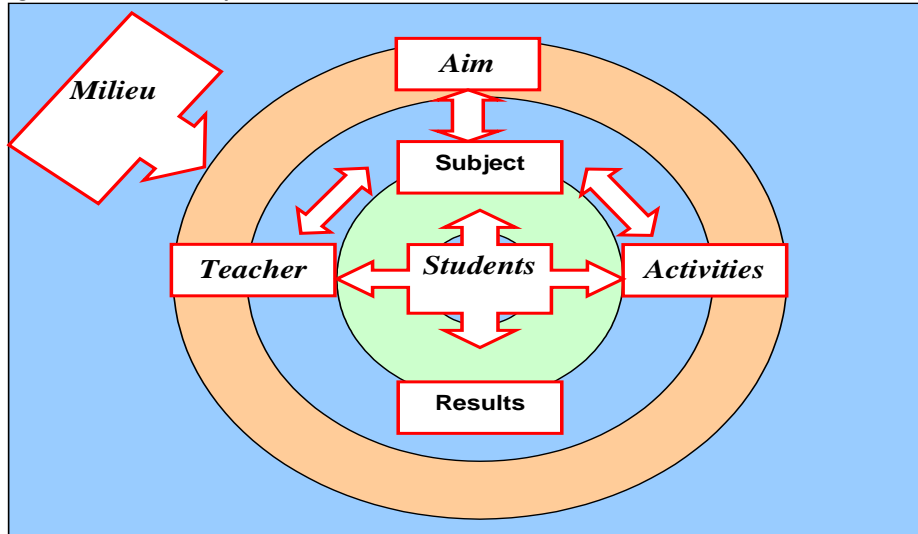
The following sections review the seven curricular elements in terms of importance and implications for the curriculum framework across the three areas of literature. Concluding the review of the curricular elements is a proposed curriculum framework adapted to incorporate each highlighted aspect of the elements.

2.3   Aims: The 'Why' of the Curriculum

Having reviewed the nature of a curriculum framework and identified the seven essential elements of curriculum, attention now turns to the first category of elements needed for planning. 'Aim' is the curriculum element that identifies the goals, aspirations and objectives of the educational process and degree programme. The focus on foundational concepts, learners' deeper learning needs and the institution's responsibilities, rather than current short-term issues, has proved to be a successful strategy (Kerr, 2001). Scholars note that a shortcoming among instructors is that they do not separate planning from implementation and begin with content, rather than starting with a broad view of programme objectives or overarching aims (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). Each institution and programme will inevitably decide how its mission will manifest itself and be carried out using the

latest technologies (Brooks, 2009), but embedding aims into the curriculum design results in a more cohesive student learning experience (D. F. Walker & Soltis, 2004). This section examines the nature of graduate education in terms of the broad, underlying issues that must be considered for distance graduate education in answering this classic curricular 'Why?' question.

2.3.1 A Set of Ideals for Graduate Education

Understanding the nature of graduate education reveals the aims of graduate programmes and the pathway the curriculum provides towards becoming an informed intellectually and socially aware learner with personal and professional confidence. Graduate education extends from Postgraduate certificate to Masters, Ph.D and Postdoctoral programmes, and from taught to research-oriented programmes. This study focuses on the taught master's degree level programmes.

The distinctions between the aims of undergraduate and graduate professional education are no longer demarcated along the traditional lines of generalist and specialist (Mandelbaum, 1980). A liberal education "cultivates the whole human being for the functions of citizenship and life in general" (Nussbaum, 2007, p. 38). Graduates expect to have the capability to manage the increasing velocity of changing business environments supported by liberalizing adaptive skills (Bradshaw & London, 2005; Buraphadeja & Dawson, 2008; Frankena, 1980; D. Green, 2010; Kerr, 1994b; Passmore, 1980). Graduate education, polymorphous even within individual universities, is not bounded by a single philosophy to guide the conjoint "excellences" (Passmore, 1980).

A key difference between undergraduate and postgraduate endeavour, however, is that graduate education fundamentally focuses on more purposeful and advanced knowledge (Commission on the Future of Graduate Education, 2010). It is a more self-directed approach to study resulting in the ability to act autonomously in research, planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level (Gregory & Wohlmuth, 2002; QAA, 2008). Graduates join or are already members of a community of experts in their fields with "real-world" interdisciplinary forms of knowledge (Bradshaw & London, 2005) and it is this attachment to the learning needs of society that give it relevance (Duderstadt, 2000).

It can be said that graduate education is the cornerstone of critical thinking and disciplinary inquiry and graduates are the talent with the ability to devise solutions to grand challenges (Commission on the Future of Graduate Education, 2010). John Dewey (1916) explicitly connected critical thinking to the health of democracy and the development of leadership and innovation. These differences are central to the approach of curriculum design appropriate to graduate education.

The first organisational decision for planning graduate curricula, according to Tyler (1949) and subsequent theorists, is to establish the aims and a small number of consistent, highly important objectives. Tyler further suggests developing an appropriate philosophy to be used as a standard to filter objectives and outcomes. Contemporary 'graduate attributes' are such a set of aims and outcomes consistent with this inclusive approach and philosophy. Australian HE institutions are leaders in adopting and applying attributes within curricula (Treleaven & Voola, 2008). There is a wide range of literature from the narrow and mechanistic to the holistic and spiritual around graduate attributes at different levels as they underpin highly

desirable transferable knowledge, skills, values and competences and are intended

to prepare graduates for global citizenship and successful adaptation to new

situations (Barrie, 2004, 2006; Clough, 2008; T. Cunningham et al., 2007; EQF, 2006;

W. Green, Hammer, & Star, 2009; Mohanty, 2007; NQAI, 2003; QCA, 1998; Tapscott

& Williams, 2010). For masters programmes, there are many similar sets of

standards of quality outcomes at the national, international and accreditation levels

e.g. the AACSB standards for business school accreditation, UNESCO Delor's

Commission Pillars of Learning, Scotland's enhancement themes, the Level 9 Irish

National Framework of Qualifications and Level 7 European Qualifications

Framework (Delors, 1996; EQF, 2006; NQAI, 2003; QAA, 2007).

More than just skills and competencies, the attributes reach to set ideals for

educated global citizens possessing "certain kinds of human dispositions and

qualities" (R. Barnett, 2006, p. 61). They suggest and need to be considered

cumulatively as a transformative or threshold concept for graduate education as

learners move through critical exploration of their own values, engage in scholarly

enquiry into other value systems, and, ideally, emerge as reflective practitioners

motivated to life-long learning (Haigh & Clifford, 2010). Generic attributes take on

constructed meaning when expressed in disciplinary context (UNSW, 2010).

Institutions interpret attributes individually, but, in general, eight levels outline the

aims, characteristic capabilities and specific application for the research graduate

and are summarized in Table 2-3.

Table 2-3: Graduate attributes

Graduate Attributes	Graduate researchers:
1. Knowledge of discipline (Specialist)	Extend boundaries of the field through research & publication
2. Communication skills	Challenge existing theories, defend new ideas using

(Social & creative contextual)	scholarly conventions
3. Team work (Social & interdisciplinary relationship skills)	Develop & maintain interdisciplinary, cooperative networks & working relationships with supervisors, colleagues, peers within institution & wider research community
4. Information literacy (Research & critical evaluation)	Understanding of research methodologies and techniques & appropriate interpretation & application nationally & globally
5. Problem solving (Creative & critical application)	Apply effective project management through the setting of research goals, milestones & prioritization of activities
6. Lifelong learning (Cognitive independence & motivation)	Demonstrate insight into the transferable nature of research skills to other work environments
7. Global perspective (Broad social & cultural awareness)	Show a broad understanding of the international context in which research takes place
8. Social responsibility (Application of values)	Demonstrate awareness of issues relating to rights of other researchers, research subjects & others affected by research

(E. Cunningham, 2009; Delors, 1996; EQF, 2006; Gavari Starkie, 2008; López Menéndez & Pérez Suárez, 2009; MCEETYA, 1996; NQAI, 2003; QAA, 2007; UNE, 2010; UNSW, 2010; UTS, 2005)

Design teams need to be conscious of these graduate outcomes of knowledge, skills, and personal qualities and integrate them as they develop programme aims. These capabilities express a forward-looking notion that focuses on the ability to learn from and adapt to a diverse and changing society. The Irish Universities Association confirm that graduates should have "the skills to continue learning throughout a professional lifetime and… to place their work in a broader social and cultural context" (Irish Universities Association, 2005, p. 12).

The attribute of 'Social responsibility' listed in Table 3.3 links closely with the concept of an educational philosophy, a key element of curriculum design.

2.3.2 Role of an Educational Philosophy

It can be said that an educational philosophy ties the attitudes and the relationships of a career field to its stakeholders, society, ethical issues and hopes for the future of the field itself (Stark & Lattuca, 1997; Stark, Lowther, Hagerty, & Orczyk, 1986). In the past, discussion of educational philosophies was restricted in the pervasive subject-dominated curriculum (Wiles & Bondi, 2007). In modern common sense, "good", being moral and doing the right thing, is a rational and desirable aim that supersedes shifting agendas (Frankena, 2000). Peter Drucker (1954), a seminal thinker on management education, noted that management fulfils the needs of social justice and "central will always be integrity".

A foundational educational philosophy serves as a practical lens for graduates in times of accelerated environmental change and uncertainty. It provides a grounded, timeless set of principles tied to objective ideals that can help graduates make value-laden choices confidently on a personal or professional level to resolve dilemmas (Mohanty, 2007; Reigeluth, 1999; Schott, 2009; D. Walker, 1990); choices that are "in some sense more worthy and have a higher moral quality" (Mahony, 2009). Graduates gain an employability advantage in the competitive workplace because the ability to resolve troublesome issues using solid choice-making skills is highly valued by employers (Harned & Sutliff, 2003; Society for Values in Higher Education, 2010; Treleaven & Voola, 2008).

In practice, ethical priorities underpin, inform and drive graduate actions such as professional behaviour, evaluating other people's behaviour, and supporting the search for living a meaningful life in harmony with others. Alternatively, ethical

failures at management levels can have disastrous, far-reaching effects (Friedland, 2009). Across T&HM curricula, principles such as social responsibility are acknowledged to link the discipline to the business world holistically, but application remains fragmented (Yeung, 2004). From a teaching and learning perspective, the assumption that ethics can be learned lies at the heart of effective implementation (Geary & Sims, 1994). Studies show that distance students can develop integrity by internalizing higher order moral reasoning in an effective learning environment, (Frank, Ofobike, & Gradisher, 2010), thus re-emphasizing the importance of designing for reflective learning.

A clear educational philosophy brings a practical set of principles to curriculum design on three levels: the institution, the teacher and the student. For the institution, a supporting set of values drives consistent messages that contribute to brand identity and differentiation and also strengthens the framework's intrinsic value with clarity of purpose and meaning to endure change (Heywood, 2010). For teachers, values commit and empower them to reach for high standards in learning outcomes and to direct selection of learning activities. For students, developing the awareness that achieving professional competencies is not enough is a threshold concept. Future leaders require a vision of social justice, equity and environmental responsibility toward the sustainability of the planet (AC Nielson Research Services, 2000; Baume, 2010; Hager, Holland, & Beckett, 2002; Haigh & Clifford, 2010). The importance of including an educational philosophy in the curricular element of 'Aims' is that it counterbalances the environmental pressures of 'milieu' with a broad stabilizing perspective and serves as a foundation for curriculum design and student choices.

In summary, the institution, teachers and students benefit from a framework fully conceived with a respect for the wholeness and goodness of the greater social system, as principles and attributes add value to the graduate degree and meaning to the programme objectives. Curricular aims support the greater needs of graduate education in the fullest sense; cultivating critical capacities, good judgement, fostering a complex understanding of the world and its peoples, and education that refines the capacity for caring (Nussbaum, 2007). Not a guarantee for specific employment, the true value of the graduate degree belongs to the graduates who capably work through challenges by applying intellectual independence, specialist knowledge, understanding and social competencies and, as such, can be contributing participants in society (D. Green, 2010; Passmore, 1980).

2.4   Milieu: The Higher Education Environment

As 'Aims' touch individuals on an enduring and personally meaningful level, 'Milieu' establishes the context in which the curriculum is being developed. It clearly identifies the factors to be considered by the design team in exploring the shaping of the proposed curriculum. It offers a context from which to tease out the needs of curricular aims, teaching and learning and assessment strategies. Understanding Milieu enables the programme design team to prioritize issues and areas to be addressed. By doing so they enhance the likelihood of success by being able to better match the design of the programme to the needs of the environment in which the programme will ultimately be delivered. Failure to take cognizance of the Milieu can lead to programmes that poorly meet the needs of all stakeholders. Government policies in areas such as economic and social development impact

resources and increase expectations in a "culture of evidence", putting pressure on

HE to produce institutional transparency and accountability in curriculum design and

delivery, efficiencies and measurable student learning outcomes (Ronald Barnett,

Parry, & Coate, 2001; Brint, 2008; Coate, 2009; Lydell, 2008; Olson, 2010). The

T&HM industry, the biggest provider of jobs worldwide (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Page,

Brunt, Busby, & Connell, 2001), serves the interests of stakeholders in both public

and private sectors. T&HM graduate education is directly linked to a constantly

changing, demanding consumer market with its emphasis on discretionary spending

on predominantly leisure activities (Bibbings, 2005). Represented by Figure 2-5, this

section of literature examines the major external environmental forces that

currently influence T&HM education and the constraints and opportunities that they

present to the distance graduate curriculum framework.

Figure 2-5: Relationship of contextual influences to curriculum design process
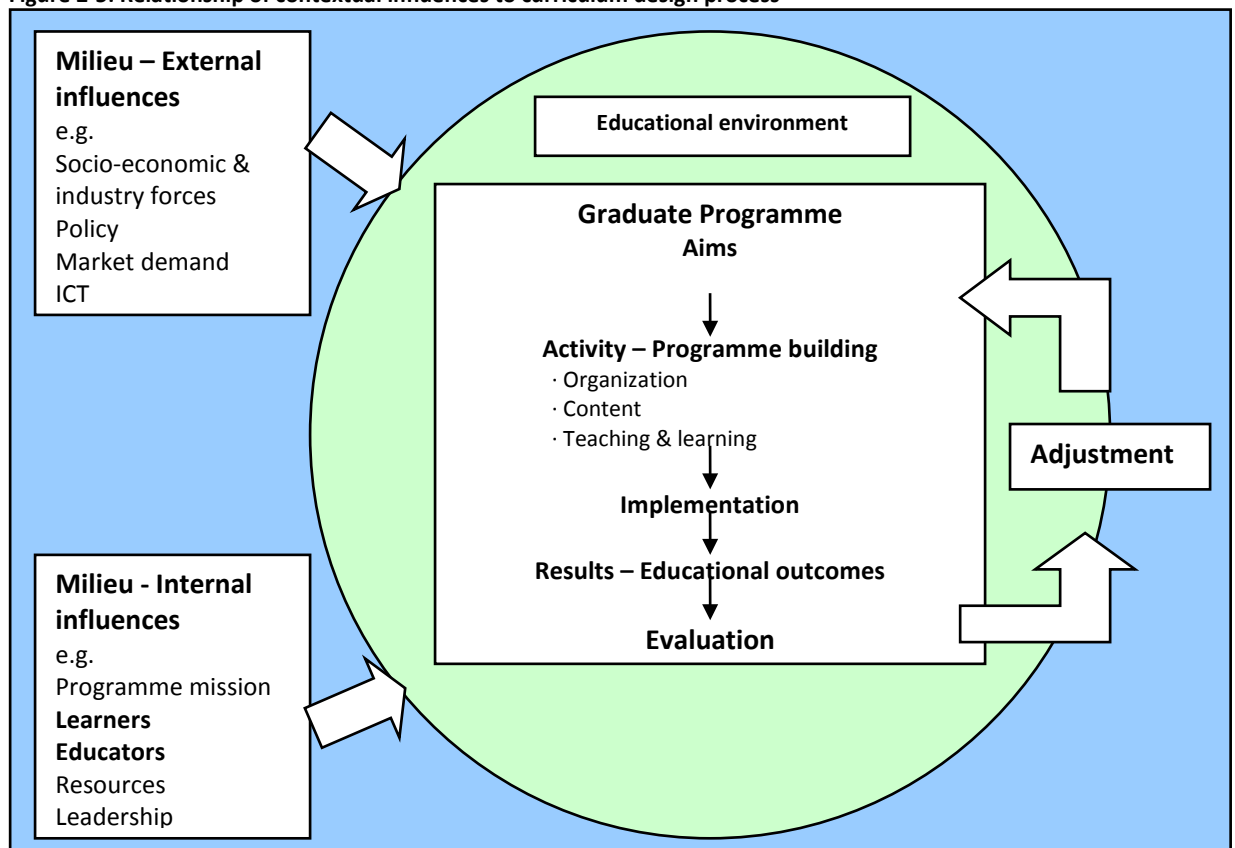
2.4.1 The Expanding Role of Higher Education

Graduate education is a strategic national asset (Commission on the Future of Graduate Education, 2010; OECD, 2008) valued for its role in the development of the primary resource in the knowledge-based economy: human capital. In the context of a knowledge-based economy, human capital generally refers to the people with advanced qualifications and growing research capability (Department of Enterprise Trade and Employment, 2006; Douglass & Edelstein, 2009; Gavari Starkie, 2008; National Center on Education and the Economy, 2007; OECD, 2008; Teghe & Knight, 2004; The Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, 2010). The concept of human capital is a product of mid-twentieth century neoclassical economist thought that views "the knowledge, skills, and education of an individual as a fertile zone for speculative investment" (Adamson, 2010); justifying international policy that supports educational development financially and ideologically. The World Economic Forum Global Competitiveness Report (2009) and Commission of the European Communities (2008) cautions nations to not lose sight amid short-term urgencies and to proactively invest in well-designed lifelong learning systems; a "long-term competitiveness fundamental" underpinning national fiscal and social stability and future prosperity during business cycle downturns. The OECD's 2008 report *Tertiary Education for the Knowledge Society* confirms that "A first priority for countries should be to develop a comprehensive and coherent vision for the future of tertiary education." European Commission's 2020 Strategy Report (2010) aims to "unleash" Europe's innovative capabilities by improving educational outcomes and quality outputs of institutions by stepping up the modernization agenda of HE curricula as a flagship initiative.

Institutions of HE are the gatekeepers of key national success factors: knowledge, innovation and workforce skills (Irish Universities Association, 2005), therefore understanding the complex environment in which the curriculum is being developed is of importance to those individuals wishing to undertake the design of curriculum. The "battle for brainpower now complements traditional geo-political struggles for natural resources" (Spongenberg, 2010), putting significant pressure to satisfy national economies driven to "move up the value chain" to economic growth built upon the production, not necessarily of things, but of ideas leading to progress (Sala-I-Martin, Blanke, Hanouz, Geiger, & Mia, 2009; Stewart, 2010).

If, as some scholars believe, that universities become an arm of the state and industry (Brown, 2009; Shattock, 2008) with greater dependence on state funding, then the curriculum would surely become an expression of their priorities. The increasing reliance on human capital, the core HE product, raises nagging questions concerning how the aims of the curriculum might be compromised by serving such vested external interests in the outcomes of the educational process. The danger of a curriculum based on an unmitigated economic business model driving educational goals is that it may effectively lower the horizon for education (Galvin, 2010; Teghe & Knight, 2004). The tension between, *"Bildungsideal",* the concept of universal educational ideals, on one hand and the reform-driven measurement of learning outcomes and economic production on the other, has prompted the Council of Europe to redefine educational aims to reflect the intrinsic values of European HE due to the "excessive emphasis on economic issues" (Council of Europe, 2007). John Dewey would likely agree that education based mainly on the principle of profitability "magnifies deficiencies, producing a greedy obtuseness that threatens

the very life of democracy itself" (Nussbaum, 2007, p. 40). Institutions that utilize a curriculum framework have a means for recognizing and balancing the relationship between HE and national prosperity goals and a possible antidote for market-driven bias of government and industry.

2.4.2 Access, Lifelong Learning and Equality: Technology-enabled

Politically-based policies influence institutional aims and opens possibilities for learners. National and international educational goals charge HE to "facilitate universal access to education to a wider audience"(Council of Europe, 2010; European Ministers of Education, 1999) and as a social institution some consider that a major role of HE is its moral responsibility to advance knowledge for the benefit of society (DePauw, 2009; Thomson, 2009). The Irish Minister for Education, Mary Hanafin TD, spoke of the central role of HE to create opportunities of access by creating multiple flexible modes of learning "to sustain the competitiveness of…the new knowledge-intensive workforce" (Irish Universities Association, 2005). The White Paper on Adult Education (2000) states that the growth of knowledge-intensive industries requires new skills and workforce up-skilling and retraining.

There is ample evidence that the overall level of educational attainment plays a key role in the vibrancy of a nation's economy and in securing social cohesion and sustainability (Gavari Starkie, 2008; Lumina Foundation for Education, 2009). Distance education expands the potential to fulfil national and institutional policy that aspires to unlimited student diversity and access (Desai & Pitre, 2009).

There is a long tradition and mandate for HE curricula to support access and equality of education (P. C. Candy, 1991; HEA, 2008). These issues are increasingly

relevant for graduate education as a new diversity of students, many pursuing lifelong learning, enter into programmes. The twin concepts of lifelong learning and access refer not only to the need to ensure that all members of society can participate in advanced learning, but also that over a working lifetime, individuals have educational access on several occasions or even continuously (Irish Universities Association, 2005) to increase competitive skills, employability, social inclusion and the development of active citizenship for a better quality of life (European Ministers of Education, 1999; Gavari Starkie, 2008; QCA, 1998; UNESCO, 2005). Although, broadly speaking, lifelong learning includes all aspects of education and training - formal, non-formal and informal - at all ages and stages of life, irrespective of where it occurs or who organises it (P. Candy, 2000), this study limits its focus to non-traditional students served by distance masters degree programmes.

The commitment and steps to achieving equality of social inclusion and educational opportunity are developed throughout the framework. Curriculum design teams can confer on how to best utilize new digital learning technologies to reach out to a changing student population who may be studying on or off campus, transnationally, or in specific contexts such as the home, the workplace, fieldwork locations, or other places (Robyn Benson & Samarawickrema, 2009).

2.4.3 Distance Learning in Higher Education

Transforming education, new technology applications free programmes from many restrictions of time, place and pace of learning and can address students' needs in a huge variety of learning contexts (Newman, 2010). At the close of the 20th century, developed nations of the world experienced what 1960's futurist Kenneth

Boulding (1964) called a "systems break". Such breaks divide human history and introduce new eras. In this case the new era centres around the phenomenon of the Internet, "an onset of many new interactive technologies" (Wiles & Bondi, 2007, p. 30) and where the engine of progress is communication (Duderstadt, 2000). ICT may not replace personal interaction (G. Williams, 2005), but it makes the dimensions of time and space less coercive and puts unlimited digital information resources at our fingertips (JISC, 2009). The integration of technology within society drives the development of online education creating an unprecedented learning curve for curriculum development and distance programmes, the pioneers in HE design (Brooks, 2009).

Distance learning takes many forms that can blend face-to-face and online or be exclusively web-based. Distance learning is commonly divided into three modalities: 1) off-site synchronous, 2) remote synchronous and 3) asynchronous. 1) Off-site synchronous is used to join small groups for instructor-led class time using video conferencing. The technology does involve significant infrastructure and technical support (Murphy, Anzalone, Bosch, & Moulton, 2002). 2) Remote synchronous allows learners and instructors to meet in real time, wherever they may be, using their personal computers and online collaboration tools, such as Adobe Connect or eLuminate Live. 3) The asynchronous modality, the most flexible, is not limited by coordinating time and place, but does work best when learners have concrete deadlines (Gautsch & Griffy-Brown, 2010). Web 2.0 tools make asynchronous learning more social with added interactivity and audiovisual media. Blended learning is not defined by a single design formula as it combines various modalities to suit programme goals.

Much of the educational research in distance learning has focused on comparing online with classroom attendance courses and the 'No significant difference' phenomenon in terms of performance between the two modalities e.g. (Bernard, Abrami, Lou, & Borokhovski, 2004; Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2010; Ruiz, Mintzer, & Leipzig, 2006; Russell, 2001; Sulčič & Lesjak, 2009), with substantial evidence that learning outcomes are comparable. Like other disruptive technologies, it has improved over the years (Conole, de Laat, Dillon, & Darby, 2008). A recent systematic meta-analysis of over a thousand evidence-based reports from 1996-2008 commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education showed that online learning outcomes are equal to on-campus and that blended learning surpasses conventional classroom instruction (Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2010).

There is a growing openness to distance education among students and the expectation that institutions of HE will be heavily involved in ICT, which is reflected in the record numbers of students enrolled across almost all disciplines (I. E. Allen & Seaman, 2008; Instructional Technology Council, 2009). The distance masters degree in particular dominates the online degree market with a wide variety of entrepreneurial manifestations of full-time, part-time, workplace, weekend courses, accelerated programmes and web-based alternative delivery options (ASHE, 2005).

Flexible provision is what the Irish HEA (2009) describes as "a key indicator of the responsiveness of …higher education to…society." This mode of learning also has the potential to:

- Fulfil industry needs by enhancing human capital and continuous learning e.g. (APLU, 2009; QCA, 1998; UNESCO, 2005).

- Increase enrolment and the degree of educational efficiency (Evans, Haughey, & Murphy, 2008; Kolowich, 2009; Tattersall, Waterink, Hoppener, & Koper, 2006; UNESCO, 2005).

- Increase pedagogical innovation with ICT to maximize interactivity of the learning experience (R. Benson & Vincent, 1997; Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006).

- Meet the demand for student-centred approaches and the unmet needs of adult students (Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006).

Understanding how to leverage the intrinsic strengths of ICT, such as its ability to facilitate personal ownership of learning, prompt feedback and convenience, access and choice to learners and to minimize its weaknesses such as the effects of separation, adds new layers of complexity to curriculum design (Hampton, 2010; M. N. K. Saunders & Williams, 2005). Applying distance learning theories to instructional strategies change designers' thinking about how to compensate for geographic distance and engage learners meaningfully.

A key consideration for the design process of distance programmes is that technology introduces the issue of *where* education takes place that is not present in face-to-face (F2F) teaching (D. Randy Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, & Fung, 2004). An array of mobile devices such as digital textbooks, electronic readers, iPhones, iPads and smart mobile phone technology changes where and how education is experienced and offer students more personalized, interactive learning materials (Quality Assurance in e-Learning, 2010; P. Williams, 2003). Video and audio conferencing and 'chat' are types of communication modes providing immediacy and synchronicity to reduce perceived distance. Conferencing software WiZiQ or eLuminate Live are examples of synchronous and user-friendly virtual classroom

applications. Mobile digital applications such as Web 2.0, digital storytelling, 3G networks or immersive virtual field trips have the power to engage and inspire learning in new socially contextualized ways (Heider, Laverick, & Bennettt, 2009).

New digital innovations and unrestricted access to knowledge reshape knowledge distribution. The creative use of ICT options is making it cheaper and easier for quality experience through options such as podcasting, blogs, or social networking sites to stimulate new thinking about how technology integrates with teaching and learning (Robyn Benson & Samarawickrema, 2009; HEA, 2009). Open educational sources, software, publications and databases are becoming available ubiquitously. Networked repositories, such as Open Culture or iTunesU, community of practice wikis, full text online free-access journals, collaborative and cross-disciplinary databases offer resources such as e-books, websites, podcasts, videos, slides, documents and more that are all tagged and catalogued for easy search and retrieval. The exponential growth in the amount of quality open source content on the web directly benefits the self-directed learner and provides diverse reusable learning objects for the course designer (JISC, 2009).

In the past, distance education initiatives were often undertaken as isolated, one-off, ad hoc events, separate from mainstream curriculum, learning theories, codes of practice, subject benchmarks and other institutional quality requirements and were not ideal environments for supporting learning and cognition (Hampton, 2010; Irish Universities Association, 2003; Quality Assurance in e-Learning, 2010). Pedagogical issues appear to have been of secondary concern until recently (JISC/UCISA, 2003). The result was often short-lived pockets of success (Fullan, 1993; Iverson, 2008) and distance education is evolving from a focus on *which* technology

to use, to being fully engaged in deciding *how* designing learning activities and programme structures make sense as an integrated system of learning to suit learners' needs (Bardzell, Bardzell, So, & Lee, 2004; Britain & Liber, 2004). Regional accrediting agencies do require distance programmes to offer the same student services and support for distance education students, but designing the online learning environment must go well beyond just digitizing material used in a conventional classroom. Pedagogy must exploit "the potential of highly integrated, technically sophisticated, interactive multimedia forms of online teaching and learning" (Sjogren & Fay, 2002). Reports suggest that giving pedagogy precedence over technology fetishism and embedding distance education in the institution's core strategic business is the way to realize sustainable excellence (Irish Universities Association, 2003; Olcott, 2009), although, to date, this development lags behind considerably (European Commission, 2008).

In summary, the pressure of expectation is increasing on curriculum designers. Distance programmes are moving into the mainstream and out of the educational "ghetto", a result of institutional and national policies endorsing flexible provision for lifelong learning, ICT-supported innovative teaching solutions and the gradual acceptance of distance learning (European Commission, 2008). No longer an *if* question of whether web-based education is appropriate, but rather the task is now answering the questions of *when* and *where* learning takes place, and *how* rich online learning environments can be designed to yield the greatest educational value (Banks & Faul, 2007). This can only come from deeper understanding of which ICT and pedagogical strategies work best coupled with a strong institutional commitment and a comprehensive open design process. The dynamic nature of

technology and internal and external environmental influences means that designing distance learning will be a continuous process of experimentation, evaluation and surmounting cultural and institutional roadblocks (Lorentsen, 2001; Y. Park & Moser, 2008). An open-minded spirit of possibility (K. C. Green, 2009; Hampton, 2010) is an attitude that can help design teams frame multidimensional approaches that integrate web-based technologies with learning theories, contextual issues and institutional constraints (Lorentsen, 2001).

Technology-driven mobility and competition in open educational frameworks

Technology also enables student mobility and broadens demand for HE effectively creating a worldwide competitive market (Colbeck, 2002). Students are rapidly moving toward seamless mobility across systems and borders (Douglass, 2009). An institution's curriculum framework can be used strategically to provide a competitive advantage as a dynamic tool for positioning programmes with optimum flexibility in terms of location, time and method (Dimitrova, 2007) to attract a mobile student population.

Standardization in European HE sparked competition while taking a giant step toward the transition to a knowledge-based economy. At the end of the 1990's HE degrees across Europe were wildly diverse and posed a complicated landscape of incompatible elements for students trying to navigate across programmes. The Bologna Declaration (Bologna Declaration, 1999) and the Lisbon Summit in 2001 (The European Commission, 2000) ushered in the 10-year process of simplifying and harmonizing the chaotic system of undergraduate and graduate HE programmes by creating a single system of degrees within an agreed framework and a consistent credit (ECTS) and grading system.

The result is a unified European HE structure and inter-institutional co-operation that generates an upsurge of international student mobility (Irish Universities Association, 2005; OECD, 2009). Institutions now compete for an attractive European pool of over 2.4 million mobile post-Bologna Bachelor degree graduates every year, who have broad choices among masters' programmes worldwide (EFMD, 2006; Faganel, Sirca, & Dolinsek, 2005; Loades, 2006). Changing ICT further connects and levels the playing field where developed countries find themselves competing directly with programmes from emerging countries (Carr, 2007; The World Bank, 2009). In fact, institutions that once complemented each other's offerings more often compete for the same students with the same degree programmes as mission differentiation is increasingly a thing of the past (Bruininks, Keeney, & Thorp, 2010). The curriculum design team is thus in a position of evaluating the competition and driving design built on their programme's strengths and/or market niche.

Competitive Edge, Partnerships and Ranking

From a student perspective, selecting a graduate programme in the global marketplace is a comparative process where academic status makes a difference (Europa, 2008; Labi, 2010). Institutions recruit students by differentiating themselves from the crowd where "brand" alone is not enough (Adamson, 2010). Programme partnerships between institutions to form academic or brand synergies is one common strategy to attract students by broadening appeal and provision (Rovai & Downey, 2010).

Annual international university rankings and league tables are major drivers influencing how graduate management programmes position themselves in the

market and make curriculum decisions (Labi, 2010; Shanghai Ranking Consultancy, 2010). Rankings are imperfect proxies of HE quality, but they are part of the marketing equation (Lalancette, 2010). Experts claim that college rankings are *not* objective, that their usefulness and political correctness are debatable (Butler, 2010; Labi, 2010), nonetheless rankings significantly affect student application rates, institutional reputation and even government policy and funding (Bastedo & Bowman; Husson & Waterman, 2002; Labi, 2010).

The implication for curriculum design is that the more creative intellectual aspects of graduate education can be undermined by forcing undue focus on superficial ranking or accreditation criteria rather than on building innovation and other quality features (Bastedo & Bowman, 2010). Social media has the potential to enhance the differentiation process by innovatively educating and communicating with prospective, current and former students, which can translate into increased enrollment, student retention and remarketing (Hampson, 2010). Social media is a highly decentralized, bottom-up communication approach that can be used in a value-added way that invites credibility through open participation. One graduate business school incorporating demand for a global orientation and student-centred flexible use of technology is the London School of Business and Finance's blended campus and Facebook-accessed degree programs (London School of Business and Finance, 2010). Differentiation can also take the form of value-added incentives such as the Wharton School of Business' commitment to lifelong learning that offers an executive education course to their MBA alumni free of charge every seven years (Damast, 2010)

Creatively integrating new ICT or organizing the curriculum in new student-centred designs can strengthen a programme's identity and differentiation that focuses on its unique attributes or combined strengths. The process can balance market strategies, but not at the expense of sacrificing a programme's distinctive identity and learning experiences. The framework should offer a way to compete locally and globally on the basis of service and value, rather than primarily on brand and ranking (Bruininks, Keeney, & Thorp, 2010).

Competition: For-profits in higher education

Competition among distance programmes also comes in the form of for-profit institutions. Reports from the U.S. and Europe reveal that while public higher education budgets are tightening, forcing cutbacks to programmes and even closures, the majority of the private for-profit institutions have increased their budgets (I. E. Allen & Seaman, 2010b; Stanistreet, 2009). Although they only serve a small percentage of the postsecondary student population, 10% in the United States (Kroll, 2010), it is significant to note that their growing popularity is based on a business model of customer satisfaction, marketing and recruiting principles (Carey, 2009; Epstein, 2010). Flexibility, convenience or affordability are what characterize private for-profit HE offerings (R. Wilson, 2010). Generally eyed with a sense of mistrust by traditional HE institutions, for-profits have become financial success stories for professional education (Benton, 2010). Recent investigations in the U.S. however, have shown that "socially destructive", deceptive and fraudulent practices exploit government funding programs and most vulnerable students, which will inevitably create a backlash of restrictive measures (GAO, 2010; Kroll, 2010; Lipton, 2010).

Increasingly, competition is forcing a convergence between profit and not-for-profit educational initiatives and attitudes in terms of accommodating student preferences. Traditional education systems operating in much the same way they have for generations, may find that inaction jeopardizes programme sustainability and ability to compete globally (Adamson, 2010). Undoubtedly the needs and satisfaction levels of future and existing students should be prioritized in designing a new or revised curriculum.

The reality for most public institutions is that it is a difficult time to launch new initiatives such as distance programmes whose start-up may be resource intensive. There is less public financing to support HE (Bruininks, Keeney, & Thorp, 2010) and poor economic conditions constrain development (APLU, 2009; Kolowich, 2009). Reports from the U.K. and U.S. disclose that lack of resources, support and incentives impede online course development almost as much as instructor workload and lack of time (I. E. Allen & Seaman, 2010b; APLU, 2009; OFSTED, 2009). An organisation's best tactic for combating downturn inertia is to have a vision and to prepare a strong plan for managing resources (Fain, 2009).

In summary, this review is a snapshot of the complexity of the contextual element of 'Milieu'. Clearly external influences on the educational environment can or should result in minor or major adjustments to curricula. Higher education's role today is at the centre of an increasingly connected network of impatient, demanding stakeholders and transformative technology that combine to create situations that call for global awareness and high-level planning skills on the part of a curriculum design team. The curriculum framework becomes the linking component between

the converging forces of change in a new world order of educational provision. The task of the unseen design team is to approach the Milieu step-by-step by systematically collating, summarizing and analysing external factors to strategically leverage opportunities, such as new ICT, and minimizes threats, such as competition or resource limitations and tease out solutions. With the aims of the programme and needs of the learners in mind, conflicting influences can be negotiated within the framework. It is not a simple process, but the stakes are high and the responsibility for excellence falls on the shoulders of those who are willing to grapple with complexity; applying wisdom and support from learning theories, assessment strategies, an understanding of the nature of distance graduate education and resulting in an engaging and meaningful distance learning programme.

Although content for the distance curriculum is no different than for traditionally-delivered programmes, it is in the creative techniques, activities, underlying theories, ICT and structure involved in the content delivery strategies where the differences are found. The next section discusses these components of distance teaching and learning.

2.5 Teaching and Learning Strategies for a Rich Learning Environment

The art of distance learning lies within the creative element of 'Activity'. This refers to the means, methods and actions designed to plan and implement teaching and learning to yield the intended learning outcomes. The 'How' question of the curriculum has historically been a topic of hot debate (ASHE, 2009) partly because

one's view of knowledge affects one's view of instruction. Wilson (1996) makes the distinctions that if knowledge is viewed as content to be transmitted, then instruction is probably seen as a product to be *delivered*; if knowledge is conceptualized as a cognitive state, then instruction is thought of as *learning strategies* designed to affect one's schemas, and if knowledge is perceived as personally constructed meanings, then instruction is recognized as the *development of a rich environment* on which one might draw. The reality is that the boundaries of learning construction are likely blurred, but the conceptualization is useful for instructors and designers to reflect on their paradigms.

Amidst an array of theories relating to distance and graduate learning, the most prominent ones and their derivatives are examined because of their use in knowing how to think and act in terms of curriculum design. As the purpose of the educational experience, whether online or on-campus, is to structure the educational experience to achieve desired learning outcomes, applying learning theory to enable interaction in the context of distance education is key (D. Randy Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005). Structuring the learning activities within the framework can be arranged in an infinite variety of ways and designers can benefit by considering how they can work together with an overall alignment strategy to meet their needs.

2.5.1 Foundational Theories for Distance Learning

Grounding studies in ICT-based education in a learning model is considered good practice (Leidner & Jarvenpaa, 1995). Ren, Kraut and Kiesler (2007) suggest that theory and application work hand-in-hand to build online communities and

student engagement, key to student satisfaction and perception of quality. Underpinning distance graduate education is a family of social constructivist theories valued for their promise to help learners to become thinkers who can grasp and apply higher-order concepts (Brooks & Brooks, 1999; D. Randy Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 1999; , 2004; Masterman, 2008).

Constructivist and Related Learning Theories

Constructivism's focus on knowledge construction makes this theory of interest to all concerned with teaching and learning. It is a philosophy (von Glaserfeld, 1995), a branch of cognitive psychology (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1998) and an important learning theory that guides teaching methods (Baviskar, Hartle, & Whitney, 2009; Brooks, 1987; B. Howard, McGee, Schwartz, & Purcell, 2000). Drawing on the work of Bruner (1960; , 1996) and many others, constructivism is concerned with how personal understanding is formed based on experiences. Research shows that in a technology-rich online environment constructivism supports the shift away from an objectivist didactic teaching model towards a Vygotskian concept of scaffolding reflective cognitive development (L. J. Clark, 2001; Gray, Boyle, & Smith, 1998; Mirici, 2006; Olakulein & Ojo, 2006; Underhill, 2006; Wildman, 2007) in a "safe, free, responsive environment" (Airasian & Walsh, 1997). That is to say, instead of focusing on learning objects transmitted from one person to another, teachers and students using ICT engage in a community that socially extends personal knowledge as a result of discourse and reflection (Thayer-Bacon, 2000; G. Williams, 2005). The individuality and diversity of learners is encouraged, utilized and rewarded as an integral part of the student-centered learning approach (Duffy & Kirkley, 2004; Honebein, Duffy, & Fishman, 1993; Mayer, 1999). Related

learning models effective in distance applications include: collaborativism, cognitive information processing, social (Gunawardena, 1995), teaching (Anderson, Rourke, Garrison, & Archer, 2001) and cognitive presence, community of inquiry (D. Randy Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005), media richness and transactional distance theory (M. G. Moore, 1989; Wan, Fang, & Neufeld, 2007).

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning focuses on the benefits of active small group participation such as co-creation of knowledge or transferable skills for team-based work (Palloff & Pratt, 2005). Online learners who seek flexibility are not always enthusiastic about working in groups, but it appears that regardless of the subject matter, students working in small groups tend to have an enhanced sense of community, increased skill acquisition, and retain learning outcomes longer, than when the same content is presented in other instructional formats (P. J. Black & D. William, 1998; Brindley, Walti, & Blaschke, 2009; J. Shen, Hiltz, & Bieber, 2006). Ke and Xie's study (2009) of adult online learning show that there is a high level of student satisfaction in collaborative knowledge construction that correlates to gaining from opportunities to share experiences.

Community of Inquiry and Social, Teaching, and Cognitive presences

The theme of interactivity runs throughout the constructivist theories and is also framed in the Community of Inquiry online learning model proposed by Garrison, Anderson and Archer (2000). Studies have shown that integrating social presence, teaching presence and cognitive presence sustains an online Community of Inquiry, vital elements to achieving meaningful learning outcomes (Arbaugh et al., 2008; D. R. Garrison, Cleveland-Innes, & Fung; K. N. Shen & Khalifa, 2008). The

three presences together address "the qualitative nature of interactive inquiry consistent with the ideals of higher education" (D. Randy Garrison & Cleveland-Innes, 2005). The implication is that although the three elements of cognitive, social and teaching presence, or interaction exist in all HE learning experiences, the importance of interpersonal communication in a computer-mediated learning environment is considered to be paramount (Baker & Taylor, 2010; Laves, 2010).

As an interactive community of inquiry is generally considered the *sine qua non* of HE learning environments, it should also be noted that interaction should be at a meaningful level of richness, structure and engagement (Picciano, 2002). Research shows that increasing the various aspects of interactivity online builds emotional appeal, facilitates discourse toward higher order thinking and overcomes the lack of human warmth that can be missing in a virtual classroom (Bai, 2009; Ji Hee, Hollenbeck, & Zinkhan, 2008). Multiple studies of online courses have confirmed that perceived interaction with the teacher directly correlates with student satisfaction, perceived learning and overall course effectiveness e.g. (Hay, Hodgkinson, Peltier, & Drago, 2004; Picciano, 2002; Richardson & Swan, 2003; Swan, 2002; Thurmond, Wambach, Connors, & Frey, 2002).

Media Richness Theory

Closely associated, Media Richness Theory addresses the online interactive environment from a technological perspective. Daft and Lengel's Media Richness Theory (1984; , 1986) was an early warning to designers that the use of text-only and language were inadequate for creating the new kind of richness needed for distance learning environments. Although multiple studies have shown there is no significant difference in learning as a result of different ICT combinations e.g.(Maag,

2004; Schnitman, 2007; Schroeder, 2006; Schutt, 2007; Tantrarungroj, 2008; Zhang,

Zhou, Briggs, & Nunamaker, 2006), the assumption is that richer, more "natural"

learning interactions increases student satisfaction, builds community and creates a

sense of F2F communication (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). Humans are

visually oriented and multimedia enhancements build trust and engagement with

material (C. H. Cho, Phillips, Hageman, & Patten, 2009; Fielding, 2009). As a learning

strategy too much media can produce the opposite of the desired effect and create

cognitive overload, hindering understanding of complex concepts (Mayer, Heiser, &

Lonn, 2001; Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006). It is, it appears, the way that the

multimedia is used interactively that increases learning according to a study by

Zhang et al (2006). Increased focus on using a variety of forms for presenting

student learning activities is a constructivist principle (Olsen, 1999) and although it

does not provide a single solution for choosing the most effective media

combinations, media richness supports an instructional design team's awareness of

its application in terms of the nature of user experiences in distance education (K. N.

Shen & Khalifa, 2008).

Transactional Distance Theory

Finally, each of these theories are means for bridging the weakness of

distance learning; transactional distance. Though distance education theory has long

been at an impasse adopting what could be termed a global theory, Moore's

Transactional Distance Theory (TDT) has gained respect as being one of the most

useful instruments for developing sustainable distance education programmes and

policies (Gokool-Ramdoo, 2008). Moore's theory (1972; 1989; 1991; 1997) was one

of the first to focus on interaction issues and suggests that it is the separation

between teachers and learners, not the geographic distance, that creates a psychological and communications space that is the transactional distance. Moore's concern is pedagogy and the theory identifies the multiple relationships between learning behaviour, structure and various media of communication affected by space and time (Lemak, Shin, Reed, & Montgomery, 2005). Figure 2-6 illustrates for designers how transactional distance works in practice; indicating the conceptual area of maximised learning and satisfaction according to Moore's theory.

Figure 2-6: Learner relationships & area for maximising learning & satisfaction

(Hillman, Willis, & Gunawardena, 1994; Moore, 1989)
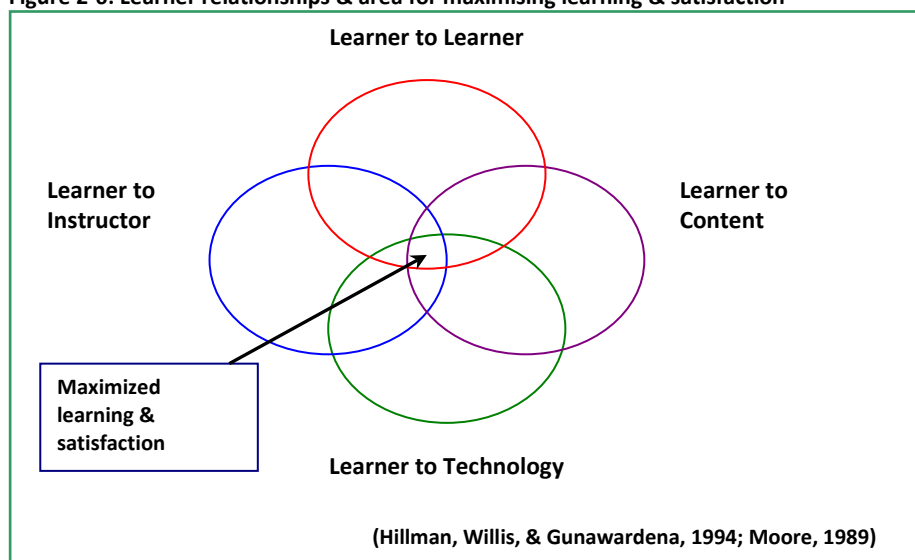
Theorists argue that maximising learning and a positive student experience for graduate management education is achieved by intentionally designing for a flexible structure/high dialogue framework that promotes self-directed learning (Dooley, Lindner, & Dooley, 2005; Millson & Wilemon, 2008). Makau and Marty (2001) define dialogue as "…a process of communicating with others - rather than at, to, or for them - and the sharing of a mutual commitment to hear and be heard", in other words, again, as in the Community of Inquiry model, it is the quality of interaction that is key to student success online.

In the early stages of an online programme students might require high levels of structured tasks and e-moderating strategies to bridge the transactional distance and to facilitate intrapersonal dialogue (Robyn Benson & Samarawickrema, 2009; Moule, 2007; Salmon, 2000b, 2003). A rigid course design and delivery structure can stifle creativity and result in a more passive student role (D. Green, 2010; Lemak, Shin, Reed, & Montgomery, 2005), thus designers will want to minimize transactional distance by emphasizing dialogue features in a flexible structure.

2.5.2 Organizing learning: Constructive alignment

Regardless of theoretical orientation or practical perspective, curriculum scholars emphasize the importance of curricular coherence and structure (J. Howard, 2007). The first step in bringing order to the organisation of content would generally be through considering the scope and sequence of material, without which there is the risk of "ad hoc content delivery and the missing of significant learning" (ACT Department of Education and Training, 2009). Whether the teaching approach is problem-based, issues-based or sequential in the traditional sense, the planning of an "aligned design for teaching" (J. Biggs, 1999) is as important as content (Dearing, 1997). Constructive alignment, a concept most often attributed to J.M. Biggs (1996, 2003, 2007), organises the programme vision and increases coherence.

Consistent with a process model theory, all curriculum elements, student-centred learning activities, assessment tasks, learning outcomes and the programme's educational philosophy, are balanced not only with each other, but also with the goals of student learning outcomes and possible mandated standards,

such as equality legislation. In this approach, outcomes are defined at the programme and course level, e.g. at the programme level, intended learning outcomes would be graduate attributes (J. Biggs, 2009). Wiggins and McTighe (2005; , 1998, 2005) popularized progressively aligning and designing backwards from the broader institutional or programme aims. Educators begin with a nominal list of desired results and determine acceptable evidence of learning (Jones, Vermette, & Jones, 2009). Students experience the curriculum forwards as a coherent programme leading to increasing levels of sophistication of learning (Huba & Freed, 2000; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998, 2005).

For distance programmes, Palloff and Pratt and others (2003; Ritter, Polnick, Fink, & Oescher, 2010) suggest that alignment enhances distance learning. Distance programme websites may occasionally indicate that there is technology and module design support, but this is critical, as few individual faculty members possess the required 'laundry list' of pedagogical and technical expertise necessary and scholars suggest that the alignment process should be a full-fledged collaboration between teachers, technical, administrative and design staff (Oblinger & Hawkins, 2006; Wang, Gould, & King, 2009). Collective good judgment and experience of the academic staff result in collegial goodwill and educators' interest and engagement in teaching and learning of the design process. Collegiality and creativity, important factors in academic job satisfaction, are indicators of high quality programmes (Donald, 1997; Fogg, 2006; Haworth & Conrad, 1997; Udelhofen, 2005). The first planning step of the team is to establish a shared vision of how technology improves teaching and learning in the distance programme (J. C. Moore, 2004).

The results of alignment is a more streamlined integrated curriculum focusing attention on fewer targets and reinforcing key ideas in different ways in order to deepen understanding for students (Bruner, 1960). See Table 2-4 for an example.

Table 2-4: A simple curriculum alignment map: M. J. Allen (2004)

Curriculum Alignment Matrix			
Course	Programme Objective 1	Programme Objective 2	Etc.
100	I		
101		P	
102	D	P	
103	I	D	
Etc.			
I = introduced. P = practiced. D = demonstrated			

Alignment removes the potential instruction gaps because learning activities are embedded across the programme and are directed towards the different levels of understanding, fostering a deep approach to learning. Rubrics, such as Bloom's taxonomy, offer a way to make qualitative judgments using criteria constructively aligning students' levels of performance against what they are intended to learn (J. Biggs, 2009). Mapping a rubric of aims and outcomes requires intentional work 'up front', but ensures that courses provide instruction in key domains (Tractenberg, Umans, & McCarger, 2010).

Having an aligned map of the design team's work aids change as it becomes a programme's living document that instructors can revisit and revise to adapt to the needs of the students, programme accreditation, changing milieu, technology, or used to incorporate new instructors or sequencing (Knight, 2001; Uchiyama & Radin, 2009). "The result of mapping is deliberate accountability; precision articulation of common student performance goals both horizontally and vertically;

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and ongoing review of those goals in real time (Jacobs, 2004)." It becomes a foundation to enable and encourage future action (Stark, 2000). The final aligned curriculum map is a bird's eye view of how the curriculum pieces fit together to achieve intended learning outcomes using various teaching and learning activities providing many opportunities to make connections and the best possible learning experience (D. Clark & Linn, 2003; L.D. Fink, 2003).

2.5.3 Programme Structure, Characteristics and Options

An awareness of the variety of programme structures that 'fit together the pieces' is essential to the comprehensive curriculum design process for distance learning. This study asks in Research Question #2 specifically about these pedagogical and technical dimensions in existing distance masters programmes. Secondary sources show that distance graduate programmes in T&HM offer a wide range of value-added attributes in terms of programme structure and options. Programmes feature include such options as:

- Using the same instructors both on-campus and distance;
- A high degree of richness of multimedia or synchronous course time;
- Unique learning opportunities, e.g. through group travel or academic partners and business affiliations;
- Comprehensive amount of course materials or programme administration provided to students;
- An emphasis on student access to research and technical resources

Programmes differentiate themselves by offering different approaches to the flexibility of their programme structure and use of ICT tools to build the programme's learning environment.

Blended Learning Environments

A blended learning model, also known as hybrid, distributed or replacement models, is a form of distance education that strategically combines distance and online resources, the desired amount of programme flexibility, effective use of digital media and a curriculum formed for particular student needs (Macdonald, 2008; Millson & Wilemon, 2008). The notion of blending different ways to teach is as old as teaching itself (J. Williams, 2003) and rather than an either-or proposition where learning is situated in either a traditional classroom or 100% online, blended learning takes advantage of the complementarity of F2F with online instruction (Graham, 2006; Teng, Bonk, & Kim, 2009).

The importance today of a blended structure is the limitless possibilities it offers instructional designers who can strategically blend F2F teaching and learning components with the convenience of the distance learning environment (Schuhmann & Skopek, 2009) to create opportunities for students to interact with their peers, faculty and the content both in and out of classrooms for optimum learning outcomes (Laurillard, 2002; Morrison & Young, 2009; Vaughan, 2007), foster relationships and "prepare students to perform in the digitally interconnected business world"(Gautsch & Griffy-Brown, 2010).

A designer might select blended options for their many advantages, such as helping allay feelings of isolation or anxiety, improved cost-effectiveness; authentic learning; greater access to a range of appropriate individualized learning and teaching resources and increased opportunities for human interaction (Bonk & Graham, 2006; J. C. Moore, 2004). Oliver and Reeves (2005) note that blended pedagogy that typically works incorporates strongly constructivist strategies such as:

problem, scenario or project-based learning centered on authentic tasks in an ICT-rich environment or collaborative learning with multiple channels for communications. They also note that blended programmes, like online, generally fail for the same reasons: as a result of poor pedagogy, such as extensive use of talking heads, isolated learners who get limited instructor feedback, low-level outcomes measured by multiple choice exams or traditional academic assignments that lack substantive challenge. As in 100% online, blended learning requires redesign and reconceptualization of the on-campus experience as it becomes a new form of learning (D. Randy Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). Questions remain regarding the most beneficial blends (Cao, Crews, Lin, Burgoon, & Nunnamaker, 2008).

National surveys conducted in the United States suggest that the future is bright for this format. The Sloan-C survey shows consumer preference for and openness to online/blended programmes far outstrip their availability, indicating this as a prime growth area for institutions (I. E. Allen, Seaman, & Garrett, 2007). One surprising finding from the Sloan-C survey (2007) that curriculum designers should be aware of is that blended learning is generally not part of a transition strategy from F2F to fully online courses, but rather a discrete option that institutions choose on its own merits. This corroborates to some degree the belief that blended programmes are a reasonable compromise due to either a "general sense of disillusionment with the stand-alone adoption of online media" (Macdonald, 2008, p. 3) or for instructors who have negative perceptions of distance learning because of the diminished contact with the student (M. Allen et al., 2004). Regardless, the blended format addresses learner concern for access and flexibility, as well as provides high levels of dialogue and measured levels of structure to assure

quality (Millson & Wilemon, 2008; M. G. Moore, 1997). Comparative studies show

that student achievement and satisfaction in blended environments either equals or

surpasses those in fully online or traditional mode (G. Black, 2002; Christmann &

Badgett, 1999; Lilja, 2001; Means, Toyama, Murphy, Bakia, & Jones, 2010; Persin,

2002; Ritter, Polnick, Fink, & Oescher, 2010) or are even preferable to other delivery

modes (Gunter, 2001).

Programme Option: Induction

Orientation or induction is the first "high impact" practice that a student

experiences when joining a programme and is a key component for student

motivation, engagement and success, and, as such contributes to the design of any

programme structure (Kuh, 2008; J. C. Moore, 2004). It is an opportunity to answer

student questions, discuss expectations about relationships and faculty and student

interaction, programme structure and create academic and professional vision for

students (Fraser, 2004; Kuh, 2008). Whether F2F or virtual, orientation prepares

attentive enthusiastic students for the online environment (Harrell, 2008) and data

shows that it positively impacts student programme satisfaction and retention

through purposeful educational activities that require investments of time and

energy by students, thereby increasing engagement and commitment to the

academic programme (Chang, 2005; Fraser, 2004; Kuh, 2008). Ali and Leeds' study

(2009) of 84 business majors in a pilot programme similarly found that induction

contributed positively to the building of learning communities and emotional and

social support for the learners. Orientation 'jump starts' success in distance learning

by turning motivation into actions and behaviours that result in successful

achievement of programme outcomes

2.5.4 Strategies for Selecting Learning Activities

"The point is not how you are going to teach, but how and what you want your students to learn." (J. Biggs, 2009)

Within the programme structure are the vital activities that stimulate "what you want students to learn". Adaptation to changes in the HE paradigm means educators are diversifying instructive, assessment and collaborative solutions to keep up (Franklin & Peat, 2001; Neo, Neo, & Teoh, 2010). Learning activities can link engagement with the moral questions of human values in the knowledge construction process (Steed, 2009) or build cognitive strength through logically scaffolded activities (Harvey & Kamvounias, 2008).

Teaching online is different than in a traditional classroom in terms of focus on pedagogical approach and structure (Hawkes & Coldeway, 2002). To a large degree, online education still suffers from the pedagogically inferior traditional "lecture/notes/test" model that is shoehorned into the Procrustean bed of a virtual environment (Tucker, 2010). As in F2F teaching, constructivist-based learning strategies suggest criteria based on eliciting prior knowledge, creating cognitive dissonance, application of new knowledge with feedback and reflection on learning (Baviskar, Hartle, & Whitney, 2009), but for online delivery, these require reconceptualization using ICT tools. Online activities with social media can stimulate discovery and unprecedented engagement with course content (Kolowich, 2010) and increase access and interactivity with mobile devices (Bolliger & Shepherd, 2010). The highest levels of student perceived learning involve collaborative teaching and learning and group-oriented activities (Arbaugh & Benbunan-Fich, 2006). While Salmon (2000a) noted that online courses allow and even require

reflection as part of the learning process. Best practices suggest that teachers should resist the temptation to dispense wisdom in online discussions, but instead promote discovery by staying out of the student interchange unless it needs redirecting (Brower, 2003).

ICT properties are well-adapted for reflective and collaborative deep learning through communities of inquiry and offer new ways to support complex analysis, individualized feedback and scaffolding features needed for formative in-depth assessment (Quellmalz & Pellegrino, 2009). Eportfolios are useful assessment tools for extending reflective, formative learning (Peacock, Gordon, Murray, Morss, & Dunlop, 2010). At the same time, however, online technology provides students with quick ways to cheat and assessment might be designed in the form of a lightning round of answering five questions in 10 minutes; meant to prevent Googling answers (Gabriel, 2010). A great deal of research shows that there is no significant difference in the quality of learning between distance and traditional education (Giguere, 2009; Mozzani-Miller, 2006) and multiple studies confirm that is not the delivery format that is the important factor in student success (Arbaugh et al., 2009; Russell, 2001), yet prompt feedback has been called the "Achilles heel" of distance education (Gabriel, 2010; Osei, 2010) and assessment of student learning in distance education ranks among the greatest challenges for the distance instructor (Instructional Technology Council, 2009).

2.5.5 Assessment and Learning Outcomes

Assessment, in general, is critically important to education both for meeting different goals, such as accreditation and to support learning (Donald, 1997; Taras,

2008), and, constructively aligned, can focus collective attention and create linkages across the curriculum (P. Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & William, 2003; Maddalena, 2009). The careful design of assessments is particularly important for distance education because "society somewhat unfairly imposes higher expectations" of online learners (Oosterhof, Conrad, & Ely, 2008, p. vi), thus putting the onus of proof of effective instruction on defensible assessment of achievement.

Formative assessment, first defined by Scriven (1967a), is currently a "hot topic" within HE and recognized as "one of the most powerful ways to enhance student motivation and achievement" (Cauley & McMillan, 2010). Consistent with current constructivist theories of learning and motivation, formative assessment works on feedback principles and is part of complex low-stakes teaching, while high-stakes summative provides evidence of the level of student performance at the end of the educational programme (Scriven, 1967b). Summative testing's goal is measurement of performance; valuable for accreditation or diagnostic use, but limited in terms of effective instruction and often resulting in shallow learning and lack of engagement (Huebner, 2009; NQAI, 2003). As the knowledge-based teaching paradigm that targets successful passage through summative assessment shifts to pedagogy focused upon the development of lifelong transferable skills (A. Ali, Tariq, & Topping, 2009), formative assessment becomes central. Literature repeatedly shows that formative assessment in general:

- Improves student outcomes and allows greater self-direction and autonomy for the student (P. J. Black & Wiliam, 1998; P. J. Black & D. William, 1998; Costa, Mullan, Kothe, & Butow, 2010; Kennedy, Chan, Fok, & Yu, 2008; J.

Pellegrino, Chudowsky, & Glaser, 2001; Velan, Kumar, Dziegielewski, & Wakefield, 2002; Wiliam, 2007; Zakrezewski & Bull, 1999).

- Develops better learning patterns through a series of activities focused more on the individual's experience, interests and reflection, rather than narrow skill building (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992; Nunes & Fowell, 1996).

For distance learning, formative assessment:

- Provides online teachers and students with a means for prompt support and feedback, monitoring the learning process, diagnosing problems; thus enabling adjustments to new and better instructional design approaches (Gipps, 2005; Niu & Hamp-Lyons, 2006; Peat & Franklin, 2002).

- Results in higher final exam scores when weekly online formative assessments are given (Klecker, 2007; Peat & Franklin, 2002)

Perhaps of most significance to teaching and learning online practice is the accumulating research on the positive relationship between student motivation and formative assessment (Brookhart, 1997, 2007; McMillan, 2004). Motivation and confidence are well-documented as a key for online learner academic achievement (Fyans & Maehr, 1987; K. J. Kim, 2009; Li, 2010; Sander & Sanders, 2009; Walberg, 1984) and retention (J.-H. Park & Hee Jun, 2009). Students seeking performance goals are more likely to be extrinsically motivated by grades. Intrinsically motivated students seeking mastery learning goals find formative assessment more motivating, such as using online self-assessment, where they improve their own performance towards success (Klecker, 2007; McMillan & Hearn, 2008).

Studies show that self-assessment is an important online learning strategy because, with teacher feedback, it stimulates metacognitive development to help students identify strategies for autonomous, lifelong learning and self-regulation of their learning processes (Falchikov, 2005; Ibabe & Jauregizar, 2010). This form of

assessment is particularly suited to graduate level students with the maturity to take control of their learning (Costa, Mullan, Kothe, & Butow, 2010). For learners with lower levels of autonomy or computing confidence, using metacognitive teaching strategies for distance learning is more effective. Stahl & Bromme's (2009) study found with online university students in Germany that by breaking down the online tasks into small, structured components and providing well-chosen and easily accessible online resources to assist them, the metacogitive strategy fuelled motivation and high-level autonomous achievement. Other examples of formative assessment approaches that can effectively be used online are: problem-based learning for contextualised application of attributes (Sable, Larrivee, & Gayer, 2001; UTS, 2005) and peer assessment, a social, collaborative process that raises awareness and stimulates reflection on the quality of peers' work (Stanier, 1997; van Gennip, Segers, & Tillema, 2010).

Learning design focuses on progressive development by providing clear learning targets and teacher feedback (Stiggins, 2005, 2007) so online learners can set attainable learning goals and build confidence (Bandura, 1997). Posting quality-related criteria for interpersonal communications at the start of the online course clarifies expectations effectively (Conaway, Easton, & Schmidt, 2005). Prawat and Floden (1994) noted that self-efficacy, or feelings of competence to solve new problems and the confidence to risk failure, is much more powerful than any external motivation and are indicators of quality learning outcomes. Active participation in the motivational online climate is how the graduate builds confidence and the survival skills to create solutions in the problem-dominated workplace (Donnelly, 2004). This environment should be free from pressure, safe

and positive (Claxton, 1998). For distance education, studies show that self-efficacy grows from technology and cultural competencies and learners having control over the pace of their formative assessment (Compeau & Higgins, 1995; Compeau, Higgins, & Huff, 1999; D. Green, 2010; K. J. Kim, 2009; Niu & Hamp-Lyons, 2006; Peltier, Schibrowsky, & Drago, 2007), however boosting student's self-esteem by providing them with positive, but false or inaccurate feedback about their strengths or weaknesses, is not advocated (Pintrich, 2002).

Rovai (2007), Majeski and Stover (Majeski & Stover)and Bai (2009) found that deep or higher level learning, learner satisfaction, and a sense of community is promoted by dialogue and problem-solving questions structured around questions that encourage students to develop different perspectives and explanations of a practical topic or scenario. The level of thinking that occurs is directly related to the level and quality of questions asked (King, 1995; Yang, Newby, & Bill, 2005). Ke and Xie's study of adults in online courses (2009) found that an integrated course model promotes learning satisfaction and also confirms the advantages of a combination of closed and open discussion questions where students are encouraged to share their own experiences and contribute to open-ended discussions (Dennen, 2008). These study findings confirm practical application of designing for multiple learning styles to stimulate learning (Shute & Towle, 2003) and well-structured instructional design as top priorities (Ke & Xie, 2009; Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006).

Good ICT choices can help engage learners in the communal creative spirit of the Web 2.0 age (Gauci et al, 2009), or conversely, rushing to the latest technology can be a barrier to learning (J. C. Moore, 2004). Although there may be a paucity of

theory and empirical research on creating the ideal online learning environment (K. J. Kim, 2009; Song, 2000), studies reinforce that certain online programme components such as; orientation, team experiences and formative assessment support motivation and confidence (Breed, 1997; D. N. Clark & Gibb, 2006; Newswander & Borrego, 2009). The answer to which digital tools work best for stimulating critical thinking in a distance format seems to lie in matching the selection and practice of the pedagogy appropriate to the learning objectives being pursued (JISC, 2009). Studies find that authentic and interactive learning activities are motivating to the distance learner (K. J. Kim, 2009), but the most important consideration for using technology is that it should provide added value (J. C. Moore, 2004). Reports state that technology should be harnessed more readily than it has been to allow students to apply assessment tools independently to develop and sustain motivation and confidence (Irish Universities Association, 2003).

Outcomes-based Assessments, Measurement and Curriculum Design

The culture change within HE from a content-based focus of curriculum to a more student-centered approach is realigning the teaching paradigm with a learning paradigm (Barr & Tagg, 1995; C. Robertson, 2001). Outcomes-based assessments, a possible effect of the HE reforms driven by the Dearing Report (1997) in the United Kingdom, now represent the standards by which most programmes and courses are measured and by which course or programme quality and effectiveness are determined (Treleaven & Voola, 2008). Based on graduate attributes, outcomes-based assessment process identifies what students are expected to be able to *do* and how they are expected to be able to *think* at the completion of the course or programme (Jackson, 2000; WCET, 2010).

Accountability requirements for HE pressurize having the ability to measure mastery of student learning outcomes disaggregated into three distinct levels of performance: personal, professional and learning to learn, or intellectual (Tractenberg, Umans, & McCarger, 2010). The adherence to standardized outcomes-based assessment and accepting a one-size-fits-all approach could jeopardize the critical notions of open-ended student-centred learning. Pressed to measure outcomes due to the demands of transparency and audit, such rigid testing can have a demoralizing effect on teachers (Hussey & Smith, 2003), however diagnosis of student learning outcomes is the basis of improvement.

One widely-accepted generic tool for assessing the achievement of student critical thinking skills across different cultural, linguistic and institutional contexts is the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) performance task. Currently being piloted online on an international scale by the OECD, the CLA measures students' integration of analytic reasoning and problem solving skills from different sources, such as letters, summaries of research reports, maps, diagrams or tables to answer hypothetical, but realistic questions (Lalancette, 2010). The outcomes criteria are characterized in profession-independent terms of the skills, habits of mind and organisational principles that can foster graduate excellence (Tractenberg, Umans, & McCarger, 2010) and enhance employability (Maher, 2004). Thus, it could be suggested that international distance graduate programmes might envisage utilizing assessment designs based on this proven approach that requires students to marshal evidence across broadly diverse sources in answering questions of a practical nature. Designers can allow for uncertainty and unplanned learning events

by shifting the locus of control back to the student, which may optimize opportunities for deeper learning (Maher, 2004).

As assessment provides the catalyst for learning, it is still content that is at the core of a programme's identity.

2.6   Selection and Integration of Curriculum Content

The essential question of what is meaningful in curriculum was expressed in the 1890s as 'What ought to be taught?' or 'What knowledge is of most worth?' and is at the root of the decision-making process of content selection (Hewitt, 2006). Over one hundred years later the main criterion of academic knowledge is not necessarily the search for truth, but more likely the production-oriented 'What use is it?' (Ronald Barnett, Parry, & Coate, 2001; Lyotard, 1984). Although differing views have been present since the first generation of curriculum scholarship (Flinders & Thornton, 2004), early curricula were based on ideals dictated by academics, scientists and philosophers rather than marketplace realities, theory or practitioner experience (Hewitt, 2006; D. F. Walker & Soltis, 2004). Franklin Bobbitt, (1918), generally conceded the honour of authoring the first textbook on the subject (Flinders & Thornton, 2004), framed curriculum development around a set of goals that includes formative experiences or deeds to be performed by students to become successful adults in society. This was a first step toward practical, culturally relevant curriculum content in terms of preparing the student for serving society.

As discussed, the traditional role of graduate education is to prepare students for their specific careers and deepen their subject knowledge. Discipline specific content is shaped in significant degrees by the values and practices of the

knowledge field and does change over time (Ronald Barnett, Parry, & Coate, 2001).

There is also a great deal of literature that substantiates the importance of

developing critical thinking, social skills and the ability to link deeper holistic

concepts; the more generic capabilities that high-skills employers value as

adaptation skills (W. Green, Hammer, & Star, 2009; Lattuca & Stark, 2009;

Macdonald, 2008; Tourism Research Centre, 2008). Thus content requires mindful

instructional design to elicit both outcomes of "generalist as well as the specialist in

an age of specialization looking for better generalizations" (Kerr, 1963). The

curriculum renews itself through evaluation of content, learning activities and

outcomes to determine how this is to be achieved (W. H. Clark, Jr., 1980). Content,

the metaphorical meat in the curriculum design sandwich, is the part of the system

that is intrinsically practical, relevant and must harmonize with other curricular

elements to make sense as a whole (Roth, 2010; Wood & Brotherton, 2008).

Relevancy and Threshold Concepts

Relevancy and threshold concepts are two constructivist selection strategies

for determining 'what ought to be taught' by focusing on 'what use is it?' Many

factors come into play in selection of content: graduate attributes, learning theory,

programme aims and institutional mission as well as sequencing, accreditation

standards, and disciplinary requirements. Adult students perceive excellence as both

content relevance and how well the teacher provides an engaging, supportive

learning experience (Steinman, 2007). Student satisfaction is tied to the perception

of relevance and is frequently cited as a factor positively correlated to student

persistence and motivation in distance learning (Doo & Kim, 2000; Hall, 2002; K. J.

Kim, 2009; Levy, 2007; J.-H. Park & Hee Jun, 2009; Shea, Pickett, & Pelz, 2003).

Relevance makes learning meaningful by connecting new information to personal experience, a unifying constructivist norm.

Given that the instructor or designer's task is to take graduate students beyond mere information acquisition to altering the way they see things (Ogunleye, 2002), awareness of moving towards a primary concept binds concepts, improves learning and helps in content choice (Posner & Rudnitsky, 2006). Today the unprecedented amounts of content and data available to students make the core task of learning to critically analyse and integrate learning into generalized understanding more difficult (Bostock, 1997; Kirkwood & Price, 2006; Laurillard, 2002; Sept, 2004). The 'over-stuffed' curriculum: so much to learn, so little time (Wankat & Oreovicz, 2001), is a design flaw that does not contribute to programme quality. One way to simplify and focus on relevant content that contributes to understanding troublesome knowledge is 'threshold concepts' (Perkins, 1999). Referred to variously as a constructivist 'quest for essence' (Brooks & Brooks, 1999), epistemological reflection (Baxter Magolda, 2004) or central "big ideas" (Fosnot, 1996; Wiggins & McTighe, 1998, 2005), threshold concepts reduce the need for excess content and disparate facts and takes competency-building to the next level by introducing a transformed way of thinking irreversibly, described as a "portal opening up a new and previously inaccessible way of thinking about something" (Meyer & Land, 2003).

To illustrate, Meyer and Land (2006, p.3) give the example of a cook who comes to realise that the concept in physics of heat transfer as a function of temperature gradient is key to the chef's art. 'Imagine', they write 'that you have

just poured two identical cups of tea; you want to cool down one as quickly as possible, you add milk to the first cup immediately, wait a few minutes and then add milk to the second'. Intuitively, you might think the first cup will be the cooler but it is the second because 'in the initial stages of cooling it is hotter than the first cup with the milk in it and it therefore loses more heat because of the steeper temperature gradient'. Once this principle is understood, trainee chefs shift their attention from ingredients to the pots and pans selected for particular dishes. This kind of 'turn' in understanding a subject marks an important initiation into any subject culture.

The advantage of structuring learning around such approaches as threshold concepts, relevancy and graduate attributes is that it can simplify thinking about the subject area as a contextualized integrative system. Studies show that they can serve as a trigger for critical reflection for educators, developing a deeper understanding of their disciplinary field, their learning and teaching and their students (McLean, 2009). Change then becomes an organic aspect of curriculum design, which is dependent on processes and relationships rather than specific content (Irvine & Carmichael, 2009; Meyer & Land, 2003).

Design effectiveness ultimately is dependent on the experience and the expertise of the teachers who creatively use formative assessments and unifying concepts as opportunities to improve teaching and to guide learning activities (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2010).

2.7   Changing Roles of the Instructor and Curriculum Designer

The literature suggests that a curriculum framework for distance graduate education needs to consider the implications of the crucial role teachers and designers play in fostering high-level thinking (Buraphadeja & Dawson, 2008). It is tempting to assume that the technology-mediated learning environment may make the teacher's role less important or demanding, however, it may be even more creative or complex as the focus shifts to student *learning* rather teaching or dispensing knowledge (Wan, Fang, & Neufeld, 2007). Charged with managing the course, timelines, procedural rules and decision-making norms, online educators also strive to create virtual learning environments that engender a sense of inquiry and active learning (Keengwe, Onchwari, & Onchwari, 2009; QCA, 1998; Ritter, Polnick, Fink, & Oescher, 2010).

To date, instructor characteristics have received far less research attention than student characteristics (Arbaugh et al., 2009) and they are clearly important to mastering online teaching skills. ICT connects people across time and space, however miscommunication can also be a result (Cornelius & Boos, 2003). Without the benefit of body language expressing inflection or student engagement, pedagogy skills and effective communication become all the more important (D.R. Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2001). Increasing interaction is one part of the formula, and quality interaction is the other (Hampton, 2010).

Pedagogical approaches may be significantly different from those used in F2F classes (I. E. Allen & Seaman, 2010b; Harasim, 2000) as online instructors guide students to accurate sources of information, facilitate making group connections online and help students make complex inter-domain connections through

technology-enabled tools (Proserpio & Gioia, 2007). Scholars differ about what facilitates critical thinking, but research findings emphatically agree that under qualified instructor guidance, increased teacher/student interaction and teaching presence are the strongest predictors of student learning (Eom, Wen, & Ashill, 2006; D. R. Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000; D. Randy Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2004; Harvard, Du, & Olinzock, 2005; K.-J. Kim, 2009; Wanstreet, 2006; Yang, Newby, & Bill, 2005) and, in fact, may be the primary variables for predicting online learning outcomes (J. B. Arbaugh & B. Rau, L., 2007; Connolly, Jones, & Jones, 2007; Marks, Sibley, & Arbaugh, 2005).

Online teachers report good results in building relationships translating F2F 'high-touch' strategies such as the use of individual's names, illustrating with personal stories or case studies to increase engagement for online learning (Ji Hee, Hollenbeck, & Zinkhan, 2008; McMahon & Davidson, 2003; Naisbitt, Naisbitt, & Philips, 2001). Students are looking for familiar personal contact approaches in a modern web-supported setting (JISC, 2009). Great teacher-to-student relationships depend on making 'serendipity' a design element (Macdonald, 2010) and, a paradigm shift for instructors, is finding expression for their personalities in the online environment (R. Kelly, 2010; McMahon & Davidson, 2003). Instructor enthusiasm may be more important to student engagement as computer competency (McMahon & Davidson, 2003; OFSTED, 2009) as an energetic teaching presence and well-planned activities significantly improve student satisfaction, learning, interaction, build trust and engagement (C. H. Cho, Phillips, Hageman, & Patten, 2009; D. Randy Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2010). Effective design and

learning activities encourage active participation, which is critical to student success and quality of online education (Lear, Ansorge, & Steckelberg, 2010).

2.7.1 Preparing Students for Student-centred Learning

Moving the locus of learning stimulation from the external teacher to internal individual whose responsibility is to reason, seek, and assess the relevance of information based on individually evolving needs, is a major paradigm shift (Chronicle of Higher Education, 2009; Kember, 2009; Kuiper, Volman, & Terwel, 2005; Trigwell & Prosser, 2004). Studies on the topic of student-centered learning consistently show that students learn better when they take more control of their learning by having an active role developing understanding and *doing* things rather than remembering or watching/listening (J. Biggs, 2009; Davis, 1993; Kember, 2009; Machemer & Crawford, 2007; Miers, Coles, Girot, & Wilkinson, 2005; Stiehl & Lewchuck, 2007). The teacher-centered "instruction paradigm" is a culture that has dominated classrooms for centuries and presents a barrier for effective distance education and can be difficult to change (Zhao, McConnell, & Jiang, 2009).

The student-oriented approach at the graduate level is not completely new (Kember, 2009), however its widespread acceptance now offers the instructor and designer opportunities to explore new ways of teaching and learning, emphasizing the role of the students in the process (López Menéndez & Pérez Suárez, 2009). The teacher's task is to go beyond subject matter to prepare students to become effective learners and creative, critical, constructivist thinkers (Dooley, Lindner, & Dooley, 2005). Creative thinking underlies innovation; a 'Knowledge Economy' asset, and research shows that it can be learned (Donnelly, 2004; Sternberg, 2002). An

"imaginative curriculum" (Donnelly, 2004) suggests that designers include learning activities to develop creativity by stimulating traits positively correlated with creativity such as curiosity, attraction to complexity and novelty, tolerance for ambiguity, open-mindedness and persistence (Feist, 1999). Evidence from the data indicates that using more ICT-based 'risk-taking' strategies that break from the carefully structuring detailed teaching plans will improve depth and quality of knowing by presenting challenges (Hannafin, Hannafin, & Gabbitas, 2009; Millson & Wilemon, 2008).

2.7.2 Academic Staff Development

Getting academics to theoretically underpin their reflections on their practice from educational theory is always an uphill struggle… with most stopping for a permanent rest at Mount Kolb. (Cousin, 2007)

Part of the framework's internal milieu is keeping teachers abreast of emerging theories and technologies and providing them with the support to manage the rising tide of new ICT tools and pedagogical research. This can be difficult, especially considering that studies indicate that most online teachers in accredited business programmes are subject experts, like many other teachers, but lack formal teaching training (Arbaugh et al., 2009; Little & Page, 2009; Perreault, Waldman, Alexander, & Zhao, 2002). A report of online programmes reviewing the past decade shows that although concerns have diminished substantially regarding the online teaching experience, teaching support remains insufficient (Alexander, Perrault, Zhao, & Waldman, 2009). ICT teaching training should be ongoing so faculty are comfortable in their 'classrooms' and can manipulate the online environment (M. Collins & Berge, 1996; Ritter, Polnick, Fink, & Oescher, 2010). Curriculum

implementation is hindered by teachers who lack ICT-based pedagogy skills (Little & Page, 2009).

Models for teaching at a distance are still under development (Desai & Pitre, 2009), but improving teachers' knowledge level of online instructional strategies positively correlate to the degree of cultivation of sense of community and student learning outcomes and, thus, is critically important (Brint, 2008; Ritter, Polnick, Fink, & Oescher, 2010). One example of raising the quality of outcomes and professional outlook towards teaching innovation is the recently adopted set of 'active' values of Irish educators for embedding into teaching practice (LIN, 2010). Lee Shulman (1987) argued decades ago that subject matter knowledge is only one of seven types of knowledge used by expert teachers. Two kinds are critical professional teaching expertise needed to facilitate online learning; classroom management and presenting and connecting subject matter understanding with effective teaching strategies (Brint, 2008). The best faculty development programmes provide opportunities to puzzle through experiences and questions with colleagues in ways that lead to new insights, strategies, and experiments. If these conversations are organised following a predictable pattern, faculty learning communities become an integral and valued part of academic life and a forum for institutional change (Malnarich, 2008). Additionally new student demographics mean that teachers should raise their awareness about their own cultural biases and develop a willingness to approach teaching from an inclusive perspective.

Teghe and Knight (2004) urge HE institutions to plan for, and invest heavily in, training for staff in all aspects of the delivery of online flexible learning and provide incentives to academics to become 'e-moderators' of online learning, as

well as give them a recognized status as specialist educators in the HE sector. Educational developers have encouraged academics to complement caring for their subject matter with caring for their good teaching practices, but getting this dual care ethic to cross fertilize has proved to be difficult (Cousin, 2007). Indications are that sustainable distance graduate programmes depend on faculty development (Chan & Welebir, 2003; Malnarich, 2008) and strong mentoring (Shiller, 2010).

2.8   The Learner Experience

It can be said that key challenges in HE include the changing relationship between teacher and learner and also the principle of lifelong learning, which has become a unifying theme for programmes and policies and brings a sea change in student demand and demographics, as discussed earlier (P. Candy, 2000; Commission of the European Communities, 2001; Gavari Starkie, 2008). For students, pursuing HE is not a decision made lightly at any age. Making the financial and time commitment are among their biggest life choices (Hampson, 2010).

For the curriculum framework, planning for the new breed of master's degree students means meeting the expectations of these flexible workers (Adamson, 2010) and the externally mandated goals of "values, knowledge, adaptability and entrepreneurial skills necessary to sustain… economic, social and cultural development" (Irish Universities Association, 2005). These graduate school learners will not look like the ones of the past who were expected to be docile, obedient, passive participants in authoritatively instructional courses (Quinton, 1980).

Student Demographics

The age range of the graduate student continues to broaden with older learners who defy traditional age boundaries, as well as with growing cohorts from younger generations (I. E. Allen & Seaman, 2010b; M. G. Moore & Kearsley, 2005). Distance graduate management programmes appear to attract predominantly female learners who generally reside near their academic institutions (Arbaugh, Bangert, & Cleveland-Innes; Laves, 2010). These older, diverse students bring different interests and experiences and have high expectations for teaching quality and user-friendly services, effectively changing the 'classroom' culture dramatically (Crosier, Purser, & Smidt, 2007). Osei's (2010) study of 691 online executive masters in business students, who were mostly older (>30 years), confirmed that the majority of these older learners positively perceive their online experience in terms of content and instructional medium. Adult students, who are attracted to distance education for flexibility of time and space to better accommodate the constraints of work and family responsibilities (Cercone, 2008; Osei, 2010), generally live within a one hour commute of their institution's physical campus (I. E. Allen & Seaman, 2010b; Laves, 2010).

Younger students entering graduate education is also increasing (Mangan, 2009). Significant to ICT-based learning strategies, technology is not separate from their lives as it might be for adults (Moyle, 2010). They may eagerly participate in an online class discussion, but resist exchanging ideas in a F2F classroom (Brooks, 2009). The conundrum is how to design formal learning tasks based on their informally learned skills without undermining their motivation and enthusiasm.

Learning Characteristics

The learning characteristics of the students are key to developing instructional strategies in a learner-centred model. Andragogy is the umbrella term covering principles about adult learners such as: age and generation, learning style, cognitive styles and controls, and multiple intelligences (Dooley, Lindner, & Dooley, 2005; Gardner, 1983, 1999; Kolb, 1984; TOJDE, 2006). Adult learning theories suggest that differentiated instruction that accommodates individual learning characteristics are the most effective, thus instructional strategies make the difference in how adults learn online, rather than the technology itself. Multiple studies confirm that individual characteristics such as age, gender or educational level are not specifically linked to online learning performance (J. B. Arbaugh & B. Rau, L., 2007; Ke & Xie, 2009; J.-H. Park & Hee Jun, 2009; Willging & Johnson, 2004; E. A. Williams, Duray, & Reddy, 2006), but, that said, there is consensus around the belief that the amount and quality of prior knowledge positively influences gains in new knowledge and is closely linked to capacity to apply higher order cognitive problem-solving skills (Dochy, De Rijdt, & Dyck, 2002).

Two facts about non-traditional learners stand out that change the way curriculum needs to be considered: Their learning styles - they come to HE knowing different things and learn in different ways (Mendenhall, 2009), and the level of responsibility that they must accept for their own learning (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Hannafin, Hannafin, & Gabbitas, 2009). The implication for the curriculum is that instructors will need to accommodate extremely diverse active learners with high learning and support expectations (Osei, 2010). Many educators struggle with teaching learners with backgrounds different from their own (Sadker, Sadker, & Zittleman, 2008), but teachers who can leverage mature learners' unique strengths

into meaningful and interesting learning design find adult learners a good fit for distance education (Cercone, 2008; Donavant, 2009; O'Lawrence, 2006).

The level of responsibility is higher for distance education students who need the complex skills to self-monitor, self-regulate their learning and garner resources and peer support (Blocher, de Montes, & Willis, 2002). Research points toward motivation and self-discipline as vital to success. Distance education is moving toward a self-designed, self-directed learning environment where the learner moves through autonomy to interdependence (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). Those learners who are able to manage learning autonomously with adequate support may form online communities of practice where social construction of knowledge through learner/learner dialogue makes it possible to minimize structure and requires active rather than passive participation (Blocher, de Montes, & Willis, 2002; Chu & Tsai, 2009; Nevo, 2002). Students, given tools to facilitate their learning in this manner, also need direct support, one of the major factors in their ability to succeed in graduate school (Council of Graduate Schools, 2009). Understanding the skills and attributes necessary for distance learners to succeed in the changing learning environment is fundamental in designing a curriculum framework that envisages the entire learning paradigm.

2.9   Results: Quality, Evaluation and Change

The literature shows that academic standards are rising, which impacts the importance of effectively evaluating learning outcomes within a programme. Distance graduate programmes outcomes are expected to include teaching and learning that is "informed by the latest research, delivered through the optimum

channels, supported by the latest technology and structured to develop effective research and lifelong learning skills" (Irish Universities Association, 2005, p. 12). A curriculum that meets these high expectations would be the intentional product of a continuous cycle of re-evaluation of programme standards against outcomes with the net impact of raising the calibre of distance masters programmes (M. J. Allen, 2004). Operating at the frontiers of knowledge and practice, focus on evaluation and quality are key to the evolutionary design process.

2.9.1 Quality Frameworks & Accreditation

In programme design, quality assurance (QA) either through internal institutional QA or through an external accrediting body or both is a retrospective process that can also play a formative role. QA assists in establishing core standards and quality levels (EAQAHE, 2005). Defined by learning outcomes, quality frameworks are established or are in the process of being developed and implemented across 70 countries (Coolahan, 2010). Such frameworks are made up of the essential building blocks of knowledge, skills and competences. Research suggests that distance programmes, sensitive to scepticism by students and employers of the inferiority of an 'online' degree, should pay particular attention to assurance that the learning outcomes, value and rigor are the same standards as on-campus programmes (Brooks, 2009; Burnsed, 2010; Millson & Wilemon, 2008; J. S. Robertson, Grant, & Jackson, 2005). In response to that concern is the UNIQUe quality certification for tertiary education for excellence in using ICT to develop knowledge competences in higher education launched in June 2009 (EFQUEL, 2010).

Seven universities and institutes in Europe and Russia are currently piloting the certification.

Accreditation guidelines reinforce the assessment design issues of measurability (AACSB, 2008). Graduate management education is vested in a curriculum that provides 'hard' and 'soft' transferable general management skills with deep specialist knowledge that reflects the world in which future leaders of organisations will be living and working (Barry, 2007; Forum, 2010; Mangan, 2007). Currently there are three primary accrediting bodies for management education internationally: The Association of MBA's, The European Quality Improvement System and The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business. The two accrediting bodies recommended by International CHRIE for the T&HM sector are: The Accreditation Commission for Programmes in Hospitality Administration and the Commission for Accreditation of Hospitality Management Programmes. Additionally the UNWTO certification of Tourism Education Quality (TedQual) is an international assurance of T&HM programme quality and efficiency of tourism education training and research (UNWTO, 2009).

Accreditation and QA can be a two-edged sword for curriculum design because accrediting bodies specify the amount of general courses necessary to comply with their standards, which may stifle flexible and agile curricula for innovative distance programmes (George, 2009; JISC, 2010). This may leave curriculum designers with the choice to either purposely design outside of the purview of the prescribed requirements or accept standards that may compromise their desired student learning outcomes.

In addition to QA criteria distance programme design must also consider the quality of the learning environment. Research from both institutional and student perspectives consistently rate instructor interpersonal communication and pedagogic skills in distance delivery as most important, as well as the following, for contributing to quality online programmes:

- Support: Technical and institutional support of faculty and students;
- Instructors: Creative collaboration with academic and disciplinary colleagues;
- The teaching/learning process: Effective online communication, prompt feedback (Cashion & Palmieri, 2002; Osei, 2010) and technology skills for planning and implementing learning at a distance;
- Evaluation/adjustment (Dooley, Lindner, & Dooley, 2005; Egan & Akdere, 2004; IHEP, 2000; Peat & Franklin, 2002; Thach & Murphy, 1995; P. E. Williams, 2003).

2.9.2 Evaluation and Change

The two broad goals of evaluation are accountability and development. Evaluation provides useful feedback for a variety of audiences, including agencies, funding bodies, relevant communities and learners, and its development-oriented function aids curriculum decision-making for the adjustment and evolution of practice (Glenaffric Ltd., 2007). New ICT, changing content, learning orientations and teaching innovation are implemented with increasingly diverse student populations making evaluation an imperative for redesign (Lockee, Moore, & Burton, 2002; M. Oliver, Harvey, Conole, & Jones, 2007). The literature notes that the many factors involved in the success of distance learning makes the creation of a comprehensive curriculum evaluation plan challenging (Lockee, Moore, & Burton, 2002; M. Saunders, 2000). It is an iterative problem-solving process that usually takes more

than one pass to cover all of the essential tasks (Glenaffric Ltd., 2007) and often includes conflicts over interpretations and solutions (Lueddeke, 1999). Pressures to establish acceptable evidence of programme performance for learners while reflecting transparency requirements, budget constraints and increased stakeholder interest in HE, is value-laden and not politically-neutral (de Freitas, Oliver, Mee, & Mayes, 2008; Esterby-Smith, 1994), however, experts state that programme evaluation, conducted with integrity, can contribute substantially, not only to management, account for resources and justify strategic initiatives, but also to the mission that gives graduate education its value and reason for being (Bhatia, 2009; M. Oliver, 2000).

There are many models for curriculum evaluation. The evaluation process involves putting values on comparative assessment outcomes. For the curriculum design team clarifying standards criteria, such as Level 9 Irish or Level 7 European Qualifications Frameworks, are means for establishing relative worth pinned to frameworks that have undergone extensive review for comprehensive credibility and value (EQF, 2006; Guba & Lincoln, 1989; McNeil, 2006; NQAI, 2003; M.Q. Patton, 1997). Meaningful metrics can be defined by these standards (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2010). Being explicit about the purpose, methods, intended outputs and outcomes in a planned systematic and open endeavour is a strategy that works for balancing the two agendas of accountability and improvement (Rowntree, 1982; UK Evaluation Society, 2010).

Stake's (1967) pluralist approach serves the perceived needs of those concerned by using multiple perspectives and critical inquiry to capture the complexity of the situated curriculum. Patton's (1980; , 1997) well-tested utilization-

focused model of evaluation extends the practice of using many sources for evaluation in a situational approach, and supports the evaluators' using a mix of methods appropriately to match particular questions and decision maker needs. For carrying out evaluations that are specifically technology-oriented, the Flashlight Triad model helps identify issues and outcomes from ICT teaching and learning application (TLT Group, 2010). These evaluative processes may involve a large repertoire of techniques, but generally the entire programme does not need to be evaluated at one time and focusing on specific areas for evaluation and appropriate criteria yields more useful results (Glenaffric Ltd., 2007).

It is possible to conceptualize evaluation as a series of knowledge-based, multi-perspective learning steps. Scholars suggest that the best time to devise evaluation is when the goals and programme are in the design phase (Stark & Lattuca, 1997). The tradition of educational evaluation has established stages and data collection approaches. Saunders' (2000) RUFDATA method is an example of a reified procedure and 'tool' derived from the consolidated practices of a group of evaluators that is one of many similar approaches, e.g. (Scriven, 1967b; Stufflebeam, 1983, 2002; Twidale, Randall, & Bentley, 1994). RUFDATA questions reflect and develop practice-driven evaluation that can be used for self-evaluations particularly in dispersed organisations.

R: What are our **Reasons** and Purposes for evaluation?

U: What will be our **Uses** of our evaluation?

F: What will be the **Foci** for our evaluations?

D: What will be our **Data and Evidence** for our evaluations?

A: Who will be the **Audience** for our evaluations?

T: What will be the **Timing** for our evaluations?

A: Who should be the **Agency** conducting the evaluations? (M. Saunders, 2000)

A set of evaluative questions like these can be used for distance programme evaluation as it spans multiple uses and audiences of the evaluation of different programme aspects. The literature suggests that there are three main groups of recipients of evaluation data and programme elements to be evaluated, shown in Table 2-5.

Table 2-5: Evaluation recipients & programme aspects: Levine (2005)

Recipient of Evaluation Results	Programme Element to be Evaluated
Institution/Sponsor/Community (Summative Evaluation)	Organisational Efforts (Inputs & processes)
Teacher/Curriculum designer (Summative & Formative Evaluation)	Organisational Results (Products & outputs)
Learners (Empowering Evaluation)	Outcomes (Societal Impact)

Summative evaluations from students and teachers prove if the products, programmes and learning activities worked in terms of addressing needs or programme goals, and what lessons were learned (Lockee, Moore, & Burton, 2002). Lindegaard (2010) highlights that the importance of a strong innovation culture is often undervalued and hard to measure. What might be typically considered summative, actually can provide formative lessons from distance students as there is constant change and redesign in online courses and ICT use.

Balancing and alignment are the powerful concepts behind effective evaluation, as this review has shown. The curriculum team in the cyclical process of review looks back and evaluates and looks forward and implements. This facilitates keeping courses up-to-date and continuously improves them (Donnelly, 2004). Also, it is important to note that because the highly interactive distance programme places a considerable amount of shared responsibility for learning with the students,

the implication for the curriculum designer is that 'empowering evaluation' should inform the learners directly and provide opportunities for learners to interact directly with each other (Levine, 2005). Such evaluation often is based on formative reflective opportunities that are built into the instructional programme (Levine, 2005).

Interdisciplinary networking nurtures relationships with the programme and stakeholders and current research shows that it should be linked to the overall evaluation process (Lindegaard, 2010). By providing a process for people to collaborate on ideas and information, evaluation progressively enhances the sophistication and creative thinking across multiple levels of stakeholders, external and internal (Meyers & Nulty, 2009), thus, evaluation requires integration, synthesis and the construction of understandings in ways consistent with the set of educational values and the professional pathways of the discipline to effect meaningful change (Meyers & Nulty, 2009).

2.10 Creation of a Framework for the Practice of Curriculum Design

The aim of research is to extend theory, thus, evaluation of existing curriculum models, distance education studies and contextual imperatives, suggest the need for a model that extends beyond what constitutes curriculum design for traditional classrooms. At this point in time, the literature indicates that restructuring curriculum for graduate level distance programmes has not kept up with drivers of change and the need for a new learning paradigm. Second, the model needs to take into account required competencies and curricula rooted in the interests and learning preferences of the individual learner. Finally a differentiated

model for distance graduate education should provide curriculum designers with enough guidance to ensure an inclusive process that exemplifies the principles around which the framework has been developed. Through a synthesis of the literature reviewed, such an extension of theory and research in the form of a practical curriculum framework for sustainable student-centered programmes with flexible educational provision is proposed.

To summarize, this study's extensive review and the analysis of literature for online graduate learning in HE focused on seven distinct areas derived from three main disciplinary bodies of literature and the integrated dimension of change, as shown in Figure 2-7.

Figure 2-7: Key focus areas drawn from the literature

Curriculum Framework for Distance Graduate Programmes						
Key focus areas						
Aims Flexible structure & values	**Milieu** Environment & Adjust for resource changes	**Content** Relevant & integrated	**Activity** Learning theory & strategies	**Teacher** Educator's role & needs	**Student** Student's role & needs	**Results** Quality: Evaluation & sustainability
Major areas of the literature						
Curriculum, learning theory & instructional design	Graduate education & values	Drivers of change in higher education	Distance education, theory & ICT resources			

The key focus areas incorporate the nature and elements of graduate distance curriculum, the evolution of theory and practice, the characteristics of the teacher and learners, and those processes which provide the foundation for the design and

delivery of effective online graduate programmes. Each of the seven elements brings forth core considerations for a distance graduate programme. Briefly they include:

Aim: The purposeful nature of graduate management education and a practical underpinning educational philosophy of 'Good' is encapsulated in a working set of graduate attributes.

Milieu: The pertinent social, political, economic and technical forces influencing curriculum that constrain or offer opportunities, such as changing ICT, national demands to build human capital, global competition and the need to find efficiencies among shrinking budgets.

Content: The importance of relevant, current content to the graduate level learner. Constructive alignment builds quality through collaborative processes.

Activity: The lessons learned from the evolution of principles, theories and philosophical models that underlie learning activities and their implications such as the importance of the quality of the teacher/student interaction, group projects with relevant authentic tasks and formative assessment strategies for creating a flexible, student-centred effective learning environment, the need for distance learning to exploit ICT and do more than mirror traditional teaching and the collaborative alignment process to integrate all curriculum features.

Teacher: The role of the instructor/facilitator is not the same as in F2F teaching and new skills are needed to digitally project personality, enthusiasm, teaching presence, engage students and facilitate meaningful dialogue. Training and support is needed to effectively collaborate on creation of new virtual learning environments.

Learners: The characteristics, needs and expectations of the distance learners are changing and the burden of learning has shifted dramatically to being the responsibility of the learner.

Results: It is more important than ever to be able to measure or verify

              achievement and to continuously review and balance curriculum to

              adapt to dynamic internal and external change.

These form the key considerations from the literature to bring forward in the design

of a framework for distance curriculum design.

        We can now revisit the first research question of this study, "What key

elements should a curriculum framework for distance graduate education include?"

and having a notion of what these key elements include, proceed to the next step

following Dillon's (2009) counsel and use the scheme of elements to compose a

means for 'doing something with these things'. The extensive literature around the

nature of distance graduate programmes indicates the usefulness of organizing the

elements into an adapted situational curriculum model, such as Stark and Lattuca's

(2009), for its practical awareness of milieu and powerful comprehensiveness of

process. Through identification of the key curriculum elements from theory and in

practice and their relationships, a draft curriculum design model is proposed. Figure

2-8 illustrates the draft model and corresponding attributes.

Figure 2-8: Proposed situational curriculum framework
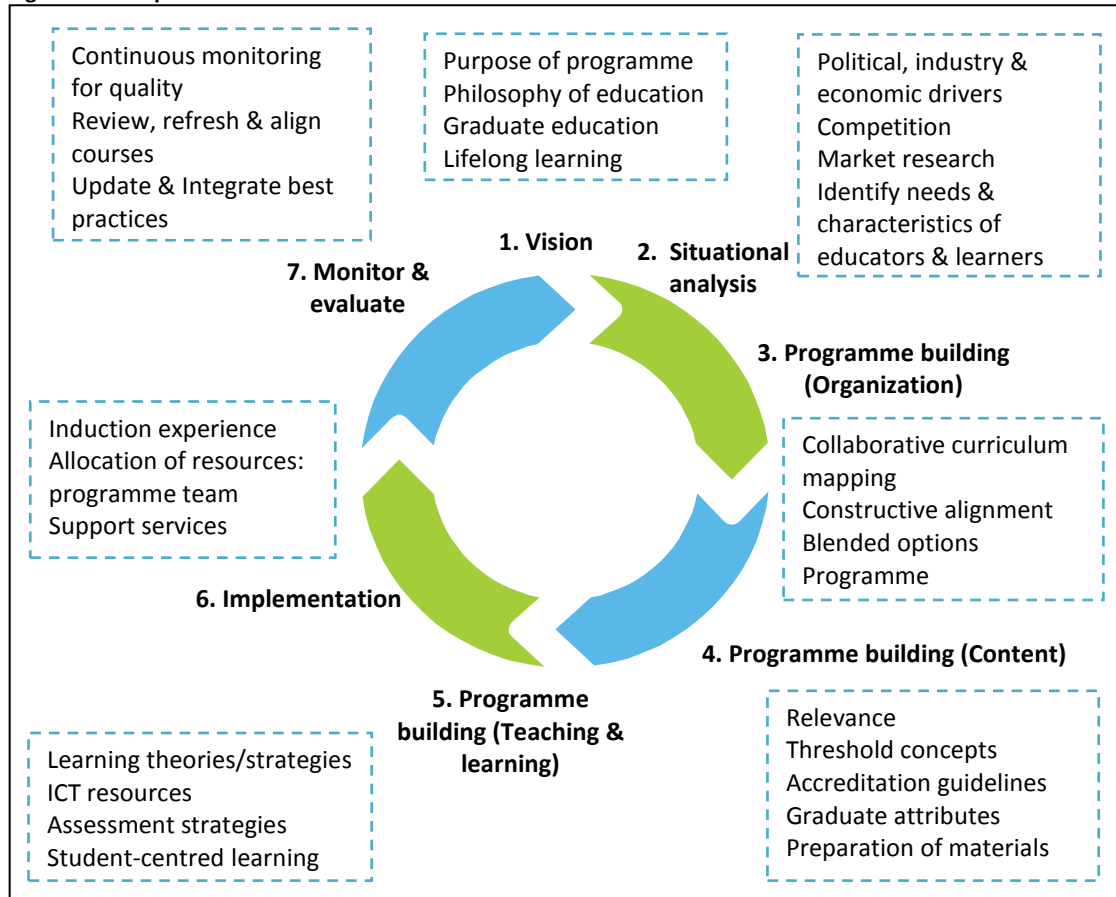
The seven elements are reorganised as: vision, situational analysis, three stages of programme development – organization, content and teaching and learning, implementation and monitor and evaluate. The first two components, 'Vision' and 'Situational analysis', somewhat like the 'Chicken and the Egg' quandary, could actually take place interchangeably. Implementation and the programme building stage, 'organization', are new additions to the set of elemental features that have emerged from the literature as significant to distance program design.

This model is designed to achieve intended learning outcomes through a continuous cyclical process of re-planning, redevelopment, and reappraisal that represents a practical planning tool for practitioners. The dimensions are intended to allow programme flexibility and multidimensionality. It allows for the dynamic introduction of new technology; a challenge for instructors who will be continuously

integrating effective pedagogical practices as ICT tools evolve. The design acknowledges that the practice of distance learning is situated and, thus, constructed in specific educational environments subject to external and internal influences that may modify and, directly or indirectly, affect the elements of the plan.

The literature provides evidence that in some cases a programme's design process may be more organised around a specific group of learners, a disciplinary niche or industry stakeholders. It may be driven by national or institutional policy, accreditation or influenced by other environmental factors such as community needs or alumni feedback. For this reason the model is not meant to be prescriptive or impose rigid standards, but rather establish a comfortable, systematic approach to programme design. Distance education is different than on-campus and literature has repeatedly shown that quality depends on a structured negotiated curriculum design process that supports well-prepared teachers, engaged students and appropriate ICT.

The next chapter, Research Methodology, is based on the understanding of underpinning literature and theory, describes the research process and completes Step One of the research questions.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

Purpose of Study

As outlined in Chapter One, the key focus of this study is to create a comprehensive curriculum framework for the design of distance graduate management degree programmes, and in doing so, support educators who are engaged in this activity and to offer guidelines to make informed decisions for the improvement of effective, sustainable programmes. This chapter describes in detail the methodology used to answer this study's overarching question: "How can a systematic approach to the effective design of distance graduate education programmes, with reference to tourism and hospitality management, be developed?"

Organisational Statement for Chapter

This chapter begins with a summary of the methodology and the paradigms of inquiry followed by the details of the design and methods for this study. The rationale behind the design choices for addressing the research questions is discussed. This chapter includes descriptions of the sampling procedure, the participants and instruments and the assumptions and limitations of the study. Processes for data collection and analysis for each of the methods used is presented and the chapter concludes with a consideration of ethical treatment of subject and the study timeline.

3.1.1 Overview and Methodology Rationale

The goal of this research methodology is to present a process that collects, presents, and analyses data fairly and accurately. This study employs an exploratory research design – or taxonomy development model (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007) in a mixed methods approach. Research design refers to a plan of action that logically links aims and philosophical assumptions to specific methods (Creswell, 2003; Crotty, 1998; Yin, 2009) to ensure the evidence obtained enables answering the research question as 'unambiguously as possible' (de Vaus, 2001). The rationale behind this mixed methods approach is supported by three factors:

1) The widespread belief that examining the problem from multiple methodological perspectives offsets the weaknesses of any one method and the propensity of a single method to bias results (N. Denzin, 2009; J. Tribe, 2001);

2) Distance higher education research is generally driven by collaborative and constructivist paradigms and thus a qualitative research emphasis is appropriate (Arbaugh & Benbunan-Fich, 2004; Leidner & Jarvenpaa, 1995);

3) Competent research methods choice addresses influences that inevitably contextualise the study (Benbunan-Fich, 2002; Bryman, Becker, & Sempik, 2008; Buchanan & Bryman, 2007).

3.2   Restatement of the Research Questions

To restate the research questions from Chapter One that dictate the steps and methods required to undertake this study are:

Step One: Creation of a Curriculum Framework

RQ 1. What key elements should a curriculum framework for distance graduate education include in terms of: educational philosophy, curriculum content, emphasis, learning strategies/pedagogy and evaluation approaches?

RQ 2. What are the pedagogical and technical dimensions of existing accredited Tourism and Hospitality Management graduate degree programmes – 100% online and blended?

Step Two: Towards the Development of a Curriculum Framework

RQ 3. How do programme directors and students perceive the learning experience of their distance programmes?

RQ 4. In the context of developing a curriculum framework, what are the practical implications of implementation that need to be considered?

Step Three: Refinement of the Curriculum Framework

Q 5. How can evaluation of existing curriculum models, the imperatives of the drivers of change and field testing, inform and lead to the development of a more dynamic, comprehensive model for graduate distance education?

Q 5a. How do existing curriculum frameworks for distance graduate tourism and hospitality management programmes compare to this proposed framework? Are there indications of need for change?

Q 5b. What are the implications for the new curriculum model?

3.2.1 The Procedural Process

A blended qualitative-quantitative research methodology is employed to progressively explore the research questions to achieve the research goals:

In Step One, Creation of a curriculum framework, a comprehensive literature review around the dimensions of the objectives of the study and the first two RQs are discussed to highlight the elements key to a curriculum framework for distance graduate management programmes. Providing the first point for triangulation, data from secondary sources is aggregated and reviewed to identify and describe the characteristics of the existing accredited distance T&HM masters degree programmes in three world regions. The study participants are drawn from this population. This step concludes by proposing a draft curriculum framework.

Step Two focuses on RQ3 and RQ4's directive to explore the perception of the distance programme experience from the viewpoint of primary stakeholders: programme directors and alumni. Step Two gathers exploratory both qualitative and quantitative data about existing programmes through semi-structured interviews and surveys, revealing insights and concerns about the distance programme experience from their perspectives. Qualitative and descriptive numerical data are coded and analysed. Triangulation enhances the credibility and dependability of the analysis (A. Martin, Fleming, Ferkins, Wiersma, & Coll, 2010), shown in Figure 3-1.

Figure 3-1: Data triangulation of distance masters degree programmes in T&HM
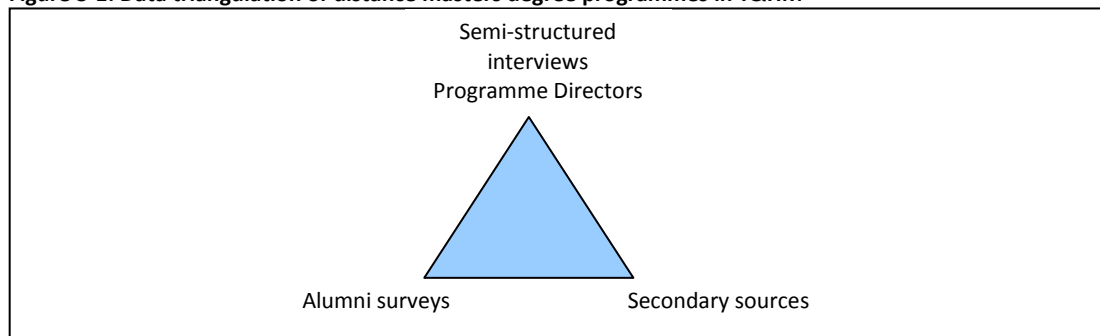
Additionally, through interviews, team meetings and interaction a pilot field test with programme team members at DIT contribute the additional validation dimension from teachers who are transitioning from traditional on-campus to a blended delivery format. Application and review of the draft model by educators in the planning process is used to identify potential practical problems and inform revision (van Teijlingen & Hundley, 2001).

Step Three, Refinement of the curriculum framework, discusses and evaluates the implications of the key findings towards the development of a generalizable curriculum framework. A visualization of the process outlined by the methodology relating the research questions and data is represented in the following flow chart:

Figure 3-2: Research process flow chart
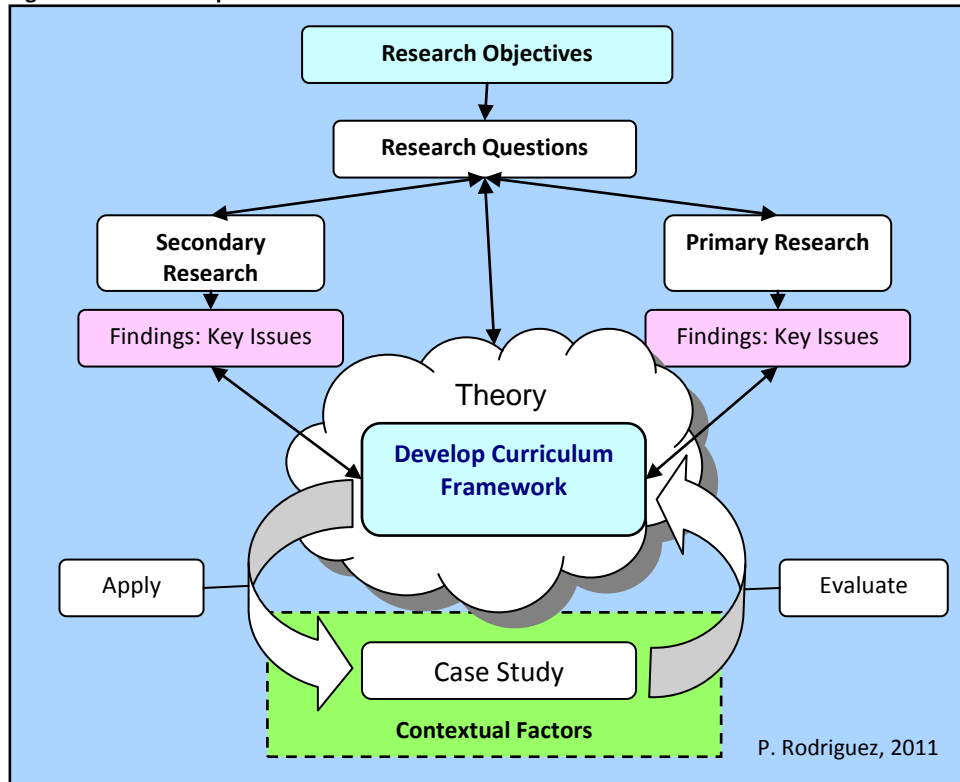
3.3   Research Design

This study's exploratory mixed methodology design approach is suggested because it progressively builds data to develop and expand theory (Fielding, 2009; Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989). In a sequential-phase exploratory design the data of the first method - the qualitative gathering of descriptive programme data – helps develop and inform the subsequent methods of data gathering – surveys and interviews of two purposefully selected stakeholder groups and field testing, that includes both qualitative and quantitative data.

This study measures the diverse attributes and processes associated with curriculum, suggesting that a broad-based research methodology and a worldview spanning three source paradigms: the positivist, the interpretive and the critical, will yield the best results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). These paradigms provide

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complementary quantitative and qualitative data that help "define variables and processes and to generate hypotheses in new areas" (Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006, p. 95). The basic research design involves mixed data that is merged sequentially, which is illustrated in Figure 3-3.

Figure 3-3: Sequence and weighting of data

QUAL	The initial qualitative data about each programme are drawn from primarily secondary sources
QUAL/quan	Semi-structured interviews and embedded questionnaires for programme directors emphasize qualitative data.
QUAN/qual	Programme graduate online surveys combine quantitative and qualitative results with unequal weighting on the quantitative data
QUAL/quan	Case study data from Add-on programme with emphasis on qualitative information

The quantitative data are intended to help generalize qualitative results with the final emphasis on a convergence of data into a cross-interpretation of results (Creswell, 2008).

The research design for this study was conceived to identify the elements key to developing a systematic curriculum framework for distance graduate programmes with specific reference to T&HM. These factors become part of a proposed framework and are then applied in a naturalistic setting for credibility (Stake, 1995, 2000). Ideally, pragmatic and authentic results are the final product of this process.

Overviews of the four main research design features follow:

3.3.1 Secondary Research

The secondary research establishes the population for this study and their essential programme characteristics. In undertaking the secondary data compilation, a search across digital and print sources were extensively reviewed to capture the complete population of distance graduate programmes in T&HM in English around the world. Multiple databases and search engines were utilized. The search emphasis was put on digital sources for two reasons: since distance programmes are web-based, they need to be easily searchable and maintain a strong web presence, and also publications cannot be as current as internet sources.

This listing represents the necessary exploration of the field of masters degree programmes in T&HM currently on offer in order to categorically identify the programmes listed as "distance". Furthermore, sorting through the sources revealed that there were programmes ineligible for the study as they were either just starting and did not have alumni who could participate in the survey or that were no longer active and were just lingering internet artefacts, e.g. The University of South Australia. Twenty institutions are identified initially, and subsequently narrowed to a final sample of twelve programmes meeting the study criteria. In spite of the care taken in compiling the data highlighted in this study, it is possible that there may be an elusive distance graduate programme that did not show up in the search, but it is unlikely that it is an accredited, established T&HM faculty. The above caveats need to be taken into consideration as a possible limitation of the present study; nevertheless, this limitation constitutes a finding in its own right, because one of the observations to be drawn from this study is the need for more transparent

international standards and visibility within T&HM distance programmes (Naidoo, 2009).

Pedagogical typologies and characteristics emerge from this initial documentation of distance programmes and contribute to the formation of the draft curriculum framework. Cumulatively the secondary research forms the first leg of the triangulation methodology that converges with primary data.

3.3.2 Primary Research

Primary research is focused on capturing first hand data from programme directors and alumni of distance programmes and the case study programme to provide descriptive data of each programme. This step requires adapting existing instruments to create both a protocol for interviewing programme directors and case study team members, and also an online survey instrument for alumni of distance T&HM graduate programmes. The participating institutions are listed later in this chapter under Programme Population. This is a first time systematic identification and attempted survey of this international group of programmes and participants. A detailed description of the methodology used for data collection in the following Research Procedures section.

3.3.3 Case Testing Procedure

The type of research questions posed is a prime determinant in selecting methodology. A case study approach is a preferred strategy when a 'how' question is posed, such as "How can a systematic approach to the effective design of distance graduate education programmes be developed?" Also a criterion is whether the research focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context, which

this study satisfies (Yin, 2009). The case study method also requires sufficient data collection to understand significant characteristics of the case and collection in its natural context (Bassey, 2000a). This small case study achieves that through an in-depth examination of the programme, programme documents, its institutional context, participation in staff meetings and interviews. It is a research approach to provide proof of concept and practicality. In this instance, it allows the researcher to actively test the proposed elements of the curriculum framework with practitioners in T&HM education.

The conversion of a traditional on-campus programme to online format is a prevalent form of programme development yet has received little research attention (Kampov-Polevoi, 2010). Additionally, although there are many conceptual frameworks for online and blended learning in the management education area, only a few are tested (Arbaugh et al., 2009). Several attempts have been made to understand and represent the use of distance teaching and learning in T&HM (Braun & Hollick, 2006; Haven & Botteril, 2002; Sigala, 2001, 2002), but Cantoni, Kalbaska, & Inversini's (2009) recent review found a complete absence of research within the eLearning community on the tourism subject thus making this case application a timely contribution to educational research.

The case study centres on a group of practitioners who are part of DIT's School of Hospitality Management and Tourism and represents the final stage of the triangulated data collection process. The one-year Level 8 Honours degree Add-on programme enrols about 30 top-tier students annually and serves three streams of specialisation: hospitality, tourism and leisure. The programme team is taking steps

towards flexible delivery options for their students. With the goal of applying the draft curriculum framework to their design process, the Add-on programme team became participants in testing the proposed curriculum elements.

Soliciting opinions and comments from instructional staff provides an additional dimension to this study's programme design perspective. It is a type of hypothesis testing and opens dialogue in a collaborative setting. It is an addition to an integrated triangulation method, which is not an end in itself, but it does mitigate the limitations that result from using a single method and ensure internal and external validity of the findings (N. K. Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Some unknown part or aspect of the results obtained may be attributable to the method used in obtaining the results (Macauley, 2001). Praxis brings together theory and practice in an iterative, constructivist approach. Field testing involves being directly involved with programme team members to probe their perspectives on their programme strengths and how the programme can best evolve into a blended format.

Like action research, there is not one "right way" to field test, but it does bring "a quality of engagement, of curiosity, of question-posing through gathering evidence and testing practices" by employing many ways of knowing (Reason & Bradbury, 2006, p. xx) or as the curriculum theorist Stenhouse observed,

> "The crucial point is that the proposal is not to be regarded as an unqualified recommendation but rather as a provisional specification claiming no more than to be worth putting to the test of practice."(1975, p. 142)

Capitalizing on programme members' enthusiasm for their programme and their perceived opportunities to initiate progressive teaching and learning is an 'appreciative' mode of inquiry (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003). This positive

orientation to responding to development issues is strongly values-oriented and consistent with this study's research paradigm. Overall, the case approach adds a humanistic wholeness and integrity that effectively mixes data from multiple sources and perspectives contributing to a more complete picture of a comprehensive curriculum framework (Sturman, 1994).

3.4   Research Procedures

3.4.1 Populations and Samples: Distance Programmes and Alumni

To gain a balanced perspective of the distance graduate degree programme experience, it was necessary to collect information from two discrete groups of stakeholders: programme directors and students who have graduated from distance programmes. Programme directors have a perspective of their distance programmes that puts them in the position of seeing the broad curriculum landscape, thus their input is of primary importance. Seeing the programme from the other viewpoint is the student, who is best positioned to comment on the user side of the programme delivery. The two groups enable the researcher to compare and contrast responses across institutions about how the curriculum is constructed and experienced.

The premise arising from the nature of the research questions suggests using different types of protocols, both quantitative and qualitative, to elicit complementary sets of responses from each group to form a more complete understanding of the distance graduate management curriculum. One of the challenges of mixed methodology is the consequence of having different samples and different sample sizes when converging the different data sets. Different sample sizes are inherent in mixed method design because qualitative and quantitative data

are collected for different purposes, e.g. deepening and descriptive vs. generalization (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007).

Sampling Strategy

The programme directors and alumni who participated in this study are from a sample of accredited masters degree programmes in T&HM that are conducted in English and delivered by institutions in Australia, Canada, England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and the United States. The distance graduate management programmes under the general categorization of tourism and/or hospitality management make up the complete population. Another criterion for inclusion in the population for this study requires the programme to have been in existence long enough to have graduates. A thorough review of secondary sources initially revealed twenty programmes that apparently offered a distance graduate degree in the T&HM field and had graduates. The sampling strategy was simplified by the fact that twenty is a manageable number of 'eligible' programmes, thus the population became the target sample. Determining this sample necessitated substantial foundational research. This work began in January 2007 and continued to be updated until actual data collection began in April 2008.

Sorting and Defining the Programmes

An important part of the process was to establish boundaries around what exactly is meant by a graduate programme in T&HM. There are a variety of degrees, for example the executive certificate degree for professionals in the field, but this study is limited to accredited masters level degree programmes.

Also to further delineate the population for this study, the programme title either includes Tourism and/or Hospitality or demonstrates that it is primarily

concerned with this area. This therefore excludes programmes that are, for example, solely Food science, Nutrition, Culinary arts, Food safety, Environmental health, Recreation or Leisure studies, Sports business or Sports management, Human kinetics or Kinesiology, Gastronomy, or Merchandising.

Tourism and Hospitality Management (T&HM) represents distinct types of professional programmes within business and management education (Wood & Brotherton, 2008). It is the academic study of the running of hotels, restaurants, and travel and tourism-related businesses. As business-led programmes, they are explicitly blended with the social sciences in order to provide business and management training grounded in a wider social scientific education to satisfy the needs of employers (Bibbings, 2005; Stone, 2009). It is a discipline that derives its principles, competencies and skills to be taught from disciplines outside of it (Frechtling, 2010). Business competencies include succeeding in a competitive environment, but in T&HM universal knowledge of sustainability and social impacts are key concepts (Flohr, 2001; Kinnaird, Kothari, & Hall, 1994). Many programs emphasize the message that graduates will not operate or manage within a social vacuum and will manage businesses within the confines of a global village with consequences and responsibilities (Stone, 2009). The challenge of business education is its provision to replicate the diverse competencies required for successful business activity for its sector (Horsely, 2009).

Within the T&HM concentration there generally can be found such degrees as these in Table 3-1:

Table 3-1: T&HM degrees and specialties

Degree	Examples of degree related specialties
Food Management and Operations	Food science, Culinary arts, Food and beverage operations, Nutrition
Lodging Operations	Hotel operations, Resort management, Lodging management, Financial management and cost control for hospitality organisations
Global Tourism	Travel and tourism management, Tourism analysis, Cultural and heritage tourism
Sustainable Tourism	Natural destination management, Responsible tourism, Green tourism and Eco-tourism
Tourist Attractions Management	Heritage attractions, Arts and cultural attractions, Industrial attractions, City based attractions, Retail attractions, Natural attractions
Entertainment Management	Theme park management, Theatre management, Cinema management, Museology, Live music and Music festival management
Event Management	Hospitality sales, Catering management, Hospitality marketing management, Sports management

The challenge was to isolate the population of T&HM concentration programmes from similar, sometimes overlapping programmes.

To identify a comprehensive listing of distance graduate programmes in T&HM, it became necessary to review both public, private, not-for-profit and for-profit academic institutions from fifteen different countries. This involved checking and cross-checking for accuracy. The population of distance masters degree programmes in T&HM is not found in any one listing or database. Major sources of listings came from UNWTO, CHRIE, international higher education directories, the accreditation list for the United Kingdom, Hobson's Good Guides for Australia, the Sloan Consortium and other online listings. The internet provided the primary means of searching and there proved to be many misleading roads to finding the actual programmes. Some websites listed programmes that were no longer active and other websites described programmes that were not actually distance.

A total of 184 accredited masters degree programmes in T&HM conducted in English from 112 institutions of higher education were closely examined to find distance masters degree programmes. A geographic breakdown of the overall T&HM programmes is presented in Figure 3-4.
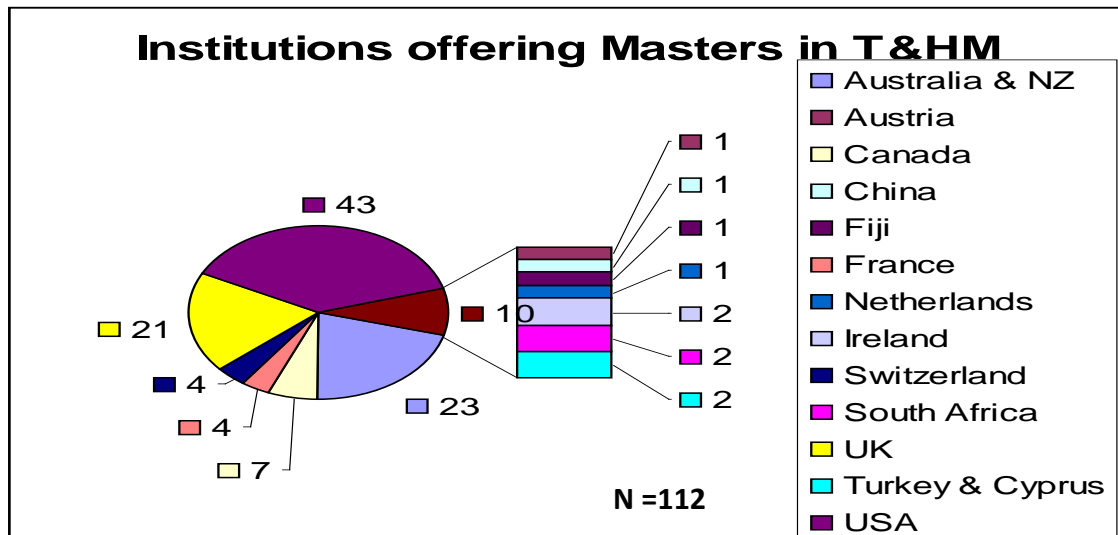
The general assumption is that a programme's web pages provide the most up-to-date and accessible programme information. This appeared to be true in most cases, but data mining to identify delivery format or other programme basics was often hampered by websites that combined poor navigation with lack of content. When it was impossible to confirm accuracy of online information it was necessary to follow-up with personal correspondence in many cases to find or confirm facts.

Programme sample

In the process of investigation it became evident that some changes in the nature of the population of programmes had taken place or were being considered by institutions. Between January 2007 and May 2008 some programmes, upon enquiry, were discontinued even though from their websites they appeared to be active. The changes were relatively modest and did not impact on the overall

population to any great extent. As previously stated, this process initially revealed

20 distance masters programme population that at first glance appeared to fit the

search criteria. Table 3-2 is the overall listing of what was termed "distance"

programmes in T&HM:

Table 3-2: Overall population of 'distance' masters degree programmes in T&HM

	Name of Degree Programme	Institution, Department and Location
1	MSc Food Science & Nutrition w/ emphasis in Hotel and Restaurant Management	Auburn University Nutrition and Food Sciences Distance Learning and Outreach Technology Distance Education Degree Programmes in Human Sciences Auburn, AL, USA
2	MBA (Tourism and Hospitality Management)	Australian Institute of Business Administration Adelaide, South Australia
3	MA in Tourism Planning & Development	California Institute of Pennsylvania Cal U Global Online California, PA, USA
4	Master of Ecotourism	Charles Sturt University Faculty of Science and Agriculture School of Environmental Sciences Wagga Wagga, NSW, Australia
5	MBA Concentration in Hospitality & Tourism MBA Concentration in Sport Management	Columbia Southern University School of Business Orange Beach, AL, USA
6	MSc Hospitality Management MSc Hospitality Management Executive Distance programme	Florida International University School of Hospitality and Tourism Management North Miami Beach, FL, USA
7	MBA concentration in Hospitality & Tourism (HAT)	Florida State University Dedman School of Hospitality The College of Business Tallahassee, FL, USA

8	Masters of Tourism Administration • Event & meeting management • Sport management • Sustainable destination management • Individualized studies	George Washington University Department of Tourism & Hospitality Management School of Business Washington DC., USA
9	MA Tourism & Leisure Management Development (Athens)	Liverpool John Moores University Faculty of Education, Community and Leisure Liverpool, England, UK
10	MBA Hospitality Management MBA eTourism Management	Queen Margaret University The School of Business, Enterprise and Management Tourism, Hospitality and Events Edinburgh, Scotland, UK
11	MSc. International Hospitality Management	Sheffield Hallam University Faculty of Organisation & Management School of Leisure and Food Management Sheffield, England, UK
12	MBA Hotel and Tourism Management Master of Convention and Event Management	Southern Cross University School of Tourism and Hospitality Management Division of Business Tweed Heads, NSW, Australia
13	MBA Hospitality and Tourism Management	Strayer University Lorton, VA, USA
14	Executive MBA Hospitality & Tourism Management	University of Guelph's College of Management & Economics College of Biological Science School of Hotel and Food Administration Guelph, Ontario, Canada
15	Masters of Tourism	University of Otago School of Business Department of Tourism Dunedin, New Zealand
16	Master of Hospitality Administration Executive online programme	University of Nevada, Las Vegas Harrah Hotel College Las Vegas, NV, USA
17	MSc Hospitality Management	University of North Texas School of Merchandising and Hospitality Management
18	MBA International Hotel & Restaurant Management	University of South Australia International Graduate School of Business In partnership with Le Cordon Bleu

19	MSc Tourism Management MSc International Hotel Management	University of Surrey School of Management Guildford, Surrey, England, UK
20	MSc Cultural Management	University of Ulster Faculty of Business & Management School of Tourism & Hospitality Management Ulster, Northern Ireland, UK

These programmes made up the core population from which programme directors and alumni could be selected. Sixteen of the twenty programmes were public institutions and four institutions were private. Of the four private institutions, three were for-profit and one was non-profit. The smallest institution has a total student enrolment of just over 5,000 (Queen Margaret University, Scotland, United Kingdom) and the largest institution has a total student enrolment of over 40,000 students (Florida State University, United States of America). The extensive "Report of Accredited Universities offering Online Masters Programmes" can be made available, which includes a complete definition of search criteria and full listing of programmes and programme details for available online masters programs 2007-2008.

From the 20 possible institutions that offered a distance masters in T&HM identified out of the 112 potential institutions, one programme at the University of South Australia programme was discontinued during the time span of this study and removed from the population leaving 19 programmes.

A key criterion for selecting the research population from the greater number of T&HM masters programmes is that masters programmes considered in the final grouping must be conducted in a primarily distance learning format. There are programmes teaching in traditional classroom format, but based on a "distance" campus away from the university centre with instruction that is face-to-face

traditional classroom delivery. Data from such programmes would not contribute to the goals of the research focusing on programme attributes and innovations specific to the 'distance experience'. Of the 19, two of these programmes were on-campus programmes offered at overseas sites, thus they represent more of an on-campus experience for students than a distance experience. This eliminated the programmes from Liverpool John Moores University, whose programmes are taught in classrooms in Athens, Greece and similarly, the University of Surrey offers distance classes in overseas classroom locations: Mauritius, Barbados and Athens.

Of the remaining 17 institutions offering qualifying distance programmes, the Masters of Tourism degree programme offered at the University of Otago did not meet the selection criteria as it is a masters by research-only programme and, as such, would not contribute to the curriculum framework for distance teaching and learning.

A final third round of selection refinement was a self-deselection process. From these 16, four institutions either did not grant an interview or did not respond to requests for inclusion in the study. Although available secondary source information is included in this study, primary data from interview or survey was not possible. For these reasons the following institutions were not included in the final list of those programme directors and alumni who participated: The Australian Institute of Business Administration, Australia; The California University of Pennsylvania, USA; Strayer University, USA; and the University of North Texas, USA. It should also be noted that there was a prevalent sense of secrecy among these programs about their proprietary nature. Some directors alluded to their belief that

revealing their "trade secrets" might reduce their competitive edge, or perhaps the fear was exposure of programme weaknesses.

The remaining 12 institutions comprise the final working sample providing the foundation of primary data for this research. Also note that if programme directors were not participants in the interview process, then there was no possibility of establishing contact with their alumni.

Figure 3-5: Final institution sample by Carnegie typologies

Figure 3-5: Final institution sample by Carnegie typologies
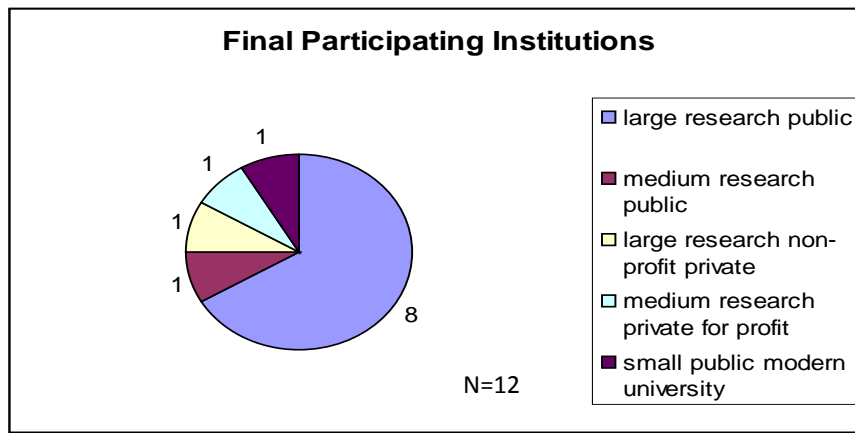
Geographic Distribution

The distribution of the final 12 participating programmes closely matches the geographic distribution of masters programmes globally, simulating a reasonable geographic representation of the larger population.

Figure 3-6: Final Sample Institutions by Geographic Distribution
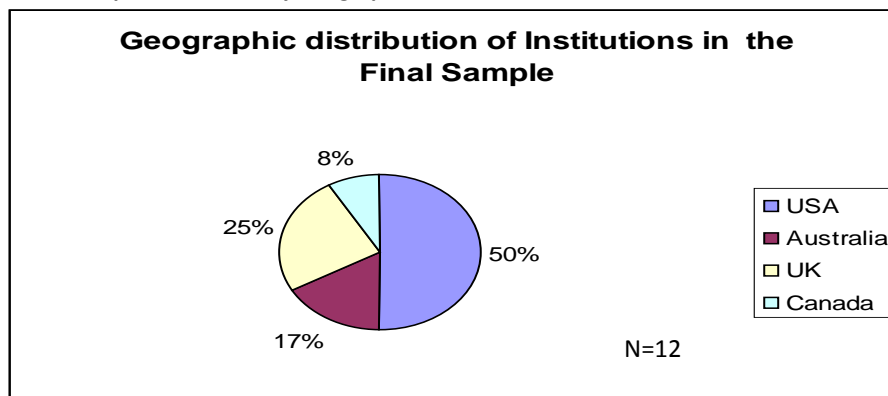
Thus, the final sample of institutions who contributed primary data in the form of interview, questionnaire or student survey, and which complied with the selection criteria specified for this study was narrowed down to a dozen. Table 3-3 lists the institutions and key distance programme attributes including the institution's distance education centre, if any, as available from secondary information.

Table 3-3: Final sample distance graduate programmes

	Degree programme title	Delivery format	Distance learning centre	Institution and location
1	MSc Food Science & Nutrition w/ emphasis in Hotel & Restaurant Management	Online with final presentation on campus	Office of Distance Learning & Outreach Technology	**Auburn University** Auburn, AL, USA
2	Master of Ecotourism	Online with optional F2F courses	The Distance Education programme	**Charles Sturt University** Wagga Wagga, NSW, Australia
3	MBA Concentration in Hospitality & Tourism or Sport Management	100% Online	Completely online university	**Columbia Southern University** Orange Beach, AL, USA
4	MSc Hospitality Management Or Executive Distance programme	100% Online, cohorts, industry internship (not for Executive)	FIU Online	**Florida International University** North Miami Beach, FL, USA
5	MBA concentration in Hospitality & Tourism	100% Online	FSU Online	**Florida State University** Tallahassee, FL, USA
6	Masters of Tourism Administration	Online with residencies & internship, cohorts	Information and Systems Services/Black board	**George Washington University** Washington DC, USA
7	MBA Hospitality Management MBA eTourism Management	100% Online	WebCT and Information Services	**Queen Margaret University** Edinburgh, Scotland, UK
8	MSc. International Hospitality Management	Online with optional F2F orientation	In-school media department – (now	**Sheffield Hallam University** Sheffield, England, UK

			outsourced to RDI)	
9	MBA Hotel & Tourism Management Master of Convention & Event Management	Online with option to attend campus courses	Specifics unknown – heavy involvement with distance education	**Southern Cross University** Tweed Heads, NSW, Australia
10	Executive MBA Hospitality & Tourism Management	Online with residencies	Office of Open Learning – course designers	**University of Guelph** Guelph, Ontario, Canada
11	Master of Hospitality Administration Executive online programme	100% Online	WebCampus	**University of Nevada, Las Vegas** Las Vegas, NV, USA
12	MSc Cultural Management	Online with optional F2F orientation	Campus One virtual campus	**University of Ulster** Ulster, Northern Ireland, UK

In terms of accreditation, all but one program are accredited through regional, state ministries of education or the equivalent:

- The Australian programs are publicly-funded, state accredited institutions under the Department of Education, Science and Training with professional body affiliations.

- The Canadian institution is accredited by the Association of Universities and Colleges in Canada (AUCC) and is provincially regulated and funded.

- The institutions within the United Kingdom are each accredited by the Privy Council, a state accrediting body, and affiliated with the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), UK, and professional bodies, e.g. Tourism Management Institute, Association of Business Schools, The Hotel and Catering International Management Association.

- The public and private institutions in the United States are regionally accredited and associated with professional bodies. The for-profit Columbia Southern University accreditation is from DETC (Distance Education & Training Council) and CHEA (Council for Higher Education Accreditation), non-profit organizations for quality assurance in higher education.

To complete the data on each programme the programme director was requested to participate in a semi-structured interview to complete the gaps in the programme profile, history and mission and to explore more deeply the programme structure, ethos and experience. The Programme Director occupies a central position in coordinating and managing the programme and was thus ideally placed to assist in providing feedback essential to this study.

3.4.2 Characterizing the Programmes: Research Question Two

The second RQ probes the pedagogical and technical characteristics of existing programmes. In reviewing the existing distance masters programmes in T&HM, they clearly represented a wide variety of delivery methods, content and philosophies. Many websites required drilling through many web pages to find specifics and then only to find details about actual programme delivery method usually missing. Reviewing the variety of programme attributes seemed confusing and lacking consistency, for example required credit hours or courses varied by programme and institution. The details offered by each programme on their websites emphasize different features such as noted in Table 3-4 below.

Table 3-4: Variables among programme characteristics

Nature of programme characteristic	Specific programme element
Convenience factors	Fast degree completion, open enrolment or ability to switch to campus from online
Quality elements	Same instructors online or on-campus, cohorts, value-added external partnerships, residencies, digitized or extensive course materials or resources, multimedia
Programme emphasis	Specific degree granted, Scope – broadening or deepening, Executive programme, niche subject area
Requirements	Thesis or professional paper - optional or required, group work, induction, internship hours
Financial	Programme cost, pay for programme "up front" or

considerations	incrementally, loans available for tuition, Programmes can be more, less or as expensive as on-campus

Even though each distance masters programme appears to serve varying perspectives of student needs and outcomes, reflection of their characteristics inspired a means for comparing them from a theoretical and practical perspective.

Typologies

Consistent with the theoretical lens of appreciative inquiry and based on distance education typologies (Katz, 2002; Lemak & Miskin, 1995; Miller, 2000), it is possible to sort the distance programmes into four functional categories of programme similarities:

- One-to-One;
- Platform & Interactivity;
- Flexible Combinations and
- Multimedia & Community

Some of the programmes could fall into more than one of these categories, as they offer their programmes in a variety of formats. However even though some programmes tailor the delivery methods to suit the individual student preference, the typologies are suggested to help visualize the general programme approach.

The One-to-One grouping is built on a "Classroom of One" structure. In a sense this is a modernized version of the first generation distance programmes, the correspondence-type course, where interaction is non-existent or minimal in terms of student/student or social aspects such as orientation or residency. The emphasis is on one-to-one between the tutor and the student. This format can permit the greatest amount of autonomy for the student, such as the one-year thesis-only Masters of Tourism degree programme offered by a medium-sized public university

where each student works with the guidance of a tutor. It consists of the preparation and submission of a thesis that embodies the results of supervised research (U of Otago website).The student, however, must work independently without contact with other students.

The Platform and Interactivity category identifies the use of a variety of new ICT used with a web-based course platform, such as BlackBoard. The platform affords the use of synchronous or asynchronous discussions that enables; student-instructor, student-content and student-student interactivity in various degrees (De Lange, Suwardy, & Mavondo, 2003). This emphasis on technology combinations is the core programme delivery strategy.

The Flexible Combinations grouping is a category that frames a wide variety of delivery and course structure options. The guiding strategy is to accommodate student access with a broad selection of course delivery options and technology that facilitates their learning experience that is the most convenient for them. One example of innovative programme structure is an MBA programme at a private accredited HE institution offering one intensive subject per month. Students have the possibility of finishing their masters in a year taking twelve modules and both distance and campus students interact in online eStudy groups.

The Multimedia and Community grouping is similar in that it embraces innovative teaching and learning technology, but also includes an element of face-to-face experience in their programmes, i.e. blended learning. The key concept for this grouping is that developing a sense of community is important and a central part of the curriculum design strategy.

Table 3-5 lists the distance T&HM programmes available via distance as of December 31, 2008 distributed by programme delivery typology.

Table 3-5: Typologies: Distribution of distance programmes by delivery format

One-to-One	Platform & Interactivity	Flexible Combinations	Multimedia & Community
• Auburn U • Sheffield Hallam U • U of Otago • Charles Sturt U	• Australian Institute of Business Administration • Florida International U • Florida State U • Queen Margaret U • CA U of PA • U of North Texas • U of Ulster	1. Southern Cross U 2. Columbia Southern U 3. Strayer U 4. U Nevada Las Vegas	• George Washington U • U of Guelph

Note: Of the original twenty academic institutions, three have been removed: Liverpool John Moores and the University of Surrey were omitted as their distance programmes were distance in name only. Their programme delivery methods are traditional on-campus classes delivered at institutions away from their main campus locations, e.g. Athens, Greece. The University of South Australia is not included as its distance masters programme was discontinued before December 2008.

All four formats allow differing amounts of interactivity and programme flexibility. Using the primary conceptual attributes underpinning transactional distance theory: dialogue and flexibility or structure, the relationship of the distance programmes can be conceptually plotted in quadrants. The Dialogue axis and Flexibility or Structure axis represent a theoretical interpretation of how the programmes might be placed on a cross-sectional scatter plot. The programme loci are generalizations for the purposes of visualizing the programme characteristics as they relate to each other through the theoretical lens of Transactional Distance

theory. Figure 3-7 illustrates the 17 programmes offering a distance masters in
T&HM in this paradigm.

Figure 3-7: Programme characteristics: Transactional Distance Quadrants
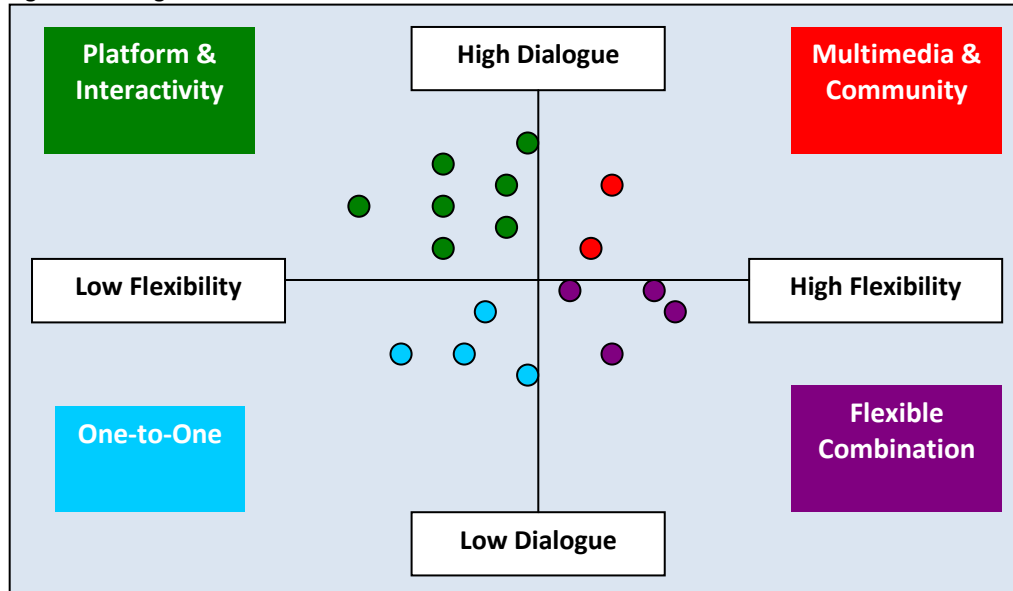
This plotting may prove to be a useful means for interpreting the available
secondary data where each programme demonstrates highly individualized
characteristics and there is incomplete or inconsistent data that might otherwise
enable easier matching between characteristics. The Multimedia and Community
combination of programme elements would appear to most successfully comply
with the quality criteria of having high flexibility and dialogue (Millson & Wilemon,
2008). Transactional distance theory suggests that this ideal programme structure
correlates positively with student success. Additional examples of programme
variables by theoretical construct are found in Table 3-6:

Table 3-6: Programme characteristics in terms of flexibility and dialogue

Theoretical dimension	Programme characteristics
Flexibility	Length of programme, number of weeks to complete module, combining on-campus/distance option, programme start times, flexibility of module options, innovative use of technical, educational and administrative components, readiness to change, assessment and media variety

Dialogue	Orientation, residency or capstone. Interactivity – includes media selected and student/teacher interactivity, use of cohorts, blended learning, assessments that develop community such as presentations or group work.

3.4.3 Student sample

Graduates of all twelve current distance graduate programmes in Tourism and Hospitality Management are the population for this study. To comply with survey guidelines found in the literature (Iarossi, 2006), the population eligible to be tested are only those who have recently graduated from a programme, that is to say, not longer than two years ago. This delimitation of the population is for two main reasons: recall and relevance. After a period of time, respondents are likely to lose accurate recall of an experience (Iarossi, 2006) and also their educational experience will seem less relevant to their current lives as time passes. Their responses may be biased or less spontaneous.

At the end of the interviews, each of the programme directors was asked to facilitate the distribution of the online survey request to the programme alumni through their listserves or alumni database, or if it was more convenient, to forward email contact information for programme graduates that could be contacted. This request was carried out at their discretion. Some programme directors invited their alumni to participate in the survey via online newsletter, or personally sent emails to alumni or other means that they felt protected student anonymity. Several directors bluntly stated that they would not have time to find or contact alumni for the survey. By December 31, 2008 there were 94 completed surveys from students that represented 5 institutions across the US and Canada.

3.4.4 Assumptions and Limitations

Assumptions

This study aims to create a practical and generalizable framework for the design of distance programmes. It is assumed that the reader understands that the nature of distance learning is that it is highly influenced by rapidly changing technological trends. Future developments in ICT are unknown, thus making generalizing from present day data more of an informed vision of 'what may be'. The study adopts the strategic approach of emphasizing enduring values and traits such as 'student motivation' and less on 'novelty' features such as specific software or electronic course platforms to increase generalizability shelf life (Schofield, 2000a).

Limitations

Evaluation instruments are selectively constructed to suit the research questions. The researcher needs to be aware that in construction, it is inevitable to lack perfect congruence between the conceptual, or 'latent', criteria, which are actually crucial to the curriculum, and those items chosen to be assessed, the 'actual'. As with any instrument measuring specific criteria, this 'criterion problem' means that the evaluation will inevitably pick up information on extraneous and irrelevant factors, 'contamination', while at the same time failing to detect factors that are relevant but latent, a 'deficiency' (Austin & Villanova, 1992; Starr-Glass, 2005). Well-designed methods minimize this effect.

Sample selection is critical to the validity of the information that represents the populations being studied. The nature of the prosecution of the research for this study presented obstacles to obtaining representative samples of alumni of distance

graduate programmes that could not be compensated for by research design. The alumni experience may be portrayed in an overly positive light, and possible reasons include:

- Self-selected students motivated to respond to the survey are more likely to have been satisfied with their programme experience;
- Student respondents were hand-picked by the programme director to participate;
- Effect of time on recollection of programme experience after receiving diploma; and
- Non-response bias from programmes unrepresented by student surveys.

Thus, acknowledging this constraint on the generalizability and usability of the responses, the ability to draw inferential conclusions about the experience of the larger population of distance masters degree programme graduates is restricted, however, the non-representative data can still be useful with careful consideration of bias (Grapentine, 2006).

3.5   *Instrumentation*

There are two different data collection tools: one for each sample group. The evaluation instruments incorporate both practice and theory from the fields of instructional design, cognitive and adult learning theory, and distance learning theory. The instruments each contribute a different dimension of information, answer different research questions and also overlap on some questions. Instrument design focuses on gaining a deeper understanding of distance graduate programmes curricula and how they could be improved in the future.

Description of the Instruments

Survey length and question composition are significant as they impact response and completion rate (Ting & Tourangeau, 2008). Research shows that completion rates for surveys declines as the number of questions increases (Fowler, 1995). For this reason both instruments were optimized to yield the greatest amount of information pertinent to the curriculum framework in the least amount of time.

The Interview Protocol

The interview protocol has six sections of questions. Each section has key questions, some qualitative, others quantitative, that can be prioritized by the interviewer depending on the amount of time available for the interview. Collegial review of the instrument indicated high face validity. A highly qualified sample group was invited to pilot the instrument. This group was representative of the population but did not include respondents in the research sample. Pilot respondents provided feedback on syntax, word usage, and comprehensive coverage of content. This is described in greater detail in the next section.

Alumni Questionnaire

The alumni questionnaire was limited to 30 questions to minimize user fatigue; some questions required Likert scale responses and others open-ended text responses. An online format was the most user-friendly and practical way to administer the survey to internet-savvy participants who were located around the world. Again, a collegial review of the instrument fine-tuned the syntax, word usage and content. Subsequent pilot testing was administered to distance graduate programme students who were outside of the research population.

Reliability for single test administration was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha. For data that has a multidimensional nature, Cronbach's alpha is usually low. Although Cronbach's alpha is not technically a statistical test - it is a coefficient of reliability (UCLA, 2008). Results indicated high reliability for the Alumni experience survey (see Table 3-7) and deemed to be an acceptable measure for internal consistency.

Table 3-7: Alumni survey - Reliability of instrument

Instrument	Alpha	Number of Items
Alumni experience survey	.862	30

How the instruments were designed

The purpose of the instruments is to inform the design of the new curriculum framework for distance graduate programmes, and specifically to answer as many of the research questions as possible. The most important aspect to be researched is to determine which characteristics of the various programmes contribute the most to students' perceived satisfaction and learning outcomes.

The literature review suggests that there are three broad areas that, when measured, hold the most potential for explaining the differences in course outcomes: individual participant differences, course structure and assessment differences, and differences in course participant interactions (J. B. Arbaugh & B. Rau, L., 2007). With this in mind, both the interview protocol for programme administrators and the alumni questionnaire were developed primarily from two tested instruments.

The multi-dimensional questionnaire developed by Liu, Magjuka and Lee (2006) was administered to online professional MBA students at a "top-ranked"

Midwestern business school in the United States. Their instrument modified from Kreijns, Kirschner, Jochem & Van Buuren (2004) and Towell & Towell (as cited in Kreijns et al., 2004) measured for students' sense of community, the effectiveness of instructors' online facilitation, social presence, perceived technology effectiveness, and perceived satisfaction overall. This questionnaire featured Likert-type questions about student perceptions and attitudes toward pedagogical, technical, and social aspects of learning online. The internal reliability of the survey, Cronbach's alpha, was reported at .89.

The other foundational instrument used is designed by Arbaugh and Rau who developed a survey to measure MBA students in 40 different web-based courses over a period of two years, 2000-2002 (J. B. Arbaugh & B. Rau, L., 2007). This instrument measured perceived student learning and delivery method satisfaction, which are key areas to understand in the construction of a distance graduate curriculum framework. The study demonstrated a strong correlation between the test variables of "perceived learning" and "learner-instructor interaction" ($r = .69$, $p < .001$). "Media variety" and "perceived satisfaction" was also strongly correlated: ($r = .78$, $p < .001$) as a relationship that contributed to delivery method satisfaction.

The interview protocol for programme directors and the questionnaire for programme alumni both have questions drawn from these two reliable instruments and have overlapping questions as described in detail in the Crosswalk Tables found in the Appendix. The programme director interviews differ from the student survey in that there are areas that pertain specifically to the administrative experience, alumni questionnaires target feedback about the student experience and the case study interviews emphasizes teaching and learning. Both the interview protocol and

questionnaire went through a developmental process resulting in the final instruments.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol addresses RQ 1 regarding "What key elements should a curriculum framework for distance graduate management education include in terms of: philosophy, content, emphasis, learning strategies, learning environments, delivery systems and feedback/assessment strategies?" The interview questions first complete the descriptive data on each programme to answer RQ 2: "What are the pedagogical and technological characteristics of existing accredited T&HM graduate programmes – 100% online and blended?" and also to probe deeper into the seven elements of curriculum design and satisfying RQ 1. This interview protocol is designed to gather both narrative and numeric data.

Pilot Testing the Interview Protocol

The first primary data gathering instrument used in this study is the Interview Protocol for Programme Directors or Administrators (See Appendix). The questions in the interview protocol are adapted from Walker's Rationale (D. F. Walker & Soltis, 2004) , the JISC report (Britain & Liber, 2004), the student-oriented instruments by Liu, Magjuka and Lee (2006) and Arbaugh and Rau (J. B. Arbaugh & B. Rau, L.). Before using the interview questionnaire with programme directors who were on the final refined list, pilot interviews using the instrument were conducted to determine:

- How long would the complete interview take?
- Was the interview too long? Too short?
- Were there any confusing questions? Concepts? Assumptions?

- Did the order of the questions flow well, thus facilitating a natural conversation?

- Was the resulting information useful?

Over a period of two months, starting in February 2008, the draft interview was pre-tested by four senior-level educators. These educators are uniquely qualified to take part in the pilot test because they are or have been administrators of distance masters degree programmes in T&HM. Each of these educators graciously agreed to be interviewed with the understanding that they would be providing feedback about the content and logical flow of the questions. Their critique shaped the final interview document. It became apparent from the trial interviews, shown in Table 3-8, that the protocol would have to be flexible to accommodate the programme directors' available interview time. The resulting interview protocol was in a six part format:

1. About the Person providing data
2. Programme Background
3. Student Level
4. Programme Ethos and Emphasis
5. Teaching, Learning, Design and Assessment
6. Lessons learned

Each of these parts could be adjusted to maximize the available interview time. The pre-testing of the interview protocol, shown in Table 3-8, was essential to grasping the importance of creating a flexible, prioritized interview format.

Table 3-8: Pilot testing the interview protocol with experts

Pilot Interview date	Length of Time	Comment	Participant
Feb 13, 2008	60 min	Need to drastically shorten to keep the interview time closer to 30 minutes.	ML, Orlando, FL
Feb 20, 2008	30 min	Interview time was perfect, but questions need to be prioritized	TH, Las Vegas, NV

		to capture key concepts. Interviewee answers were brief and succinct and had carefully prepared by previewing the protocol.	
Feb 26, 2008	45 min	It was a struggle to get through all of the questions. Too long still. Need to revise. Some questions about philosophy were confusing. Add a glossary to the appendix.	LM, Nassau, The Bahamas
Mar 28, 2008	25 min	We could not finish the interview due to interviewee's commitments, but the interview went well. The questions stimulated a lively and interesting flow of answers. I still need to simplify many questions into a Likert scale response to speed up data gathering.	GS, New York, NY

In the end, there was a set number of questions to be answered in sentence form and a series of questions within the interview protocol that were set into a table format to be answered by ticking a box on a Likert rating system. This combination of qualitative and quantitative questions made it possible to move through a great deal of information efficiently. It also made it possible to free up valuable interview time to probe in depth on a particular question when schedules permitted.

Design Issue: Prioritization of Questions

For the Programme Director interviews, the main design issue concerned time. There was no way to know exactly how much time that there might be allowed for the interview, thus the interview needed to be able to hit the main content areas in a short period of time – about 30 minutes. Conversely, if time was not a constraint, then a bank of additional relevant questions or prompts were also prepared. By carefully prioritizing the questions in each section, if the interviewees

granted more time to discuss their programmes, then additional questions could systematically be included in the discussion. This strategy resulted in creating essentially two interview protocols: One that the interviewee received and a second researcher version that included additional questions on content. Having supplemental questions worked very well in practice and made it possible to have directed inquiries that logically built on previous interview questions. Additionally, when time allowed, the interviewer followed-up on interesting Director comments that did not follow the protocol.

3.5.1 Alumni Questionnaire

The student data collection instrument in this study is the alumni online questionnaire. This online survey includes questions that parallel those asked in the programme director interviews. The questions in the survey for the programme alumni, however, directly relate to RQ 3: "How do students perceive the learning experience of their distance programmes?" Many studies measure programme effectiveness by student satisfaction feedback rather than grades or tests alone (Dessinger & Moseley, 2004; IHEP, 2000; Kirkpatrick, 1998; NEA, 2000; Reeves & Hedberg, 2003; Sherry, 2004; Thompson & Irele, 2004). Thousands of studies and decades of research support the evidence of a significant correlation between student satisfaction ratings, perception of quality and student learning e.g. (Arreola, 1995; Cashin, 1995; Jacqueline, Robert, & John, 2008; McKeachie, 1979, 1994), indicating that student ratings of courses are valid and reliable measures of teacher-mediated learning (Aleamoni, 1987; Arreola, 1995; College, 2002; d'Apollonia & Abrami, 1997).

The online survey provides scaled numerical values as well as narrative data from open-ended questions. The questions in the survey also relate to the seven curricular elements that this study seeks to refine after integrating the survey responses. (These are discussed in Chapter Two.)

In response to the need to manage teaching and learning effectiveness with educational design within a curriculum framework, student evaluation of existing programmes is a critical part of the process. Distance learning, a multidimensional construct including traditional teaching plus the additional dimensions that relate to the electronic aspect of distance pedagogy, is complex (Abrami & d'Apollonia, 1990; College, 2002; Conole, Dyke, Oliver, & Seale, 2004), thus the development of a crosswalk table provides another way to more fully visualize the relationship of questionnaire questions to the research questions and the related literature.

Pilot Testing the Alumni Questionnaire

The questionnaire was designed and then reproduced on an online platform for creating surveys, SurveyGizmo. SurveyGizmo was chosen because it has features that make it possible to create a visually appealing survey that includes scoring a question on two separate scales, e.g. "Importance" and "Satisfaction". In March 2008 the written survey was vetted by colleagues at DIT and a survey expert at University College Dublin. By April 30, 2008 the questionnaire was completed, assigned a URL and activated online. The questionnaire was then ready to be tested by online graduate students. The test survey participants were distance students currently enrolled in an online masters degree programme from Mountain State University, West Virginia, USA. Eight students completed the survey online in July 2008. The test was fully functional and produced results that were manageable.

There was some slight duplication of questions and a small amount of editing for word usage was done to shorten and further simplify the survey.

Procedure Plan for Contacting Alumni

The Programme Director was requested to provide a way to contact alumni. Due to policies that require universities to protect personal information about their students, the identification of alumni would necessarily remain secure, however many programmes keep a listing of their graduates and can contact them freely. Directors were made aware of the request during email communication prior to the interview and then again after the interview about a way to reach graduates of his/her programme to participate in a survey about their programme experience. Each programme director was provided with a short note to circulate or use a template to invite alumni to participate. The URL to the survey, http://www.surveygizmo.com/s/45151/distancealumni , was included in the note.

Design Issue: Maximizing Response Rate

A serious design challenge with the alumni survey was how to maximize response rate. Prior to collecting data it was clear that the first data collection challenge with alumni would be getting access to them. In most cases, institutions did not keep records for contacting alumni of the distance programmes. Some programmes had only a handful of alumni they could contact, others said it was not their policy to permit access and others just had no system to contact alumni at all. Therefore, maximizing the possible responses from the alumni that were accessible was very important.

In the introduction of the alumni survey was an incentive to complete the survey. A substantial credit with an online retailer was the prize being offered to one

lucky survey participant. If participants were interested in including their names in the prize drawing they were instructed to add their email address at the end of the survey. This apparently was an effective incentive, demonstrated by the fact that nearly 85% of respondents chose to enter their names in the drawing and a Starbucks credit subsequently awarded.

3.5.2 Case Study Instrument

To better understand their needs and motivations, the key programme instructors were interviewed using the interview protocol with slight modification. The emphasis is on capturing their perceptions of their teaching styles and priorities and their concerns and hopes about translating their classroom experience to online. Five categories of questions are retained:

1. About the Person providing data
2. Programme Background
3. Student Level
4. Teaching, Learning, Design and Assessment
5. Lessons learned

Included in the series of qualitative open-ended questions are the same two quantitative series of questions. The first set of questions focus on what factors motivate transition to programme flexible delivery. The second table of 'appreciative' questions asks the team members' opinion of what factors they feel have a positive impact upon student success. These answers can be compared directly with those of the programme directors participating in the study.

Added to the interview is one additional question that is targeted at identifying programme team members' opinions about the transition to flexible delivery:

2.4. Do you feel a move to flexible delivery would be a positive move for this programme at this time? (Yes/No)

- *Would you have any concerns about moving to flexible delivery?*
- *What would help?*

Add-on programme team members all generously agreed to be interviewed and interviews lasted between thirty minutes to one hour. Each of the conversations was recorded and transcribed, with the exception of one interview where the voice recorder batteries failed and the interview was transcribed from notes. Content analysis of the responses and comparative analysis of the embedded quantitative tables help complete the framework by adding personal and immediate relevancy to the application of the model. This instrument can be found in the Appendix.

3.6 *Validity of Data in Mixed Methods Design*

Validity, a concept rooted in the positivist tradition, generally refers to the quality or degree to which a research instrument measures what it is supposed to measure and, consequently, permits appropriate interpretation of data into results, findings and insights (Bunker, Gayol, Nti, & Reidell, 1996; Gephart, 2004; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The notion of triangulation assumes that validity and reliability of findings is enhanced when two or more complementary measures combine to reduce researcher biases in the study of the same phenomenon and results converge and corroborate (Creswell, 2008; N. K. Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Greene & McClintock, 1991). The comprehensiveness of this study is enhanced by the triangulation of the semi-structured interviews with programme directors, alumni surveys and secondary sources which also gives the researcher more confidence in a truthful picture of the subject (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009). The blending of data further converges through a larger structure of feedback loops and field testing (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The triangulated structure and

detailed instrument testing for this study are provided for transparency (Zalan &

Lewis, 2004). Each data source in this mixed method design supports and

validates each other.

In addition to triangulation of data, the methodology for this study included

presenting and receiving feedback about the progressing study from both internal

and external sources as shown in Table 3-9.

Table 3-9: Cross validation and feedback activities

Present article based on literature review at international conference	ISTTE conference, Dublin, Ireland 2008
Presentation of dissertation subject for review at conferences	Leeds Metropolitan University, England, 2007 Bournemouth University, England, 2008 THRIC conference, DIT, Dublin, Ireland 2009
Annual evaluation before internal and external review panel	DIT - 2007, 2008, 2009
Informal external peer critique and comment	DIT - 2007-2011 Colleagues within the School of Tourism and Hospitality Management, George Washington University 2007-2010
Informal peer critique within the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism and the Learning, Teaching and Technology Centre	DIT - various meetings with faculty members and teaching and learning experts to discuss progress and issues, 2007-10
Presentation to Graduate Distance Education faculty and staff about Distance education approaches to programme building	George Washington University, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, June 2010

3.6.1 Research Instrument Validity: Cross Walk Tables

The research instruments used in this study were grounded in existing valid

and reliable instruments and in the significant body of research literature reviewed.

The design process includes adaptation of existing research instruments and rounds

of pilot testing, feedback, expert review and revision with the project focus in mind.

Crosswalk tables are matrices created for both interview and questionnaire instruments to validate the relationship between the instrument questions and the research questions, rationale and previous testing instruments, literature or theory. A crosswalk is defined as "a mapping of the elements, semantics, and syntax from one metadata scheme to those of another" (NISO, 2004). The table also substantiates the importance of each question as it corresponds to the study's research questions.

The crosswalk table for the interview protocol for programme directors and case study participants relates the interview questions to the research questions, specifically the main (RQ) and the first two sub-questions, RQ 1 "…which key elements should a curriculum framework for distance graduate management education include?", and RQ2 "What are the technological and pedagogical characteristics of existing programmes?" Similarly, the alumni online questionnaire explicitly addresses RQ, RQ1, RQ2 plus RQ3, which asks, "How do students perceive the learning experience of their distance programmes? Are they satisfied? Is it effective?"

To illustrate how the Crosswalk table establishes a direct tie between each interview protocol question and its associated validating rationale for its inclusion, the following example is provided.

1. Section One is "About the person providing the data", which is a basic demographic question, but the rationale is its importance in contextualizing the study.
2. Section Two invites a narrative description of the origin of the programme. The subsequent questions identify on a scale of 1 to 5 how strongly the participant agrees or disagrees with each statement about the motivational

factors behind the creation of the programme. These questions answer RQ 2's inquiry about the technological and pedagogical characteristics of the programme and potentially each of the curriculum framework sections. Based on literature about quality tourism education (W. Cho, Schmelzer, & McMahon, 2002; McDonnell, 2000; McKercher, 2002; Sigala, 2002) and the seminal "Tyler Rationale" (Tyler, 1949) of curriculum design, which focuses on Aims and Objectives, questions focus on context and motivation behind the creation of new models for programme delivery.

3. Section Three is about the students. These questions ask the Directors who is enrolling in the programme and why and what criteria seems to predict online student success and/or completion. Similar questions are also on the student questionnaire to cross-validate. These questions are drawn from Baum & Horng, 2008 survey "Quality indicators for the assessment of Programmes in Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure Studies" and also from Levy 2006 survey "Online Learning Experience" Adult learning theory supports these questions Several important theoretical foundations support these questions (Knowles, 1975; Mesirow, 1991).

4. Section Four interview questions focus on 'Ethos and Emphasis'. These questions consider the programmes' emphasis and philosophical underpinning and further define each programmes the technological and pedagogical characteristics, or RQ 2. Theory foundations include: Managerial ethics, (Kreitner & Rief, 1980), Business values, (Rokeach, 1973) and Values-based curricula for Tourism, (Sheldon, 2008). These questions are the heart of the programme design for graduate business management masters' degrees

5. Section Five leads a discussion of the teaching and learning attributes of the programme. These five questions relate to both RQ1 and 2 to identify key elements and characteristics of distance programmes. Answers inform the curriculum framework areas of: Instructional Processes, Evaluation and Adjustment

6. Section Six asks the programme directors to reflect on their total experience and suggest improvements or identify effective practices. The alumni and

case study participants are asked this same general question. Theory underpinning these questions are: constructivism, social, cognitive and teaching presence, and the e-learning ladder (Moule, 2007; Salmon, 2000b).

7. A final query at the end of the interview allows participants to add or amend a comment to clarify their experience. The interview question is: 'There may be attributes your system has that you feel are not covered by the questions above and that set it apart from other systems. Please elaborate!'

The complete interview protocol, alumni survey and detailed crosswalk tables can be found in the Appendix.

3.6.2 Treatment of Missing Data

Missing data is a part of almost all research. Data can be missing for various reasons and there are a number of approaches for dealing with missing values. In this study missing data was a result of:

- Selected sample individuals who refused to participate or respond
- Participants who did not provide complete data in an interview or questionnaire
- Technology not working correctly, as in recording an interview or a telephone connection being dropped

The data missing is completely at random. Randomly missing values are unrelated to each other and thus do not impact the validity of the data collection (Alison, 2001). In other words, it is just as likely that any one piece of data might be missing as another. Thus the approach to missing data is to simply omit those participants or values and to run the analysis on the remaining data.

In regards to the distance graduate programmes sample, out of a final qualified population of 13 programmes, this study was able to complete 12 interview protocols from programme directors. Therefore with a missing value level

of 7.7%, the data collected is safely within the 10% threshold of error where problems occur (Malhotra, 1996).

Could the research instrument design contribute to missing values? Keeping this question in mind during the design phase, both the programme director interview protocol and the alumni online surveys were diligently tested for clarity and brevity. Questionnaire fatigue is always a concern with voluntary participants and keeping the interview or survey interesting, short and easy to understand improves response rate (Moser & Kalton, 1993).

For the interviews, missing data was less a problem of omission than interviewees having a restricted amount of dedicated interview time where they could more fully expand on each section. In many cases it was possible to complete the missing or insufficient data from other information provided.

The alumni surveys were designed so that key questions needed a response in order to move from one section of the survey to the next. Out of a total of 25 questions, only 7 of them were mandatory. Required questions targeted areas such as:

- Motivation: e.g. "What were your primary reasons for enrolling in the distance masters degree programme?"
- Evaluation of methods and technology: e.g. "Overall, how satisfied were you with the quality of the interactivity in the programme?"
- Expectations and delivery: "Did the content of the programme match your reasons for enrolling?"

Omissions did occur more frequently in the survey where participants were provided open answer questions where they could state their opinion or comment on specific aspects of their distance learning experience. The assumption for the

open questions in this survey is that any completed optional open-ended comment type questions were considered positive and enriching, but not critical. Also, the inclusion of too many mandatory questions on an online survey caused participant drop-out in pre-testing, so these were intentionally left as optional. There were only three open-ended questions on the survey:

- Question Nine: "Other reason(s) for enrolling?" 42% of respondents chose to answer this question.
- Question Fourteen: "Comments on technology or learning methods?" and 63% of all alumni respondents answered this area for comments.
- Question Twenty five: "In your opinion, is there a specific technology or programme attribute that seemed to work particularly well? Please explain." This question was actually the final summarizing question. 62 out of 92 or 67% of the participants responded to this question.

Question twenty five was clearly the most important question to broad curriculum design of the three open-ended questions and also demonstrated the highest response rate of the three.

In conclusion, there were missing data after all of the information from the programme directors and alumni were collected. The missing data, however, as stated above, was random in nature and unlikely to bias the results. Additionally, in both the interviews and surveys, the unexpected generosity of participants provided rich details above and beyond the basic questions. Alumni candidly shared insights that made the answers more personal. Programme directors contributed information in tangential areas such as aspirations for future development and frustrations with environmental challenges. Overall, the participants were supportive and many expressed their enthusiasm for the sharing the results of the research.

3.7 Data Collection

Programme Data

After the secondary research of the literature review and environmental scan of distance graduate programmes in T&HM was complete; what remained was a target list of twelve programmes to explore at a deeper level, as previously listed under the section Programme Selection in this chapter. The twelve institutions contributing primary data were the following:

Table 3-10: Participating Programme Directors

Participating Programme Directors	
Australian	
	Charles Sturt University, Albury-Wodonga, NSW
	Southern Cross University, Lismore, NSW
Canadian	
	University of Guelph, Guelph, Ontario
European (UK)	
	Queen Margaret University, Musselburgh, Scotland
	Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, England
	University of Ulster, Belfast, Northern Ireland
For-Profit	
	Columbia Southern University, Orange Beach, AL
United States	
	Auburn University, Auburn, AL
	Florida International University, North Miami Beach, FL
	Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL
	George Washington University, Washington DC
	University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV

3.7.1 Programme Director Interviews

After the pilot testing of the interviews was complete and the interview protocol was finished, the researcher began soliciting interviews with the directors of the programmes via email correspondence either directly with the directors or

through their administrative assistants. A note was written to solicit participation was completed and vetted by colleagues. It introduced the researcher and the focus of the study. Similar to the online survey design challenge, it is a difficult task to compose a note that is short enough to be read, long enough to convey the message and also captures the right "tone" of courtesy and academic importance. This template underwent frequent revisions as follow-up notes became necessary to elicit responses from busy administrators.

Between April and November 2008, there were 12 interviews of programme directors for 11 programmes using the Final Interview Protocol. Of note there were a few adjustments in data collection strategy along the way. There were two interviews for Florida International University because on July 1st, 2008 the programme director changed, and it was possible to interview both the outgoing and incoming programme directors. Also, the programme director at the Florida State University programme chose to fill out the interview questionnaire only rather than be personally interviewed. Thus, there were 13 completed Interview Protocols, which provided the data for the completion of the quantitative questions embedded within the Interview Protocol.

Interviews were conducted by phone except for two face-to-face interviews with the directors at Sheffield Hallam University and the George Washington University. The telephone interviews tended to vary in terms of technology as there were sometimes technical hurdles for connectivity and recording. A log of the interviews and notes regarding the technology used, location of interview and other details is recorded using the following headings.

Institution	Date	Recording technology and Notes	Length of interview

For the first interview, the researcher attempted to use the most current online technology available that would facilitate a long distance discussion without cost, be secure, have the ability to share visual information and also be digitally recorded to the online site. With the assistance of DIT's Learning Technology team, a web forum was created using a webcourse "Live Chatroom". The researcher sent the Programme Director from a large Midwestern US university a toll free number and a password. Two or more participants potentially could enter the chat room where the discussion could be saved digitally.

This preparation was done in the belief that directors of electronically delivered higher education would embrace the benefits of current technology and that this method could become a benchmark for interview formats. This was not the case. The director's response to this format was, "I suffer a lot when it comes to technology. … If we can just do it on the phone in person, I would rather that than me try to figure all this nonsense out." Thus the subsequent conversation and the others were captured using other more familiar methods of either a mobile phone and Bluetooth technology or digital recorder. Each of these interviews was later transcribed verbatim. The interviews are available on request from the researcher.

3.7.2 Online Survey for Alumni

After the interviews, programme directors were each sent a follow-up thank you note and, if it was a personal visit, given a token gift. Each director was also provided with a short note that could be used as a template as they contacted programme graduates. It describes the study and its importance, requests participation, offers a prize drawing and the URL to the survey. Most programme

directors promised that they would facilitate the contact with alumni in order for them to complete the online survey for this project. Although this was the intent, in some cases, in spite of repeated requests or reminders, there was no contact with programme alumni or contact information provided. Some directors flatly said that they did not track their distance alumni "as we do in-class students" or did not have time to try to find them. However, even without the benefit of full cooperation, 94 surveys were completed by students from five institutions, shown in Table 3-11.

Table 3-11: Surveys completed by alumni

Academic institution	Surveys completed by alumni
Auburn University	1
Florida International University	11
George Washington University	48
University of Nevada, Las Vegas	16
University of Guelph	18
Total number of completed surveys	**94**

Because neither the programme websites nor directors offered any estimation about the total number of alumni from their programmes, some of which had been in existence for nearly 18 years, it would be impossible to make an estimation of what percentage of the total number of graduates the participants represent. It can be said that, even with this limitation, these respondents are significant as first time representatives of this sample group.

At the beginning of December 2008, a final effort to contact additional alumni of distance graduate programmes in T&HM was made. A request for participants was circulated on two tourism specific listserves that are widely read among the international community of tourism and hospitality academics: the Trinet

and ATLAS listserves. This did not yield any additional survey participants, but there was some interest from colleagues about the results of the study.

3.7.3 Data Preparation and Handling

Each type of primary datum is handled differently. The interview data is electronic and each interview transcribed by the researcher. For missing parts of a recorded conversation due to technical issues, the researcher "filled in the blanks" from notes taken during the interviews. Each interview is also paired with an embedded Likert scale questionnaire. These tables of answers were entered into a spreadsheet for later analysis and comparison.

The raw data for the online alumni survey is captured electronically in a password protected online database called surveygizmo.com for later retrieval. SurveyGizmo enables the researcher to run a variety of reports that calculates the means, averages, percentages and descriptive data in appropriate chart and graph format. It also produces a geographic display of the location of the participants. When the survey is closed, the raw data is downloaded to a password protected personal computer, all analysis and tabulated results are on this computer and maintained under strictly confidential conditions. Raw data is released only to doctoral committee supervisors as may be required for completion of the DIT doctoral programme. Raw data and any written printouts of raw data will be maintained under locked home office storage for a period of seven years.

This section has described how these three types of data will be handled in this study. The next section describes how the data will be analysed.

3.7.4 Mode of Analysis

The interviews provide two distinct data types: quantitative and qualitative. The narrative qualitative data from the interviews are each linked to either a category or clustering of information around topics. In total there were about 10 ½ hours of interviews for programme directors and 7 hours with the case study participants, as well as four open-ended questions in the alumni survey. Since the objective is to "lift" data to a conceptual level (Suddaby, 2006), interpretation of qualitative data can be assisted with conceptual clustering software, such as Atlas-TI or coded manually using Word or Excel.

Using a hermeneutic approach, content analysis is performed by entering the transcripts and open-ended questions using a word processor to sort, group and identify major themes (Hewson & Laurent, 1996; A. Martin, Fleming, Ferkins, Wiersma, & Coll, 2010). Broadly, the hermeneutic process is "learning the whole through learning the part" (Rathswohl., 1991, p. 237). Data is coded by locating common expressions or concepts to assist the researcher's interpretation of the meaning and find commonalities between research questions and responses. This process facilitates the search for "key linkages" (Erickson, 1986), which are generalisable patterns that can string together issues to illuminate the true meaning of the whole.

The quantitative data from the embedded interview tables and some of the alumni survey is treated using SPSS to run descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Demographic information about participants in a study can provide useful data for correlational analysis and to describe the sample.

In the online alumni survey, its first part was designed to gather statistics that previous research has shown may affect the distance learning experience: gender, age, average class size, (Gilbert, 2000). The questions about programme characteristics and "Programme Retrospective" produce categorical data and ranking scales, which are handled by SPSS. Level of satisfaction with quality of online content is averaged. Each of the sixteen questions in this section are rated for "Importance" and "Satisfaction", modelled on the two-scale questionnaire used in the distance study done by Levy (2006). The online questionnaire graphically displayed the two scales as stars next to the question, which greatly enhanced its visual appeal and ease of interpretation for the survey taker. The participant selected how many stars out of a possible five to highlight. This dual scale rating feature was one of the reasons that SurveyGizmo, the online survey service, was selected.

Also, it is important to note that in the online survey, only seven of the questions were highlighted as mandatory to complete, as forcing completion of all questions can contribute to user fatigue and frustration, resulting in lower response rate, as found in the pilot testing. The key questions about who was taking the survey and summarizing questions were made mandatory.

Complete copies of the programme director Interview Protocol and the Alumni survey can be found in the Appendix.

Analysis Interpretation: Fuzzy Generalization and Appreciative Inquiry

The analysis stage employs two practical means of data interpretation: Appreciative inquiry and the 'fuzzy' generalization.

As Filleul (2009) observes, innovative endeavours inevitably include failures along with successes. Appreciative Inquiry (AI) builds on the cumulative positive experiences and the potential of innovations of existing programmes. It is both a worldview and a process that involves systematic discovery of what gives "life" to a living system when it is most alive, most effective, and most constructively capable in economic, ecological and human terms (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2003). It is less focused on the detection of error and the control of chronic problems (Commons, 2007; Steinbach, 2005). Negative problem identification is the more traditional approach to problem solving and can result in stagnation or even a sense of hopelessness (Harman, 1990). AI is appropriate to affirmative research topics that seek to systematically improve existing processes or models (Cooperrider & Whitney, 1998). The positive paradigm stimulates the design of interview protocols used in this study that probe constructive topics such as innovation, learning effectiveness and student satisfaction. Like grounded theory, it is the practitioners themselves who ultimately contribute the threads that weave the fabric for future design.

The 'fuzzy' generalization is a paradigm used in the analysis stage to unify the data of the study. It provides a qualified prediction from empirical enquiry that does not propose certainty, but rather the idea of possibility (Bassey, 2000a). Different from the scientific generalization, which is specific, repeatable and inappropriate for social sciences, a fuzzy generalization is a qualified generalization, stating that everything is a matter of degree and carries the idea of possibility but not certainty (Kosko, 1994). It is not a design weakness, "a firm reminder that there are many variables that determine whether learning takes place" (Bassey, 2000b) and helps

this study conceptually 'connect the dots' where data may be limited and guide theory development about "what is, what may be and what could be" (Schofield, 2000b, p. 93).

3.8   Ethical Considerations & Human Subjects/IRB

It was necessary to comply with the Data Protection Act 1988 and to formally identify any possible ethical issues or risks that might arise in the course of the work. In March 2008 a Declaration of Research Ethics for this research study was submitted, then titled: *A Systematic Approach to the Effective Design of eLearning Graduate Management Education Programmes with Reference to Tourism and Hospitality Management"* (Ref. No. 23/08). The Declaration included the research proposal, research questions, copies of the letters sent to subjects and also the questionnaires to be used for gathering data.

This was submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies and the DIT Research Ethics Committee for review and approval. At a meeting on 3rd April the Committee granted ethical approval to this study.

3.9   Timeline for Study

Table 3-12 serves as a timeline for this research study.

Table 3-12: Project timeline

January 2007	Begin research to establish study population.
April 2007	Begin literature review.
January 2008	Begin interview protocol design and alumni survey design.
March 2008	Pilot test programme director protocol. Submit project and documents for review by Research Ethics Committee.
April 2008	Research Ethics approval.

	Start interviewing programme directors.
April 30, 2008	Activate online survey.
June 2008	Pilot test online alumni survey.
November 2008	Final interviews with programme directors. Complete follow-up with directors to access alumni.
December 2008	Data collection is completed. Begin data write up and analysis
January-May	Analytical data write up. Atlantis? SIF funding?
March- May 2009	Attend Add-on team meetings
May-July 2009	Prepare interview protocol for Add-on programme team members. Collect programme background information.
August – September 2009	Interviews with Add-on programme team members The one year add-on degree programme (Level 8) is developing blended learning delivery for this B.Sc. honours degree.
November 2009	Revised Framework presented to programme team for critique.
January 2010 – February 2011	Chapter reorganisation, iterative revisions, synthesis and proof.

The interviews and surveys were completed as outlined in this research strategy.

This completes the First Step outlined by the research questions. The next chapter initiates Step Two of the systematic approach to developing a curriculum framework for the design of graduate management programmes.

CHAPTER 4: AN APPRAISAL OF AN INTERNATIONAL SAMPLE OF POST-GRADUATE DISTANCE PROGRAMMES IN T&HM

4.1   Presentation of Data

Introduction

This chapter presents the data arising from primary research that will be discussed in Chapter Six and which will provide necessary input for the refinement of the curriculum framework. The chapter begins with highlights from the secondary research and a brief overview of the primary research findings from the study participant groups: the directors and alumni of distance masters degree programmes in T&HM. The quantitative and qualitative data, based on an exploratory mixed methodology design discussed in Chapter Three was gathered sequentially. Chapters Two and Three have systematically identified and discussed the elements necessary for a curriculum framework (RQ 1) and identified and analysed the distance masters degree programmes in T&HM (RQ 2). The Literature Review concluded with a draft model for a curriculum framework drawn from secondary literature.

This chapter initiates 'Step Two: Towards the development of a curriculum framework' and answers RQ 3. It is the programme directors and alumni who provide the findings about how programme directors and students perceive the learning experience of their distance programmes.

Cumulatively through the experiences of the directors and students, assumptions are confirmed and new ideas emerge about good practices that result in a rich distance learning programme. An appreciative focus on the new data emphasizes strengths and, in particular, examines values, teaching and learning

strategies, student success and quality factors. Some unexpected data do not neatly

fit within the draft framework and are interwoven as they add rich details for further

design consideration. Displayed as figures, tables and text exemplars, the findings,

where possible, capture the natural tone and attitude of the study participants to

produce a sense of authenticity to the data.

The sections of this chapter present and analyse the findings based on the seven

categories in the draft curriculum framework from the conclusion of Chapter Two:

4.3 Vision: Programme purpose

4.4 Situational analysis: The internal educational milieu

4.5 Programme building: Organising the distance experience

4.6 Programme building: Curriculum content

4.7 Programme building: Teaching and learning

4.8 Implementation: Support, training and resources

4.9 Evaluation: Monitoring and adjusting for quality

And concluding with 4.10 '*Towards the development of the curriculum framework* '

4.2   *Overview of Research Findings*

Chapter Three described the methods used to determine this study's

population and sample participants. From 112 institutions with accredited masters

degree programmes in T&HM available from January 2007 through November 2008,

16 institutions offered distance programmes that met this study's research criteria.

Programme directors from a final sample of 12 academic institutions from six

countries of three world regions agreed to be interviewed for this study. 94

programme alumni from five academic institutions across the United States and

Canada responded to the online student survey. Secondary sources provided

sufficient information to determine that the higher education institutions that offer

these programmes are quite diverse. The sample programmes are from institutions with enrolments ranging from 5,000 to 40,000. This diversity extended to the academic unit within the institution that offered and managed the programme and to the title of programme, their particular focus and modes of delivery, whether blended or 100% online. Unique to this study, the programmes' delivery structures were comparatively mapped against the constructs of dialogue and flexibility, quality indicators from Transactional Distance theory (M. G. Moore, 1997). This provided a useful comparative interpretation of theoretical and practical focus for programme features that support programme sustainability.

In this chapter, primary data establishes details about the programmes, the rationale for their creation and the leadership roles of their directors, plus the student experience, their priorities and preferences. The niche T&HM programmes in this study, of varying size and robustness, are less than 20 years old and represent a range of innovators in the distance education evolutionary process still in its infancy. Academic emphasis across programmes is marked by a professional management orientation and a search for quality in all dimensions of the programme. Despite the variety of delivery formats, administrative practices and entrepreneurial adaptations for survival, common ground is found among directors' perceptions of values and good practice. Directors' roles vary in their scope of responsibilities and those who were distance students themselves have an increased awareness and concern for their students, which is a positive influence on their leadership.

Alumni data shows that for most of them, this was their first distance programme and that they are demographically typical of other diverse, older online

graduate management students noted in the Literature Review in Section 2.8. Students selected their programmes with specific expectations for content and flexibility, are generally positive about their experiences and would recommend their programmes to others, but concerns and issues not obvious from the quantitative data were brought to light through their comments. Students highly valued their instructors and the programme's face-to-face and community building experiences and felt the connections made their programmes more meaningful.

Quality and motivation appeared to be underlying programme experience priorities according to directors and learners. The instructor, ultimately the key player in creating the distance experience, must master particular skills, build student trust and have support to confidently operate in the new teaching paradigm. Directors and students provide their perspectives about effective distance teaching and learning strategies, technology, organisation and communication for effective learning. Particular emphasis is placed on administration and monitoring for overall consistent programme outcomes. Consensus between programme directors and alumni on parallel issues is noted in two areas of importance: student motivation (learner autonomy) and teacher excellence. Programme directors offer insights on many aspects of ensuring programme quality and introduce issues for inclusion in the curriculum framework design; however it did not appear that all programmes offered training and support for mastery of distance pedagogy or have a plan for designing a comprehensive curriculum.

Findings

The following qualitative and quantitative data are the results from interviews and the questionnaires embedded within the interview protocol that

were completed by the programme directors, as well as from the online surveys returned by the programme alumni.

NOTE: For referencing purposes, the participating institutions are coded to protect the anonymity of the responses. Alumni responses are likewise referred to by a individual and institutional coding. Alumni responses are in a bulleted format to clearly differentiate them from the programme director comments.

4.3   Vision: Programme Purpose and Profiles

'Vision', the first element of the proposed curriculum framework, is the curriculum element that directs the intended outcomes of the programme and reflects the collective beliefs of the faculty about what is important to be learned. Each programme director responded to a series of questions about the history, purpose and values of their distance programmes to determine the perceived programme 'vision'. Alumni express their hopes and expectations of their programmes.

Brief histories of the evolution of the distance programmes were brought out in the interviews with programme directors. These distance programmes have been in existence less than twenty years with the average of 11.3 years; the largest programme enrolling over 1000 students and the smallest under a dozen. Some started as correspondence courses about 17-18 years ago and others progressively extended the reach of the on-campus programme by complementing with flexible courses. In the late 1990's it appears that the potential of flexible programme delivery coupled with new technology began to catch on as an alternative to on-campus teaching and evolved through experimentation. Sustainability has been

elusive for many of the experimental endeavours and even in the span of time of this study the population has fluctuated. By institutional standards they are relative newcomers to academe and, as such, have to prove themselves. Compounding the difficulty, distance education is still tarred with the bias stemming from disreputable or low quality distance degree 'diploma mills' as noted in Section 1.2. Directors of credible programmes commented that they find themselves in an uphill struggle to find the balance between academic excellence and satisfying demanding distance students in an extremely competitive market.

Not the direct result of needing more classroom space, as might be the case with large undergraduate programmes, more often distance graduate programmes were launched on the back of an energetic individual with a compelling vision of education in the future or institutional strategic directives for increasing access through technology applications. One dynamic programme owed its survival to creative internal re-organisation after an earlier vision of a bespoke cohort-based curriculum failed to be a sustainable model. Funding policies that so often only reward full time student enrolment can leave few options for a programme that is targeted for the part-time student. Taking advantage of the boutique nature of the distance graduate programme, one department created an institute within the university from which the programme is run.

> *"It's a self-funding programme and any generated profit gets to be spent by the school at the dean's discretion… Last year … our school budget was cut, so we used the funds generated by this programme to pay our summer adjuncts."* – Director Institution F

This alternative strategy works only if the programme is profitable, but the fact remains that these programmes have survived their formative years of distance

delivery to present levels of maturation through their ability to successfully reinvent themselves or restructure within the institutional system through some combination of innovation and openness to the changing environment. As some programme directors noted, for the programme to thrive it must offer a value-added qualification or professional application. This is especially true in the case of executive degree programmes. Implications for distance programme designers are that the programme purposes should be clearly articulated in the planning stages and re-evaluated regularly.

The significance of this small sample of programmes and participants is that they represent the nature of such distance graduate programmes and the pursuit of sustainable quality, a theme throughout the data. In the programme background section of the interview protocol each of the 12 directors responded to questions about whether there were specific factors that motivated the creation of their distance programmes. Figure 4-1 provides a summary of the data collected.

Figure 4-1: Motivation for the creation of the programme: Programme directors
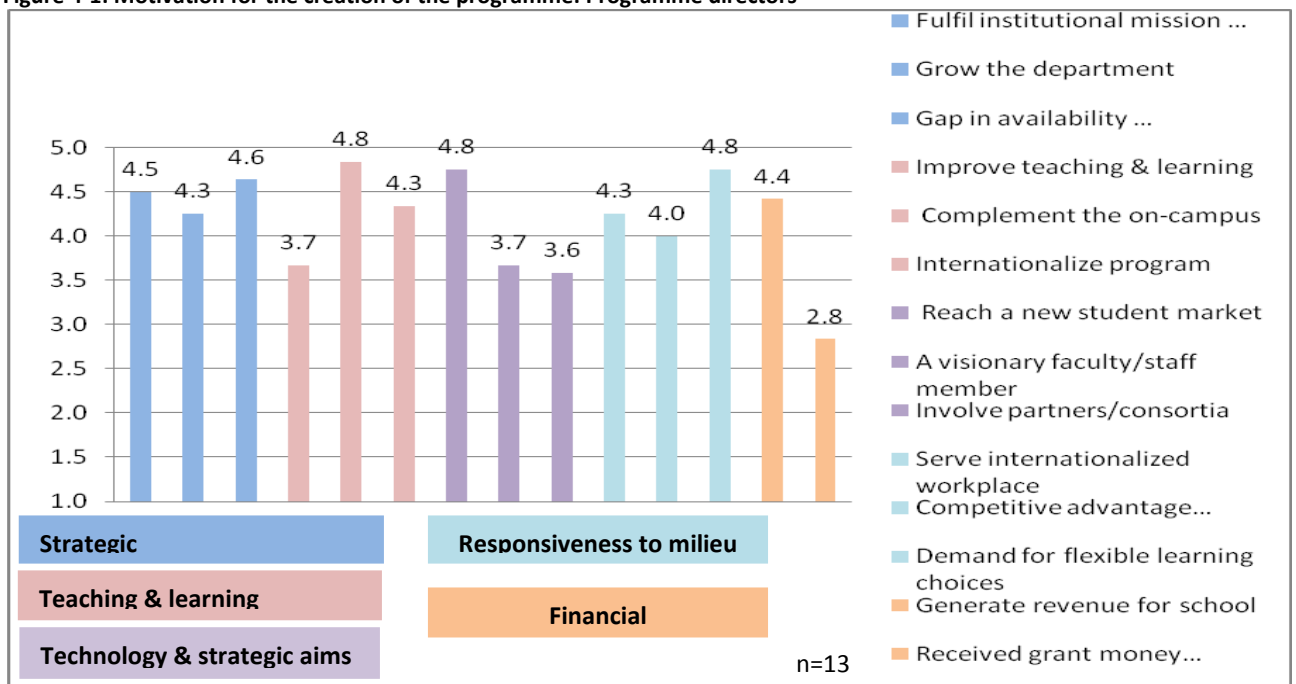
Programme directors felt strongest that their programmes resulted from a combined desire for expansion and meeting a perceived student demand with 'Complementing the on-campus programme', 'Reaching a new student market' and 'Satisfying the demand for flexible learning' each rating 4.8/5. Distance programmes offer a way to share on-campus resources to expand their potential student exposure internationally (4.3), fill the gap in availability (4.6) and hopefully tap into a new source of revenue for the department (4.4). The financial motivation behind programme creation may be, in fact, more significant than the ratings imply as one director describing the coursework masters degree programmes used the word *"lucrative"* and four directors commented that the distance masters programme existed to provide a steady revenue stream or just to catch the occasional student looking for the niche degree, as stated here:

> *"We're not dependent on student numbers for that programme, it… isn't a big drain on our resources to just to have it offered… in the background." –* Director Institution D

Thus, although the ranking scales may not capture this nuance of attitude, interview data helps explain why some low-priority programmes suffer on the academic backburner with reduced energy expended on pedagogy, design and development. On the other hand, those programmes seen as "loss leaders", or key value items, whose primary purpose is to contribute to fulfilling the institution's strategic mission serve as a showcase for innovative distance learning models.

4.3.1 Designing for Student Preferences

Programme directors concur that student learning goals and their reasons for enrolling drive programme design. Question #8 of the online survey asked the

distance alumni what factors were most important to them in their distance programmes. The findings show that professional development (61 %) was their primary reason and the combination of convenience and flexibility factors (48 %) was the second most important.

The alumni survey's optional Question #9 allowed students to freely add comments about why they enrolled in their distance T&HM programme. These adult students most value the graduate education and seek distance delivery alternatives to achieve the degree, e.g.:

- *"Online programme had exactly what I was looking for - made it possible to get the degree I wanted without leaving home"* – Student 36 Institution C
- *"The ability to work my normal job and still take the classes when it was convenient for me was the deciding factor in pursuing my Masters degree. If I had to take my classes on campus, I may still be enrolled in the programme or may not have started at all."* – Student 7 Institution D

Of the additional 40 comments from students in this section, content analysis showed that approximately 20% of the students undertook their masters degree programme as a personal challenge. This level of curiosity and commitment exemplifies the intellectual maturity of the lifelong learner. 14% of the students specifically wanted the masters degree in T&HM because they were interested in making a career switch, e.g. *"I wanted to "break" into the event management industry."* Table 4-1 summarizes factors impacting the student's selection process.

Table 4-1: Reasons for students selecting their distance programme

In general	Programme specific
1. Professional development 2. Convenience/flexibility 3. Personal goal or challenge 4. Making a career switch	• The reputation of the programme or institution • Programme uniqueness or niche degree emphasis e.g. Sustainable Tourism Destination • Financial reasons: less expensive than

	on-campus programme, programme qualifies for student loan or grant • Easier programme entry: no GMAT required

Designing for the Executive Learner

Student needs and strengths are even more important in defining the design of the executive programme. The executive learner has a particular attraction to distance graduate management education. Directors note that they are part-time students willing to pay more for a masters programme that provides deep discipline-specific knowledge and flexible programme delivery. The credential improves their upward mobility and the professional skills are value-added benefits that can be put to immediate use in the workplace. 25% institutions in this study offer executive programmes and claim to be highly selective; admitting only those with substantial professional experience at the managerial level.

Directors whose institutions offer executive degrees explained some of the distinctive features of the programmes. Executive learners demand convenience and academic quality of the highest standard. They expect to be catered to administratively and have course materials supplied to them in a timely manner.

"We market our online executive programmes as being all inclusive. In other words, I am not about to nickel-and-dime my students. You've paid your fee for whatever it is and - Bingo! – We're going to supply you with everything that you need. For any other distance programme, it will tell you what textbooks you have to get, and they are available in the bookstore and you better go buy them." – Director Institution M

"Not the average freshman who is just checking off classes to graduate. They may seem pretty radical. They have high expectations." - Director Institution N

Working full-time, learners are sensitive to having their time "wasted" and look for cutting-edge course content and materials. These programme directors agreed that they are pressurized to keep the courses at an appropriate high level that is on the pulse of industry practice and provide instructors with credible industry qualifications. The implication for the curriculum framework is that having a clear sense of the purpose of the programme and understanding the potential student is not enough; the programme must be able to provide consistent administrative services and targeted academic value to attract and retain students.

4.3.2 Educational Emphasis and Values

The proposed curriculum framework suggests from the Literature Review that having a clear programme purpose and educational philosophy are design features closely tied to a quality distance experience. Although programme directors in general, were less comfortable with discussing programme philosophy and values, about half of them had clearly considered values at the graduate level and a quarter of them had formally prioritized incorporating values across the programme's curriculum.

The interview section 'Programme Ethos and Emphasis' offered the directors an opportunity to rate the importance of specific areas of educational emphasis and values to their programme content. The purpose of these questions was to try to capture whether or not the existing distance programmes articulate an educational philosophy, shown in Figure 4-2.

Figure 4-2: Directors' perspective of programme emphasis & values

Programme Emphasis & Values

Category	Rating
Corp Social Responsibility	4.3
Compensate past defects	3.3
Respect for diversity	4.1
Cross social strata	3.6
Good citizenship	3.9
Lifelong Learning	4.5
Entrepreneurship	4.3
Globalization	4.4
Profit	4.2
Stewardship	4.3

n=13
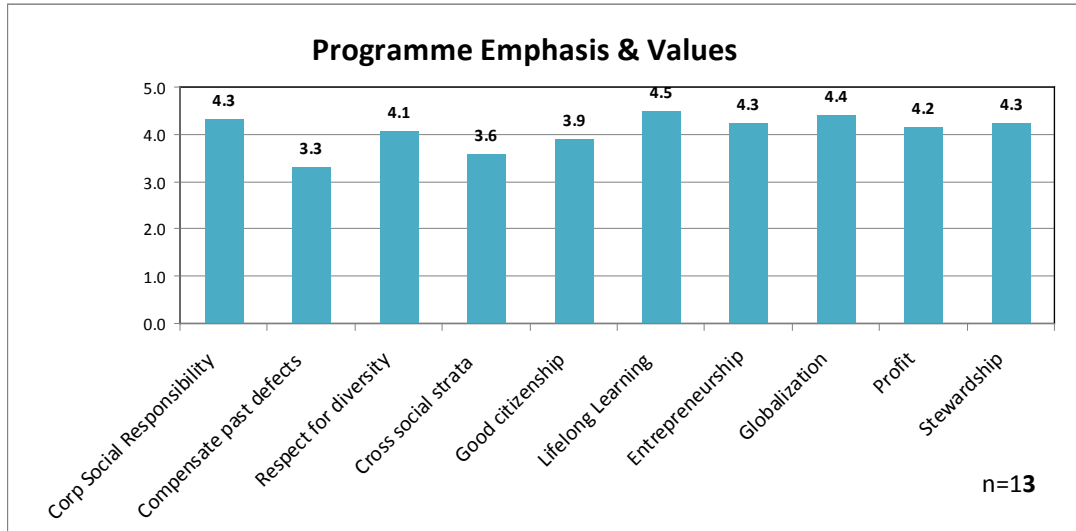
The ratings averaged 4.1, indicating that directors agree that management professionals should anchor their studies in a range of solid values. The numeric scales in bold show particular emphasis on lifelong learning, entrepreneurship and the responsibility of the individual assuming a sense of stewardship for global and corporate ethical issues.

Although programme directors hedged about whether their programmes had a philosophical emphasis, they did feel confident about the principal emphasis of their programmes in practice The open-ended interview questions further clarified that as business management degrees, these distance programmes are strongly rooted in the broadly focused practical side of professional and personal development with career goals in mind, as stated below:

"Giving an academic perspective to practical issues. I mean that is what we are really about with this MBA." – Director Institution J

"The programme is geared to practical application, but includes personal development, professional deepening, specialized knowledge, as well as being beneficial for those interested in a career change." – Director Institution E

One director interpreted personal development in terms of socio-economic and environmental ethical awareness directly related to the subject area, e.g. sustainable tourism or ecotourism:

"If you are going to be involved in tourism, you have got to do it in a sustainable way: environmentally, socially and economically. So that would be a thread throughout. And also ethics and being ethical in practice is important. This emphasis and related values would be sprinkled throughout the courses." - Director Institution D

Even when a director admitted that the programme did not emphasize values, there was a candid acknowledgement that, on reflection, perhaps they should:

"This is not a programme that is geared towards the altruistic aspect. It is a deficiency I think."- Director Institution I

Only 25% of the surveyed programmes indicated that they formally incorporate ethical guidelines, and directors noted that this does not originate at the programme-level. One director explains how values are part of the overall educational philosophy at his institution:

"The College endorses ethical values at the college level, not by programme. It is our general behaviour philosophy. Like a sustainability concept, it is just as one of those values…It needs to fit within the university." - Director Institution O

In Australian systems, the generic 'Graduate Attributes', are national quality guidelines for HE learning outcomes, as discussed in Section 3.3.1. Institutions that had tackled and operationalized values into the distance graduate curriculum found that the adoption of values and integrating them into each course has taken great concerted effort between programmes and their internal institutional quality teams:

"The Teaching and Learning people here, who are behind that sort of thing, were adamant about it. It is something new for us. At the beginning of this year it was finally cemented into every course. It took quite a bit of soul

searching and head scratching. We wanted to make sure that we were absolutely aligning the Graduate Attributes with the outcomes with the assessment tasks." – Director Institution K

In other systems these may be referred to as 'Values-based learning objectives' or competencies. These desired outcomes are formally integrated across all courses at the graduate programme level.

The logistics of applying values: Using a rubric and long term effects

Aligning the underpinning programme goals or graduate competencies with intended learning outcomes can appear to be logistically challenging according to interviewees. One director learned from experience that integration requires a rubric for mapping outcomes and values across courses:

"I go through and see, well you are saying 'Here one of the things that we want to do is to help with the 'Inclusion across cultural norms' and we include it in the assessment task. That is part of what we do now. So it gives me a very quick and easy check." – Director Institution K

In terms of lifelong learning, questions arose about the effectiveness of teaching ethical behaviour and the metrics needed to assure long term outcomes:

"It's very difficult to change people's values. You can give them an awareness of consequences in terms of certain behavioural outcomes. No way to measure it. There isn't any way of knowing …to what degree and how consistent that would be from one individual to another as a result of these programmes would be very hard to measure." – Director Institution M

There is no guarantee of permanent affective change from any educational endeavour, however, in good faith these programmes have grappled with raising their programmes with a consistent values-based process. They lead the way for more focused curriculum design that purposefully integrates ideals across curriculum content.

Competition is a condition of the external environment. The next section focuses on particular aspects related to the internal situational environment as part of the curriculum framework that affect the learning experience.

4.4   *Situational Analysis: The Internal Educational Milieu*

The importance of the educational environment in which the programme is being developed has been highlighted in Section 3.4. Examining this milieu forms the second stage of the curriculum framework. A situational model gains its strength from understanding the dimensions of the environment in which it operates and towards that end, the findings presented in this section are from the two primary participant groups from the sampled programmes: directors and alumni. Demographics help evaluate whether the alumni are 'typical' distance graduate learners and, thus, contribute to the generalizability of the findings. Student disposition towards learning give the curriculum designer clues to motivation and thinking processes. The director interviews suggest characteristics important to performing their leadership roles. These profiles contextualize the participants' perspectives and allow insight into the responses that make up the rest of the primary research findings. Other aspects of milieu affecting curriculum design, such as the broader external environment and conditions that affect distance masters degree programmes are amply discussed in the Literature Review.

4.4.1 Profile of the Alumni Participants

The online survey collected basic alumni demographic information and combined with director and student comments, maximized student experience data within survey limitations.

Gender, Age, Major, Geographic Location and Online Experience

The 94 students participating in this study represent five distance masters degree programmes in T&HM and Figure 4-3 shows the distribution of participants predominantly located across the U.S. and Canada.

Figure 4-3: Geographic Distributions of Student Survey Participants

Distance masters students are generally "non-traditional" in the sense that they are older than traditional on-campus students and represent a wide diversity of personal and professional backgrounds. The average age of these students is a good indicator that they are indeed mature mid-career professionals or career switchers as 63% of students were > 30 years old. The predominantly female sample (64.5%) is also typical for professional masters programmes as noted in Section 3.8. This sample of was made up of 55.3% Tourism and Hospitality Management majors and nearly 20% identified themselves as Event Management majors.

87.1% of the students replied that they were from the same country as the programme origin and programme directors added that even though their students mostly live in the area, they selected distance education because their jobs don't allow them to commit to taking on-campus classes on a regular basis. The majority of alumni participants confirmed that the traditional classroom-based graduate degree was impossible due to their work/life schedules and commented that their career development was a priority requiring single-minded determination:

- *"I work as a Catering Manager so I could not go to a regular classroom setting programme. With the online programme, I was able to study and still work my crazy hours."* – Student 2 Institution B
- *"I had started my degree in the on-campus programme, but moved out of the area. I completed online after taking a year off."*- Student Institution E
- *"Requires self-motivation."*– Student 10 Institution E

The leap of faith to commit to distance learning is particularly impressive knowing that approximately three quarters of the adult students (73%) reported that their degree programme was their first formal distance learning experience. Programme directors shared that their students are demanding and have higher programme expectations than their on-campus counterparts, which is not a surprising characteristic for diverse, motivated and mature adult learners.

Student characteristics are critical factors for online success, more so than in an on-campus experience because, as this director stated, maturity is fundamental:

"At an online level, you (the student) really have to be more committed and more mature and know that you have to do this and nobody will be telling you or calling attendance if you didn't." – Director Institution F

4.4.2 Profile of the Programme Directors

The twelve directors interviewed had been with their programmes anywhere from six months to nine years. From the information shared, some programme directors claimed to have both academic and professional qualifications, and all directors have strong teaching backgrounds - some with more than 10 years of distance education experience.

Directors' attitudes seemed to correlate with their background or reflect their institutional culture. Two directors admitted stepping into their positions

having absolutely no previous training or experience with distance learning. They portrayed their programme involvement as more or less a project management task and seemed rather detached from the student experience. On the other hand, those directors who were once distance students themselves noted that their experience influences their decisions and appreciation for their students and programmes, for example:

> *"I studied and did my masters way back with Open University from England. All inside the letterbox! Stuff would come in the mail. And that was it. There was no contact whatsoever. So I am very aware of what it is like being an external student – a distance student. It really wasn't the best of experiences. I suppose that has really shaped my attitude of how I believe things should be done now."* – Director Institution K

> *"I've been a distance education student myself as well. In fact, I did my masters programme by distance. …Yes, I can see it from all sides. I think distance education is a fantastic offering that a university can provide because the reality is that it opens up the possibility of education to people who couldn't otherwise do it."* – Director Institution D

From these comments it is clear that personal distance learning experience imbues the director with a special concern and respect for the "external" student and positively affects programme leadership. They conveyed a passionate entrepreneurial outlook: optimistic, seeing the big picture, imagining possibilities, anticipating their students' needs and having close communication with technical, administrative staff and instructors.

Overall, the characteristics of both the alumni and programme director participants bring out several important environmental conditions weighing in the curriculum design process. Alumni profiles were consistent with what the literature

suggested as typical adult learners, giving the sample more generalisability. Within the institution, the part-time programme and student do not have parity of status with the full-time, which restricts options and weights institutional priorities and student financial relief. Of importance to learning outcomes may be the issues around first time distance learners and diversity and how these can be dealt with to build towards student success in an online environment. Programme director's attitude toward their role and support of the learners' experience in some cases directly links to having a distance education background. The directors and their online students provided a glimpse at the working internal milieu. The roles of the instructor, director and administration, other aspects of the internal environment, are discussed later in this chapter in Section 4.8 *Implementation*.

The model continues to build a structure based on conditions, components and processes. The next section of findings relates to the process of how the study participants perceive the organisation of the programme.

4.5   *Programme Building: Organizing the Distance Experience*

The curriculum framework conceptually breaks programme building into three parts: Organisation, Content and Teaching and learning. This section focuses on the aspects of programme organisation that participants perceive as significant to their distance programme. Designing the organisation of the distance programme is a comprehensive step where the student experience is framed.

Organisational structure decisions centre around the degree of programme and course flexibility and convenience; primary drivers behind distance education. How students engage with their programmes, e.g. size of class, cohorts or blended

learning, are organisational considerations that are part of the total programme identity. The technology-based and scheduling variations are literally infinite with resource limitations and student recruitment strategic factors in selection.

Flexibility Options

Total flexibility is a distinctively distance education organisational concept. The director of the for-profit institution in this study provided one example. Their distance MBA in tourism and hospitality, one of their smallest programmes with about 1000 students, claims to offer total flexibility for their students in terms of programme structure. They have open enrolment, that is to say, individuals can start anytime or if they prefer, can join a monthly cohort group start-up. A 100% online programme, high tech or low tech options are offered at the discretion of the instructor and there is no limit to the number of students who can enrol in a course at any time. Another example of total flexibility is a programme offering a seamless learning experience that gives students the option of on-campus, distance or blended format:

> *"Programme can be 100% distance. It can be blended learning. Where they have their option of coming to campus. And without skipping a beat, because everybody's on the same track at the same time. Same instructors campus/distance."* – Director Institution K

Shown in Table 4-2 are various organisational variables mentioned by directors that can increase programme accessibility and desirability.

Table 4-2: Programme structure flexibility features

Flexibility feature	Description	Variations
Length of programme	Programme requirements achievable in 2 years or less.	Part-time students can take up to 5 years to complete programme, depending on circumstances.
Intakes	How often programmes	Admission once, twice, three times

	allow students to enter the programme	a year. Monthly or anytime intakes.
Timing	When courses begin or end or Length of courses	Year round course availability. Courses on rotations. 8 or 6 week courses. Week long intensive courses. Intensive weekend courses at conference. Course timing extensions to meet student needs
Exit points	Allow incremental exit points	Receive lesser degree or certificate as students build incrementally through the masters degree requirements
Total flexibility	Offer distance and/or face-to-face and/or open start times.	Allow students to cross over between on-campus and online. Allow students to step into programme anytime.

The first item on the table, 'Length of the programme', is a key consideration in programme selection for students with time and financial constraints. In an increasingly competitive distance education market, three years for the degree is considered too long to attract and retain distance master students. One director was actively reorganizing their three-year programme to fit into the two-year format. Another director advocated removing assessment deadlines to better accommodate distance learners, suggesting that assignment schedules can be negotiated between student and instructor at the beginning of the module or semester and then tracked as students follow individually designed schedules.

A flexibility advantage that 79% of students claimed in Question #11 that they enjoyed was some degree of self-pacing in their courses. Being able to work at your own pace was *"very convenient…with direction… while working full-time."* More structured courses might have an advanced pace where *"you certainly couldn't languish on any one section. The opportunity to fall behind quickly was always present."* Self-paced learning is a variable in the design process that impacts student convenience, but is also linked to student autonomy preparedness.

Experiments with flexibility are the norm for distance programmes. Total flexibility appears to factor in student recruitment, but there is no indication that it correlates to a quality learning environment that facilitates the intended learning objectives. Flexible formats create challenges for teaching and learning strategies, programme administration, tracking student progress, instructor timetabling, creating a sense of community and resource allocation to name a few.

4.5.1 Structuring the Learning Environment

In general, institutional and accreditation guidelines, policies and procedures affect distance and on-campus programmes equally. Programme structures are also based on common practices, but impact distance environments in different ways. Distance programme directors discussed practices that can enhance the distance experience.

Student Cohorts

Methods for developing relationships between the students, instructors and programme administration are valued for facilitating dialogue and building programme loyalty. One of the first strategic programme structure decisions is whether students enter their programme in a cohort and experience the programme as a group or individually. A quarter of the programmes in this study grouped students into cohorts but did not enforce lockstep programme progression. If students drop out of the cohort or delay their course progression, they break the valuable social chain and are at higher risk of attrition. One programme discarded their cohort concept as they found groups *"didn't work very well".* Directors of 100%

online and blended programmes found cohorts useful for starting social networks and programme completion through peer motivation.

Number of Students Participating in a Class

There are no physical limitations on the number of students who can participate in a distance class. In mandatory Question #10 of the student survey, 45% of the alumni reported that their average class sizes were 10-20 students per class, although 10% didn't know how many were in the class. Several directors said that having a minimum of 10-15 students ensured that there would always be enough students to run the course, but once enrolment started to climb there are other issues of adding course sections or limiting student enrolment. In one director's opinion,

> *"After about 15 it becomes a kind of a logistical nightmare for the faculty to teach"* – Director Institution F

but another director stated that classes ran efficiently with 20-22 students per class. Directors observed that for work-based training it may be appropriate to run a course with 60 or more that is self-taught with the instructor just grading exams.

There are limitations to what is manageable without diluting the programme quality with adjunct instructors or overloading teaching staff. Often faculty members teach in a distance programme on "overload" to their full time campus teaching. For a programme to expand, more full-time trained faculty may need to be hired to maintain the student/teacher ratio of the class sections. Sacrificing the quality of the learning environment with overcrowded online classes was generally discouraged as students pay for and expect to be taught by experts at the graduate level.

Alternatively the student experience suffers when classes are not big enough. One programme director whose niche programme enrolled less than a dozen students observed that when classes were too small, it results in causing a sense of isolation and not supporting interactivity or stimulating interest:

"When the numbers are too small…3 or 4… it's like pulling teeth"- Director Institution R

In Question #18 of the online survey, students rated their level of satisfaction and importance of the class size. Although the average rating for satisfaction with class size was high at 4.29 out of 5, the class size was not a particularly important issue to students, rating a significantly lower 3.21. The more important factor was clearly the interactivity and dialogue within the overall experience. Face-to-face components can also increase dialogue.

4.5.2 The Blended Learning Experience

Blended learning intuitively seems like the best of both worlds. Over half (58.3%) of the T&HM distance programmes that participated in this study either required or offered optional blended learning components. For this small sample several different blended forms were used: induction, intensive residency courses, capstone, optional on-campus/online course blend, or workplace experiential. A quarter of the programme directors rated the added-value of blended learning highly and even for those categorized as 100% online, the minimal "live" experience served many purposes. Student's can gain sense of community, technical training, meet instructors, network, etc., but, that said, on-campus learning advantages trade-off with loss of programme flexibility by adding cost, travel and time commitments and eliminates some potential students.

The majority of the management programmes required field experience or mentorships as part of their professional degree requirements and less than half of the programmes included optional or compulsory on-campus experience in some form. On-campus activities ranged from a one day "dunking" focusing on library and web-based resource skills, to others that were a few days to a week or more of intensive sessions or work in a teaching restaurant. One institution offered a school-wide on-campus 4-day "dissertation school" once a year to meet and organise thesis work with a supervisor and provide dissertation support. Information was also mailed out on a CD. Another institution was adding more residential weeks to the programme because an 8-week online course can be taught intensively in 5 residential days; shortening the length of time to complete the degree – an attractive arrangement for graduate students. Offering courses in 3-day blocks on campus with other courses online was another combination. No formula was proposed for determining the 'correct' ratio of blended components to online, but this sample was predominantly online and used blended experience strategically, based on individual programme philosophy and identity, resources and responsiveness to environmental factors.

Student Perception of Blended Learning Elements

Sixty of the student participants in this sample were in programmes that offered either classroom or some kind of face-to-face experience. In Question #12 of the student survey, alumni were asked to identify which face-to-face components, if any, were used in their programmes. Figure 4-4 displays the responses. NOTE: n=86 for this particular question.

Figure 4-4: Face-to-face components of programmes: Student survey

Face-to-face components

	Residency	Face-to-face classroom	Case studies	Events
Never	29.8%	66.7%	37.6%	41.9%
Sometimes	26.6%	29.0%	32.3%	48.8%
Frequently	43.6%	4.3%	30.1%	9.3%

Legend: ■ Never ■ Sometimes ■ Frequently

n=86
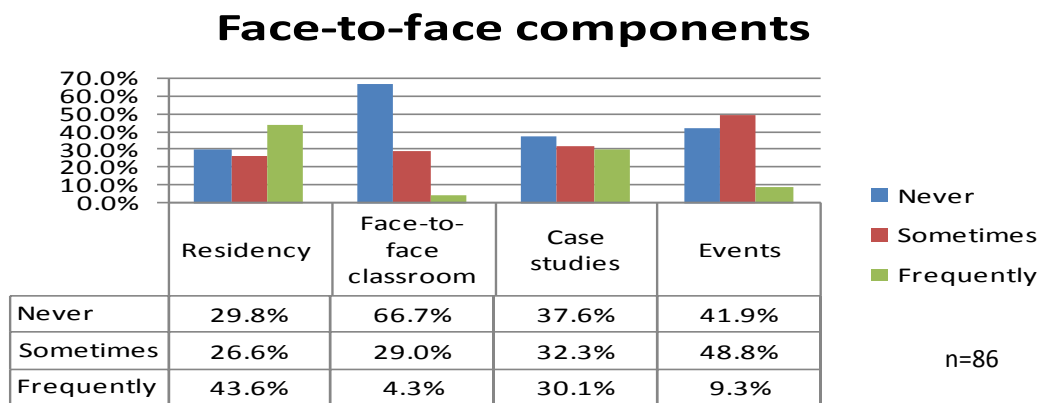
The majority (70%) of the distance programmes in this sample used their on-campus experience as a residency and/or an in-person induction rather than in events or classroom time. Case studies are strongly represented in these graduate management programmes as a blended component (62.4%).

In Question #19, those students who had face-to-face components in their programmes were asked their degree of satisfaction and importance of having face-to-face interaction with other students/professors at orientation or having in-person opportunities e.g. residency, event, workshops, etc. On average the ratings for their residencies and other face-to-face experiences were all rated between 3.7 and 3.9 on a five point scale indicating quantitatively they were somewhat positive about these elements, but not to any great degree. In the open comments, however, many students made the extra effort to voice their strong endorsement of the value of the programme residency, e.g.:

- *"The residency to begin the three year programme was invaluable. I strongly believe that at least once per year the students should be brought back to a residency week in order to reconnect, gain support from peers and staff, and to further develop the networks necessary to learn from and be able to depend upon peers in online group work settings throughout the year."* – Student 12 Institution D

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- *"The orientation and capstone in-person requirements were excellent. Meeting classmates and professors in person at the start and end of the programme really helped to promote networking and build the bridge from in-person to online."* – Student 38 Institution C
- *"The best attribute of this programme was the residency at the end of the programme. Meeting colleagues with whom you have been taking classes with for 18+ months was the best way to end the programme. Making these connections face-to-face was an amazing attribute of the programme."* – Student 21 Institution C

The three sample comments above underscore students' enthusiasm for the face-to-face components that added meaning to their entire experience. Unlike students with daily on-campus exposure, prolonged study isolation combined with long-term online sharing of academic and personal challenges make the in-person activity an emotionally intense experience of connecting faces to names for many students. This level of endorsement was not obvious from the quantitative rating question, but comments show blended education makes a positive emotional connection to the programme. And as much as educators universally hope for such levels of student enthusiasm, one programme director was resigned to the reality that some students perceive coming to campus an unnecessary burden:

> *"I still think that having residential schools is a positive thing, but, you know, if students don't see any value in it, well then, fair enough, we have to accept that or we have to change it and do something that they see some value in. But I think everybody is so busy these days that people just want to sort of…get the degree and get on with their lives."*- Director Institution D

The triangulated methods were useful in bringing out a fuller picture of the programme experience by illustrating that blended programmes need to individually weigh the value of the components in the overall programme design.

4.5.3 Programme Organisation, Preparation and Technology

It should be noted that one of the most obvious, but least mentioned characteristics of distance education is the benefits of the organisation process imposed on its designers. Both students and directors remarked that well-organised course structure is a hallmark of best practice in distance education. The careful course preplanning was appreciated by students who perceived this as a value-added feature, as noted in this comment:

- *"I feel as if the materials are better presented in an online format with many multimedia teaching helps that are cued up and ready to go. Traditionally professors, teachers cram in the lesson at the last minute."* – Student 28 Institution C

Valuable comments from several alumni brought out that it is, in fact, the combination of organisation and technology that gives particular value to the distance experience and actually increased satisfaction for students because they could plan and pace the academic workload:

- *"Upfront course outline and work load was very important so you could schedule around your personal schedule and work ahead if needed."*- Student 12 Institution E
- *"Detailed syllabus with time lines was also helpful in assisting me in pacing my studies."* – Student 8 Institution B

The design of the organisational shape of a distance programme is on the exciting cutting edge of educational experimentation. Linking programme purpose strategically with the individual programme identity, its students and instructors, takes pedagogical skills, a tolerance for risk, intuition and leadership. Adding face-to-face programme elements seems to have the cumulative effect of making the entire programme more meaningful for students or when used as intensive courses, adds

appeal by dramatically shortening course time for students. An effective distance experience is inseparable from effective curriculum planning.

The next set of programme building data relates to the framework section considered the heart of the programme and the major "pull" factor: The curriculum content.

4.6   Programme Building: Curriculum Content

It is the programme content and delivery structure that combine to establish a programme's unique niche in the international HE market. Students expect their graduate programmes to be current with the rapidly changing trends in the global T&HM industry as well as grounded in the deeper industry issues. This section summarizes the subject matter related responses from the Programme Directors and the alumni perception of the programme content.

Some programmes in this study were designed to focus on deepening their specialist professional's knowledge, while others took a conceptual "shotgun" approach to broad content, designing with the career changer in mind. Directors mentioned programme marketability and serving their "borderless" students meant offering global perspectives on such areas as Leadership, Sustainability or Strategic planning. While, conversely, one programme was scrambling to produce made-to-order hospitality modules to cater to an influx of chefs needing masters degrees. Launching new courses can present challenges because the development and approval process is slow; generally taking about 1 ½ years to roll out. A programme can take even longer. Some directors found innovative ways to work around

bureaucratic barriers to be more responsive to the student needs and offering fresh, new courses with a quicker turnaround time.

4.6.1 Desired Learning Outcomes: Director Perspectives

Course content is directly defined by intended learning outcomes. Programme directors rated the importance of twenty cognitive development and professional application learning outcomes and objectives drawn from the literature for their programmes.

Figure 4-5: Specific Desired Learning Outcomes: Directors' questionnaire
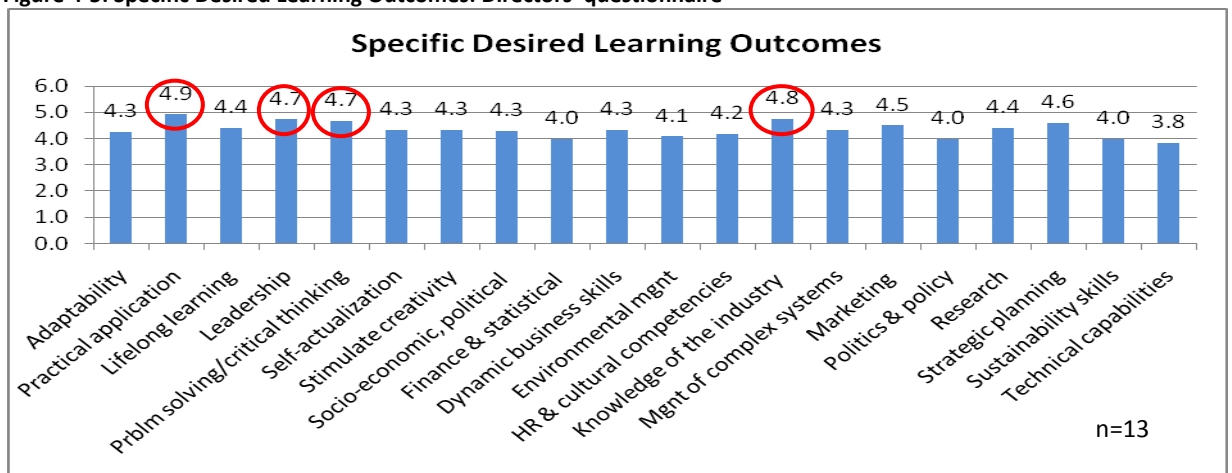
Circled in Figure 4-5, the directors strongly agreed driving content was relevancy or 'Practical Applications', or being able to apply what is learned (4.9/5), with 'knowledge of the industry' second most important (4.8/5) and 'Leadership' and 'Problem solving/critical thinking' also priority learning outcomes (4.7/5). Content relevance or knowledge of the industry is more straightforward in a teaching and learning sense for distance education than critical thinking or leadership. The interviews brought out the directors' concern about the difficulty of teaching "soft" skills, such as leadership, attitude, demeanour or respect for values in a distance format, as this director voiced:

"We are trying to teach leadership, but it is difficult to do that in a distance learning programme without any interaction." – Director Institution I

There was a low amount of variance among the directors regarding intended learning outcomes across these quantitative questions; generally agreeing that the suggested content areas had some value within their programme. In the interviews, some directors felt that there was a danger in scope being so broad that the degree can become cheapened, as has happened with the mass MBA online degree programmes of questionable quality. They observed that for T&HM distance education, it can be a search for the niche that they can "own", but choosing which direction is the right one is not always obvious. Some content areas may thrive long term e.g. Strategic Planning with many ways to adapt it to current management issues and tie to cognitive learning aims, or, as in the case of one withering programme, the content may be so limited that it becomes outdated e.g. eTourism and no longer marketable. This emphasizes the importance of distance programmes defining themselves and being responsive to external change in an extremely competitive arena without geographic barriers.

4.6.2 Satisfaction with Programme Content: Alumni Perspective

Students rated their perception of the overall quality of the content of their distance programmes in Question #17 of the online survey. Significantly, 85 % of the distance students felt their programmes were doing a good job and were satisfied or were very satisfied with the content. From the open comments from Question #16 students said:

- *"Exceeded my expectations."* – Student 21 Institution C
- *"The programme was well balanced."* – Student 13 Institution E

Deeper questioning into their perceptions of content quality again returned a high satisfaction level, shown in Figure 4-6.

Figure 4-6: Satisfaction with Specific Content Quality: Student perspective
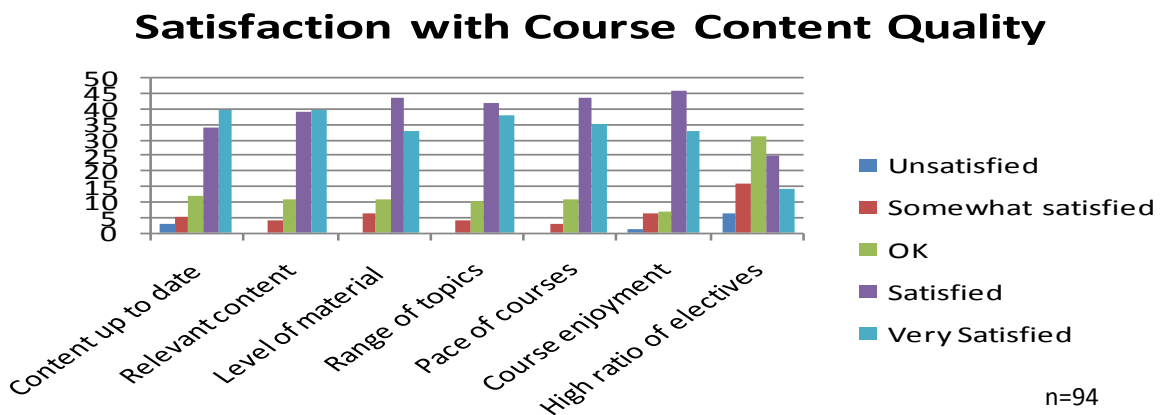
Content being up-to-date, a concern for distance students who are very sensitive to being served stale, canned lessons, appeared to be less of a problem than might be expected with 78.72% of the alumni being satisfied or very satisfied; however, again, the quantitative data was perhaps somewhat misleading as the open comment sections brought out that there actually were disappointments with the content being current:

- *"Felt as though many lessons were recycled from previous semesters without updating for newer research findings or historical data."* – Student 22 Institution C

And this was not necessarily an illusion. A director stated that their courses were delivered 'off the shelf' at his institution:

"They are already written, boxed, canned. And they are rewritten every three years. And then revalidated every 5 years." – Director Institution J

Figure 4-6 also shows that alumni had strongly positive opinions about "Relevant content" (84%) and "Course enjoyment" rating a combined satisfaction score of 85%. The comment below is typical of the adult student appreciation for expert selection of course material and practical applications:

- *"I received…supportive, relevant lessons, strategies that I'm able to use in my current job…a wide variety of research findings, principles, and the perspective on how to implement the strategies learned."*- Student 47 Institution C

From this comment it is also apparent that content enjoyment correlates with the application of principles and strategies and the development of a mindset of intellectual growth; foundational to lifelong learning.

Range of Content Topics

Again relating to programme purpose, the scope of the curriculum content was an important issue among these graduate students. The fourth question in Figure 4-6 shows high satisfaction on the quantitative ranking scales for content range, and subsequent comments show that it is the career changers who value a broad range of content:

- *"The programme was challenging for me; I was new to tourism as an industry - so I was well-challenged and viewed each course as a way to learn new aspects of the industry."* – Student 5 Institution C
- *"I think it really helped me broaden my perspective of the industry."* – Student 11 Institution B

Students with professional experience had high expectations for deepening, current content and resented wasting their time on the basics:

- *"I learned more than enough to enhance my professional knowledge of hospitality management."* – Student 4 Institution E
- *"More in-depth topics -- only the basics are taught -- too many introductory courses -- this is especially frustrating for tourism professionals who have been in the business."* – Student 32 Institution C

These comments also confirm the importance of aligning student expectations with the programme's identity and purpose.

High Ratio of Electives Available

In Figure 4-6, the responses to the last option stands out from the others. Students showed dissatisfaction concerning the "Ratio of electives to required courses" where only 42% of the students were either satisfied or highly satisfied and the other 58% were either marginally satisfied or unsatisfied. In subsequent open-ended survey Question #16, the lack of electives was again articulated as a sore point, but conversely, having enriching electives drew praise:

- *"The content covered was general and broad, yet allowed individual choice to delve deeper into specific areas of interest."* – Student 8 Institution E

Although students want choice, directors stated that offering an array of taught online electives can create logistical problems. Programmes may only have a small number of electives available online or not allow electives because fluctuating enrolment can make a course financially prohibitive.

Content Matching their Reasons for Enrolling

Qualitative survey Question #16 asked students how the content matched their expectations, and if it didn't, they were asked to suggest what might have helped. An appreciative inquiry approach, this question was included to explore the nature of the content students thought was important to them. 90% of all responses included constructive comments that could be clustered into two general categories: Practical/Relevant or Expanded Knowledge. Table 4-3 shows the frequency that comments related to each theme.

Table 4-3: Meaningful content areas for students

Practical/Relevant	Expanded Knowledge	Other
57.7% of comments	43% of comments	6.3% of comments

These open-answer results reinforce students' primary reasons for enrolling stated earlier in 'Programme purpose': Professional development or 'expanded knowledge', but emphasizes that relevance of content is an even stronger driver for adult learners seeking tangible benefits from their educational commitment.

Sequencing of Content: Student Surveys

One further dimension of content design was examined in the student survey: Sequencing of content. The Literature Review indicated that the scope and sequencing of the curricular content is important to the curriculum framework. Sequencing refers to the organisation of the delivery of programme content, i.e. chronological vs. thematic, inclusion of practice in theory, ties to other modules in the programme. The students rated their level of satisfaction with the logical sequencing of concepts in their programmes under Question 15 of the survey. 93 alumni rated the course content sequencing very highly with 82.8% either Satisfactory or Very Satisfied, indicating that curriculum design in this area was strong. There were no further comments from students or directors about this aspect of curriculum design.

In summary, these findings show that the self-selected students in this study are generally satisfied with the quality of the content in their distance graduate programmes in T&HM. Quality content that brings useful new knowledge and ways of problem solving appears to have the most value to graduate students who are focused on the practical. Teaching soft skills to those in management careers with the constraints of distance delivery are challenges to be met with distance education theory and interactive technology. Programme directors will need to creatively work with their teams to overcome institutional barriers to development

time for keeping course content up-to-date. Additionally students feel strongly about having choice in their coursework and offering electives can help with the content scope and deepening issue that separates the student sample. Sequencing of content does not appear to be a significant issue for distance programme design at the graduate level.

The final part of programme building is the nexus between content and reaching the intended learning outcomes in a distance graduate programme; the teaching and learning component of the curriculum framework.

4.7   Programme Building: Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning strategies should be developed by the programme design team and provide the framework for any instructor to operate from. Pedagogic approaches incorporate learning theory and ICT and link to programme purpose, structure and curriculum content. In this section, the programme directors and alumni reflect on the instructor, the technology-based tools and teaching and learning approaches of their distance experiences. Designing excellence in distance teaching and learning is more complex than on-campus because *"This is the group of students with the biggest set of difficulties."* – Director Institution K

Distance education technology was identified as one of the main contributing factors to the high student satisfaction ratings. There were many ways that media made their distance courses more convenient, e.g. *"Having all the materials online made getting them easier. Having videos online made them convenient to watch"* or *"It was nice to log onto Blackboard and click on the lectures, so wherever you are you can retrieve lectures, even if you forgot your DVD."*:

however, as students experienced the programme, they found that technology actually *"…made learning easier";* surpassing expectations in many cases. Adult learners quickly tackled the ICT learning curve, took personal pride that the web-based technology was easy to manoeuvre, kind of "cool" and *"pleasantly surprised at how effective the technology was".*

Although two programme directors stated that students didn't particularly care how their programmes were delivered, student comments refute that as they found their technology-enhanced materials to be a distinct learning advantage for reviewing, sharing and navigating material easily, such as in this comment:

- *"It was good that a lot of sessions were taped. That way, I could watch them at home at 5am while my son was still asleep. It was great that my statistics class was on compressed video because it was SOOO easy to just back it up over and over to hear him discuss difficult concepts. That was the best way to have had statistics distance ed."* – Student 1 Institution A

This group of students did endure some technical flaws in the implementation of course technology, but overall as technology improves, options for teaching and learning opportunities will continue to increase. That said, data about the specific aspects of technology-enhanced pedagogy emerged in the findings, which are provided later in this section, but the first and foremost element in teaching and learning is the distance instructor.

4.7.1 Profile of the Effective Distance Instructor

The primary instructional resource of the distance programme is the instructor. Students rated the quality of their instructors in Question #18 of the alumni questionnaire on the two scales of Satisfaction and Importance. These two

scales, discussed in Methodology, are commonly associated together as quality indicators and when closely aligned indicate that expectations have been met. The 5-point rating showed that students were generally satisfied with their instructors (3.98) but in terms of importance, the alumni overwhelmingly agreed (4.8) that the instructor is vitally important and, significantly, for a group who were otherwise positive about most aspects of their distance experience, sent a clear signal that their expectations were out of alignment with their experience. The distance instructor's mastery and creativity in applying technique is pivotal in the student's learning experience, as captured in this student's words:

- *"It is my belief that no matter how great the technological aspect of the programme is, it takes a great teacher to incorporate various learning methods to make a successful class!"* – Student 14 Institution E

One director summed up the ultimate responsibility of the instructor in the comment:

"If a student fails, it is the failure of the teacher." – Director Institution K

Online instructors may not have to work harder than on-campus, but online pedagogy requires more upfront strategic organisation to anticipate time, assessments and technical skills needed to run a class. Directors found that successful online instructors were team players and had 'buy-in' to distance education. Instructors who may have been used to an informal style of class organisation may find the adjustment to the demands of online preparation uncomfortable, because, as this director noted, *"In distance learning you cannot wing it."* – Director Institution H

A reflection by a hands-on type director encapsulated the nature of the effective distance instructor and the combination of skills and personality needed:

"The type of faculty member who has successful classes is the faculty member that is very outgoing, very technologically savvy, not that they need some kind of special skills, but they need to be comfortable and spend a lot of time in front of a computer…Coming up with creative ways…to make it very easy for students to ask questions.

To probe deeper into the subject matter and getting them started into discussions. Keeping a sense of humour, so that it is not a dry yes, no or maybe answers, so that the students feel very comfortable with writing their own thoughts - and those thoughts are always commented on…

I think it takes a special faculty person with a personality that lends itself to that kind of environment. And that is hard to find." – Director Institution F

4.7.2 Core Teaching and Learning Principles from Experience

Effective distance teaching and learning rests on the basics: consistent application of learning theory. Directors observed that good responsiveness between both teacher and student was a good predictor of online student success and/or completion. Nearly all directors replied in interview Question 3.3 that student/teacher communication was the goal because, as one director put it:

"You don't have students in front of you once or twice a week. You don't want them to feel that they are on their own." – Director Institution F

According to directors, effective feedback begins with instructors following essential communication protocols such as; making sure the students know when they may have online "office hours" or posting generic FAQs to the class threaded discussion board to avoid answering the same questions over and over. From experience, directors found that for instructors to manage feedback most effectively they should log in every day for thirty minutes and reply to the messages and move on. For instructors, this amount of daily communication might seem to be a

burdensome task, however the poor time management habit of once a week for six hours has negative repercussions as this director observed:

> *"Distance learning kind of needs to be…almost daily. If a student posts something and then for them to have to wait until next week to get their response, they lose interest. They posted something that was dear to them, a question that they wanted to know or a comment they wanted to make. If the comment sits until a week later, by then they couldn't care less and most likely after that they won't bother to reply with any more feedback. A daily interaction is the best, but it is hard to get faculty to buy into."* – Director Institution F

These methods for good online communication habits support consistent timely interactivity. The alternative, when instructors' feedback is delayed, can result in a tragic shutdown of communication and trust from the student, isolation or lack of engagement.

Interactivity and organisation skills can add up to building relationships into an online 'community of inquiry' or social network that facilitates shared learning. Directors' success 'recipes' typically included *"Well-structured class and discussion, student motivation and interest, bonding with fellow students."* Surprisingly, one director with ten years of distance education experience did not perceive student bonding as an added-value success factor:

> *"I don't know if that is a relevant issue for distance learners."* – Director Institution I

Such a dismissive comment raises the alarm of whether directors understand fundamental best practice and the importance of relationships to distance programme sustainability and excellence.

Answering RQ3 includes assessing if the student experience confirms good practice in terms of the core teaching and learning principles: interactivity and feedback. Question #21 on their survey and showed overall they were satisfied or very satisfied (77.66%) with the interactivity of their programmes. In Question #20, interactivity issues were examined in greater detail on the dual scales of Satisfaction and Importance.

Figure 4-7: Interactivity: Satisfaction & Importance to students
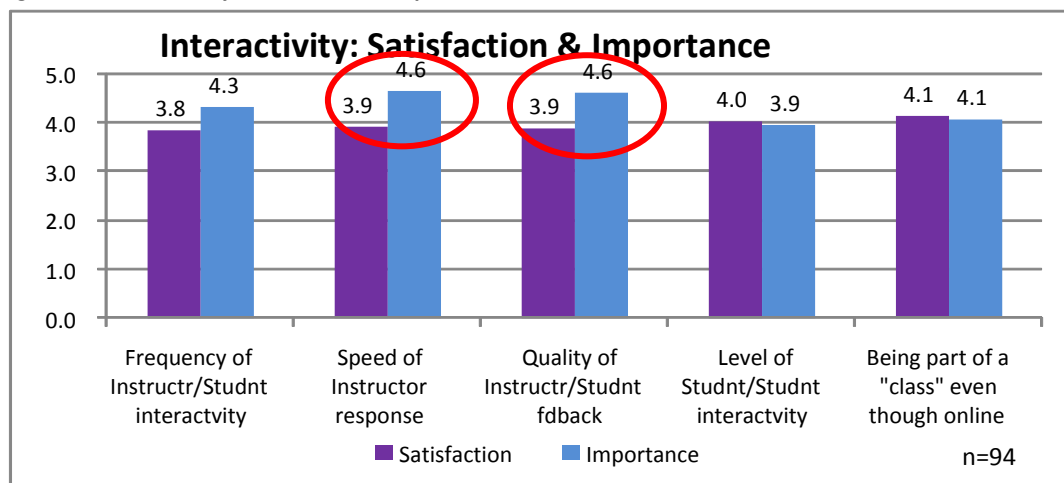
In Figure 4-7, the ratings for Satisfaction and Importance of interactivity show that expectations and experiences were closely matched when it came to student-to-student interactivity and students feeling they were part of a class. Student expectations were not closely met when it came to frequency of interactivity and the circled data highlights an even greater discrepancy between Satisfaction and Importance regarding "Speed of instructor response" and "Quality of instructor to student feedback". Students indicate that these issues were highly important (4.6), but rated a low 3.9 in satisfaction. This important information about student perception of programme effectiveness shows a performance gap that the curriculum framework should address. Student comments such as *"I was looking for*

more one-to-one interaction with profs [sic]" indicate that insufficient contact created frustration.

Methods for Effective Distance Teaching and Learning

As the studies reviewed in Section 3.6.1 noted, there are theories that support techniques to help reduce transactional distance and increase student satisfaction. The following are five thumbnail sketches of recommended methods drawn from the study participants' teaching and learning experience that improve the learning environment and are motivational for students. There were many more inspired specific practices that directors found effectively built dialog.

1. Presence: Creating 'presence' online takes expertise and enthusiasm and students are perceptive about instructors' ability to create an engaging space for learning:

- *"Even though this is an online programme - you can really tell when professors are engaged or not engaged. I've been very pleased but also VERY disappointed with some of my professors' level of interest they have displayed for working with their students."* – Student 16 Institution C
- *"To be successful with the material, it needed a strong presence and leadership ability from the prof [sic] in order to create a vibrant online community of learners."* – Student 3 Institution D

2. Personality: Summarized in Table 4-4 are basic techniques directors suggest for personalizing the class website to make it 'come alive' and express personality:

Table 4-4: Basic tips for creating personality online from directors and students

Practice	Rationale
The simple practice of posting pictures and bios of staff and students or use of webcam for synchronous chats.	Helps put faces with names. Students relate and connect better seeing a human face.
Instructors developing their own online "voice" that comfortably reflects their personal style and personality	E.g. written lecture notes should sound conversational to facilitate easy reading of lengthy course materials.
Videos or audio of the instructor with good sound quality	Contributes to personalizing and enlivening the material

3. Variety of methods and tools: Variety of instructional methods can stimulate learning interest and directors note good results in learning outcomes. The teaching and learning mixture of methods differed across programmes, but nearly all directors were in agreement that it was beneficial to use multiple teaching tools or materials to improve the learning environment. As explained by this director:

> *"… You can't just present everything in one format. We try very hard to have different delivery methods in each unit as much as it is possible. Different forms of teaching. Different forms of assessment. You have to keep it mixed up. Some students react against that. They would like the familiarity of the same. In general we find that if we mix it up that we get overall better results."* – Director Institution K

77% of alumni surveyed indicated that their preference was to have a variety of forms of media and assessments, as this student notes:

- *"Variety of course presentations: PowerPoints to download, DVDs, VHS tapes, compressed video, recording presentation of me to send to class to watch, etc…."* – Student 1 Institution A

Another student confirms that a variety of media methods serves different learning preferences:

- *"I found it very effective…to be able to hear the taped lecture! I tend to learn more from seeing, hearing and doing, than by just merely reading. I can attest to this in that subsequent to this particular masters course, I also acquired another online masters from SPAIN, in Spanish (not my native language), and I was extremely disappointed because there were no online lectures, just merely reading, etc. This was not easy for me."* – Student 7 Institution B

4. Lecture length: In practice, programme directors advised keeping the lecture short, whether it was a narrated PowerPoint, videotaped campus lecture or other streaming media. It was suggested that dividing multimedia lectures in chunks from

5 minutes to no longer than 20 minutes, with 10 minutes "about right" for keeping student attention and presenting material in focused segments: helpful guidelines for module design.

5. Managing diversity: As lifelong learning becomes a cultural norm, diversity will continue to expand, particularly in distance programmes. To effectively design assessments instructors need an understanding of learners' academic gaps and strengths. One programme's method to manage diversity for consistent learning outcomes is assessing the critical thinking and writing skills of students by administering essays to students early in the programme to quickly sort out student abilities. Using early essays formatively gives students feedback to meet class standards. Other methods were not suggested, but should be explored due to the high priority of this issue.

4.7.3 Perception of the Teaching and Learning Components

The student survey quantitative Question #11 asked students to profile the technology-based teaching and communication components used in the delivery of their programmes. Combined with qualitative comments from both alumni and directors, components are analysed to understand how characteristics contributed to distance pedagogy.

Communication

95 % of communication between learner and instructor in this study was by email or the course website; however 71.5% of communication also relied on occasional phone contact. In at least three programmes, the relationships between the directors and students were at a level where directors felt comfortable picking

up the phone occasionally to call students to resolve administrative or personal issues and they supported an 'open-door' student policy. This practice reflects a 'high-touch' approach to the student experience.

Course Materials:

Descriptions of course materials by programme directors showed that, for the most part, course materials mirror on-campus programme use of textbooks and syllabi, either electronic or hard copy. Some programmes provide "very copious" study guides or "distance education packages" and these appear to be vestiges of earlier correspondence format programmes. Several directors noted a sense that tangible materials contribute to students' learning enjoyment and sense of belonging to the programme.

Access to digital resources for students is made available in various forms and degrees of completeness, such as pre-purchased eTextbooks, although not the most current editions, provide a high level of convenience for foundational subject readings. The academic institutions also provide a growing number of online research eLibrary resources and digital repositories. Deciding the balance of electronic and hard copy resources is in the hands of the course design team and while pre-printed materials reduce costs for the student, all are evolving towards paperless alternatives.

Virtual Lectures: Asynchronous and Synchronous

Digitally delivered lectures are central elements of the asynchronous or synchronous learning environment. Figure 4-8 shows three modes of delivering lectures online; Asynchronous – recorded lecture or narrated PowerPoint and Synchronous.

Figure 4-8: Content presentation characteristics: Student survey
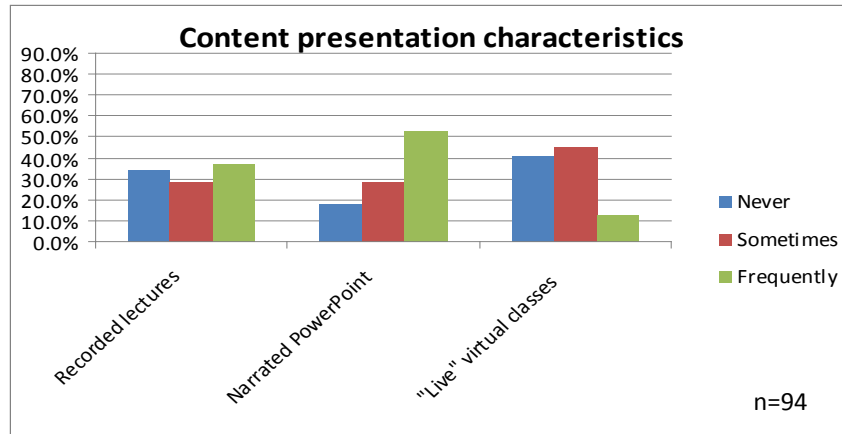
Two thirds of this study's participants were provided with recorded lectures. Some programmes did record the full on-campus lecture, which was provided to students as links, or CDs or DVDs. Students appreciated the flexibility of being able to control the lecture as their time and interest permitted, as in the following typical comments concerning the use of technology:

- *"It really helped to be able to stop the lecture, write down my notes, then go back to the lecture. This is something that can't be done in a regular classroom."* – Student 44 Institution C
- *"I feel that it was very crucial for the actual course lectures to be available for review."* - Student 7 Institution B

Some courses provided complete recorded campus lectures that students found *"very well put together and helpful."* Other students *"…enjoyed the lectures that could be printed and downloaded."*

Lectures were delivered in various formats, but the application used most often in these sampled programmes was the ubiquitous PowerPoint.

PowerPoint Presentations

In Figure 4-8, the next mode of lecture presentation, narrated PowerPoint, is shown to be used extensively (81.9%). In retrospect, a more complete picture of

PowerPoint prevalence could have included one more question to clarify the use of PowerPoints without narration, whether animated or static. This was a sacrifice, however, made to survey brevity. Presentations with PowerPoint are a staple of the campus graduate classroom and transfer well to online delivery because they offer instructors effective and easy to use features. Their versatility can be expanded to include both audio and interactive features and to condense or illustrate lessons, which students enjoyed:

- *"It was great to be able to listen to the PowerPoint lectures whenever, and as often as I wanted. That made it easier to concentrate on learning the material instead of trying to make sure you took notes."* – Student 2 Institution C
- *"The PowerPoint recorded lectures were great because it provided you with the most important aspects of the lecture. Unlike a traditional programme, sometimes you have to guess what is important and take notes accordingly."* – Student 27 Institution C

The interactive features can give asynchronous material the feel of a synchronous or "live" experience although PowerPoints are essentially one-way presentations. One student mentioned that lectures that looked more like television than PowerPoint slides were *"far easier to digest"*. Using PowerPoints cost the programme nothing, can effectively boost visual appeal and can be used creatively to build a meaningful, interactive learning environment.

Synchronous Classes and Friendly Technology Tools

The third lecture mode shown in Figure 4-8 is the use of synchronous online classes. Synchronous class time is used for lecture and also interactive forums between teachers and students. This group of alumni was nearly split in the use of live virtual classes, with 58.7% who did use this function while the other 41.3% did

not at all. Although timing a synchronous class is more difficult for distance students due to working across time zones, cultures and schedule conflicts, they do enjoy "*the group communication tools that allow synchronous collaboration*" and dealing with such logistics is common in the globalized workplace.

- *"I love the eLuminate Live sessions. They truly helped create a "classroom" environment - because we were all chatting, IM'ing, listening to the professor, watching the professor write on the "white board" and really engaging on a topic. I think that this really helped me feel like I was part of a class!"* – Student 16 Institution C

Part of the enjoyment appears to be the sensory richness that doesn't imitate a classroom, but rather creates a different kind of class experience. Students also mentioned that it allowed guest lecturers to join their live classes.

Programme directors said that synchronous class time was popular as long as the technology was foolproof and easy to use e.g. video conferencing tools built into the course website. Alumni confirmed this in Question #22 of their survey, where 89% of alumni felt that "ease of use" of technology, whether freeware or proprietary, synchronous or asynchronous, was important to their experience. Some programmes experimented with "cheap and easy" solutions such as inexpensive headphones or webcams, or the use of free tools, such as Skype, MSN messenger, or Yahoo messenger to increase synchronous interactivity and have more ICT options in their toolkits. As these two students experienced, synchronous communication was often sourced among themselves:

- *"We found MSN messenger to be very useful for communication--more so than what was provided on the website."* – Student 5 Institution D

- *"The ability for students to have access to a conference call line worked very well for us. It was not provided, but we used such a line to assist in getting projects kicked off and completed."* – Student 3 Institution B

This is an excellent example of students empowered to creatively approach problem-solving. They valued synchronous dialogue, were goal-oriented and found ways to boost the collaborative functions of the courses. Co-creation of learning methods should be incorporated intentionally into design strategies for student-directed learning.

Discussion Boards

The Transactional Distance construct of dialogue was most often manifested as online 'threaded' asynchronous discussions. Question #11 of the student questionnaire revealed that nearly all (93.5%) of the sampled participants had programmes that used the discussion board function with their distance programmes and 62.4% used it frequently. Many alumni commented that the discussions were the most important part of the learning experience and the unifying element to regularly connect students to both content understanding and connect the class socially. Through sharing experiences, the diversity of students and constructively brought relevance to the lessons:

- *The discussions worked well as far as hearing from other professionals. Their experiences helped to enhance your knowledge base and let you know what works in the "real" world."* – Student 27 Institution C

Some students found asynchronous online discussions more substantive than live classroom discussions because with less time constraints they could read the material and synthesize it into well-written discussions, fostering deeper understanding and exploration of the material than in a classroom setting. In online

discussions student participation is forced, unlike in a classroom where students can lurk at the back of the class. If a student hasn't read the material, it becomes obvious to the entire class, which can be very motivating.

Discussion boards rated highly with students in this study, but perhaps this is due to having few alternative means of interactivity between the instructor and other students. Some of the sample programmes were text-based only and not media rich and, as this student noted, other media options would have improved the experience:

- *"Would have liked more phone opportunity and/or verbal communication - maybe more video lectures from the teachers so you could see them face-to-face. More opportunity to talk to the other students as well, rather than just discussion boards."* – Student 8 Institution E

The adoption of new technology-based tools has the potential to continue improving the community of learners supported by online peer interaction and feedback.

Other Web-based Assessment Tools

As in on-campus courses, directors report that all types of assessments are utilized; exams, quizzes, papers, group projects, presentations, etc, but delivered in web-based formats. Online platforms, referred to as Learning Management Systems or Virtual Learning Environments, such as BlackBoard, Desire2Learn or Moodle, provide the consistent course interface, which usually standardise technology features and appearance of the courses. There is great similarity among these platforms in terms of toolsets. The differences are in how instructional strategies and use of distance learning principles are used to meet learning goals. Examples of project-based assessments activities using digital media to good effect were

mentioned, such as students taping site visits or creating a tour guide project as a video. One director was thrilled to find electronic feedback software that allowed adding audio feedback to a digital assignment by clicking on the text and recording comments. *"They love it. It's phenomenal!"* Students can then listen to the feedback. This particular technology was found to be very appealing to students and instructors because it offers a more personal voice for remote students.

These limited findings reinforce the value of technology-enhanced assessments, activities and feedback in various formats to student learning. As directors implied, their primary expectation of technology is that it works. The design team has a growing number of digital resources to consider when making decisions around choice and newer applications with creative potential to inspire and motivate learning will be key.

Distance Collaborative Assessment

One of the most noticeable aspects of the teaching and learning strategies rated by the students on Question #11 is, despite of geographic barriers, the predominant use of group work (97.9%) and used on a frequent basis (79%). Graduate management education emphasizes team skills building. Alumni satisfaction was varied in their impression of online group work, mostly for the same reasons it receives mixed reactions on-campus: there are always some students who work diligently on projects while others don't contribute their share of the work:

- *"I have mixed feelings about the group work portion of online courses. In many instances it worked very well and in others, a few in the group always did the bulk of the work. There is no real way to work around this problem as it is evident in traditional learning settings as well."* – Student 12 Institution D

Geographic distance added another level of difficulty to group work, but the main criticism is the technique used lacked authenticity, which adult learners prefer.

- *"I have found the group work technique to be rather artificial, as one is forced to work with total strangers in different time zones. While I agree that one must master teamwork to function in a workplace I fail to see that this method really models a real-life teamwork situation."* – Student 47 Institution C

Open comments also revealed that the marking of collaborative work is an issue. One student suggested that it would be fairer to weight grading more toward individual work:

- *"The courses where individual work was worth more than group work as a percentage was definitely better for me."* – Student 12 Institution D

Marking schemes for collaborative assessments can be challenging and with the growing use of Web 2.0 technologies and more shared assessments this will be a focus of debate.

Team-based projects are a hallmark of management education because graduates will find group work an essential in the workplace. Also, from an institutional perspective, collaborative work minimizes possibility of unethical use of online materials.

Summary

Key findings in this section suggest that distance teaching and learning best practices arise from application of theory and principles, such as transactional distance and dialogue. Students expressed satisfaction with the interactivity of their courses, but stress the importance of fast, quality feedback from their instructors. Instructors in distance education drive the student experience by combining knowledge and technical skills with an engaging online presence. Instructors who

practice consistent protocols for student feedback strengthen learner motivation to stay engaged and increase formative learning. Mixing assessment and media variety is a proven strategy for effective practice. Discussion boards are the main tools for developing dialogue between students, the teacher and other students and connecting to the course content. Discussions and lectures are usually asynchronous as a practical function for accommodating individual schedules, but synchronous, easy-to-use ICT is appreciated by students and adds a dimension of immediacy and more sense of community to dialogue. Overall this sampling of elements illustrates the extensive, changing variables at play in the instructional design process and value of having a framework to align the many parts and players.

Data in the next section, 'Implementation', provides the participants' perception of the resources needed to actively support the distance learning environment.

4.8   Implementation: Support, Training and Resources

The draft curriculum framework identifies 'Implementation' as the action stage of curriculum development and design where the instructional resources and daily course activities come into focus. As the programme or course begins, the actual practice of bringing together the programme parts involves implementation strategies. This section presents the findings from the perspectives of both directors and alumni of the administrative and instructional support system.

4.8.1 The Website: The Experience Starts with Building Expectations

Because of the digital nature of the distance programme, creating a virtual entity online is a vital extension of programme support. The student's first

encounter with the programme is usually its website that should both clearly portray what students can expect from the programme and capture their interest. Here market research should demonstrate the programme's value-added nature and establish how it differentiates itself among others offered internationally. The website, critical to success of the distance programme, is the information portal where potential students evaluate to make important selection decisions, as these directors commented:

- *"What we believe now is that most people find us when they are out looking. When you are online – googling or whatever, and they find us."* – Director Institution N
- *"80%, believe it or not, find us via our website. Essential…Especially true for international students."* – Director Institution M

Student responses confirmed that they found out about their programme mostly through the internet (35%) as shown in Figure 4-9.

Figure 4-9: How students found their programmes: Student survey
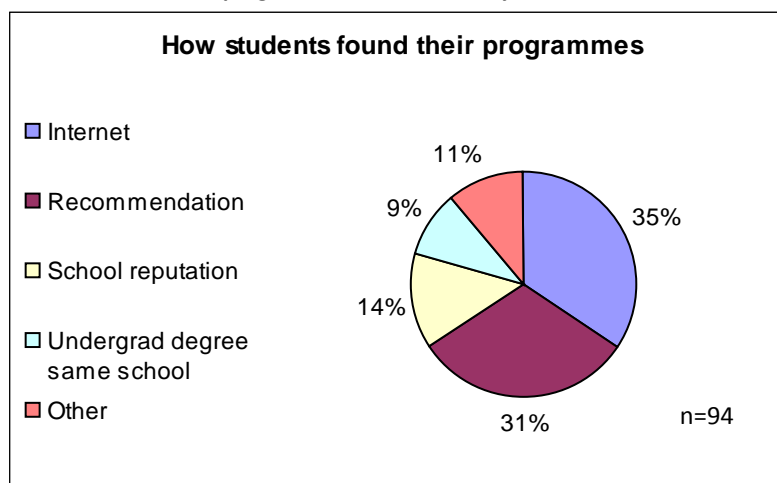
A substantial proportion of this sample of students was attracted to the programme by recommendation (31%) or school reputation (14%). Recommendations came from friends, family, programme affiliates and organisations and some programmes stage informational recruitment sessions featuring current or past students to offer

first-hand recommendations. Of interest is the fact that 9% of this sample group came from within the institution where they were enrolled in an undergraduate, which is useful information from an internal marketing perspective.

Distance programme directors realize that to battle the ongoing perception among some academics and students of their programmes being a "light" version of the traditional on-campus degree that they need to build trust among potential students. Unlike a traditional programme, a potential distance student can't pay a campus visit, so to overcome biased perceptions the functionality of the website, reputation of the school, accreditation and academic rigor are important tools to build confidence in the programme image. Students said that their first contact with the programme may have been from a career fair or an ad in the local paper, but that led to online informational follow-up. Directors expressed feelings of frustration to resignation with having an inadequate, uninformative online presence that results in a poor image:

> *"Marketing is not effective now. The website needs substantial work. Some overseas visitors are adversely impressed with the site now. There is a need to sharpen it up. I think there is potential for anything if it's marketed and managed effectively. On the website, you can look up a course and you will see whether it is full time, part time or distance learning. That's about it. It's got to have its own marketing feature."* –Director Institution I

> *"Whenever you go into the University homepage, you are not directed to eLearning opportunities. It is kind of hidden away there. I think that is because within the university, everybody wants a bit of space."* –Director Institution P

Students commented that they depend on the institution's accurate description of the programme to make informed decisions and that having a clear understanding

of the programme contributed to their selection decision and ultimate satisfaction. Programme mismatch can create serious issues in the students' overall learning experience:

- *"I was looking for more sports management-oriented learning. I was forced to do projects on sports that were not easily transferred from the tourism-centric classes."* – Student 10 Institution B

Staying true to the programme's purpose and accurately portraying its uniqueness builds trust while demonstrating some flair will generate excitement, separate it from the crowd and enhance recruitment for a sustainable programme.

4.8.2 Programme Leadership and Administrative Support

Role of Administration and Director

Programme leadership and *"administration is key"* to the quality and sustainability of the programme experience according to directors. The day-to-day running of the programme and the fulfilment of the programme's educational commitment to its students falls under the auspices of the programme director, who depends on administrative support. Distance programme administration is different than on-campus programme administration because directors and administrative staff need to manage more complex factors such as diverse student demographics, technology resource challenges and more systems to coordinate for development, delivery and support. For example, flexible programmes may have student intakes on a different schedule than the on-campus, so attention to details about financial aid checks need to be carefully monitored. The programme experience inevitably suffers when the administrative framework is not well developed, as noted:

"At this institution, although we are very much looking towards developing distance learning, I don't think that we are particularly well resourced in terms of being able to cope with the administrative demands of it." – Director Institution I

Several programme directors acknowledged that they had "*lost some students because of administrative inefficiency*" and emphasized how pivotal administrative support is to programme quality and even survival:

"I don't think that there is a particularly strong understanding of how complicated it can get administratively…if we are not competent in terms of the administrative efficiency then we are doomed to failure I think." - Director Institution I

A director of an executive programme with a "Programme concierge" and a reputed near 100% retention rate said the secret to meeting student expectations is being able to provide *"Service and response"* and understand distance students who *"need prodding to stay on track."*

Role of the Director

At the director level, programme leaders have the tacit responsibility of knowing how to exploit their institutional frameworks to leverage solutions for flexibility needs that might fall outside the norm. This requires both thinking out of the box and finesse as noted by the director of a U.S. programme:

"The courses have to fall into what the world regards as the semester or the federal government gets all confused. So we restructured it so it fits the mould that works for the way that universities usually function, which was a change …. And that was actually huge. And then we let people step in anytime." – Director Institution N

Programme directors' leadership and communication skills are key to navigating their programme's success within the institution and externally, for example student

trust in the programme is jeopardized when directors cannot deliver courses promised, as this director remarked:

> *"Difficulties of delivery across schools has continued, with a number of postgraduate level subjects which were part of the published programme being discontinued by the School of Business"* – Director Institution D

For some directors the distance programme is just one aspect of their broader role within the institution. They may have a range of responsibilities as part of a larger institutional remit or only a narrow administrative task in addition to teaching. Directors had up to three administrative assistants or no administrative help. About a quarter of the directors generated an exceptional attitude of vitality of leadership and vision that marked them as innovators in their fields, while another quarter of the directors of small programmes were palpably discouraged by internal disinterest and watched their withering programmes being relegated to "back burner" status. Nonetheless, all directors focused on the practical and the desire to achieve a high standard of quality education. They found that the job involved a focus on quality, as noted by this director:

> *"You just have to manage it on a day-to-day basis. But constantly I am looking for better faculty, more consistency… Those are the things that you really have to struggle for day in and day out."* – Director Institution M

This same energy and commitment serves the administrator well in the constant vigilance for programme excellence.

4.8.3 Instructor Training and Support

As noted previously, academic institutions generally have support centres for distance education that may not have any responsibility for everyday management

of the programme, but offer a spectrum of technology support, instructional design and marketing services.

Directors, who may not agree on all aspects of programme implementation, did prioritize having a system for faculty academic preparation:

"The eLearning thing is great, but let me say to you that academics are struggling with it because of lack of time and lack of understanding and training. And I think that's a big issue. It's fine if we are going to go down that road, but I think that academics need to be given a lot of support and training to actually be able to use these tools properly." – Director Institution D

To develop the confidence necessary for instructors new to distance learning, hands-on attention to learning new habits of teaching is practical, as this director comments:

"What I try to do is work with those faculty members and show them, 'Yes you can. And this is how you do it. It's not that hard to log in every day.'" – Director Institution F

Although not all directors agreed that previous online teaching experience was particularly important, it was stated that following core distance learning principles and developing top quality instructional material compensated for inexperience:

"Faculty experience is not really relevant. Quality of the CD-ROM is more important. Student/teacher contact and feedback is very important." – Director Institution J

The implication is that a team approach to distance teaching support allows instructors to focus on using familiar communication technology to good effect while IT professionals coordinate the digitized materials.

4.8.4 Technology Challenges: Consistent Experience

The quantitative findings paint a positive picture of student satisfaction with technology; however on reflection experiences may have been less than perfect. In Question #23 the average student satisfaction rating for programme technology and support was 4.06 out of 5. More detailed Question #22, shown in Figure 4-10 used the dual satisfaction and level of importance scales to reveal that even though the majority (72%) of students were satisfied with their programme's 'Quick tech support', 86% ranked it as important, showing a disconnect between expectation and satisfaction.

Figure 4-10: Technology support: Satisfaction & Importance: Student survey
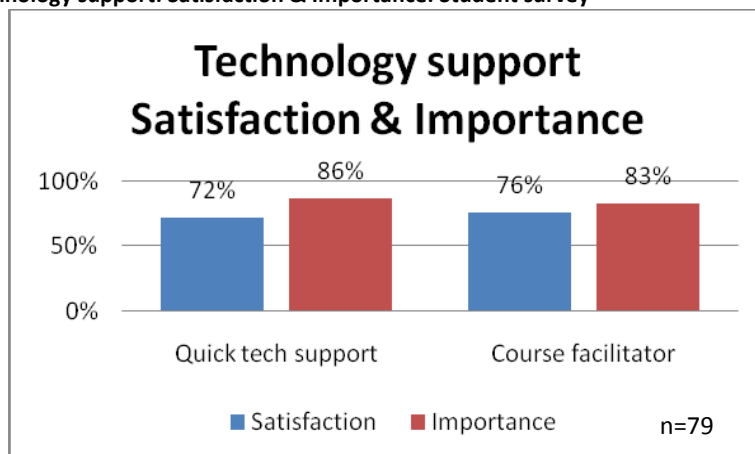
Students noted that when instructors struggled with the technology or kept tinkering with it, it undermined the learning experience for them. Not all programmes had facilitators or someone to assist with technology-related course issues, but Figure 4-10 shows that from the 79 responses 83% of them rated this support component important, which implies that the functionality of the facilitator role might be a component to be expanded to ensure consistent quality.

Inconsistent or poor functionality or tech support causes stress and frustration, especially if problems occur during exams. Students commented:

- *"It was great as long as an Oklahoma storm didn't mess up the connection."* – Student 3 Institution E

- *"Experienced some challenges with materials or concepts which I did not understand. Difficult to get aid or assistance in those situations."* – Student 6 Institution E

- *"I do wish that the technology on the lectures was improved. Sound is often grainy when taped by professors. When "professional" voiceovers are used, they often mispronounce terms which can be off-putting."*- Student 7 Institution C

- *"The pre-recorded classroom lectures were many times hard to hear and sometimes hard to see what was on the board."* – Student 3 Institution B

Strong Preference for Up-to-date Technology

Distance students expect current technology and were perturbed and vocal about having to use old, outdated technology that made the content appear lifeless or reused, and ultimately hampered quality teaching and learning, e.g *"primitive slides/audio were not always good learning tools."* Alumni suggested using more socially constructed learning tools, such as wikis, chat rooms or webinars and fewer static presentations. An expectation of their online experience was that *"programmes keep up"* with change using new web-based ICT with trained, engaged instructors:

- *"Looking back there were not as many Web 2.0 technologies when I took the course. Those would have helped quite a bit for the networking and interaction."* –Student 6 Institution E

- *"There is so much technology out there that I was extremely disappointed with the web-based discussions that the professors used. I felt it was the lazy way out--especially when they wouldn't participate in the discussions. One prof did provide a lecture CD, but in so many of the classes it would be interesting to hear lectures on special topics. Tell the profs the technology is*

there - Use it! --and to the IT guys - Let them know the tech is there and teach

them (instructors) how to use it." – Student 5 Institution D

Because of its power to stimulate interest in learning in new ways, there will always be pressure on the design teams to keep up with new ICT applications and needs for tech support to ensure consistent functionality and student satisfaction.

This section on implementation brings forward the importance of the programme support features included in the curriculum framework to effectively operate the programme on a daily basis. Beginning with the website, the most common means leading to enrolment, expectations and trust are established between student and programme. The programme administration supports and motivates distance students with a 'hospitality' attitude of quality service while working closely with the director to coordinate administrative details that one director likened to running a small business. Nuances of the leadership role are quite varied and director creativity and commitment to programme goals are strong factors in sustainability. Instructors need confidence entering distance teaching and may find that partnering with IT instructional designers works in many cases as technical skills develop. Students have high expectations for technology support as part of a quality programme and are eager to use new technology and applications that make their classes more engaging.

This brings into focus the necessity of having a well-integrated means for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the programme's learning systems.

4.9   Evaluation: Monitoring and Adjusting for Quality

Evaluation is the process leading to the improvement of the curriculum framework and the learner experience. In this section, comprehensive and tactical

means for monitoring and maintaining quality courses are presented by directors. Also, directors and students evaluate overall effectiveness of their programmes, the learning methods and support and rank the factors that contribute to student success in distance graduate programme.

Monitoring quality, as the distance education format matures and grows, requires vigilance over changing components, conditions and processes on many levels. Directors' deep concern for quality and consistency in their academic offerings is reflected in this statement:

> *"The things that we struggle with continually…if there is one thing that keeps me awake at night…it's Quality. Quality is a determination of what each individual faculty member does in their particular online or residential delivery."* – Director Institution M

Directors' fears are substantiated, as this unprompted student comment shows:

- *"There are wide variances from instructors as far as the web board input, guidance, engagement and expectations are concerned."* – Student 19 Institution C

Directors confirmed that each distance programme had a process for evaluation and redesign. In general periodic module or programme review is part of a systematic formal process. Distance programmes are revalidated with the same guidelines as their on-campus counterparts. The size of the institution affects the ease and time needed to adjust programmes. Course updates may happen each semester or be upgraded every 2-4 years. Complete revalidations are generally every five years and individual subjects reviewed annually which includes feedback *"from industry, and students and also graduated students."* Feedback should be a continuous looped system to facilitate incremental changes, as illustrated in this

institution-wide adoption of a management philosophy of ensuring that the needs of those using a product of an organisation are continually being met:

> *"As we apply a continuous quality improvement theme to industry performance, we apply that to what we do in the classroom and in an online forum. …We are always conscious of the feedback that we get. And that has to feed continuously back into the development of that programme. As the overall Mission and Vision, it is a principle and process used in all teaching across the school"* – Director Institution A

This holistic approach, similar to Graduate Attributes in its universality, goes a step further, seamlessly integrating quality as an ethic in teaching, programme development and as a lifelong paradigm for learners. Interview time limitations left deeper details an area for further enquiry.

Monitoring and Evaluation Methods

Although a few directors stated that their programmes were not adept at evaluating student satisfaction or course quality, four programmes shared protocols for student progress, programme satisfaction and teaching engagement that they found worked well, shown in Table 4-5:

Table 4-5: Monitoring and evaluation methods: Programme directors

	Student evaluation of programme
1.	During residency take advantage of face-to-face time to have programme evaluation student focus groups facilitated by the director.
	Online student evaluation of programme with feedback
2.	A completely transparent process generates programme evaluation feedback. Students engage in an open online discussion to evaluate their course experiences and make suggestions. Students identify best practices, as well as areas needing adjustment as a threaded discussion. The programme director forwards the feedback directly to the programme council and then, completing the loop, each issue is addressed and cycled back to the students. This process was reported to work very well for all participating.
	Monitor instructor and class quality issues
3.	Check online class quality issues using a peer evaluation process. Directors log into courses regularly to observe if instructors are providing timely feedback

	and students are engaged. Keep collegial critique an informal process.
	"I would scan… how many discussions and read some of those replies."
	If a problem is identified the director chats with the faculty member privately during the semester in a positive way without embarrassing them to correct problems before they impact student experience.
	"I would go and say, 'I see we are halfway through the semester and you have posted less than a hundred messages all combined. I don't see much of an interaction between you and students. Why is that? What can we do to change that?'"
	This method of quality assurance takes a hands-on director who communicates well with faculty members.
	Monitoring student issues
4.	Systematically monitor student issues utilizing a 3-stage alerting system to assure students stay on track for programme duration

A systematic monitoring or evaluative system is the best strategy for formatively improving pedagogy, the students' learning experience or even eliminate those courses that are low performers. Web-based technology enables a new level of efficiency for quickly pinpointing trouble spots and resolving issues.

That said, the guiding RQ 3 for this chapter seeks to understand the perception of the distance learning experience, and evaluative questions addressed that directly.

4.9.1 Evaluation Results: Overall Satisfaction

Overall this study's alumni participants reported good learning experiences and reconfirmed what programme directors outlined as good practices for instruction: engaged, communicative instructors, clear course expectations and effective use of media, e.g.:

- *"I enjoyed my educational experience and … benefited greatly. The instructor-lead lessons recorded on CD's were very helpful and prompt responses by email from instructor were most helpful. Detailed syllabus with*

time lines was also helpful in assisting me in pacing my studies." – Student 8

Institution B

Addressing how effective the combination of teaching, technology and support was in helping students reach their learning goals, the survey Question #13 showed that 83% of students evaluated the overall combination of delivery methods used in their programmes to be effective or very effective as shown in Figure 4-11.

Figure 4-11: Learning method effectiveness: Student survey

In Question #24, at the end of the alumni survey, student satisfaction was broken down into components. Figure 4-12 shows programme satisfaction high across three areas: interrelating issues in course content (79.8%), 'Skills learned in the programme were transferable for future career situations' (90.4%), served their needs well (86.2%). Their high regard for their programmes prompted 87% agreement that alumni would recommend their programme.

Figure 4-12: Programme retrospective of student satisfaction
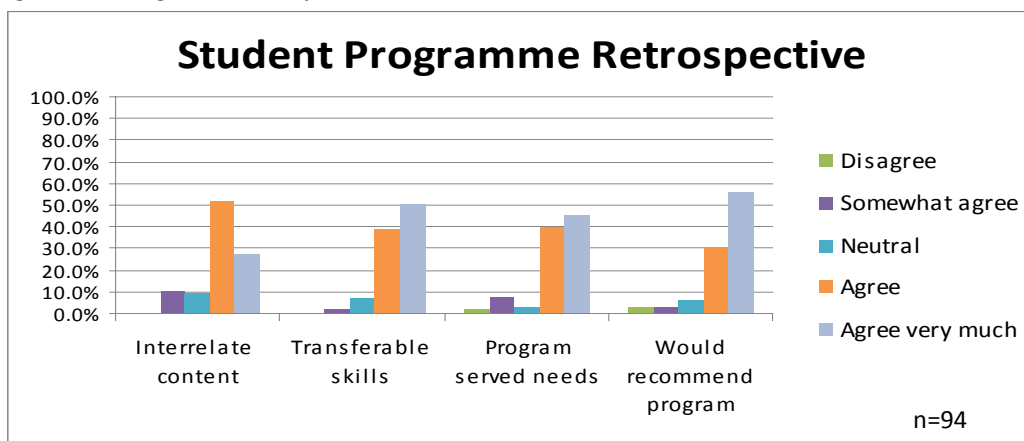
Figure 4-13 indicates less enthusiastic responses about the quality and difficulty of distance versus on-campus programmes. About two thirds of the students agreed that the courses were the same quality compared to other university courses they have taken and 21.3% thought that distance programmes were more difficult than on campus. The difficulty question was intended to evaluate rigor, an academic measure of quality, but may have been misleading as it could be interpreted as relating either to rigor or convenience. Nonetheless, differences of opinion between participants on the level of rigor of their programmes emerged in the comments.

Figure 4-13: Programme quality and difficulty: Student survey
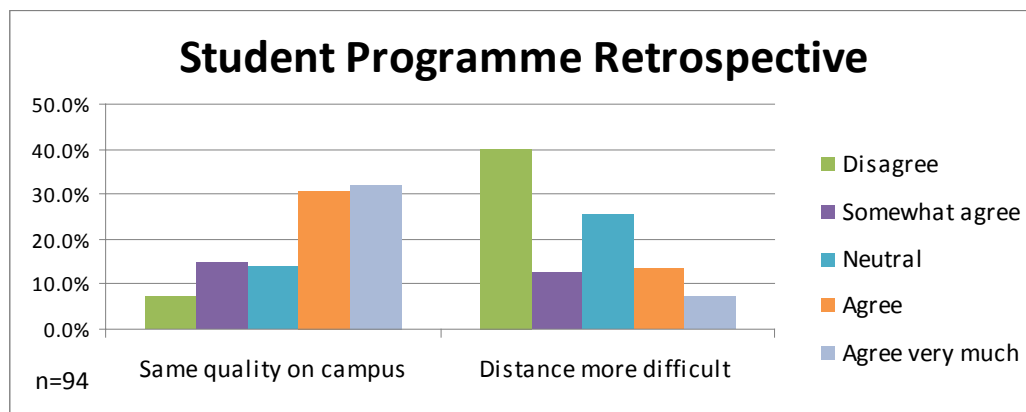
Disappointment was expressed by those expecting *"More challenging course work"* *w*hile others found the content and assignments to be both challenging and satisfying, e.g.:

- *"Difficulty level made the ultimate achievement that much sweeter."*- Student 15 Institution D
- *"The topics were varied and challenging."* – Student 33 Institution C

The findings show that there is room for programme quality improvement, and that although the programmes may not have been perceived as more difficult, perhaps a better question might have been whether a programme was perceived as LESS difficult than traditional.

4.9.2 Distance Student Success Factors: Director and Alumni

Perhaps the most emphatic response on the alumni survey is the evaluation from Question #24 about the importance of student self-discipline and time management, shown in Figure 4-14.

Figure 4-14: Self-discipline - Key to success: Student survey
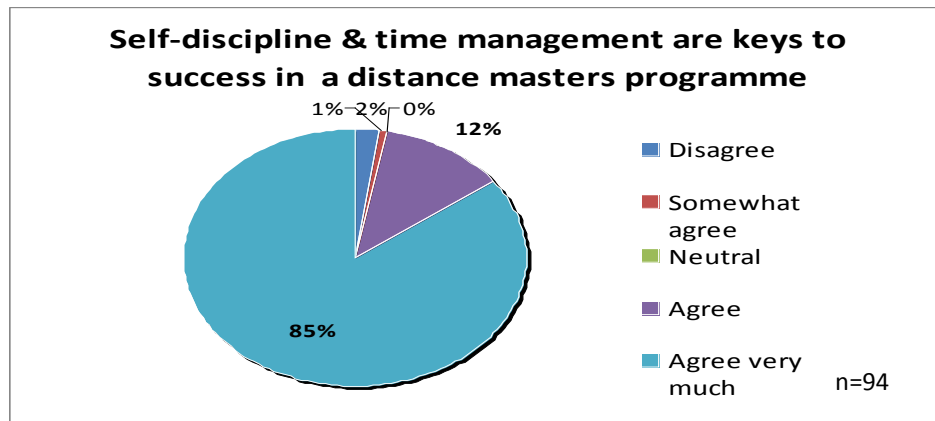
Nearly all of the students - 96.8% **-** agreed or strongly agreed that self-discipline and time management are essential to success in a distance masters programme. Several students candidly stated that even if the programme provided the learning resources and network, it was still ultimately up to the individuals to organise themselves and actively engage with the process:

- *"This type of programme, the student gets what they want out of the programme, and can either learn a lot or a little."* – Student 10 Institution E

Similarly, the programme directors rated 17 predictors for online student success and/or completion in Section Three of their interview protocol. Substantiating the importance of the dependent variables of self-discipline and motivation, the programme directors were in complete consensus reporting that by far most important to student success is the ability of the individual 'to manage their personal and professional lives'. Programme directors scored this a perfect 5.0 on a

5-point scale. The second factor of 'Student motivation' was second most significant with directors rating it 4.9 as shown in Figure 4-15.

Figure 4-15: Criteria that predict student success: Directors' questionnaire
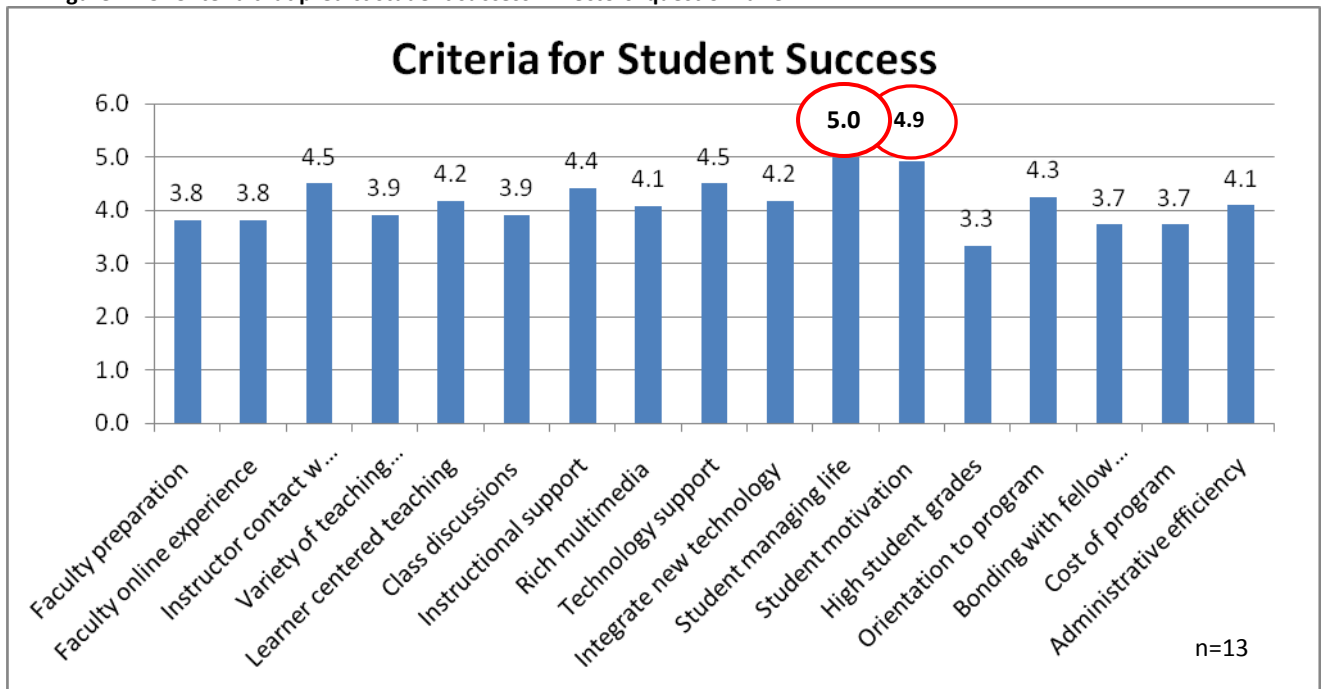
Programmes directors also agree that student success correlates to 'Instructor contact with students' (4.5), 'Instructional and technology support' (4.5 and 4.4 respectively) and 'Orientation to the programme' (4.3), factors addressed earlier in this chapter.

Finding in this section significantly conclude that both students and directors acknowledge that the "secret of success" for the distance learner are the dual variables of motivation and self-discipline. The solid consensus around this topic should have implications for future design of distance programmes in terms of formatively stimulating learning interest using new social ICT applications and authentic assessment activities. These findings also show that students generally evaluate their distance experiences and the combination of teaching and technology method highly and where students found the distance programme academically challenging a sense of accomplishment justified sacrifices made to enrol in the

programme. When comprehensive principles are applied to evaluation as an institution-wide system, the constant concern for quality is alleviated as the entire curriculum is affected.

Viewed as a whole, the evaluation process can synthesize feedback into a higher level system, which brings attention back to the development of the curriculum framework.

4.10   Towards the Development of the Curriculum Framework

In summary, data collected from the distance programme directors and alumni perspectives advance our knowledge of distance education graduate programmes in T&HM and inform the development of the Curriculum Framework. Chapter Four provides a wealth of new data about the programme participants, the nature and organisation of such programmes, as well as identify challenges that need to be addressed in the curriculum framework. The mixed quantitative and qualitative data combine to bring out important nuances of the distance experience about learners, directors and instructors: The diversity of the distance learners has implications for the design of effective teaching and learning; directors who themselves were distance learners appeared to be more empathetic for the distance student experience and attuned to their academic experience and the critical importance of the instructor in the distance experience and their expert use of up-to-date technology. All data sources pointed dramatically to student motivation and ability to manage their lives as the factors most critical to distance learner success. The themes of sustainable academic, administrative and technological quality and student motivation are threaded through all programmes and characterize the data.

The diagram of the Curriculum Framework from Chapter Two is included here as a reference for the following discussion.

Figure 4-16: The draft curriculum framework
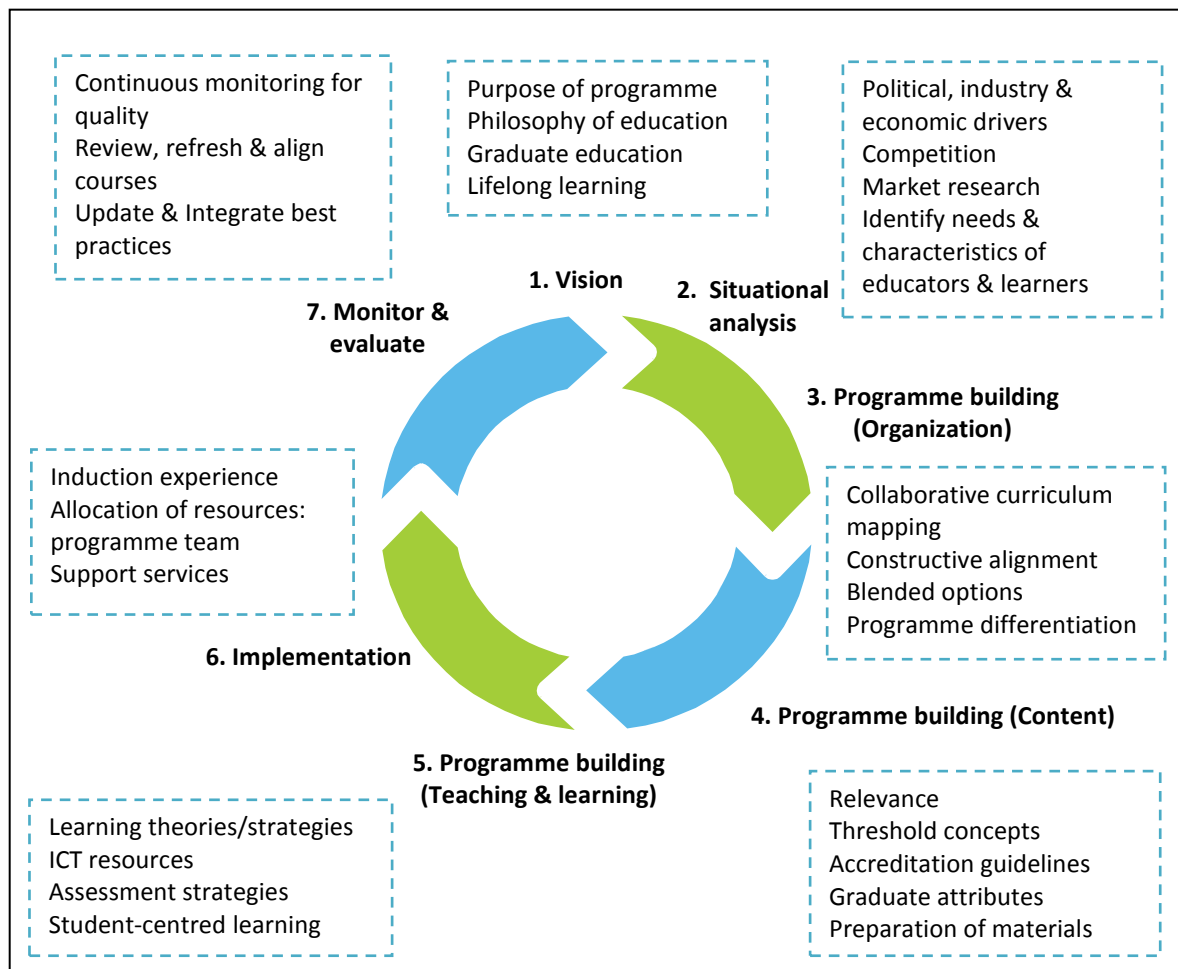
Graduate programmes exist for many reasons and these sample distance programmes likewise represent many facets of the rich dimensions of T&HM education. It could be said, however, that web-based programmes, relative newcomers to HE, differ in that they are exploring the boundaries of the mission of HE enabled by technology. They are pushed by demands for flexible access or institutional goals. These distance programmes are generally created to exploit ICT to expand programme reach and revenue, as shown in Figure 4.1 at the beginning of this chapter. Some directors explicitly view their mission and identity as inseparable

from filling the gap in provision and serving a new type of graduate student. These findings support the importance of a framework that is inclusive of broad differences in purpose, as well as provide sufficient guidance for developing accessibility for diverse learners.

A programme needs to have a healthy awareness of its own purpose, as its worth lies in effectively providing demanding adult learners the professional development, convenience and personal challenge they seek, according to alumni in Section 4.3.1. The pressure is even greater to provide for the needs and accommodate the strengths of the executive learners who expect 'five star' attention to detail. These findings confirm that even amongst programmes with different 'raisons d'être', the common denominator is the ability to deliver consistent quality. Designing curriculum with a framework is the means to accomplish this and directors reflected that two important factors in the quality equation is attentiveness of their learner's educational priorities and pinning personal and professional development to a philosophy of desired general behaviour outcomes, as discussed in Section 4.3.2.

Directors emphasise that adaptable skills and social and professional values need to be embedded in the curriculum for lifelong learners, shown in Figure 4-2. A small percentage of programmes in this study lead in raising social consciousness by incorporating values and universal principles across the curriculum in a purposeful way. Both learning theory and ethical principles reviewed in Chapter Two, Sections 2.5.1 and 2.3.2 support the use of a value system such as "Graduate attributes" to constructively align graduate programs. One director explained the logistics of aligning the values across the programme using a rubric method. This practice

requires design team commitment to common goals and professionalism to create the learning, assessment and evaluation strategies that can ensure best possible and lasting learning outcomes. Weighting this feature of the curriculum model may be prudent as taking the extra steps necessary to raise the underpinning standards has significant benefits. It positions programmes to both satisfy learners' desire for adaptable professional and personal development and the institutional desire for sustainability; the reward of maintaining long-term excellence.

The curriculum framework is founded on the assumption that sustainability is a product of effective curriculum design. Understanding the internal and external environment is the Situational Analysis stage of the design process: See Figure 4-16. Section 4.4.1 provided the profile characteristics of key internal stakeholder groups: the programme directors and the learners and discusses the role of the distance instructor.

The "non-traditional" diverse, working adult alumni matched the profiles of learners in professional distance masters degree programmes from earlier studies reviewed, which increases generalisability of the data from this small sample group. For most, this was their first distance degree programme. This fact highlights the importance of programme design scaffolding technical and instructional support to ensure confidence. This group consists of highly motivated and goal-oriented learners, a critical strength that should be capitalised on in design strategies. Learner diversity also has implications for teaching and learning for the curriculum framework. Some directors noted methods were needed to address learning issues resulting from disparities arising from students from many different backgrounds who may have gaps in their learning skills for graduate distance learning. As diversity

increases, focus on establishing pedagogical protocols within the framework will become more salient.

Interviews with directors gave evidence that all were sufficiently competent in terms of general teaching qualifications, however attitudes towards their programme involvement were decidedly mixed. From statements made, it was obvious that a director's positive disposition and engagement with student achievement was linked to having personally been a distance student. The observation could be made that directors constructively building on experience are particularly suited for the role. Others who exhibited high levels of energy and enthusiasm for the potential of the distance programme and learner experience also showed great adaptability and creativity in dealing with institutional barriers. Exemplary directors understood that retooling programmes to address issues also presented opportunities, such as the example of shortening course length to fit funding criteria while increasing flexibility and student satisfaction. The implication could be that bringing an appreciative approach to distance programme management is practical and can contribute to sustainability.

The scope of the role of the director, discussed in Section 4.8.2, was different from one programme to the next. Although responsibilities and support varied, directors emphasised the importance of a well-developed administrative system to student success and programme sustainability, especially for 'high-touch' executive programmes. Seasoned directors felt that efficient, responsive administration and training can make the difference between failure and excellence. More complex than a traditional programme, distance programme administration includes monitoring a complicated set of issues associated with distance delivery, such as

technology resources, the satisfaction of remote learners with high service expectations, internal complications arising from concessions for flexible scheduling and timely response to potential students, to name just a few. The framework should help chart a course for administration and allow room for expansion and change.

In addition to responsibility for administration, the director of a distance programme apparently needs finesse and leadership inspired by possibilities. From director comments, there is a sense that distance programmes within a predominantly traditional classroom-based institution face resource issues that are compounded by being perceived to be on the periphery of HE. Programme directors may find that using the framework as a planning tool can serve as a credential to earn collegial respect to demonstrate management diligence and to efficiently anticipate resource needs. Director characteristics are part of the programme team selection process in the Framework's 'Implementation' stage, shown in Figure 4-16.

Instructor preparation is considered a priority by directors who state that mastering technical skills and distance teaching and learning takes "a lot of support and training" to build confidence. Students rank the instructor as 4.8/5 in importance in Section 4.7.1, yet satisfaction was lower at 3.98/5. They expressed disappointment in gaps in quality; implying that maximising instructor effectiveness should be a central emphasis of the design model. Both directors and alumni openly stated that the ultimate responsibility of course success rests with the instructor. One director's reflection at the end of Section 4.7.1 articulates the elusive combination of knowledge, skill and personality that marks the exceptional educator. Working within a new pedagogical paradigm requires creative energy,

good online habits, as well as the confidence to lead student-centred learning. Alumni enjoyed the benefits of classes that were carefully designed and organized as it increased their ability to plan and structure their own learning, as discussed in Section 4.5.3. Distance programmes take more pre-planning and design training for instructors to master techniques for boosting interactivity; arguably the single most important factor in distance learning, which is substantiated by alumni feedback in Figure 4-7.

Organisational options increase access flexibility in virtually unlimited combinations, such as using forms of blended learning. Directors discussed a wide variety of flexibility features designed to increase programme convenience and desirability. Table 4-2 in Section 4.5 presents many of these options, which are essentially created to accommodate learner preferences and give programmes a competitive advantage. Directors mentioned that offering options can be logistically challenging. The framework should offer a design forum for balancing resources and flexibility choices while maintaining quality standards such as accreditation.

Some programmes support and motivate learners by developing social networks by starting them in cohorts, other programmes found this organisation to be impractical. Dialogue is also impacted by class size. Most of the alumni believed that their classes had between 10-20 students. Directors stated class size parameters are determined by enrolment and teaching and learning criteria. Studies have shown that size does matter for developing socially constructive teaching and learning strategies such as dialogue, a key quality construct (Gilbert, 2000), and, as such should remain a framework guideline.

Section 4.5.2 showed that blended learning components were well represented in the sample group. Typically management programmes require field experience, but induction, intensive residential coursework and capstone projects were examples of F2F features used strategically to boost a sense of community and immediacy, add depth to the learning experience and accelerate the programme. Management graduates are expected to master behaviour skills. Directors found that teaching at a distance made this more challenging and, in this instance, F2F solutions may work well. A mixed format adds another layer of complexity to curriculum design and programme administration and limits flexibility to some degree, but can also capitalize on personalizing the programme experience, promote different learning methods and showcase instructional talent. Student endorsement was enthusiastic. The ratio of online to F2F features is again a matter of balancing trade-offs within the curriculum design.

Keeping deepening and broadening programme content aligned with the programme purpose is also a matter of balance. Alumni in this study were generally very satisfied with the course content and directors and alumni alike stressed the value of practical knowledge in Figures 4-5 and 4-6. Some alumni were disappointed with out-of-date content; a flaw often attributed to poor quality distance programmes. Keeping content dynamic is a quality baseline for adult learners, shown in Figure 4-6. Learners inevitably want choice and 58% of participants would have enjoyed having more electives. Directors were quick to point out that there are many resource considerations to weigh to make taught courses available, such as enrolment and timetabling. The model may help simplify content decisions by organising priorities, principles and practice.

Teaching and learning at a distance is dependent on consistent good communication. Developing protocols for interactivity, as mentioned, can help build trust and retain students. Good theory-based online practices, such as creating presence, personality online and shortening lecture length, were highlighted by directors in Section 4.7.2. Discussion and audio-visual lectures and presentations were offered in various digital formats, with PowerPoint options being the most prevalent, shown in Figure 4-8. Overall technology, whether synchronous or synchronous, was most effective when it reliably worked, was up-to-date and instructors were comfortable using it. Technology benefits however could be significant in creating rich classroom experience, stimulate interest and allow learners to reflect and review in ways that promoted autonomy. Effective assessment, according to alumni, directly relates to prompt, quality feedback, shown in Figure 4-7 and increases motivation. Group assessment deserves special attention because of its predominance (97.9%) among graduate management distance programmes and its benefits of shared learning and difficulties in marking fairly. The teaching and learning stage of the framework, Figure 4-16, is most responsible for the learner's direct experience and is also the area where changing technology tools and materials will have the greatest impact, thus implying that this area may require more frequent review.

"Virtual" programmes depend almost entirely on their online presence as their global interface and clear communication of their unique attributes. It is not surprising that most students chose their programme by searching the Internet, shown in Figure 4-9, however more significant is the large percentage of this small

sample who selected their programme because of a personal recommendation (31%), an affirmation that social networking is particularly valuable for recruitment.

Implementation of the distance programme is integrally tied to developing web-based tools used to create learning environments and, as such, will be changing in ways not yet imagined, making programme leadership, teacher training and technology support within a systematic framework pivotal to consistent quality learning experiences.

The dynamic, web-based nature of the programmes and having remote learners makes monitoring and evaluating a key element in programme sustainability, as discussed in Section 4.9. Two main observations for managing quality issues emerged: institutional adoption of a cyclically applied "Continuous quality improvement" scheme that supports responsive change, and instituting new student feedback methods that have a high degree of transparency and accountability, such as listed in Table 4-5. These practices suggest that more can be done in this area. Distance programmes are most effective when considered holistically as each curricular component is linked.

Overall this small self-selected sample was highly satisfied with their programs, but was less satisfied with specific aspects of quality; Figure 4-12. These findings do give evidence that adult distance learners largely appreciate their experience even if it is not perfect. Ultimately student success is perceived to be most closely associated with the variables of motivation and self-discipline and that excellence in curriculum design will focus on strategies with these at heart. The curriculum framework design should create a space where instructors can bring

together the 'art and science' to create an environment for quality distance teaching and learning.

The next chapter is a small case study that completes the data contributing to developing the distance curriculum model. Through the eyes of instructors, the curriculum framework is applied to planning the transition of an on-campus programme to new flexible options.

A full discussion of the key study findings, the nature and organisation of distance graduate programmes and the final RQs that complete the curriculum framework can be found in Chapter Six of this dissertation.

CHAPTER 5: A TEST WITH PRACTITIONERS IN T&HM EDUCATION OF SOME OF THE ELEMENTS OF THE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

5.1   *Introduction to the Case Study*

This chapter provides further primary research findings through the means of a small case study. The case selected, described in Section 3.3.3 'Case Testing Procedure', is chosen as a method for opening the study to dialogue and to test curriculum design concepts contained within the proposed framework. It provides first-hand data from programme instructors planning the design of a blended distance learning programme and adds a rare examination of the team-based process of programme transformation. The facilitated discussions are also motivated by the need for the programme team to understand how the team can overcome the perceived barriers of classroom-bound instruction by collaboratively pooling strengths.

Solutions and concerns that arise in a field application help move the study naturally toward answering the overarching research question of "How can a systematic approach to the effective design of distance graduate education programmes, with reference to Tourism and Hospitality Management, be developed?" Facilitated by the researcher, experienced campus-based instructors in HE engage in the design process, providing new data that triangulates with the previous primary and secondary data and addresses RQ 4:

RQ 4: In the context of developing a curriculum framework, what are the practical implications of implementation that need to be considered?

The existing successful undergraduate degree Level 8 on-campus programme in T&HM at the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) is planning to convert to blended delivery. This common form of programme development has received scant research attention as noted in the Methodology chapter and this study is the first to undertake such an endeavour in the T&HM field. The Literature Review found that conceptual frameworks for distance teaching and learning are plentiful, but this case offers a unique cross-checking application for the framework development. The team of instructors openly contemplate the difficulties and opportunities of programme redesign in a number of interview sessions, team meetings and discussions. Shifts in pedagogical strategies for online course delivery to engage students at a higher level of learner responsibility are explored. The team steps through the Framework process to help prioritize their needs, what resources to seek and where to begin. The case programme team, like the programme directors and alumni, separately come to mutually agree on the vital importance of the active, motivated student. The case team discovers the usefulness of planning with the curriculum framework tool providing the range of decisions needed in programme conversion.

Programme documents and interviews lay the groundwork for understanding the existing programme and the motivation for planning a curriculum with new features of flexibility. The subjects are partners in the investigation and apply recommendations from the framework process to gain a 'real world' dimension to give the research project authenticity.

The exploration of the case study follows an emergent process of applying the four phase appreciative inquiry cycle to distance curriculum design, as shown in Figure 5-1:

Figure 5-1: Applying Appreciative Inquiry to the design process
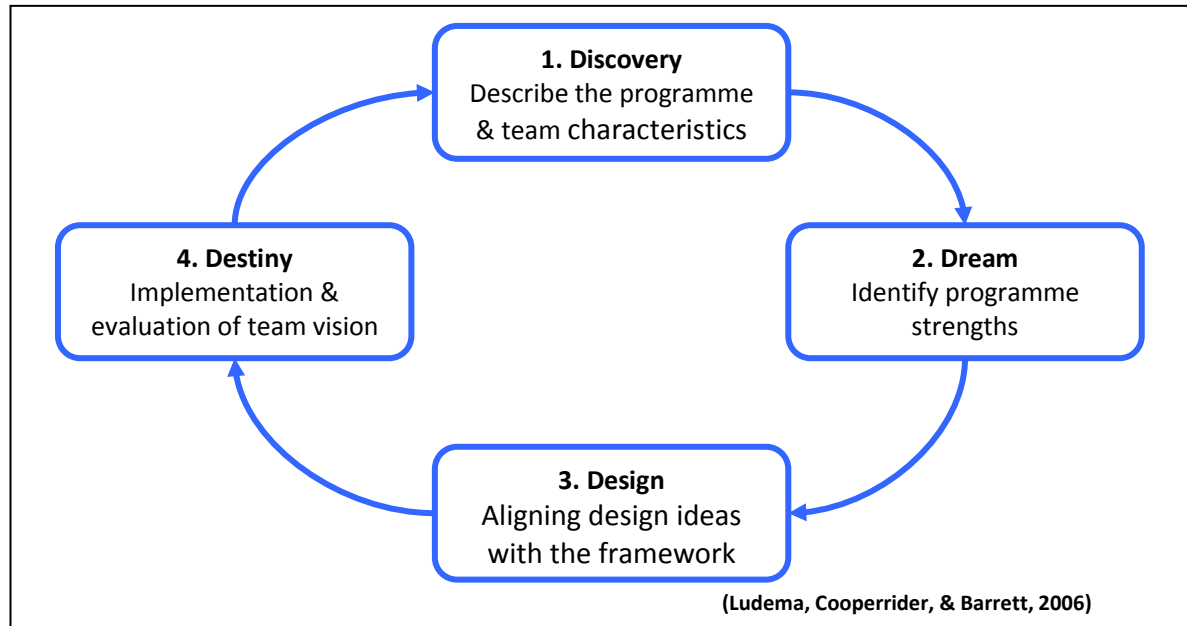
5.2 'Discovery': Background to the Case

Possible pilot projects: International multi-institution consortia

As the draft curriculum framework began to take shape from the synthesis of concepts and literature, several opportunities emerged that could test its full value. Several projects arose over a period of two years. Two potential educational consortia projects gained traction among international colleagues, but failed to materialize.

The literature reviewed on evolving distance programmes in Section 3.4.3 indicated the desirability and advantages of forming consortia for strengthening distance programmes. Web-based distance learning provision has manifested in many forms of collaborative ventures: university joint degree programmes, public-

private university partnerships, state or national consortia, for-profit consortia, universities and commercial business consortia and international consortia. In a niche area of education such as T&HM, collaboration can combine market appeal, shares costs and strengths and offers a unified support system. Thus, given the potential of a multi-institution arrangement, the idea of launching a 'green field' distance education programme and implementing the curriculum framework percolated within the DIT's School of Hospitality Management and Tourism and several academic institutions offering masters degree programmes in T&HM outside of Ireland.

Although the partnerships, which would have provided full-scale framework testing, did not come to fruition, an opportunity arose within the DIT School of Hospitality Management and Tourism to round out the study with data from instructors in the process of designing distance education formats for T&HM students.

5.2.1 Pilot Testing with a Level 8 Programme: 'The Add-ons'

The full-time on-campus Level 8 honours 'Add-on' degree programme was started in 2004 for students majoring in Tourism management DT406H, Hospitality management DT408H or Leisure management DT411H. The programme allows Level 7 graduates, responding to the growing expectation for the higher certification in the workplace, to attain an honours qualification in their specified field in an additional year of study. Building upon the ordinary degree, the Level 8 honours degree programme encourages a higher level "theoretical approach and a research ethos" (Dublin Institute of Technology, 2008) that would 'add-on' to their B.A.

ordinary degree. This relatively small programme of about 35 students is led by a visionary tutor interested in transitioning from traditional to a blended learning mode of delivery to better serve the needs of their students. Similar to the distance masters students; the Add-on students are older and more diverse than the traditional undergraduate. Introducing new flexible aspects to the programme will make the programme more accessible for the working students. In the words of an Add-on instructor:

> *"I see a huge potential to grow; particularly with lifelong learning. And with the market economy as it stands at the moment: the emphasis is on education. It is one of the areas that have potential to change. Blended learning is the way forward and I think we have to grab the bull by the horns and go for it. You know what I mean?"* - Team member C

The Add-on team agreed to participate as a pilot case in the hopes that the study methodology would provide a forum for discussion for working towards a comprehensive strategy for their programme conversion. Although the programme coordinators hoped to offer blended options in September 2009, it wasn't possible, but planning for the future blended format is still a priority. Thus this chapter, built on interviews with team members and the active planning process towards the development of a blended learning curriculum framework, satisfies RQ 4; the practical application of the framework.

5.2.2 Programme Documentation

The programme documents are the secondary data used to establish the programme's suitability for this study and their preparedness for flexible learning. Two sets of foundational documents are briefly reviewed to contextualize and characterize the nature of the Add-on programmes. The first includes the

'Programme Documents' for the three specialty areas of study. The documents describe the rationale and essential structure of the programmes. The second set of documents reviewed are the 2008 Q5 and 6 annual quality assessment reviews, which includes the staff, students and external examiner evaluation of the programme. It covers issues and modifications that have arisen in the quality review process.

The Programme Documents outline the goals and structure of the programmes. Core modules of the programme are Strategic Management, Entrepreneurship, Research Methods, Marketing Strategy and International Human Resources. There are optional modules available. A required dissertation completes their studies. The programme goals that include such competencies as:

- "Applying advanced learning, research and writing skills to conduct guided research."
- "Demonstrating individual managerial skills like decision-making at a conceptual level."
- "Participate in group learning."
- "Learn to manage their own learning and work independently as an independent, ethical and insightful professional" (Dublin Institute of Technology, 2008, p.5)

These outcomes closely align with graduate attributes and suggest appropriateness of the programme with this study's focus. Additionally the programme provides a 'ladder of progression' designed for moving learners up through education, a philosophy articulated in DIT's strategic plan for lifelong learning. Flexible pathways and the graduate-level competencies indicate the programme's philosophical compatibility with graduate distance education.

The programme utilizes an integrated mix of teaching methods including: lecture, guest lecturers, tutorials, demonstrations, site visits and case studies. Other methodologies include role play, seminar and problem-based learning. These methods are supported by assessment strategies that are individual and group-based, as appropriate. Instructors have a web course site for each module.

Programme Documents: Findings from the Q5s and Q6s for the Add-on Programme

The Q5 and Q6 quality assessments at DIT are part of a comprehensive annual process that includes evaluations from instructors, staff, students and an external examiner. The complete summation of the 2008 report for the programmes is found in the Appendix of this study. This investigation focuses on the areas that relate to considerations that impact transition to distance/blended learning and the draft curriculum framework.

The Q6 evaluations, in Table 5-1, showed that the students seem highly satisfied, although it isn't clear how this information is used formatively for identifying or improving specific teaching and learning practices.

Table 5-1: Q6 report: Quality ratings of the programme by students

	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Good	Very good	Previous report categories
Programme in general				X	Very good
Staff resources			X		Good
Accommodation		X			Acceptable
Equipment					N/A
Teaching standards				X	Very good
Learning environment				X	Very good
Job placement of grads			X		Very good
Overall quality category in previous report					

The overall internal review and external examiner notes in the Q5 reports document that the programme responded to needs by developing materials, support and choice for students. One strength and weakness relevant to distance education is highlighted:

- Students are academically strong with much interest and motivation – demonstrated by low attrition and good marks.
- There is a broad variance in dissertation work quality.

The dissertation challenge provides an opportunity for new solutions within a technology-based paradigm.

Analysis of the programme documents and quality assurance forms provide solid evidence of the effectiveness of the programme and the calibre of its students. The programme demonstrates its readiness for blended delivery per the following characteristics:

- Strong programme per staff, students and external examiner
- Small size of programme and classes.
- Broad spectrum of teaching methods
- Good feedback loops with students
- Maturity and motivation of students
- Policy of options and embracing change

The programme team members add greater understanding of the current programme, its instructors and students through interviews, questionnaires and commentary in the next section.

5.3   'Dream': Programme Quality Factors and Identity

The 'Dream' process is an 'appreciative' internal situational analysis of the programme from primary data provided by the Add-on team members. This useful

stage serves two purposes: first, it prepares the Add-on team for design by giving them an opportunity to first profile programme characteristics and to subsequently evaluate their strengths and form ideas about priorities. This process enables the team to later articulate their programme identity, a key sustainability ingredient for distance programmes, which will drive programme redesign.

5.3.1 The Add-on Team Members

"The main strength of the programme is our teaching staff."-Team member A

The seven key programme team members interviewed are all instructors with varying degrees of online teaching experience, from 'early adopter' to those with only basic knowledge of how to post documents to a web course, but all are competent instructors with years of teaching experience. Each is involved with teaching courses in the Add-on programme. Individual instructors have a relatively high degree of autonomy for developing their own modules. The staff are value-driven and student-centered with mutual collegial respect. The team attitude about transition to new delivery formats is curiosity and caution.

Comparative Questionnaire Findings: Programme Purpose

The Add-on team members completed the same two questionnaires in the interview protocol as the Programme directors to provide a means to comparatively examine the two perspectives. The first questionnaire concerns the purpose driving adoption of distance education. The responses between the two groups, Figure 5-2, show the results to be quite similar. Each group recognizes internal and external factors in the greater HE milieu behind the growing demand for flexible learning, i.e. institutional strategic goals and increasing access for students. The orange circled

areas, however, highlights significant data showing where the two groups markedly differ: 1) the opportunity to improve teaching and learning and 2) a visionary staff member. 1) The team values the potential for improving teaching and learning (4.7) substantially more than the programme directors (3.7). Although this small sample size limits generalisability, this finding allows an important insight with implications for curriculum design: because decisions about the design and improvement of

Figure 5-2: Motivation for change to flexible format: Comparative data
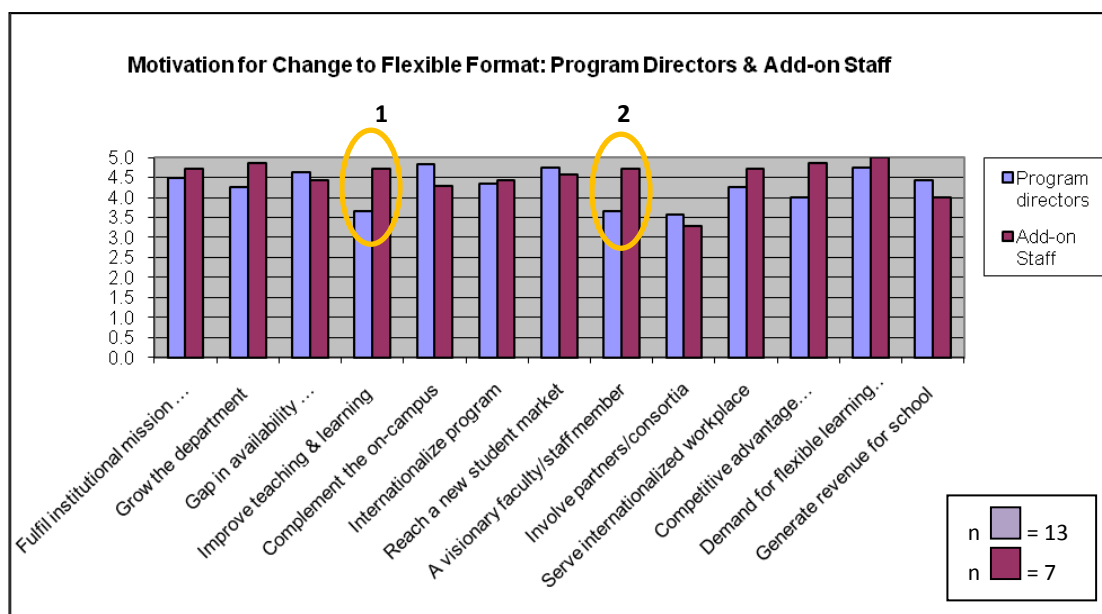
 pedagogy are at the core of the curriculum design process, instructors, who prioritize pedagogy, must have a lead role for balanced results. It is this disposition that anchors their data in this case exercise. Additionally, finding 2) alludes to the fact that the programme has a "champion", which programme directors pointed out is necessary for distance programme sustainability.

5.3.2 The Add-on Students

Information inferred from programme documents combined with the comments from the add-on staff show many similarities between the Add-on students and the distance masters students. As an Add-on team member pointed

out, the learners enrolled in the Add-on programme are essentially a hand-picked group of students:

> *"It's a great programme to tutor because every single student…wants to be there…It is the only programme in here to a certain extent that has that."* - Team member A

The students in the one-year programme are working, strongly motivated and more goal-oriented than other students studying at this level. They have more time constraints, but are interested in obtaining the Honours degree credential.

> *"The Add-ons are all motivated as they have purposefully chosen to be there for a particular reason. They are more mature and are better at managing their time."* - Team member E

In interviews the Add-on team discussed, however, their concerns about how distance learning will represent a culture shift for their learners requiring far more autonomy than they are used to. They do not feel that the students are prepared for self-directed learning:

> *"Students coming from a Leaving Cert scenario…are used to cut-and-dried"* - Team member C.

According to interviewees, the youngest students are coming from a "post-modern Celtic Tiger" culture where they are used to getting what they want handed to them, have a 'sense of entitlement' and are confident about their academic ability. They also are more familiar with performance goals rather than learning goals. Combined, this creates potentially a higher order of difficulty for instructors in overcoming a disinterest in exercising the self-discipline necessary for learning without the advantage of face-to-face supervision. Less of an issue for older students, instructors feel that academic achievement is more effectively stimulated by cultivating a mature attitude than the incentive of grades - *"particularly for online."* One Add-on instructor suggested that establishing mutual respect works well to develop

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responsibility, but this suggests that other constructivist or situational learning principles could support learners in mastering learning skills to become more self-directed.

5.3.3 Programme Strengths Relating to the Framework Steps

Discussions with the Add-on team next turned to the internal strengths of their programme that A) set it apart and B) may have impact on the design process.

Programme Strengths: Situational

Identity: Using the framework as a guide, the programme team identified their 'situational' strengths as the uniqueness of their degree programme and the perception of the institution as practical and caring, e.g. *"DIT has a name amongst IoTs as being quite applied."* These traits are intrinsic parts of the programme identity that help differentiate it from a marketing and recruiting standpoint. A faculty that cares and offers readily applicable knowledge are 'brand' features that attract distance students who are comparatively shopping, as they noted.

Programme Strengths: Content

Electives: In response to student feedback, the programme has developed a substantial bank of course electives. Choice, according to the distance students' findings in Part One, is a programme quality factor.

Programme Strengths: Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning as evidenced in the Figure 5-2 questionnaire are the Add-on team's main concern. The team identified four particular teaching and learning practices in their programme that translate into distance programme strengths:

The dissertation: The dissertation requirement affirms the programme's high academic expectations as it *"facilitates them learning how to look at things from a research perspective."* The learning outcomes are based on students actively constructing their own understanding through research skills and autonomous learning. This is one area the team and evaluative documents felt was conceptually strong, but could improve as the final products were inconsistent quality.

Instructor expertise: Experienced instructors have the skills to spark debate in a class, work as an effective team and maintain a professional curiosity. This combination of skills and attitude toward the learning environment creates student satisfaction and links to quality.

Feedback: The Add-on team is dedicated to providing substantive and timely feedback to their students, because, as one team member stated, feedback is *"A lot of work…but it's a real learning piece for them. It's worth it."* Feedback and interactivity are core principles throughout learning theory and key to distance education excellence.

Successful track record: The teaching staff are successful with learners who need extra support, or in a instructor's words, **"*Getting the weak ones through."*** This is particularly valuable in the online learning environment as monitoring distant student engagement and support are critical to student success.

Programme Strengths: Implementation

Management: Communication between the Add-on members supports effective administration, a vital element of a dynamic programme, as noted in this comment:

"The management is very good. It's very practical. It's very organised. It's very much a situation where if somebody says 'I'll get back to you' - they get back to you." - Team member D

Overall, the Add-on team, proud of their programme, emphasized the importance of preserving their institution and programme cultural identity online and, this, they felt could be done through design. Appreciatively using the framework categories to deconstruct strengths turned out to be an advantage for the team to visualize individual assets and focus discussion on priorities in the programme conversion process.

Cumulatively programme data reviewed from the Discovery and Dream stages establish a base for understanding the programme. The programme's greatest strengths are the hand-picked, diverse students, good teaching practices and an expert team whose characteristics match those of effective distance instructors: open outlook, communication skills, high standards and commitment to student learning. Instructors are contemplating teaching and learning strategies to overcome student issues created by diversity and to prepare them for 'separation anxiety' in an online environment.

The Add-on team next considered their programme design decisions using the overlay of the curriculum framework.

5.4   'Design': Programme Building

"We have got to look at ways of making it more user friendly without in any way diluting the standards." - Team member D

In the design stage the team members get down to the 'nuts and bolts' of working out the barriers of entry to flexible learning. They respond to the real

challenges of how pedagogy will be different in a distance mode of delivery. The teaching staff creates a plan forward with the curriculum framework guiding design issues related to preserving the programme culture, maintaining relationships and anticipating technology-based pedagogy.

5.4.1 Programme Building: Organizing for Sustainable Quality

The programme building decision of 'who' and 'how' of organizing the approach to design can be done in one of two ways according to the literature: either the "Lone Ranger" model, where course creation is driven by an autonomous, often 'early adopter' individual (Bates, 1997) or the collaborative, project-based course development model that has been the standard for single mode institutions, such as the Open University. The Add-on programme is small and it would be easy enough to delegate the transformation from on-campus to digital courses to their early adopter member. Interviews with this team member produced a rich variety of ideas for increasing technology-enhanced courses, but long term planning requires designing a repeatable, streamlined process and a way to ensure consistent quality. Playing from their communication and negotiation strengths, the team chose the strategy that requires a team-based design effort with coordination by the programme leader. This champion will be the conduit between teachers, media advisors and administration for coordinating the design activities and a plan for the media expert to hand off technology-based instructional design will follow. The programme leader, not having deep knowledge of ICT applications, was prepared to accept responsibility for finding answers and communicating concerns and questions to the rest of the development team.

Planning for Success from the Beginning

The team agreed that the framework made it evident that short-changing the planning process would cause problems downstream because *"If everything is not planned properly it always causes issues"*. Instructors, cautious about jumping into new course delivery, agreed planning must take centre stage for success in a new environment, as team members noted:

> *"Design the course correctly at the outset in terms of blended delivery"* -Team member G

The beginning of the programme or course is crucial for student engagement and this focus was noted by the programme directors and Add-on team alike:

> *"If you turn them off by not having things there, in the beginning in particular, then you've lost them. You lose them very quickly. You've got a bit of a window, you know?"* - Team member D

They reinforced emphasis on designing the early learning experience or induction to be as engaging and informative as possible for students.

Incremental Approach

The transition away from a full-time traditional classroom stirred anxiety about the loss of control without face-to-face contact. Teasing out the complexities of the design task stimulated problem-solving that led to an adoption of an incremental approach to online course development and a way to build confidence. Team members agree that in a multi-year plan the first year will prepare digital material from ongoing classroom activities, such as videotaping guest speakers or lectures for a digital library:

> *"Maybe one of the drier units like Research Methods, to put it up on a website, as a lecture. Oh, it is horrible pedagogy. but it is only to get them started …In terms of the progression, you are not going to be doing an online*

thing from day one… so the first year would just be building up enough materials to then draw from it to develop it further…That will take some stress off at the beginning because they will be delivering in the old fashioned way; however they are going to be hopefully getting help putting together all the material." - Team member G

The incremental approach is a practical way to build a programme's repository of digital materials in an environment of tight financial resources while giving instructors a chance to explore without risk.

Creating Flexibility: Exploring New Solutions to Persistent Issues

Neither the literature nor framework offered guidance on the issue of deciding which course to convert to distance format first. The Add-on team immediately targeted courses of a more static nature where flexibility could be added to perhaps help resolve some difficulties or substantially enrich content, i.e. the Dissertation and the Research Methods courses.

The dissertation is an ambitious undertaking for the students and, as mentioned, the outputs have been of inconsistent quality. Adding accessible online resources to boost research and writing support, as well as increasing flexibility for students to complete dissertations over the summer, would considerably enhance the learning experience by giving students more time and tools. The academic year for instructors at DIT ends June 20th, but using peer-based online threaded discussions monitored by either an off-site instructor or a postgraduate student facilitator over the summer months was a proposed solution for extending student feedback and support. Other research support staff on campus year round, e.g. librarians, could be linked in.

A blended format proposed was to begin a course face-to-face, then allow group or individual work at a distance followed by individual assessment or evaluation either online or back in the classroom. The approach was considered desirable, but too ambitious to begin with.

The team's exploration of solutions demonstrates that innovation and flexibility does not always have to be about new technology, but rather making small changes to existing practice or using familiar technology for far-reaching effects.

This discussion of flexibility expanded to include other ways to approach content development.

5.4.2 Programme Building: Expanding ICT to Enrich Content

The transition design process proved to be the stimulus needed to envision ways to digitally enhance content. A systematic process for archiving subject-specific material was proposed. The team currently posts PowerPoints, notes and links to web-based resources, such as YouTube videos to course websites. Building greater content value will involve using technology to express and expand material in new ways:

> *"First start off with your notes up there. Then we might videotape a lecture. Then we might follow some students around. Then we might… you're just building it up…And then… they can choose how to put the media together."* -
> Team member G

The team envisioned getting started right away on creating a 'Research Portal' where students could access a wide variety of generic and programme specific guidelines, media and information to support their dissertation work as needed or

discuss and seek help through a monitored chat/discussion feature. The challenge of creating a variety of media for different learning styles, suggested in the framework, pointed the team in the direction of importing and repurposing traditional practices with web-based technology for considerable added-value in terms of access, content and flexibility.

5.4.3 Programme Building: Teaching and Learning Design

'Online' is relatively new design territory for Add-on instructors, who are subject experts, dissertation supervisors and course designers, who know *"what needs to go in there content-wise…what they (the students) need to understand…where they have difficulty in understanding."* They already use a variety of methods for teaching that links to good practice outlined in the Literature Review, as evidenced here:

> *"I use a combination of teaching methods to get people interested. Trying to get them to take more responsibility for their own learning, but they're not just learning stuff off textbooks and online journals, but they are actually in their assignments, in their exams and in class, trying to form their own opinions. So a variety (of different methods) so that it isn't a monotonous delivery of material."* - Team member B

This finding, even more important when applied to online or blended formats, confirms the value of variety as a strategy for increasing student interest in learning. Although instructors emphasized they push students to be autonomous learners, e.g.,

> *"Look I'm giving you the basics in terms of notes and readings or whatever, but if you want to delve into that, that and that, here are more readings…I don't feel that I need to be summarizing stuff for them."* -Team member D

the team felt that in reality weaker students would not thrive in a distance format and that they would need to aggressively plan for developing a media work ethos.

In general, there is a misconception that distance education is easier and requires less student responsibility for learning while, in fact, the opposite is true. The framework suggests constructivist learning strategies for online settings where students take active responsibility for shaping learning with instructor facilitation, and instructors agree:

> *"I feel the days of lecture – of someone talking away - are gone…or are going to go. Students don't get it anymore. I get bored myself. I do use it where I need to impart information."* - Team member C.

Technology-enhanced constructivist assessment such as inquiry-based tasks could be strategically added for students to actively construct their own understanding and become more self-directed.

Online Group Work

Instructors were worried about tackling group assessment in an online format because *"The only thing that I have ever had problems with is when students get together as a group."* Clearly a priority for T&HM students, the findings in Part One showed that 97% of the distance programme participants engaged in group work. The Add-on team attests that students at this level tend to work quite individually and that preparation must be emphasized, *"That's number one before they come into a group setting. They have to do some work."* Another group assessment design rule instructors suggested for distance application: make assignments very structured, well defined, very detailed and systematic *"or else you lose them"* – Team member D.

Group work promotes achieving graduate management outcomes of workplace competencies, and employs learning principles of social constructivism and communities of practice. Instructors mentioned that issues around marking collaborative assessments are not unique to distance education and formalized grading criteria would reward quality interactivity or online leadership roles. The Add-on team anticipate integrating their on-campus practices with technology-based designs to engage students in authentic or simulated social contexts.

Diversity

Concern over managing diversity in the distance classroom came out in discussion. Instructors said that the three streams of Add-on students are challenging enough as groups have different learning preferences, interests and diverse abilities and experience, which can present a difficult range to manage. In a classroom, instructors manage diversity by scanning to see who comprehends and who doesn't. Instructors understood how social constructivist principles could turn diversity into an advantage through strategies built around enriching through sharing. In a distance context, this opens the door to exploring newer online social media, which this team did not discuss in detail, but as the actual programme conversion takes place will become part of the dialogue again.

Shifting Strategies for Creating Technology-based Learning

What the Add-on team lacked in online design confidence, they made up for in problem-solving creativity. They agreed that their students were a valuable resource to the programme for building a learning community, but taking it a step further, suggested involving the learners in designing technology-based teaching

and learning methods by allowing them be the agents of change. In one team member's words:

> *"They (the students) are way involved in this sort of IT and we are sort of trying to create things…It should be they who are creating them by telling us what they need and what they want… To be honest, they are way ahead of us in some ways."* - Team member C

Another team member articulated how co-creation of learning strategies between teaching staff and student focus groups would work in practice and effectively serve as formative student-centered assessment:

> *"Sit down with students who are doing the traditional thing, and at the end of each unit, ask them, 'If you were presenting this in a different format, how would you do it? What are some of the things that you see that you could get more out of?' Plus it reinforces what they are hopefully learning in the classroom."* - Team member G

Instructor and students working toward a common goal sends a bold message that learning will be an active, collaborative activity. This was appealing to the Add-on team because the process would encourage students to critically assess their learning goals, effectively communicate with a group and creatively apply their own knowledge of technology-based applications in a learning context. Assessment co-creation using user-responsive methods is a design approach that supports desirable cognitive competency outcomes and student confidence and contributes to the model (Irlbeck, Kays, Jones, & Sims, 2006).

While the team has reservations about new learning environments, they found on-campus methods that will facilitate online learning. Where they encountered difficulties envisioning how specific outcomes or issues could be managed, the framework provided principles for assessment that began to give the

team, if not assurance, at least a sense of direction in designing teaching and learning strategies.

5.5 'Destiny': Sustainable Strategies

'Destiny', the final action stage, appreciatively brings development challenges and collaborative solutions together through discussion and consensus-building. Applying the last curriculum framework stages of 'Implementation' and 'Monitor and evaluation', the Add-on team looks for strategies to sustain quality.

5.5.1 Implementation: Instructor and Learner Support

Two key points from the curriculum framework implementation process were confirmed through the interviews: the importance of instructional design support and student induction. The Add-on programme instructors, uncertain about using new technology in a blended learning format, believe designing technology-based pedagogy should involve a stepped-up relationship with an instructional designer or media specialist. The Add-on team rated the importance of 'Instructional support' 4.8 on a five-point scale in the interview protocol. In discussions with the researcher and in team meetings, they emphasized the importance of being able to sit down one-on-one with an instructional technology designer, who understands how individual instructors prefer to teach their courses, as noted in this conversation:

> Interviewer: *"If you could envision an instructor being paired with an instructional designer…"*
>
> Team member A: *"Yes. Yes. That would be perfect."*
>
> Interviewer: *"That would work?"*
>
> Team member A: *"And that would take away the worry"*

The framework suggests instructor support as fundamental and the Add-on team clarified that hands-on guidance in selecting technology applications will be the fastest way to improve their online teaching proficiency and confidence.

The Add-on team viewed the biggest barrier to implementing distance delivery as the erosion of the face-to-face relationship built in the classroom. They felt that starting by bridging the gap with programme induction was critical. On the quantitative questions in the interviews, the team rated the importance of 'Orientation to programme' as a perfect consensus score of 5, shown in Figure 5-2 in Section 5.5.3. In the words of one instructor, *"It would be a great disadvantage not to have an induction."* Preparing students for success in a blended programme, induction ignites their curiosity and highlights the participatory role students must assume.

Induction, well described in the literature and the data from the distance programme participants as valuable to overall programme quality, is part the proposed framework. Strategic orientation activities, whether face-to-face or online, familiarize students with the programme culture; emphasize time management skills and expectations while building loyalty and respect. Because online *"social networking relationships are quite different to the ones that you have across the table"*, constructing a community of learners from Day One is strategic to curriculum design. Through the eyes of these instructors, reprioritizing and repurposing the induction in preparation for distance learning is an appreciative solution to jump-start relationships, build confidence and indoctrinate students to programme values.

5.5.2 Monitoring, Evaluation and Adjustment

Quality and student success are themes throughout the case and monitoring and evaluation are the processes that drive responsive improvement. The formal programme evaluation documents gave the Add-on programme's current feedback system for monitoring student experience high marks. The team revealed their open attitude toward integrating student input into course improvement, in comments such as *"They come with their ideas…we have basically said 'What are you interested in?"*

The programme team's monitoring and evaluation practices will be critical to making the conversion a learning process. The framework suggests establishing a systematic means for continuously monitoring progress. The team decided that as new formats are introduced, they will use technology-based methods to continuously monitor what is 'working' and modify if unsatisfactory participation, assessments or outcomes are detected, as this team member explains:

> *"For example, you have a unit –and you have the objectives of each unit. You do it in one format and you find out if the students are really participating and getting it. And you have to either modify that unit… It takes a lot of time to monitor"* – Team member G

Participation is a basic quantitative measure of quality and easily collected online. At the other end of the quality spectrum, monitoring substantive demonstrations of complex learning goals such as critical thinking will be qualitative and formative.

Adjustment

A dynamic web-based teaching and learning programme requires institutional structure that supports change. Just as the distance programme

directors discovered, the length of time to amend a module in the institutional system is a hindrance to responsive adjustment. The process of approval to implementation of change takes about a year and the team expressed some frustration at the cumbersome turnaround time. Although resolving bureaucratic issues is beyond the scope of this model, programme directors facing this same problem relied on their ingenuity to navigate the institutional system to leave themselves options to better serve their students.

5.5.3 Evaluation of Student Success Factors

A cross-examination of the Add-on team with the same questionnaire as the programme directors resulted in comparative responses across multiple 'Criteria for distance student success' in Figure 5-3 on the next page. The first five questions circled show that the Add-on team highly correlate student success to pedagogical factors, specifically; faculty preparation, instructor/student contact, using a variety of teaching methods and learner-centred teaching strategies. This highlights again the difference of perspective between directors and instructors, reinforcing that balancing the curriculum will be best achieved through a collaborative design approach.

Notably neither programme directors nor instructors believe that grades are reliable indicators of student success. See the Red Arrow in Figure 5-3. This disturbing finding implies that on a large scale summative assessments do not align with learning outcome goals; a serious design flaw and strong evidence of need of improvement.

Figure 5-3: Criteria for student success: Comparative data
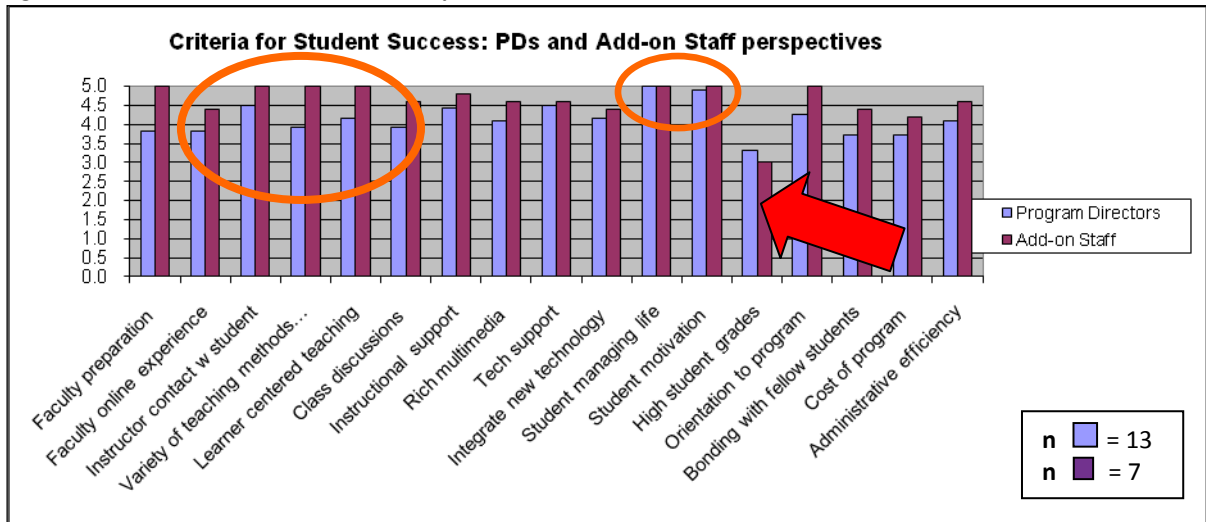
The smaller circled area shows where the two groups are in complete agreement regarding student motivation and managing their lives as keys to success. The programme alumni feedback also corroborated this finding. Triangulating the groups demonstrates the fundamental importance of student motivation and responsibility to distance student success. The practical student support strategies proposed by the team members begin with induction and formative assessments.

5.6   Summary of Findings

This case applies the programme-level framework at the course-level and adds a new dimension for helping educational practitioners in the design process. The Add-on team's summarized comments were brought back them in a meeting December 10th, 2009 for member-checking and feedback. The study findings were also presented at a Distance Learning seminar at the George Washington University in June 2010. The two groups confirmed the value of advancing the understanding of the relationship of the distance education components and acknowledged the

broader benefits of framework-based design as a methodology for solving individual issues.

The team-based interviews and discussions became a first-time forum where the team found strengths and good practices that would serve them well as a blended programme. Using their team leader as champion and coordinator helps ensure both committed leadership and consistent quality. Focus on learning outcomes meant tailoring new pedagogical approaches for the Add-on students and proceeding in an incremental fashion for the comfort level of the instructors. Instructors felt empowered to see how learning theories such as constructivism provide practical guidance for building online environments that promote higher order critical thinking and a learning community, which is consistent with their professional academic values.

The interviews also opened up an awareness of bridges that still need to be crossed to add distance learning programme components, such as:

- Strengthening student learning autonomy and preparing them for learning without the immediacy of personal cues;
- Building repositories of enriching content that *"also might be handy if a guest lecturer cannot make it at the last minute"* - Team member C
- Pairing with an instructional technology design partner to bring ideas online effectively and develop individual style and course content.

Considering that the Add-on team members are confident professionals, an important point is that there was a surprising degree of nervousness about what they perceived to be the risky business of teaching and learning without the bounded security of a classroom.

The final stage of the appreciative cycle puts into action what has been learned and monitors the outcomes. Although institutional circumstances prevent the team bringing their programme online this year, this methodology has yielded positive outcomes in terms of linking the best of 'what is' with what 'might be' and a pathway for moving in the direction of a revised broadly-participatory curriculum framework and their programme development into blended learning. For the framework and RQ 4, the practical implications of the Add-on experience have contributed the instructors' perspective and appreciation for their no-nonsense team approach to problem-solving.

This small case study is not meant to propose any kind of definitive formula. It simply presents glimpses through the eyes of dedicated traditional instructors of how the framework can assist the group design process of blended learning and the kinds of concerns and possibilities that arise. The case of the DIT Add-on programme addresses RQ 4 through a process of establishing the programme and participant profiles and following the curriculum framework model application through a four-step appreciative enquiry process for conversion to a blended programme. The team members' enthusiasm shows through in their open-minded attitude that adoption of distance education offers opportunities to improve teaching and learning and empowering their students. Strong programme leadership is invaluable for negotiating the programme vision and changes through the institution and also coordinating the technology-enhanced blended courses.

Adding the emphasis and strategies suggested in Add-on interviews enriches and refocuses the framework. The case helps both confirm the framework, e.g. the value of induction, continuous support and monitoring evidence of quality; and

open new areas, e.g. selecting courses for conversion, loss of content control and retaining institutional culture. Scaffolding the programme conversion process using the curriculum framework appreciatively has proved useful for teasing out elements to expand and protect. The programme team tended to resolve challenges by finding prescriptive answers to what appeared to be immediate problems, such as the grading issue. This propensity of practical problem solving revealed the value of using some basic project management practices to facilitate consistency during experimentation with web-based methods and to archive successes that will build on the framework model.

In summary, the data from the combined primary sources in Chapters Four and Five provide a means to triangulate towards the systematic development of a curriculum framework. These key findings help prepare the reader for the in-depth discussion in the following chapters and to some degree offer a prioritisation of material that helps answer the final central research question and sub-questions. The implications of the study are presented as a refined curriculum framework for the design and practice of distance graduate education. Recommendations are fully discussed.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION

6.1   Introduction to the Discussion

This chapter discusses the significant research findings in light of the problem stated in Chapter One: the apparent need for a systematic approach to the design of distance graduate education programmes. In addition to a thorough review of relevant literature and theory, this mixed methodology study triangulated data from three sets of primary stakeholder perceptions: directors, learners and instructors, to provide a rich understanding of the design and experience of distance graduate education.

Knowledge of education theory, in particular curriculum theory, distance education and graduate education theory, can assist and enhance the crafting of programmes and guide the work of educators. Distance graduate education puts greater responsibility on designers and educators to create coherence between programme elements in an informed design process. It is a collaborative process that requires an awareness of the significance of new media usage, learner involvement and situational pressures that challenge educators to include thinking 'out of the box' to maximize the learning-centred experience. Empirical studies make it clear that the wholesale adoption of the traditional teaching paradigm is not appropriate for distance graduate education e.g. (Berge & Mrozowski, 2001; Gold, 1997; Hampton, 2010). Thus, addressing the multiple factors that strengthen the distance learning relationship between teacher and student becomes the focus of this discussion of the design model, as well as the key issues around programme sustainability.

The global demand for provision of flexible higher education for lifelong learners increases the urgency of developing a curriculum framework that promotes clarity about attaining and maintaining excellence in distance curriculum development. This need for broad yet insightful answers prompted the creation of five main research questions; forming a three-step process guiding the data collection and bounding the study. Each question progressively highlights aspects of developing a curriculum framework appreciatively and enables understanding of the issues faced in identifying, analysing and drawing conclusions about such research.

6.2   Discussion: The Refined Curriculum Framework

The Stark and Lattuca situational model is referred to often and has served as the primary conceptual model for this study because of its robust, comprehensive, situational approach to curriculum design. Their academic plan, first published in 1997, was revised in 2009. It did not change structurally, however twelve years of thinking about, teaching and practicing the model increased their understanding of the complex contextual influences. This study, on a modest scale, follows a similar journey. Figure 6-1 revisits the eight elements of their academic plan.

Figure 6-1: Academic plan elements Stark and Lattuca (1997, 2009)
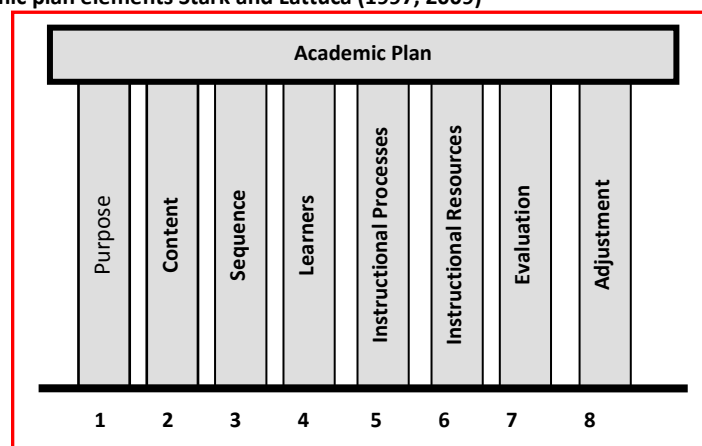
In Stark and Lattuca's revision (2009), their chronology of access and higher education ends with the period "2000 – Online learning increasingly popular" (Lattuca & Stark, 2009, p. 38) after which they dedicate a short descriptive section to distance education's growing use, but without offering insight into instructional change. It is from this point that this study extends the educational inquiry and research.

The framework developed in Chapter Two, Figure 2-8, is slightly modified and Figure 6-2 below shows the relationship between the seven key curriculum considerations of design, development and delivery.

Figure 6-2: The Curriculum Framework: A situated process model
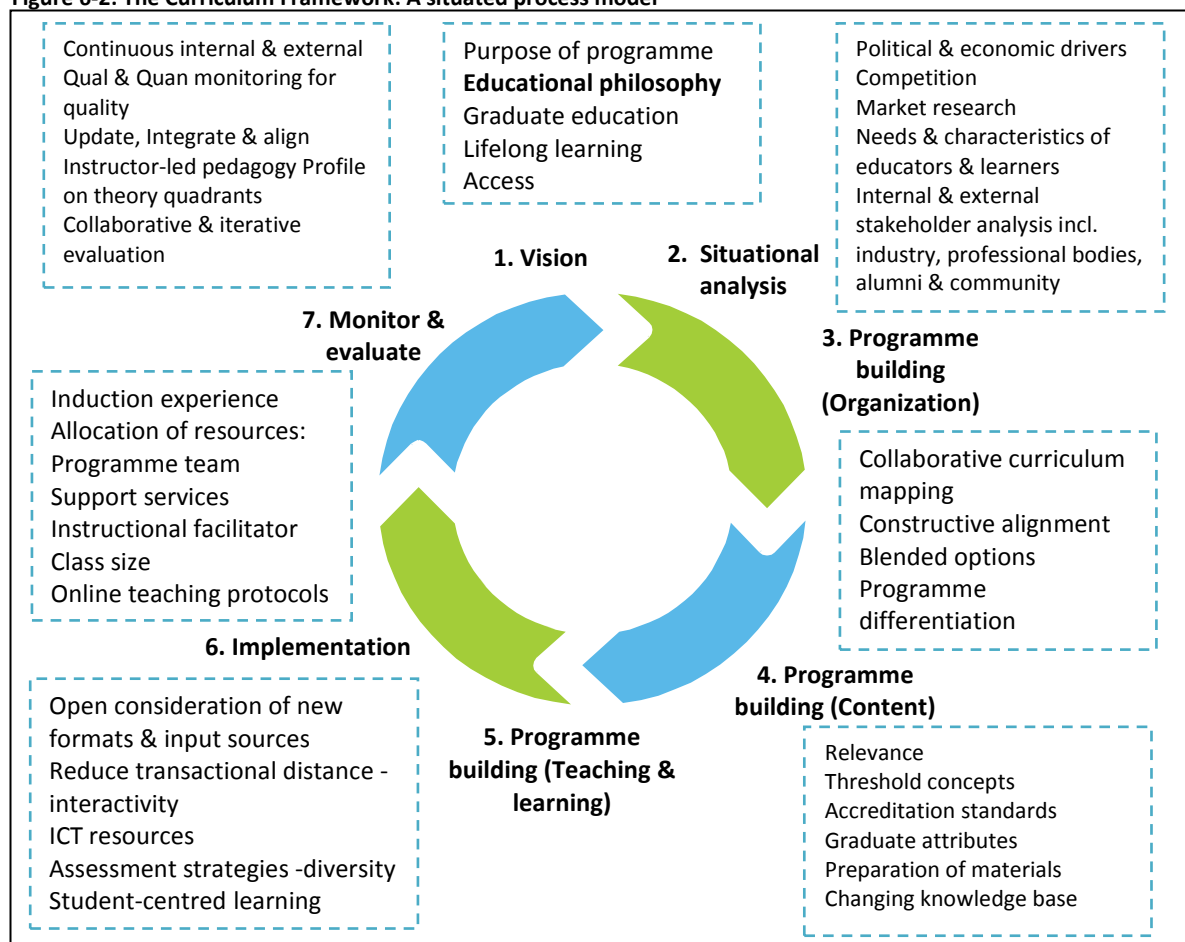
This model adds significant value to the conceptualisation of programme design, as it demonstrates that anything less than a holistic approach leaves a blind side that

could leave programme viability vulnerable. More dynamic than the early set of static pillars, the major design feature is its properties as a situational process model. The findings indicate that this system will support development of learner-centred curricula constructed for distance educational environments. Conversely, the use of a teacher-centred product model would set objectives; design a programme where students are guided through pre-defined learning experiences and finally test how well they have achieved desired learning outcomes. That approach is reminiscent of the early "canned" distance education programmes where isolated distance students passively studied the subject matter. Curricula for an ever-widening array of needs and conditions will see a diluted focus on rigid learning approaches and significant allowance for contextual factors such as student diversity, mobility and technology change. Learners are increasingly activity-oriented participants undertaking research and inquiry. The situational framework is a more flexible and fluid process supporting both collaboration between teachers and learners working at a distance and students constructing their own learning experiences, networks and pathways. The direct or indirect influences of the internal and external educational environment can modify the elements in response to change.

The framework significantly contributes to the literature by representing a convergence of ideas developed in the context of historical, conceptual and technological evolution. It reflects the complexity of the overall emerging process. It outlines a holistic, values-based organizing structure for considering curricular issues at the programme and course level, serves as a guide for curriculum research and for academic developers to make decisions regarding designing distance curricula

more effectively. Inferred from interview data, distance programmes practicing such comprehensive programme design appear more resilient to change. The framework methodology is not prescriptive, but rather specifies a linked set of decision-making issues faced in the distance programme design process around which the design team can evaluate, align and adjust as the educational goals suggest. User-responsive methods should have a higher profile in targeting effective design. Corroborated in this study and underpinning distance teaching and learning is the constructive practice of Moore's theory (1997) where high flexibility and high dialogue reduce transactional distance between instructor, learner, content and interface. As a model of curriculum development for general application, the framework has practical value and advances basic knowledge about how curricula are formed and the many factors that continuously operate "behind the scenes".

Some further buttressing of areas characteristic to the distance format and contemporary graduate management education are drawn from the wealth of new data and are presented and discussed in this chapter with particular emphasis on areas that promote both the programme product, i.e. the development of capacity of the individual and distance programme sustainability. A modification to Stark and Lattuca's model is the omission of 'sequence' as a key element. This dimension was downgraded because both alumni feedback and practice show that the order in which to study courses is not a major a concern for distance programmes at the graduate level (P. Kelly & Stevens, 2009). Students have planning advice available through a number of sources for selection of modular curriculum that cumulatively supports conceptual mastery of their subject area.

Curriculum development is a process that involves group negotiation of a series of decisions to solve inter-related complex problems, as in the case study experience, where answers are often educated guesses and not proven until put into practice and evaluated. Particularly for distance education, the iterative process must be an ongoing conversation and involve the shared opinions of the group, which is crucial to the acceptance of new ideas. The framework provides educators and researchers with some ideas that may challenge their practice, as well as provide practical means to systematically link educational goals with outcomes and improve educational quality in curricular reform.

6.3   *Key Elements of the Curriculum Framework*

This study identifies significant key elements included in the curriculum framework and these are explored under the following headings:

Graduate Education and Educational Philosophy
Curriculum Content in Graduate Education
Learning Strategies and Pedagogy
Evaluation

6.3.1 Graduate Education and Educational Philosophy

The role of graduate education is to develop the cognitive needs of its learners, advance the profession and emphasize cross-cultural values for professionals to serve industry and society. Although normative needs historically dominated the graduate management curriculum, particularly in a service sector industry such as Tourism and Hospitality, the debate between the liberal adaptive academic curricula versus the vocational specialist is yielding to the demand for a more inclusive curriculum that cultivates world citizens.

Programme directors share a pragmatic outlook regarding the goals of their programmes and graduate outcomes, and rightly so, as 'usefulness', in terms of career progression, personal development and professionalism, is the sine qua non of adult education, according to the literature reviewed. Despite obvious diversity within the field of T&HM, Figure 6-3 shows that the graduate programme learning goals were anchored in a range of values.

Figure 6-3: Directors' perspective of programme emphasis & values
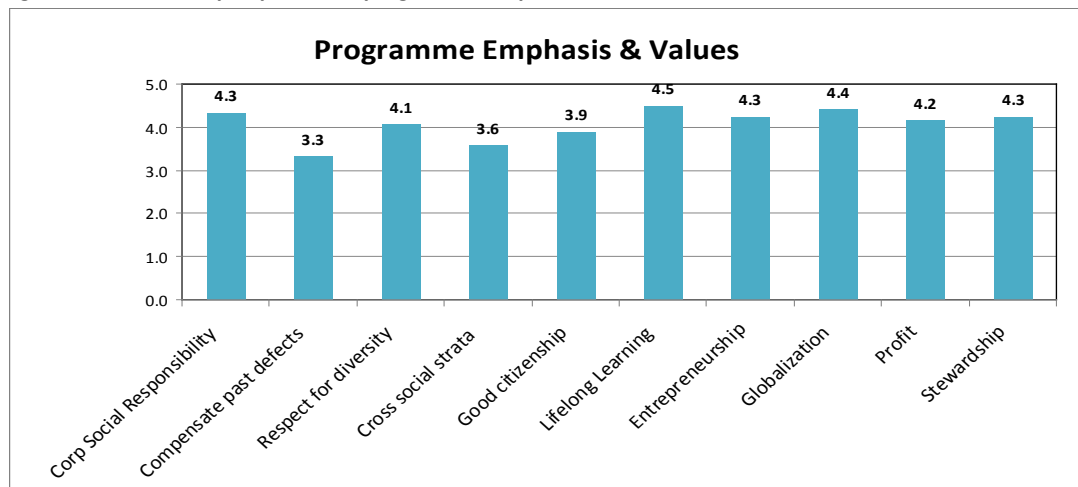
An educational philosophy for distance graduate management education is a multi-dimensional collection of beliefs that develops professional values, is inseparable from programme purpose, is embedded in content, drives pedagogy and influences the format of the programme. An educational philosophy lifts the programme purpose by re-establishing linkage of disciplinary thinking with the greater concerns of mankind and personal growth; a liberal arts-oriented professional degree programme. Discussion of educational philosophy among directors, however, generated some discomfort, not due to lack of conviction about the purposes of their programmes, but because these practitioners are detached from what they feel are unhelpful theoretical abstractions.

The argument is that this is a misperception, and that an educational philosophy as part of the curriculum framework is more than useful; it is essential. It protects the graduate curriculum from market-driven bias, where the bottom line is the dominant objective, and prepares graduates for practical business situations. Planning the programme as a whole can best be achieved if the parts are scaffolded by a rational educational philosophy that supersedes singular situations and changes that may occur. Such a philosophy is not abstract at all but embraces a cluster of principles implicit from multiple sources such as programme features, educational policies, learning theories and interviews that portray a student-centred philosophy, and become part of the curriculum framework, as summarized in Table 6-1.

Table 6-1: Elements of an educational philosophy

Philosophical element	Sample principles embedded in distance curriculum design	Sample approach, outcome or design feature
Beliefs	-Access for students to education -Student-centred learning -Development of the individual	Flexibility & convenience Formative assessment to optimize cognitive growth Graduate attributes
Values	-Expertise in ethical responsibility: The common good, rather than the common greed -Respect and awareness of human diversity	Environmentalism, Corporate social responsibility Sustainable communities Globalization
Core concepts: Content	-Professionalism -Critical thinking skills -Threshold concepts	Disciplinary depth and social skills Lifelong learning and adaptability 'Transformative' content linkage
Theories tested in the field	-Pragmatism	Profit for business, Practical worth of applied knowledge
Praxis or active experience	-Entrepreneurship -Good judgment	Creativity Wisdom in action and dialogue

Using the framework to interpret philosophy, a sample principle and approach could be:

- Professional development. Programme purpose, as stated by directors, corresponds with students' primary reasons for enrolling.
- Convenience and flexibility were alumni second most important criteria.

These represent two educational philosophy dimensions: disciplinary depth (Core concepts) and institutional commitment to student access to education (Beliefs).

Unifying principles, such as outlined in graduate attributes and other international and national qualification frameworks e.g. (EQF, 2006; NQAI, 2003), transcend specialty differences and define core learner outcomes. These should be expressed in the curriculum framework in language that educators can relate to their practice, increasing its value as a user-friendly template for communication of foundational guidelines.

The literature supports the key role of the educational philosophy in the framework because it enhances clarity and conceptual unity for instructional design and emphasises long-term values that best prepare graduates to understand the issues in the global workplace. By embedding an educational philosophy in the curriculum framework the programme design team has a tool to help balance content across the two worlds of liberal reflective traits and the competitive business world's demand for specialty skills while providing a tool for focusing assessment effectively. Programme director interviews revealed that only a quarter of the programmes in this study formally integrate graduate attributes, even though learners in both specialized and broad programmes can gain the highly desirable benefits of being more balanced, adaptable and workplace-prepared practitioners according to many studies. This key point is revisited in this chapter in the discussion of the 'Development of the capacity of the individual'.

6.3.2 Curriculum Content in Graduate Education

The alumni surveyed in this study confirm that distance graduate management students seek programmes that provide them with professional development and content that make a difference in their lives, which is consistent with the principles of graduate education and adult learning theory discussed in Chapter Two. Key issues concerning content and the challenges, new evidence and framework-based solutions are as follows:

1. Relevant content: This is central to the learning experience and, as such, is firmly a criterion in the framework design.

    - Challenge: It is not possible to keep up with the dynamic nature of knowledge, but learners do expect their programmes to approve and aggregate materials
    - Solution: The developing of digital subject portals are partial solutions.
    - Solution: Open source, learning objects and digital repositories are among expanding technology-based information sources that present unlimited possibilities for assembling flexible, accessible curricular content.

2. Content choice: Like their on-campus counterparts, distance learners have a strong preference for electives.

    - Evidence: The 94 alumni, who were positive about most of their programme experiences, expressed a low 42% satisfaction with choice of electives in their programmes.
    - Evidence: Studies have shown that choice is a satisfaction and programme retention factor (J.-H. Park & Hee Jun, 2009).
    - Challenge: For the curriculum designer increasing course choice involves balancing logistics, resources and rigor. The provision of relaxed or increased choice for learners is a recurring debate linked to the cyclical expressions of concern for educational quality (Lattuca & Stark, 2009)

- Solution: Options should be negotiated in the programme planning stages.

3. Generalist vs. specialist content: Content selection must strike a balance between what is relevant and is consistent with the educational philosophy and intended learning outcomes.

   - Evidence: Degree programmes in this study with rigid specialized content failed to thrive, e.g. eTourism and Cultural Management; a vivid reminder of the importance of a review process for renewing and revitalizing content in response to change.
   - Solution: With the guidance of the curriculum framework, key stakeholders can consult in the academic development process. Such team negotiating skills may necessitate academic development.

4. The 'overstuffed curriculum': One of the ramifications of greater choice is information overload, which makes connecting learning troublesome.

   - Challenge: Help students organise learning and understand essential knowledge in their field.
   - Challenge: Need for instructors to have a way to prioritise content relevance.
   - Evidence: Studies show that learners who understand content relationships have more learning endurance and improved learning outcomes and motivation (Posner & Rudnitsky, 2006).
   - Solution: For graduate distance learning threshold concepts emphasise relationships and ideally are transformational (Meyer & Land, 2003). This constructivist approach is included in the framework as a conceptual tool for course designers to consider content that promotes "seeing things in a new way", is more organic and less specific and maximizes critical thinking: a key graduate attribute.
   - Solution: A contextualized integrative system simplifies curriculum content by stitching new information to schema: a 'less is more' principle, in an adaptive way, resulting in increased flexibility.

6.3.3 Learning Strategies and Pedagogy

The literature confirms that the value of the graduate programme lies in the complex set of experiences within a learning community (Duderstadt, 2000). Lecturing and demonstration may remain the dominant teaching methods on campus, however starting with Daft and Lengel's theory of media richness (1986), decades of empirical literature and the data from directors, learners and instructors in this study, one can conclude that variety is the 'spice' of learning. Mixing up the ways to learn produces more lasting and meaningful outcomes and that a learning formula with more complexity works better online for multiple reasons. These key issues feature prominently in the curriculum framework for improved distance pedagogical design:

- An educational philosophy: As noted previously, offers designers layered dimensions to construct meaningful instructional approaches.
- The 'conceptual change/student-focused' paradigm: Rather than the old 'transmission/instructor-focused' paradigm, the newer approach is currently considered empowering to learners for actively constructing deeper knowledge.
- Prompt, appreciative feedback: This is key to completing the learning cycle. Whether from instructors or as online self or peer-assessment, feedback is the basis for formative learning.
  - In practice: Programme design needs to emphasize developing effective technology-based communication channels.
  - In practice: Instructors need to adopt responsive teaching habits such as those described in Chapter Four.
  - In practice: Group-based assessment, the other key formative method, requires careful preparation, clear goals and criteria to be used successfully in a distance course.

- A training or a design partner: Instructors require assistance in learning how to drive online discussions, focus collaboration and develop "teaching presence" (Laves, 2010) to reduce transactional distance.

- Design for spontaneity and creative group learning: A framework assists in shaping the elements of learners, instructor, resource materials and environment.

Directors and the case team implied that the distance instructor needs practical toolsets, support and methodologies. The curriculum framework facilitates academic development for mastering this level of pedagogy by providing a scaffold for aligning design with successful practice and applied principles.

- Group work

Confirmed in this study's findings, graduate management education appears to be firmly oriented toward group-facilitated learning and case methodology. Group work benefits from the social affordances of technologies in terms of providing constructive learning, a sense of community and peer support opportunities.

- In practice: Interaction and deep discussion are the means to achieving the learning goals of disciplinary knowledge and critical insight.

- In practice: The ubiquitous asynchronous discussion lends itself to learner reading and synthesizing material, then posting comments to the entire class, which prompts more careful commentary. In addition to providing an equalizing platform for commentary, discussions gain from the cumulative experiences of the diverse adult learners. The instructor, likewise, is challenged to review the class perspectives and craft thoughtful responses, greatly extending the possibilities of the time-limited traditional in-class dialogue.

- Technology for teaching and learning

Study findings show that the litmus test for technology is that it is user-friendly, widely used and up-to-date. Narrated PowerPoint lectures still dominate in

online classes in this study, but part of the reason they have endured is that instructors find the technology easy to use, it suits learner diversity of language comprehension and it enriches text-only formats. Specific ICT tools available for creating new kinds of learning communities continue to change at a rapid pace and instructors find this constant upgrading unnerving.

- In practice: Distance programmes in this study recommended using a variety of generic, widely available technologies, as well as more complex e-assessment tools, such as digital voice feedback for assessments, with the key to selection being what instructors can comfortably use, which tools suit the learning goal and available resources. Learners seemed mostly satisfied with the technology because of its usability, but the reality is that they were not offered much in terms of alternative interactive technologies.

- In practice: This study endorses technology-based learning tool advantages such as ePortfolios for reflective development (Peacock, Gordon, Murray, Morss, & Dunlop, 2010), mobile devices for increased access and interactivity (Bolliger & Shepherd, 2010) and social networking sites for discovery and sharing (Conole, 2010). Integration of these necessitates building confidence through training for instructors for quality assurance.

- Active learning and motivation

Student motivation, a theme throughout the data, is one of the beneficial by-products of active learning. Because mature students are more motivated and focused from the start, formative learning approaches are most effective in maintaining active participation and personal development. All study participants, such as alumni data shown in Figure 6-4, strongly indicated that internal self-discipline and self-motivation are learners' most powerful success factors.

Figure 6-4: Self-discipline - Key to success: Student survey
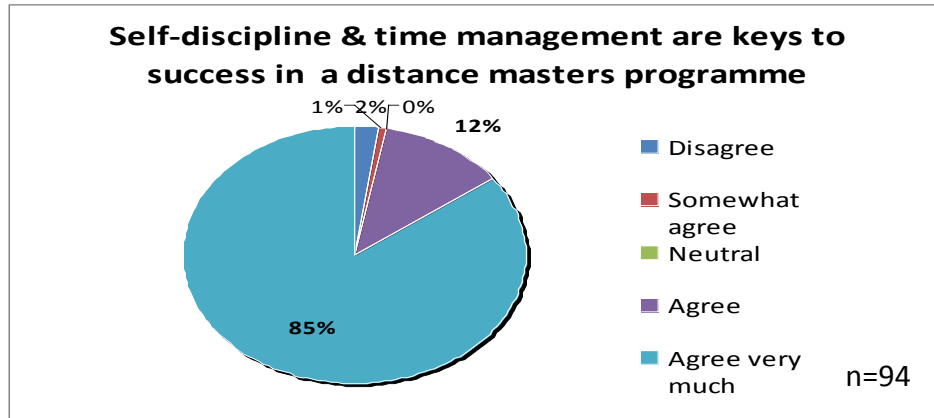
The case instructors confirmed that 'learning by intimidation' or extrinsic factors, i.e. marks, are not necessarily faithful indicators of learning success as they fail to challenge high attainers and demotivate low attainers (P. Black & D. William, 1998).

- In practice: What did stimulate learners were focused capstone projects, hands-on projects such as making a video, or intensive mini-courses that require energetic intellectual engagement and brought a change of pace.

Technology-based pedagogical tools and platforms introduce new capabilities that can improve learning, but history shows that change can be perceived as a threat to familiar institutional paradigms (Duderstadt, 2000). In the short term there are barriers to adopting new technologies as instructors lack information about practice and also suffer 'change fatigue'. Long term the technology needs to align with a learner-centred philosophy and instructor preferences. The institution's commitment to the learners' need for critical inquiry, discovery and dialogue should be the foundation for learning strategies, rather than how or what faculty members prefer to teach. The curriculum framework lends support to educational practice in the uncomfortable process of change.

Designing Interactive Distance Learning Environments

The design of interactive distance learning environments is arguably the single-most important feature of the distance programme. Instructors have to teach, yet programme design continues to move towards creating more democratized learning environments, as the pendulum of interest swings toward learning and away from 'instruction', as previously mentioned. The case instructors sensed that the predominant lecture model, where students are empty vessels to be filled, is antiquated, and literature shows the knowledge transmission approach does not engender deep learning (J. Biggs, 2009). Nonetheless, directors and alumni noted that recorded or text lectures and remain a major part of the instructional equation.

Generations of educators are familiar with the principle that interactivity is the core of the natural, rich learning environment (Dewey, 1933) and this is especially true for distance education as it reduces transactional distance (Lear, Ansorge, & Steckelberg, 2010). Students want to be partners in the modern learning experience and rated speed and quality interaction as 4.6 on a 5 point scale of importance while noting that this expectation was not being well met. A community of learners and a relationship of trust form the basis for the ideal online learning environment shown in Figure 6-5 and require a skilled instructor.

Figure 6-5: Learner relationships & area for maximising learning & satisfaction

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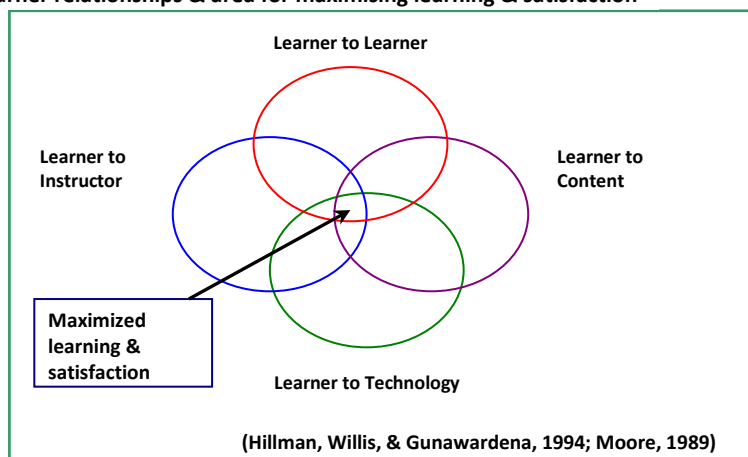
This intrinsically social dimension does not diminish the need to increase individual reflective thinking, but provides a community of learners with the psychological/emotional/intellectual support that they need for growth.

The curriculum framework helps educators prioritize challenges of using technology strategically to finesse flexibility options while building community. Directors noted that an effective instructor develops a set of online habits that combine subject matter and teaching proficiency, enthusiasm, engagement with the students and perception. Perception may be the 'X-factor' that is the most challenging online. In a classroom, as the case study team explained, the experienced instructor picks up on physical cues from the students in front of them to know where there is difficulty and can steer discussion. Less obvious in an online environment, the good instructor will find means to encourage open communication, connect with students and know when and where to deliver their expertise. A new set of instructional design skills will incorporate evolving uses of Web 2.0 applications for constructive social dialogue as well as structured online group tasks to push individual active learning strategies.

For many decades, the distance education literature centred on the "no significant difference" debate, as noted in Chapter Two. The research, in general, glossed over real differences and opportunities in learning environments that the online medium uniquely supports, such as the capacity to maximize reflective learning and small group discourse. The debate of comparative value of web-based programmes should now move on to focusing the design team on pedagogy and curriculum restructuring: mixing rich, technology-based media and face-to-face

methods to promote shared experiences of geographically and demographically diverse students.

6.3.4 Evaluation

Evaluation, based on a systematic method of assessing learning outcomes, gathering evidence and making judgments, plays a key role in the framework for distance curriculum development.

The challenge: The system of communication between curriculum developers and evaluators is central to making formative judgments. Responses from programme directors regarding their curriculum evaluation indicate that current programmes are evaluated with generally the same processes as on-campus programmes, yet the nature of the online programme is different from the traditional. It is more sensitive and exposed to changing situational influences suggesting that evaluation should reflect this.

Evidence: The documents reviewed for the case study revealed the inadequacy of *pro forma* annual evaluations for focusing on the important questions that can really improve the distance curriculum. The formal quality assurance evaluation does not ask the questions about how instructors and learners interact or examine other formative aspects of pedagogy.

Solution:

- A more productive and energizing method would be to share the responsibility for evaluation and improvement. Programme administration should provide a positive climate for a collegial, directed dialogue to facilitate negotiating appropriate change strategies (Lattuca & Stark, 2009). Directors' direct involvement in evaluation signals to instructors an interest

in their efforts to improve the virtual classroom, which can build a motivating sense of being part of a learning community.

- ▪ Rather than tossing out the old formulaic evaluation instruments, they could anchor a more innovative evaluation culture with a new emphasis on trusting the passion and professionalism of educators such as the case team.
- ▪ Also, directors contributed some excellent examples of how their programmes successfully utilize and integrate evaluative student feedback.

Evaluation of student achievement and course delivery components involves developing a collaborative systematic improvement strategy as each individual programme finds appropriate.

6.4 Profiles of Existing T&HM Distance Masters Degree Programmes

This research established that distance masters degree programmes in T&HM identified in Chapter Two vary widely in their scope and depth and serve different niche populations and disciplinary areas of specialty. Diversity characterized all aspects of the programmes: from size of institution, which school houses the programme within the institution, programme concentration and focus, different degrees awarded, credits and amount of time to completion and modes of delivery, to name just a few variables.

The data suggests that programme sustainability and student motivation and satisfaction correlate with the following issues:

- The good match between the programme's emphasis, flexibility and learners' personal goals.

Table 6-2 enumerates the various flexibility features in these sample programmes.

Table 6-2: Programme structure flexibility features

Flexibility feature	Description	Variations
Length of programme	Programme requirements achievable in 2 years or less.	Part-time students can take up to 5 years to complete programme, depending on circumstances.
Intakes	How often programmes allow students to enter the programme	Admission once, twice, three times a year. Monthly or anytime intakes.
Timing	When courses begin or end or Length of courses	Year round course availability. Courses on rotations. 8 or 6 week courses. Week long intensive courses. Intensive weekend courses at conference. Course timing extensions to meet student needs
Exit points	Allow incremental exit points	Receive lesser degree or certificate as students build incrementally through the masters degree requirements
Total flexibility	Offer distance and/or face-to-face and/or open start times.	Allow students to cross over between on-campus and online. Allow students to step into programme anytime.

- Familiarity with the learners' needs.

   - Evidence: Directors of executive programmes pointed out that executive learners, who are full-time professionals, have especially high expectations in terms of convenience and gaining value-added deep knowledge applications for the workplace. These programmes are more selective and expensive and must be able to flawlessly deliver a high quality academic experience or lose their demanding students. In other words, programme designers must be intensely aware of their learners' needs, whether executive, career switcher or other, and be able to administratively deliver the focussed and aligned curriculum.

- Developing a comprehensive plan around programme goals. The planning stage of programme creation is where collaborative use of the curriculum framework has the potential be most effective.

- Evidence: Despite the obvious programme diversity, there was consistency around strategic and financial purposes of programme creation. The motivating reason for the programme may be less important to program sustainability than how well the programme articulates its goals throughout its curriculum.

A note on using theory for programme characterising:

Creating profiles of the diverse distance programmes was challenging, as websites rarely included complete information about the teaching strategies and programme structure that might indicate quality, such as number of students in a class, course design for interactivity or degree of student support. By applying the conceptual attributes of dialogue and programme flexibility of Transactional Distance theory (M. G. Moore, 1997), the programmes could be plotted to demonstrate their delivery formats in relation to theoretical 'good practice', shown in Figure 6-6.

Figure 6-6: Programme characteristics: Transactional Distance Quadrants
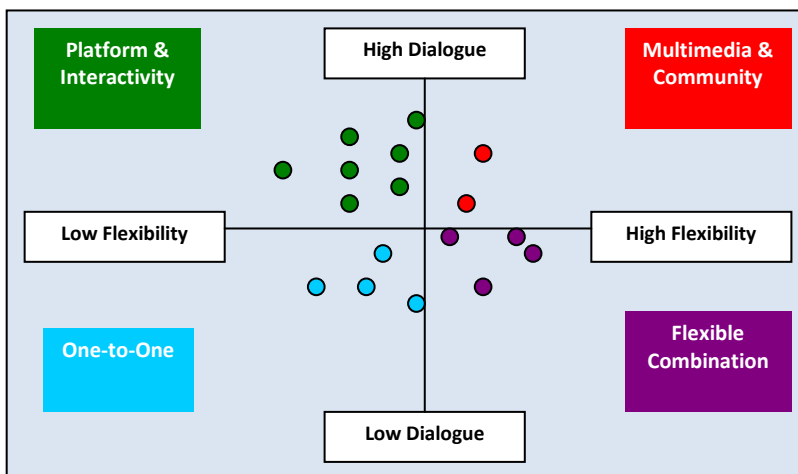
Using theory in this way contributes to educational research by providing a means for prospective students to juxtapose distance programmes in a simplified graphic way where actual data may be inconsistently available. If programmes would transparently display the degree of their programme flexibility and interactivity as an expression of their underpinning philosophy, meaningful universal

comparisons could be made. For programme designers, this useful interpretation provides them with a means to self-check where their programmes may fall within the theoretical quality realm and could prompt design changes to be consistent with their desired programme profile. For researchers, this illustrates the migration of maturing distance programmes emerging from first generation of one-way instructor-centred teaching to the next phases of increased student-centred learning and social and web-based enrichment (Holmberg, 1989).

Thus, with the many benefits of categorizing programmes with an ideologically-neutral scale as a common measure of quality, distance programmes should utilize this dimension of the framework to raise the perception of the quality of their theory-based standards. This would mark a significant stage of maturity and confidence in programme methodology; much needed at this time when inferior programmes are undermining public perception of distance education.

6.5   The Distance Learning Experience

The directors' perspective of the distance learning experience appeared quite different depending on the degree in which the director engaged with the distance programme as a laboratory for teaching and learning. As leaders, characteristics of the programme directors influence the distance programme in many ways. Interviews showed that:

- Some directors had no distance education training whatsoever and assumed a business approach to programme design.
- Conversely, directors who were once distance learners themselves understood the student experience and seemed to take into account their particular needs; a distinct benefit of constructively applied knowledge.

- The degree of enthusiasm, consistent with learning theories discussed, is a key success factor for directors and instructors in their roles to create effective learning environments.

Directors confirm that they highly value quality, yet worry about how consistent it is in practice. This is a warning signal for designers to closely evaluate where there may be a gap in the application of the curriculum framework.

Observations about the Student Programme Experience Findings

As the findings reveal in Figure 6-7, the pedagogy used in the distance programmes support a positive student experience.

Figure 6-7: Learning method effectiveness: Student survey

For 73% of the alumni surveyed, it was their first distance programme. The quantitative data showed an impressive 80-90% of students were satisfied with their distance courses content and overall quality and 87% would recommend their programmes, however, the qualitative responses were mixed and expressed more dissatisfaction with course delivery details such as timeliness and quality of feedback and interactivity, "stale" courses and lack of instructor engagement.

From the positive quantitative findings one could infer that this represents a null hypothesis: that redesign of distance curriculum is not necessary; and yet, the qualitative feedback paints a more complete picture of the student experience. A clarification of the apparent discrepancy of data is offered:

First, due consideration should be given to the effect of respondents not being randomly selected (Scheaffer, Mendenhall, & Ott, 2006), as randomization was beyond the researcher's control. Alumni were either self- or director-selected, possibly feeling post-programme gratitude for their online degrees. Also, high ratings may be attributable to at least two other possible reasons: 1. women perceive a higher social presence online than men (Richardson & Swan, 2003) and 2. adult learners for whom the idea of distance learning is an appealing and appropriate way of learning and who have background in the subject, are more positively pre-disposed toward their learning programmes (Beqiri, Chase, & Bishka, 2009; Osei, 2010). Also, the mixed quantitative and qualitative metrics introduced the surprising phenomenon that participants tended to answer ranking questions very positively and then reveal less enthusiastic insights in their individual comments. One such comment came from a student who felt that, on reflection, face-to-face learning was perhaps irreplaceable:

> *"I don't know that I would do distance education again. I found that you do lose a lot without that face-to-face communication."* – Student 7 Institution C

This apparent contradiction of seeming false positive ratings and conflicting feedback is not necessarily a conflict or limitation, but rather an example of how important nuances of learner attitudes and individual experience can be captured using a mixed methodology approach. It does raise questions about the many quantitative student course evaluations based on 'valid and reliable' measures. Nonetheless, from this sample it appears that the qualitative findings enhance reliability and also suggest that qualitative monitoring during the programme may

be more accurate and helpful to the design team and should be a part of the framework refinement.

This study, although it does not measure the effectiveness of specific technologies on student learning outcomes, does contributes to understanding student attitudes towards aspects of the learning experience:

- The majority of learners confirmed that the constraints of fixed classroom facilities would conflict with their work/life schedules and motivated their choice to study where and how they wanted.
- Students trust the instructor and programme to elevate them individually to masters degree level graduates and that fragile bond can be broken by inattention. The framework supports this key relationship by proposing the establishment of interactivity standards.
- Distance students have high expectations for the newest media, up-to-date content, access and flexibility that suit their lifestyles, but it can also be said that student enter their programmes enthusiastically committed and seem to make the best of what is available to them.

Learners' positive attitudes of enthusiasm and acceptance of distance delivery, and a seeming willingness to be active partners in educational experimentation should be nurtured in the curriculum design to maintain high levels of student motivation.

6.6   Case study: Instructor Plans to Implement the Framework

The small case study became the testing ground to explore initial reactions to a framework-based approach to pedagogical change and illuminated procedures, beliefs and implementation issues. Several key issues emerged from the process:

- Deciding where to start: As newcomers to online teaching and learning, finding an appropriate starting point is in itself a valuable insight for curriculum design (O'Neill, 2010).

- The practical worth of having systems and instructional design support in place for repeatable excellence in what they perceived as a trial-and-error endeavour.

- Clarity about the instructor's role in the changing format and being part of that dialogue, in terms of duties, time commitment, responsibility for preparing new digital content and coordinating the necessary skills.

- The vital role of the team 'champion' to lead communication and create a vision for collaborative negotiation of curriculum design. The leader can also help identify the instructional team's training needs. Leadership is discussed more fully later in this chapter.

Finding solutions were key priorities for the instructional staff:

- Establishing project management-type procedures to improve communication and cumulatively build quality on lessons learned and not lost; a practice not consistently followed by distance education pioneers.

- Developing a strategy for incremental programme building that effectively increases buy-in and reduces anxiety about the change process. This confirms previous studies recommending slow, steady small steps that allow instructors to acclimatize to new practices and lessen the "culture shock" and chance of major implementation errors (Jacobs, 2004).

- Making small changes that have a big impact on learning environments. Recessionary budget constraints and conflicts can become the "mother of invention" to inspire using technology differently, such as making digitized resources available in new ways to solve old problems.

- Using student-led assessment design as a real opportunity for building a bridge to their greater role in the learning partnership.

The case team spoke out where they recognised they needed support:

- Student diversity can be a challenge in the classroom as the instructor must engage students of many backgrounds. They wanted tools for managing different cognitive and experiential levels in an online learning environment.

  - Solution: Using theory: Learning theorists such as Bruner (1996) and Underhill (2006) suggest that socially constructive pedagogy draws on the

richness that diverse students contribute. Technology-based strategies can leverage the contribution that diversity can make to a learning community.

- Solution: Relationships: These 'hands-on' instructors felt strongly that drawing on relationships were at the heart of learning strategies.

- Solution: Collaboration: Collaborative design in a framework-guided process is the key to maximizing the benefits of online peer and instructor interaction and for minimizing cognitive disparities.

• Transitioning their students into mature self-directed, lifelong learners in a culturally different distance learning paradigm.

- Solution: Finding the particular methods will always be a case of commitment to design & redesign based on feedback and self-monitoring to suit instructor style, resources and staying relevant to learners and the sector.

Addressing concerns in the organisational stage using a framework is important as the answers influence course content and learning process design.

A note on methodology:

The novel use of the Appreciative Inquiry process for case development and exploration successfully captured a sense of the professional pride of the individuals as well as their cautious enthusiasm for innovation. The method was selected for its uncomplicated, yet systematic approach to drawing out the basics and building on them through a positive lens. Much like a grounded theory method, it allowed the researcher the freedom to follow emerging data while guiding the participants in semi-structured and open dialogue with the team. It could be suggested that an abbreviated version of this method could have potential for other programme teams contemplating distance or blended learning. Stepping through the four-stage facilitated exercise can incrementally build confidence and familiarisation of how

strengths can translate into resources in a distance learning environment and how

adoption of the framework will position them for success from the very start.

6.7 Evaluation Informs Model Development

Step Three of the study design brings the discussion focus to the refinement

of the curriculum framework by examining how evaluation of existing curriculum

models, drivers of change and field testing can inform and lead to the development

of a more dynamic, comprehensive model for graduate distance education.

6.7.1 Development of the Capacity of the Individual

Education's primary mission is the development of human potential, and

major international organisations agree that in the 'Age of Knowledge' learning will

be perpetual for individuals who may change jobs and careers many times

(European Commission, 2010; Irish Universities Association, 2005; UNESCO, 2005).

- The challenge: The evaluation of existing curriculum models, drivers of change
  and field testing indicate that higher education is at a moment in time where
  commitment to the needs of the learner must overcome 'business-as-usual'
  barriers and offer a vision for responsive, well-designed distance learning.
  - Evidence: Analysis of many outcomes-based curriculum models, from the
    propositions of Tyler and Dewey to modernized models by Stark and Lattuca
    and others, contribute to conceptualizing the framework used in this study
    that is designed to help integrate internal organisational and external
    influences on curricula.
  - Evidence: Not the handmaiden of trends, curriculum design is nonetheless
    influenced by national strategic priorities to develop innovative digital
    capabilities and a highly qualified, adaptable workforce (Commission of the
    European Communities, 2008; Commission on the Future of Graduate
    Education, 2010).

- Evidence: Evaluation of the case programme priorities further confirmed that centrally important to instructors is the opportunity to leverage new media techniques to improve student learning outcomes, but they worried that the old teaching paradigm that has served students so well, offered insufficient conceptual tools in a virtual classroom environment.

- Solution: The research indicates that there is room for improvement in current curriculum designs and that a more ideal distance graduate management programme design is one that places the development of the capacity of the individual at the centre of the curriculum.

Underpinned with non-negotiable ethical values, a potentially powerful situational curriculum model can link global and local political and social pressures with the educational needs of current and future T&HM professionals. A curriculum constructed in such a way will help learners achieve the desired liberal and professional knowledge outcomes described in Chapter Three and indicated by the directors in Figure 6-8.

Figure 6-8: Specific desired learning outcomes: Directors' questionnaire
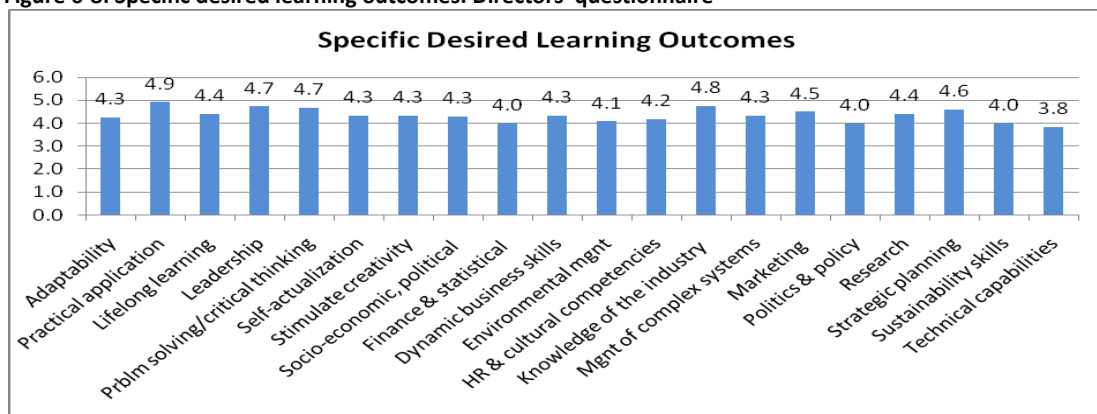
The focus is on preparing the individual for personal and career development, the needs of society and leadership within the individual business sector. To create a web-based environment that can support this degree of comprehensive education, the framework must intentionally remove any lingering ideas of the separation of technology and pedagogy and create a new learning-centred gestalt.

If there is one message to take away from the findings from the literature, directors and case study, it is that distance learning is more about seeing things in a new way than specific new technologies. A quick look across programmes reveals familiar distance design paradigms that exist, but whose core vision does not focus on the development of the individual's capacity:

- Models driven by technology – "Build it and they will come."
- Models driven by resource constraints – "We simply don't have enough classroom space, enough teachers or ability to expand."
- Models driven by profit – "We will appear to offer the students what they want in order to get as many students as we can, with the biggest profit margin and by spending the least amount possible on educational resources."
- Models dependent an extremely narrow topic. – "We will offer the only distance programme on this area and hope it attracts some students."
- Models driven by policy – "We will make education accessible to the masses."

These represent different institutional cultures and approaches that significantly affect educational decision-making, but each falls short of fulfilling the potential of the distance medium for the development of the capacity of the individual and a values-based sustainable programme, which this study's framework supports.

Closer examination of the data shows that designing for the development of the individual's capacity can be simplified by focusing on four core generic skills:

1. Knowledge of discipline (Specialist professional)
2. Active lifelong learning skills (Adaptive, cognitive independence, critical thinking, motivation for continued learning)
3. Communication skills (Social and creative contextual competencies)
4. Professional ethics (Respect for diversity, responsibility)

These four attributes are tightly bound in the literature for graduate curriculum design and in the primary research. Historically knowledge of discipline dominated graduate curriculum design, but students point out that content alone is not sufficient. Relevance of content being connected to issues or questions they really care about opens the pathway for learning constructively. Employing cognitive foundations enable students to enhance their intellectual and critical abilities and advance knowledge in the discipline (Lattuca & Stark, 2009; Posner & Rudnitsky, 2006).

From an instructor's perspective, these attributes form the base that allows learners to acquire, communicate and rehearse generic skills that become the context for learners' understanding of professional ethics, but there are challenges:

- Challenge: Distance learners, as a group, are diverse. As assessment focus shifts to the expansion of individual variation and collaboratively building consensus about which ideas to propagate, it becomes apparent that this level of sophistication of learning will be most suited to mature self-reliant learners who are willing to be co-creators of a dynamic learning environment.
  - Solution: The case team and literature support the value of metacognitive or learning-how-to-learn skills, to prepare all students for developing the adaptive growth mindset necessary for higher cognitive skills expected of graduates.
    - o Cognitive skills underpin lifelong learning goals of long term knowledge retention, thus designing assessment methods that formatively use diversity can help learners improve critical thinking skills.
    - o Induction is a vehicle that was highly endorsed by study participants to launch students' cognitive and social development by building on what student differences bring to the programme and also to increase sense of community, a quality indicator. Induction also

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builds on initial enthusiasm to bridge the gap between face-to-face and distance learning.

Organizing the programme through use of the framework to fulfil these outcomes can take many forms, and programmes will choose to address the alignment differently.

6.8   Need for Change

Technology, at the heart of institutional change, has enabled distance graduate programmes to serve educational needs in ways never before possible and the upward trend in skills drives increasingly mobile, adult learners to seek flexible ways to access education. The development of distance programmes offer institutions both academic and market opportunities for exploration and expansion, but sustainability has proved precarious. Research question 5a asks how existing curriculum frameworks for distance graduate T&HM programmes compare to the proposed framework and if there indications of need for change.

6.8.1 Four Key Factors Affecting the Sustainability of the Programme

While the Internet provides the infrastructure for knowledge sharing networks, paradoxically; it both separates people and connects them. Distance education, at its best, exploits the potential of integrated multimedia in an active student-centred learning environment and is constantly evolving. There is considerable evidence from the literature and new data that the nature of distance education is different from face-to-face learning and, in fact, must go well beyond replication of the classroom (Keengwe, Onchwari, & Onchwari, 2009).

Although maturing, many distance graduate management programmes have survived through adaptation, but without consistency. Managing and embedding

sustainable innovation and new practices requires significant engagement with a range of stakeholders and linking new approaches to institutional strategies. Clear evidence of this urgent need for change is that during the course of this study, a quarter of the distance T&HM masters degree programmes closed, restructured or faced closure, as three directors acknowledged their programmes withered due to the effects not keeping up with change.

There are many factors affecting a programme's sustainability and these are highlighted throughout this study, but this discussion focuses on four key factors that programme directors may want to consider to avoid the dangers that plague distance programme success.

1. Building Capacity and Capability

The distance programme has an ongoing need to build capacity to have sufficient enrolment. Various strategies for partnerships, student recruitment and retention and website design are brought out in the study and each plays an important role in building capacity. Each of these strategies builds on programme 'identity'. In particular strategies identified as effective in this study focus on:

- Partnerships: Building synergy and accommodating the specific educational needs of external stakeholder are reliable sources for recruiting students and a core strategy for many programmes.

  - In practice: An example of leveraging partnerships with external stakeholders is Columbia Southern University, the for-profit that is part of this study. Their partners include Capella University, Delta Air Lines, New York Fire Department, municipalities and many others that "extend to organisations in more than half of the 50 U.S. states and several countries" (Columbia

Southern University, 2009), but non-profits also carefully cultivate industry relationships.

- In practice: Bespoke programmes or professional development courses are created for specific human resource needs of partners, a development approach used by institutions such as Sheffield Hallam University and University Nevada Las Vegas. Queen Margaret University (QMU) has a Swiss hospitality partner that directs their certificate students into QMU's masters programme.

Consistent Capability

As mentioned previously, the weakest link in the distance learning chain, according to the literature and the students in this study, is the lack of prompt, quality student/teacher feedback (Gabriel, 2010). The study participants and literature emphasize that better feedback protocols and resources improve learning and sense of community and counteract students losing interest (Lear, Ansorge, & Steckelberg, 2010). Having the capability to sustain the complex distance programme systems requires consistent administrative and instructional support and dedicated staff members. This can be addressed in several way and data from this study suggests focus on:

- Using a course facilitator: Several factors converge to suggest the wisdom of scaffolding the instructor's efforts in an online learning environment to maximize effectiveness.

  - Evidence: Two institutions in this study follow the practice of having a trained individual to support the instructor and learner. 83% of alumni in programmes with facilitators ranked facilitators as important.
  - Evidence: Studies concur that adult learners need varying degrees of course and programme support by their organisations to finish their online programmes (J.-H. Park & Hee Jun, 2009).

- Evidence: This supports findings in the study by Hollenbeck, Zinkhan and French (2005).
- In practice: The facilitator assists the online instructor with issues other than content to assure timely feedback and course functionality and other tasks as they arise; making the non-subject matter issues no longer a worry for the instructor. This mediates concerns raised by the instructors in the case study.

As the tempo of technology innovation and instructor loads increase, the facilitator keeps up with innovation applications, increases capability and allows programme growth. Alternatively, the institution should give instructors allowances for time and resources dedicated to planning and developing distance learning, but this may not suffice in all cases.

2. Ability to Respond to Change

Hand-in-hand with evaluation is the ability to respond to indicators for needed programme and course change from feedback. Each of the programmes in this study introduced alternatives in programme scheduling or organisation that made their programme more relevant or appealing by increasing flexibility over the on-campus programmes.

- The challenge: Distance programmes must be engaged with strategies to continually reinvent themselves to respond to internal and external influences.
- Solution: 'Tweak' - Although bureaucratic structure prevent quick changes to overhaul a programme, both online directors and the case team identified ways where teaching method or structure could be 'tweaked' to make needed incremental changes that are consistent with educational philosophy.

- Solution: 'Explore' - In undergraduate education, experimental changes to the curriculum could result in limiting or jeopardizing students' transferability to graduate study. Less of a concern at the graduate level, pathways within the system to experiment should be explored.

The curriculum framework can be used to create a secure atmosphere that nurtures and rewards pedagogic experimentation and new ways of teaching requires

3. Curriculum Planning for Sustainability

The history of the creation of distance graduate programmes can be characterized by its 'ad hoc' nature. Internationally and nationally major trends in HE policy guidelines advocate system-level alignment and adoption of 'quantum learning' concepts (HEA, 2009). Inconsistent with this movement, the state of distance graduate programmes in the secondary and primary data revealed its inharmonious, fragmented and even transient nature.

- The challenge: Distance programmes, often disjointed from the institutional mainstream, represent pockets of innovation with weaker programmes often left foundering after losing their visionary leader and faculty support.
    - Evidence: In contrast, stronger evolved programmes appear to be those with aligned curriculum elements formally integrated with graduate values, such as lifelong learning, commitment to excellence and social responsibility.
    - Solution: Programmes grounded in an educational philosophy and using rubrics to generally align content at the course level produce programme design seemingly "greater than the sum of its parts", resolving director and student key concern for programme consistency.
    - Solution: The active collaborative alignment of views and clarifying learning expectations, following the theoretical and practical work of Biggs (1996), sharpens specificity and agreement about purpose, cornerstones for assessment (AAHE, 2010).

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- Solution: The case study found that collaborative planning with the framework brought into focus their strengths, stimulating value-added 'brand identity', ideas and actions.

Team-based Planning with an Educational Designer

Although not all programme directors indicated that they used a collaborative planning process, the case programme team discovered that a team-based process had multiple benefits as it created buy-in to the distance education paradigm while alleviating communal fears of transition and building confidence.

- The challenge: It appears from data and literature that an ongoing development relationship should exist between three discrete design teams: the development support team, the faculty team and the 'users' team with each having a shared understanding of the programme's goals and vision (Irlbeck, Kays, Jones, & Sims, 2006).

  - Evidence: The study data shows the value of having an educational designer as part of the development team; an individual responsible for educational advice on curriculum and instructional design decisions and committed to a structured design process.

    - Directors expressed concern for consistent quality across courses and programme scalability;

    - Major studies consistently shows that instructors facing redesigning courses are dissatisfied with institutional support and design assistance (I. E. Allen & Seaman, 2010b; McCarthy, 2009).

    - The case team similarly felt that online teaching would take more time and effort than face-to-face courses and were offered no incentive to take on the extra work. They outlined a preference to work one-on-one with an instructional designer on an as-needed basis.

- ▪ Alumni expressed high levels of satisfaction with well-planned classes that successfully integrated technology, relevant content and pedagogy into an online environment that "made learning easier".
- Solution: The director, programme leader, facilitator or a separate individual could fill the role of coordinating and maintaining interaction and rapport among teams. Other team players on the development team could include technology-oriented staff to ensure online system functionality and communication, learning and information resource availability and other technical advice. This team-based system decentralizes the teaching and learning paradigm and has the advantage of triangulating talent for solutions to changing needs.

A comprehensive design approach, such as the curriculum framework, has distinct advantages for distance learners. Technology enables collaboration and integration making it easier to connect academic silos and networks. Learners are the beneficiaries of the increasing confidence that results from holistic planning that knits together a better values-based curriculum.

4. The Need for Leadership

Findings in this study suggest that the programme director plays a key role in the success of the distance graduate programme. Directors are the academic leaders responsible for essential responsibilities such as navigating institutional and policy barriers, providing vision and coordinating communication for the programme team, as particularly evident in the case study.

Distance programmes still face disadvantages as policy and funding discrimination persists against programmes that serve part-time learners. The Bologna reforms and national qualification frameworks are policies increasing parity for flexible learning, but according to programme directors, field testing and literature (M. M. Martin, 2010), finding solutions for programme sustainability

depends on creative leadership of the programme champion. Directors who empathise with the learners' experience appear to be the most progressive leaders. Findings show that this individual should be mission-driven, persuasive and have a democratic/charismatic leadership style with a passion for creative teaching.

These four sustainability factors, combined with focusing on a student-centred curriculum framework may not make a programme bullet-proof or sustainable in the long term, but do provide a competitive advantage. In the absence of campus-based conventions, the distance programme has to work a little harder to be vigilant for disruptive forces coming from many quarters.

6.9   What are the Implications for the New Curriculum Model?

Curriculum should include both top and bottom influences as policy presses from the top and pedagogical change and the community of stakeholders from the bottom as noted in Figure 6-9.

Figure 6-9: Relationship of contextual influences to curriculum design process
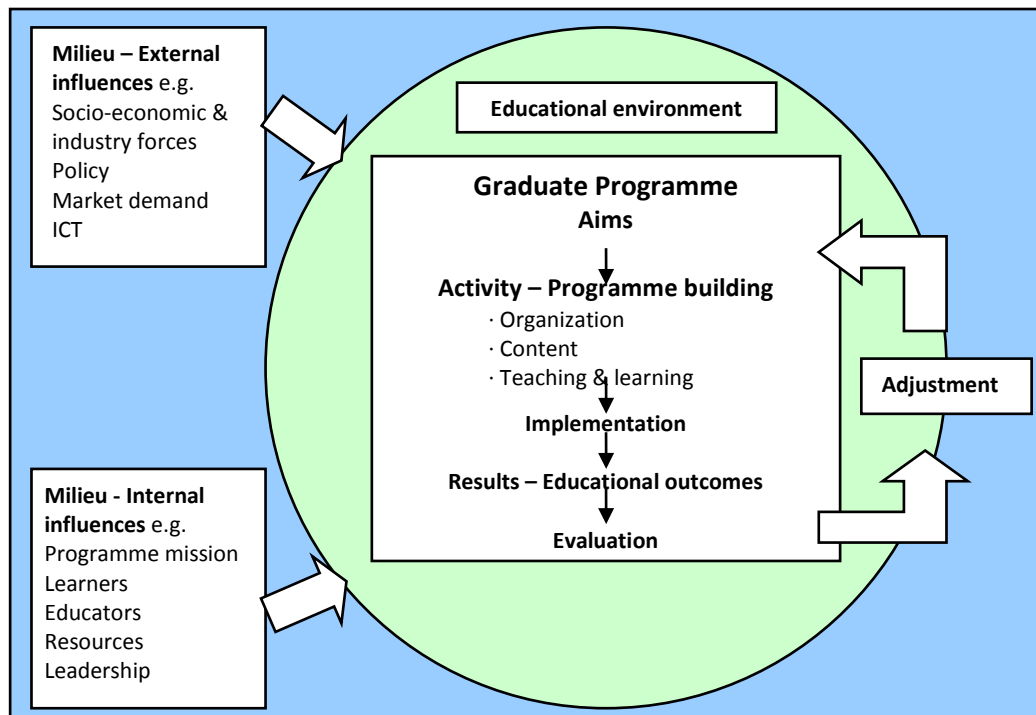
How can directors or designers prioritize decisions to facilitate student success? How can the curriculum framework help overcome obstacles? These questions of the practical implications of the curriculum framework are what designers really want answered.

6.9.1 Decisions at the Coalface

The current state of the model has evolved to bring new data and situational influences to bear on the process. The next logical step is to examine how the framework can lead designers and directors to find solutions and manage the compromises needed to balance the development of the individual against the realities of programme maintenance. Considering the innovative, entrepreneurial nature of distance graduate programmes, directors want to know how to plan for the unexpected. The programme team's expectation is for success, stability and increased market share, but experience has shown that they are likely to find unmet projections perhaps followed by failure. The curriculum framework is the means to organise how they will proactively prepare to react, adapt, maintain and even envision an image of the future.

The design team must fathom the wholeness of the framework process to master curriculum arrangement within the constraints of a set number of credit hours to deliver the best possible outcomes. The details and circumstances will change, but design trade-offs can be managed by adhering to strategies and concepts suggested in the framework. Blended learning programmes, for example, will determine the ratio of blended components by balancing choices between educational value and expense. The framework suggests a greater emphasis on

decision-making methods that freely consider all mixtures of online and face-to-face formats, increased student responsibility for the learning experience and include their perspectives in open discussion about choices.

By thinking of the framework as a toolkit, two scenarios presented below demonstrate the use of the model and best practices from this study to help designers ask the right questions:

a. Design issue: Workload of instructors

   i. Framework suggests: Learning strategies to increase self- and peer-assessment, use of group learning, peer feedback, training faculty in online time management for course effectiveness, use of facilitator, limit class size.

b. Design issue: Student engagement

   i. Framework suggests: Adapt instructional methods to learning theories such as transactional distance, teaching presence and constructivism, use of threshold concepts, select a variety of teaching methods and media, formative assessments, induction, appreciatively evaluate and build on successes. Ensure learner goals and needs closely match programme characteristics.

Curriculum theorists state that there is not a static set of answers (Dillon, 2009), which is why appreciatively approaching design questions is helpful for seeing emerging possibilities based on what 'works' and what might. This can be seen as academic bricolage, which constructively avails of many data sources by trying, testing and playing around with ideas and new technology to solve the uniqueness of each design problem.

Existing curriculum design models are foundational but not necessarily relevant to the problem-solving required for complex online learning environments.

Development of particular solutions will be built incrementally over time, be evaluated and modify a dynamic resource that links to the framework, which brings the discussion to conclusions drawn from this study.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1   Conclusions

In this study, five main research questions were posed to learn more about the nature of distance graduate management programmes and to systematically develop a curriculum framework to guide their development. Through interviews, online surveys, a small case study and document analysis, a set of curriculum elements, processes and concepts key to distance curricula are developed, which contributes to the literature about how a systematic approach to the effective design of distance graduate management programmes can be developed.

As new knowledge and review of the literature has shown, the secret to effective distance learning does not reside in better technology, but in better design. In this respect, the curriculum framework is a map to success. It suggests going beyond pushing knowledge through streaming lectures or self-paced learning modules to creating a group-based interactive environment seamlessly joining online and face-to-face learning in whatever combinations work best using technology suits the situation. It opens the way to integrating new technology while maintaining the vital balance between unpinning graduate values and internal and external demands.

The stakes are high. Institutions invest scant resources in the support and development of distance programmes. Learners commit time and money and pin their future on their learning outcomes. Distance education has a key role to play in the provision of flexible education for lifelong learners and developing the human capital to support growth within the Knowledge Economy. Inadequacies in past curricula design left questions about the quality that undermine the delivery format.

This study has systematically addressed these gaps. The design tasks are many and this framework deals with the interrelated challenges in distance programme curricula design, which includes:

- Achieving high level learning outcomes
- Preserving standards and institutional culture
- Daily management of programmes and competitive edge
- Addressing student needs and increasing diversity
- Student engagement, feedback and interaction
- Facilitating self-directed, motivated learners
- Scaling up pockets of innovation to consistent application
- Building on best practices of pedagogy, communication and support
- Academic development and support
- Interpreting pedagogic values of new technology

These issues and others present a compelling need for designers and educators to employ the framework that unites a research foundation with a comprehensive approach to prioritising decision-making. Based on a philosophic basis that girds purpose to outcomes and informs design, the framework's scope and depth allows broad generalisation of its principles beyond design of distance education programmes for T&HM and should be of major value to personnel designing any distance graduate programme.

The paradigm shift to student-centred learning presses both instructors and learners into new roles and the model is based on this orientation. Alignment using the framework is a moving target for designers, but the effort rewards learners with a space to develop to their fullest capacity. The framework does not represent a shortcut to solutions, but more importantly a sea change in the professional approach to distance education that responsibly serves the learner.

Social, economic and technological pressures make it increasingly clear that the entrenched culture of the campus-based degree programmes are too limiting and insufficient to serve emerging needs. Growing design sophistication will need to foster cognitive growth, exploit new technology and be responsive to complex environments. Strategies outlined by the design team will allow instructors to modify learning environments in limitless variations and technology will continue to blur the lines between learning, working and living environments.

This last point is very important because there does not emerge from this study, any one optimum model for online or blended graduate learning. What does emerge is a set of guiding processes, concepts and practices and the suggestion that the changes that are needed in distance curriculum design are central rather than marginal and should be incorporated by each programme in its own way. Reform in this dimension needs continuing support from practitioners, researchers and their institutions and will inevitably take time, but, in the ancient wise words of a great teacher:

"There are only two mistakes one can make along the road to truth; not going all the way, and not starting." Buddha

7.1.1 Recommendations for Further Study

This study provides an understanding of many epiphanies in the maturation process of distance graduate education. It is an important point in time where the adoption of a curriculum framework is needed for future sustainable programmes. On reflection, attitudes about distance education in HE are still changing and they affects a programme's sense of identity within its own institution. A positive attitude of acceptance is true to global values that embrace diversity in all forms and should

replace scepticism or the perception of distance education as a second tier educational compromise based on the philosophy of convenience. Fear of change, of loss of control, needs to be replaced by acceptance, new communication skills and an open paradigm of partnership in the learning experience.

Directors and alumni in this study resented the bias against distance programmes that are established to serve adult or part-time learners and that were viewed as lower priority activities within academic institutions. The truth is, the future is upon us and what better place to prepare graduate management students for the fast-paced, technologically advanced workplace where groups of professionals from different geographic regions collaborate, than in a challenging international web-based programme?

Decades ago entrepreneurial academics were enamoured with the prospect of harnessing technology to quickly produce learning programmes that could be kept on a shelf and effortlessly rolled out on demand with occasional content revisions. Oddly reminiscent of Dr. Frankenstein's creation, the technology-based programme experiments were artlessly bolted together products in the image of the original that were intended to operate effortlessly to generate revenue. Creating a student-centred learning environment was not the focus. Students did not find the programmes appealing. The lesson was that technology alone was not the educational 'silver bullet' they envisioned. Subsequent variations included ambitious multi-institution consortia-based module-sharing programmes, but collaboration more often regressed to competition. It just hasn't been as simple as originally imagined. Early adopters witnessed initial enthusiasm sour into a relationship of

distrust between institutions and educational technology, but that is changing dramatically.

What was missed in the early enthusiastic focus on broad, quick solutions was the core change in pedagogy, emphasis on the student and a sharp eye to the internal and external environments. As it turns out, excellence is still labour-intensive and fulfilling. Dedication to a systematic approach will require hard work and more research, particularly in the area of innovative blended pedagogy. Continued study of distance graduate management programmes longitudinally could evaluate a range of approaches to blended learning and provide a more accurate understanding of how and which curriculum adjustments affect student learning over time, especially because technology applications are constantly changing. Also, data gathering methodology using newer social and user data collection techniques could gain a broader perspective about what learners are looking for in a distance programme and project more into the future, e.g. Facebook or web analytics.

Although this study did not focus on instructor motivation or student recruitment, it can serve as a foundation for future development of a certification of distance curriculum quality that may positively influence such dimensions. Where the traditional academic institutions remain untouchable so far, is student trust in traditional higher education's mission and academic integrity. A universal certification that qualifies programmes or instructors for special distinction or bonus pay, such as the UNIQUe quality certification or a "Distance Design Distinction" award, would also provide a marketing tool for the programme, incentivise instructors to engage in innovative pedagogy and would give students confidence in

programme quality. Certification should be broadly endorsed. Certification could be

part of the European Commission curricular reform and modernization agenda

associated with the Lisbon Strategy; tied to the European Higher Education Area

Level 7 qualification framework or the Level 9 Irish National Framework of

Qualifications and awarded by an international educational body, such as UNESCO

or Sloan Consortium. Academic leaders need to identify such strategies to recognize

and reward the additional time and effort faculty invest crafting values-based,

research-driven curricula for meeting higher standards and future challenges.

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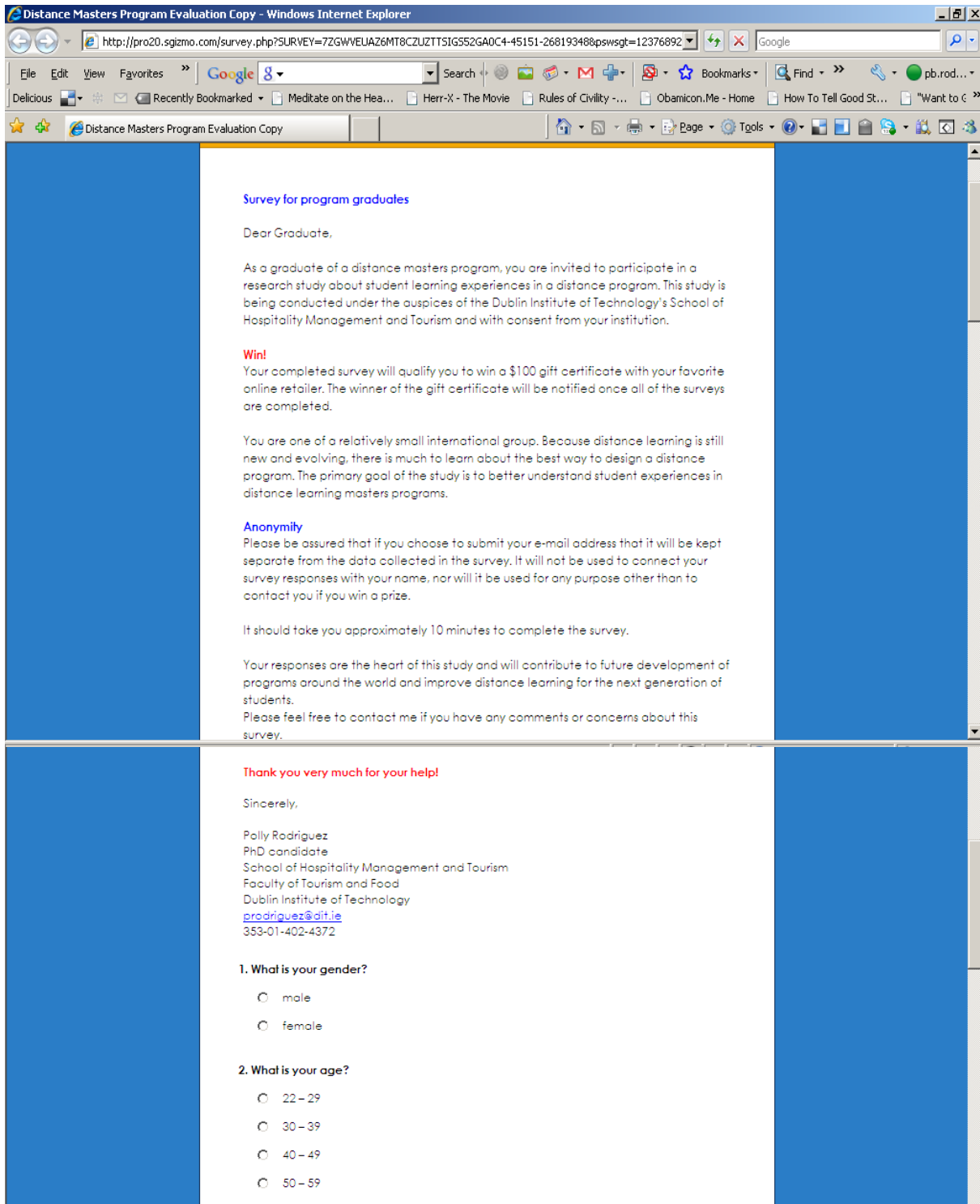
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Alumni online questionnaire as presented in SurveyGizmo.com

Distance Masters Program Evaluation Copy - Windows Internet Explorer

http://pro20.sgizmo.com/survey.php?SURVEY=7ZGWVEUAZ6MT8CZUZTTSIG552GA0C4-45151-26819348&pswsgt=12376892

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Distance Masters Program Evaluation Copy

Survey for program graduates

Dear Graduate,

As a graduate of a distance masters program, you are invited to participate in a research study about student learning experiences in a distance program. This study is being conducted under the auspices of the Dublin Institute of Technology's School of Hospitality Management and Tourism and with consent from your institution.

Win!
Your completed survey will qualify you to win a $100 gift certificate with your favorite online retailer. The winner of the gift certificate will be notified once all of the surveys are completed.

You are one of a relatively small international group. Because distance learning is still new and evolving, there is much to learn about the best way to design a distance program. The primary goal of the study is to better understand student experiences in distance learning masters programs.

Anonymity
Please be assured that if you choose to submit your e-mail address that it will be kept separate from the data collected in the survey. It will not be used to connect your survey responses with your name, nor will it be used for any purpose other than to contact you if you win a prize.

It should take you approximately 10 minutes to complete the survey.

Your responses are the heart of this study and will contribute to future development of programs around the world and improve distance learning for the next generation of students.
Please feel free to contact me if you have any comments or concerns about this survey.

Thank you very much for your help!

Sincerely,

Polly Rodriguez
PhD candidate
School of Hospitality Management and Tourism
Faculty of Tourism and Food
Dublin Institute of Technology
prodriguez@dit.ie
353-01-402-4372

1. What is your gender?

○ male

○ female

2. What is your age?

○   22 – 29

○   30 – 39

○   40 – 49

○   50 – 59

3. What is the name of the institution where you received your masters? *

[   ]

4. What was your program emphasis?

- ○ Tourism Administration
- ○ Hospitality Management
- ○ Event Management
- ○ International MBA
- ○ Sports Management
- ○ Other [   ]

5. Are you from the same country as your masters distance program?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No. If No, where did you reside during the program? [   ]

6. Was your masters program your first experience taking distance courses?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No

7. How did you find out about the program?

- ☐ Recommendation from a friend/colleague
- ☐ Internet search
- ☐ Online directory
- ☐ School reputation
- ☐ Did my undergrad degree at the same school
- ☐ An organization [   ]
- ☐ Other? [   ]

8. What were your primary reasons for enrolling in the distance masters program? *

Primary Reason #1 [-- Please Select -- ▾]

Primary Reason #2

-- Please Select --
Professional development
Career switch
Needed professional accreditation
Convenience factors
More affordable than on campus program
Prefer to learn on my own
Flexible program format
Fast track to a graduate degree
Qualification from well-recognized institution

9. Other reason(s) fo[   ]

[   ]

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16%

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Done   Internet   100%

359

10. What was your average class size? *

-- Please Select -- ▼

11. Which of the following online technologies were used in your distance program?
(All that apply)

	Never	Sometimes	Frequently
Recorded classroom lectures	○	○	○
Narrated PowerPoint or Animation type	○	○	○
Synchronous "live" virtual classroom	○	○	○
Self-paced lessons	○	○	○
Discussion Board - instructor led	○	○	○
Shared webpages e.g. Blogs, wikis or similar	○	○	○
Student-Instructor communication via email or website	○	○	○
Student-Instructor communication via phone	○	○	○
Group projects/activities	○	○	○

12. Which of the following face-to-face methods were used in your program?
(All that apply)

	Never	Sometimes	Frequently
Residency - e.g. orientation	○	○	○
Face-to-face classroom	○	○	○
Case studies	○	○	○
Events	○	○	○

13. How effective was this combination of learning methods with helping you reach your learning goals? *

-- Please Select -- ▼

14. Comments on technology or learning methods?

[text area]

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Take a look under the hood

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21. Overall, how satisfied were you with the quality of the interactivity in the program? *****

-- Please Select -- ▼

22. Technology & Support

	Satisfaction	Importance
Quick response from technical support	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
A variety of electronic teaching and learning tools e.g online quizzes, links to materials, audio/video presentations, etc	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Ease-of-use - navigation, uploading, etc	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆
Course facilitator (if applicable)	☆☆☆☆☆	☆☆☆☆☆

23. Overall, how satisfied were you with the technology and support? *****

-- Please Select -- ▼

-- Please Select --
Not satisfied
Somewhat satisfied
OK
Satisfied
Very satisfied

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24. Program Retrospective
How much do you agree with these statements?

I learned to interrelate the important issues in the course material   -- Please Select -- ▼

-- Please Select --
Disagree
Somewhat agree
Neutral
Agree
Agree very much

Skills learned are transferable for future career situations

Online courses are the same quality compared to other univerisity courses I have taken

Self-discipline & time management are keys to success in a distance masters program

Courses via Distance mode made it more difficult than other courses I have taken   -- Please Select -- ▼

I feel that this program served my needs well   -- Please Select -- ▼

I would recommend this program to someone else   -- Please Select -- ▼

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25. In your opinion, is there a specific technology or program attribute that seemed to work particularly well?
Please explain.

If you would like to be included in the prize drawing, please enter your email address here.

P. S.
Short Chat?

If you would be willing to discuss with me briefly your program experience, let me know and I will give you a call. That would be great.

Thanks a million!

Polly
prodriguez@dit.ie

Confidentiality
The records of this study will be kept private. In any report that might be published, no information will be included that will make it possible to identify individual students. Research records will be stored securely.

Confidentiality
The records of this study will be kept private. In any report that might be published, no information will be included that will make it possible to identify individual students. Research records will be stored securely.

| Click to Go Back | Finished? Submit your Survey |

91%

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Crosswalk Table – Alumni Survey

A summary of key points in the Crosswalk Table for the Alumni Survey follows:

Section One introduces the graduate survey, asks demographic questions and motivational questions. Clearly these relate to the curriculum framework: the Learner. Student-centered learning begins with understanding who the learners are, thus these first nine questions are necessary for understanding program design of content and purpose.

The questions in Section Two target online course and program delivery. These questions identify and assess types of technologies and pedagogic methods used in the programs. The questions are tied to the Instructional Processes and Instructional Resources of the Curriculum Framework and also to RQ 2 and media richness theory (R.L. Daft & R.H. Lengel, 1984).

Section Three concerns student satisfaction with the course content, and these questions are directly related to the Curriculum Framework segments of Content and Sequencing of courses. These questions are drawn from Baum & Horng's, 2008 survey "Quality indicators for the assessment of Programmes in Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure Studies" and also from Levy 2006 survey "Online Learning Experience"

Questions 18-23 in Section Four on Teaching and Learning consider the students' perception of their programs' teaching and learning strategies, participant interaction and delivery medium quality factors. Scored on the dual scales of Satisfaction and Importance, which are quality indicators, questions are drawn from

two tested instruments. These questions also relate to both RQ 2 (characteristics of program) and RQ 3 (student perception). Understanding student perceptions of their experience are a key to the design process.

Section Five questions consider the students' perception of their overall learning and satisfaction with the program. These questions are drawn exactly from the Arbaugh 2005 survey "Perceived learning, Perceived delivery medium satisfaction and participant interaction" (Arbaugh, 2005) and are directly related to RQ 3 (student perception).

Final question #25 asks the students to reflect on their total experience and suggest improvements or identify effective practices. The answers to these questions can possibly inform several parts of the Curriculum Framework: Content, Sequence, Instructional processes & Instructional Resources. Literature provided two sources for this student retrospective question: the Levy 2006 survey "Online Learning Experience" and the Educause Student Survey 2007, "Students and Information Technology in Higher Education.

The Alumni Survey and Crosswalk Analysis
Section One: Introduction to the Graduate Survey
1: Student Profile
Q: These questions capture information about the learners, where they studied and their online experience
1. What is your gender?
2. What is your age?
3. What is the name of the institution where you received your masters?
4. What was your program emphasis?
5. Are you from the same country as your masters distance program?
6. Was your masters program your first experience taking online courses?
Relates to: Research Question & Framework section

	▪ Informs Curriculum Framework: **Learner** ▪ Student-centered learning begins with understanding who the learners are.
1.2: Learners: Motivation	
	Q; These questions shed some light on the program search and selection process by the learner. 7. How did you find out about the program? 8. What were your primary reasons for enrolling in the distance masters program? Drop down menu listing: Professional development, Career switch, Needed professional accreditation, Convenience factors, More affordable than on campus program, Prefer to learn on my own, Flexible program format, Fast track to a graduate degree, Qualification from well-recognized institution 9. Other reason(s) for enrolling?
Relates to: Research Question, Framework, Rationale, Theory	
	▪ Informs Curriculum Framework: **Learner, Content and Purpose** ▪ Theory: Adult learning theories; (Knowles, 1975), (Mesirow, 1991) ▪ Rationale: a) Method of delivery also is informed and adjusted to be consistent with student priorities. b) Increasingly competitive marketplace requires data on consumer behavior. Content and Marketing of programs are influenced by student preferences.
Section Two: Online Course and Program Delivery	
2: Media, Teaching & Learning Strategies and Effectiveness	
	Q: These questions identify and assess types of technologies and pedagogic methods used in the programs. 10. What was your average class size? 11. Which of the following online technologies were used in your distance program? 12. Which of the following face-to-face methods were used in your program? 13. How effective was this combination of learning methods with helping you reach your learning goals? 14. Comments on technology or learning methods?
Relates to: Research Question, Framework, Rationale, Theory	

	• Informs Curriculum Framework: **Instructional Processes and Instructional Resources** • RQ2: What are the technological and pedagogical characteristics of existing accredited Tourism and Hospitality Management graduate degree programs – 100% online and blended? • Theory: Media Richness, Sense of Community • Rationale: Need to understand the learners perception of media and delivery effectiveness to develop or change program frameworks

Section Three: Online Course Content

3: Quality of content of online courses

Q: These questions consider the students' perception of the quality of the program course content on the dual scales of Satisfaction and Importance.

15. Please rate your level of satisfaction with the **Quality of the Online Content** in your program.
   a) Content: Up-to-date, Relevant & appropriate

   b) Material: Level, Range of topics

   c) Pace of courses

   d) Concepts: Logical sequencing

   e) Enjoyment from the courses

   f) High ratio of electives to required courses

16. Did the content of the program match your reasons for enrolling?
   a) If yes, briefly give a reason.

   b) If no, what might have helped?

17. Overall, how satisfied were you with the quality of the online course content?

Relates to: Research Question, Framework, Rationale, Theory

	- Informs Curriculum Framework: **Content of courses, Sequencing of Courses** - RQ2: What are the technological and pedagogical characteristics of existing accredited Tourism and Hospitality Management graduate degree programs – 100% online and blended? - Literature: Drawn from Baum & Horng, 2008 survey "Quality indicators for the assessment of Programmes in Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure Studies" and also from Levy 2006 survey "Online Learning Experience" - Theory: Cognitive Presence - Rationale: These questions expose learners' preferences and also to what degree the content in their programs satisfied their needs.

Section Four: Teaching and Learning

4: Quality of teaching and learning: Interactivity, Format, Communication, Technology

Q: These questions consider the students' perception of their programs' teaching and learning strategies, Participant interaction and Delivery medium quality factors. These questions are scored on the dual scales of Satisfaction and Importance, which are quality indicators.

18. Program Characteristics
- Flexibility of program format

- Opportunity to interact and contribute to classes

- Class size

- Quality of instructors

- Overall, courses were designed to allow me to take responsibility for my own learning.

19. Blended Learning
- Having face-to-face interaction with other students/professors at orientation

- Having supplemental face-to-face opportunities e.g. residency, event, study groups, etc

20. Interactivity
- Frequency of Instructor-to-Student interactivity

- Speed of response by Instructor

- Quality of Instructor-to-Student feedback

- Level of Student-to-Student interactivity

- Being part of a "class" even though it was online

21. Overall, how satisfied were you with the quality of the interactivity in the program?

22. Technology and Support
- Quick response from technical support

- A variety of electronic teaching and learning tools e.g online quizzes, links to materials, audio/video presentations, etc

- Ease-of-use - navigation, uploading, etc

- Course facilitator (if applicable)

23. Overall, how satisfied were you with the technology and support?

Relates to: Research Question, Framework, Rationale, Theory

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	- Informs Curriculum Framework: **Instructional Processes and Instructional Resources** - **RQ 2:** What are the technological and pedagogical characteristics of existing accredited Tourism and Hospitality Management graduate degree programs – 100% online and blended? - **RQ 3:** How do students perceive the learning experience of their distance programs? Are they satisfied? Is it effective? - Literature: Blended Learning survey from Blended Learning Institutions Cooperative (BLINC) Learners questionnaire for blended learning experience and the instrument developed by Xiaojing Liu, Richard J. Magjuka, Seung-hee Lee for Sense of Community in online MBA courses - Theory: Social Constructivism, Social Presence, Media Richness, Distributed Learning, Transactional Distance, Sense of Community Theories. - Rationale: These questions are the heart of the design of the program and curriculum and can only be answered by the students from their experience.

Section Five: Perceived Learning and Satisfaction

5: Student Perception of their learning experience with the program

	Q: These questions consider the students' perception of their overall learning and satisfaction with the program. 24. **Program Retrospective** How much do you agree with these statements? - I learned to interrelate the important issues in the course material - Skills learned are transferable for future career situations - Conducting courses online improved the quality of the courses compared to other university courses I have taken - Self-discipline & time management are key to success in a masters distance learning program - Conducting the program via Distance made it more difficult than other courses I have taken (reversed) - I feel that this program served my needs well - I would recommend this program to someone else

Relates to: Research Question, Framework, Literature, Theory

	▪ **RQ 3.** How do students perceive the learning experience of their distance programs? Are they satisfied? Is it effective?
	▪ Informs Curriculum Framework: **Purpose & Content**
	▪ Literature: These questions are drawn exactly from the Arbaugh 2005 survey "Perceived learning, Perceived delivery medium satisfaction and participant interaction"
	▪ Theory: Technology Acceptance Model

Section Six: And in Conclusion.....

6: Lessons learned

Q: This final question asks the students to reflect on their total experience and suggest improvements or identify effective practices.

25. In your opinion, is there a **specific technology or program attribute that seemed to work particularly well?**

Relates to: Research Question, Framework, Rationale, Theory

Q 1. What key elements should a curriculum framework for distance graduate management education include in terms of: philosophy, content, emphasis, learning strategies, learning environments, delivery systems and feedback/assessment strategies?

Q 3. How do students perceive the learning experience of their distance programs? Are they satisfied? Is it effective?

▪ Possibly informs Curriculum Framework: **Content, Sequence, Instructional processes & Instructional Resources**

▪ Literature: Levy 2006 survey "Online Learning Experience", Educause Student Survey 2007, "Students and Information Technology in Higher Education

▪ Theory: Constructivism, Social, cognitive and teaching presence

Crosswalk Table – Program Director Interview Protocol

A summary of key points in the Crosswalk Table for the Interview Protocol follows:

Section One is "About the person providing the data", which is a basic demographic question, but the rationale is its importance in contextualizing the study.

Section Two invites a narrative description of the origin of the programs. The subsequent questions identify on a scale of 1 to 5 how strongly the participant agrees or disagrees with each statement about the motivational factors behind the creation of the program. These questions answer RQ 2's inquiry about the technological and pedagogical characteristics of the program and potentially each of the curriculum framework sections. Based on literature about quality tourism education (W. Cho, Schmelzer, & McMahon, 2002; McDonnell, 2000; McKercher, 2002; Sigala, 2002) and the seminal "Tyler Rationale" (Tyler, 1949) of curriculum design, which focuses on Aims and Objectives, questions focus on context and motivation behind the creation of new models for program delivery.

Section Three is about the students. These questions ask the Directors who is enrolling in the program and why and what criteria seems to predict online student success and/or completion. Similar questions are also on the student questionnaire to cross-validate. These questions are drawn from Baum & Horng, 2008 survey "Quality indicators for the assessment of Programmes in Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure Studies" and also from Levy 2006 survey "Online Learning Experience" Adult

learning theory supports these questions Several important theoretical foundations support these questions (Knowles, 1975; Mesirow, 1991).

Section Four interview questions focus on 'Ethos and Emphasis'. These questions consider the programs' emphasis and philosophical underpinning and further define each programs the technological and pedagogical characteristics, or RQ 2. Theory foundations include: Managerial ethics, (Kreitner & Rief, 1980), Business values, (Rokeach, 1973) and Values-based curricula for Tourism, (Sheldon, 2008). These questions are the heart of the program design for graduate business management masters' degrees

Section Five leads a discussion of the teaching and learning attributes of the program. These five questions relate to both RQ1 and 2 to identify key elements and characteristics of distance programs. Answers inform the curriculum framework areas of: Instructional Processes, Evaluation and Adjustment

Section Six , the final questions asks the program directors to reflect on their total experience and suggest improvements or identify effective practices. The alumni are asked this same general question on their survey. Theory underpinning these questions are: constructivism, social, cognitive and teaching presence, and the e-learning ladder (Moule, 2007; Salmon, 2000b)

Section Seven is a final query at the end of the interview that allows participants to add or amend a comment to clarify their experience. The interview question is: 'There may be attributes your system has that you feel are not covered by the questions above and that set it apart from other systems. Please elaborate!'

Section One: About the Person providing data

1: Program Director Profile

	Q: These questions establish background information about the person providing data. **1.1 Title** **1.2 Key responsibilities of role,** e.g. Teacher (content and delivery), designer, tutor (support), content author or administrative (administration of program), recruitment, marketing **1.3 Background and experience in teaching and learning, including online teaching**
Relates to: Rationale	
	▪ Contextualizes the program information ▪ Understanding distance masters programs begins with learning about the persons responsible for their administration
Section Two: Program Background	
2: History and motivation for creation of the program	

Q: The first question invites a narrative description of the origin of the program. The subsequent questions identify on a scale of 1 to 5 how strongly the participant agrees or disagrees with each statement about the motivational factors behind the creation of the program.

2.1 To set in context, it would be helpful to have a brief summary of how your program evolved.

2.2 **Were there specific factors that motivated the creation of your distance program?**

Categories:

2.2.1 Strategic:
   a) Fulfill institutional mission and strategic goals

   b) Grow the department

   c) Gap in availability for distance access of this program

2.2.2 Academic opportunity for teaching and learning
   a) Improve teaching and learning

   b) Complement the on-campus program

   c) Internationalize program

2.2.3 Innovation combining technology and strategic aims
   a) Reach a new student market

   b) A visionary faculty/staff member

   c) Create program that involves partners/consortia

2.2.4 Responsiveness to the marketplace and society
   a) Better serve needs of internationalized workplace

   b) To maintain competitive advantage over other institutions

   c) Demand for flexible learning choices

2.2.5 Financial considerations
   a) Generate revenue for school

   b) Received grant money for development

2.2.6 Other (Please describe)

Relates to: Research Question, Framework, Literature, Theory, Rationale

- RQ2: What are the technological and pedagogical characteristics of existing accredited Tourism and Hospitality Management graduate degree programs – 100% online and blended?

- Potentially informs all Curriculum Framework sections: Purpose, Content, Sequence, Learner, Instructional processes, Instructional resources, Evaluation, Adjustment

- Literature: Relevant, quality tourism education; (McKercher, 2002), Web-based tourism education; (Spivack & Chernish, 1999); 'flexible learning' (Jakupec & Garrick, 2000), new models of instruction and delivery methods focusing on collaborative, constructivist elearning communities to enhance student learning experiences (W. Cho, Schmelzer, & McMahon, 2002; McDonnell, 2000; Sigala, 2002) Sigala & Baum, 2003).

- Theory: The Tyler Rationale of curriculum design focuses on Aims and Objectives; (Tyler, 1949)

- Rationale: Need to understand the context and motivation behind the creation of new models for program delivery

Section Three: Student Level

3: Examining the characteristics of the students in the program

Q: These questions consider who is enrolling in the program and why.

3.1 In your opinion, what attracts students to your program?

3.2 What is the target market for your program?

3.3 In your opinion, are there certain criteria that seem to predict online student success and/or completion?

Categories:

3.3.1 Faculty/Pedagogy/Androgogy
   a) Faculty academic preparation

   b) Faculty online experience

   c) Teacher/student contact and feedback

   d) Creative use of a variety of teaching methods, materials and aids

   e) Learner-centered teaching/learning

   f) Class discussions

   g) Instructional support

 3.3.2 Technology
   a) Rich multimedia

   b) Technology support

   c) Integrate newest appropriate technology applications

3.3.3 Student issues
   a) Ability of student to manage personal/professional life

   b) Student motivation and interest

   c) High student grades

   d) Orientation to program

   e) Bonding with fellow students

3.3.4 Other program attributes
   a) Cost of program

   b) Administrative efficiency

3.3.5 Other? Please identify

Relates to: Research Question, Framework, Rationale, Theory

- Informs Curriculum Framework: **Content of courses, Sequencing of Courses**

- RQ2: What are the technological and pedagogical characteristics of existing accredited Tourism and Hospitality Management graduate degree programs – 100% online and blended?

- Literature: Drawn from Baum & Horng, 2008 survey "Quality indicators for the assessment of Programmes in Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure Studies" and also from Levy 2006 survey "Online Learning Experience"

- Theory: Cognitive Presence, Media Richness theory, adult learning theories (Knowles, 1975; Mesirow, 1991)

- Rationale: These questions expose learners' preferences and also to what degree the content in their programs satisfied their needs.

Section Four: Program Ethos and Emphasis
4: Philosophy and ethical foundations of the program

Q: These questions consider the programs' emphasis and philosophical underpinning.

4.1 What is the philosophical emphasis or theoretical perspective that is reflected in your program and courses?

(Suggestions listed in the protocol Appendix.)

4.2 What is the principle emphasis of the program for most students?

E.g.
- Personal development – 'Generic' degree that provides a broad understanding of tourism and interdisciplinary skills;

- Professional/Deepening - 'Functional' degree that focuses on particular areas of tourism such as marketing, information systems, or planning;

- Specialized - 'Market/product based' degree that focuses on the development of a particular product or market, requiring expertise in the area.

- Career change?

- Other?

In your opinion, which of the following specific learning outcomes are important to your program?
Categories:
4.3.1 Cognitive development
a) Adaptability

b) Ability to apply what is learned – practical

c) Desire to pursue lifelong learning

d) Leadership: Interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence

e) Problem solving/critical thinking

f) Self-actualization

g) Stimulate creativity & innovation

h) Understanding of social, economic and political issues

4.3.2 Professional applications
a) Competence in finance & statistical analysis

b) Dynamic business skills

c) Environmental management

d) Human resource & cultural competencies

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e) Knowledge of the industry

Relates to: Research Question, Framework, Rationale, Theory	
	▪ Informs Curriculum Framework: **Instructional Processes and Instructional Resources**
	▪ **RQ 2:** What are the technological and pedagogical characteristics of existing accredited Tourism and Hospitality Management graduate degree programs – 100% online and blended?
	▪ Literature: Teaching ethics in business education (W. R. Allen, Bacdayan, Kowalski, & Roy, 2005; Fogarty, 2005; Giacalone, 2004) Blended Learning survey from Blended Learning Institutions Cooperative (BLINC) Learners questionnaire for blended learning experience
	▪ Theory: Managerial ethics, (Kreitner & Rief, 1980), Business values, (Rokeach, 1973), Values-based curricula for Tourism, (Sheldon, 2008)
	▪ Rationale: These questions are the heart of the program design for graduate business management masters' degrees

Section Five: Teaching, Learning, Design and Assessment

5: Discussion of the teaching and learning attributes of the program

Q: These questions consider the teaching and learning activities, assessment and program self-evaluation process.

5.1 What are the learning activities that your program uses to achieve its desired learning outcomes? (See appendix for samples)

    a) Identify main teaching/learning methods within the program.

5.2 Do instructors adopt a variety of assessment methods that apply to students' different learning styles to evaluate student learning?

    (See appendix for samples)

    a) Identify main assessment methods within the program.

5.3 How do you use technology to support the learning activities and assessment?

5.4 Would you say that you have a systematic process for the design of new or redesign of existing programs? (If yes, please describe)

5.5 Does the program have a systematic self-evaluation mechanism? (Describe)

Relates to: Research Question, Framework, Rationale, Theory

	▪ **RQ 1**: What key elements should a curriculum framework for distance graduate management education include in terms of: philosophy, content, emphasis, learning strategies, learning environments, delivery systems and feedback/assessment strategies? ▪ **RQ 2**: What are the technological and pedagogical characteristics of existing accredited Tourism and Hospitality Management graduate degree programs – 100% online and blended? ▪ Informs Curriculum Framework: **Instructional Processes, Evaluation and Adjustment** ▪ Literature: Drawn from Baum & Horng, 2008 survey "Quality indicators for the assessment of Programmes in Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure Studies" ▪ Theory: Technology Acceptance Model, the e-learning ladder (Moule, 2007; Salmon, 2000b)

Section Six: Lessons Learned

6: Lessons learned

Q: This final question asks the program directors to reflect on their total experience and suggest improvements or identify effective practices. The alumni are asked this same general question on their survey.
 	
6.1 Successes: In your opinion, is there a specific technology or program format that seems to work particularly well at the moment? That is to say, what are your curriculum design successes?
 	
In respect to:
    Faculty?
    Pedagogy/Androgogy methods and format?
    Students?
    Marketing?
 	
6.2 Lessons learned: What doesn't seem to work particularly well?
 	
Or what lessons have you learned about distance program delivery?
In respect to:
    Faculty?
    Pedagogy/Androgogy methods and format?
    Students?
    Marketing?**

Relates to: Research Question, Framework, Rationale, Theory

	▪ **RQ 1**: What key elements should a curriculum framework for distance graduate management education include in terms of: philosophy, content, emphasis, learning strategies, learning environments, delivery systems and feedback/assessment strategies? ▪ Possibly informs all areas of the Curriculum Framework: **Purpose, Content, Sequence, Learners, Instructional Processes, Instructional Resources, Evaluation and Adjustment** ▪ Rationale: These answers are invaluable to take the next step to building a new model based on experience. ▪ Literature: Drawn from Baum & Horng, 2008 survey "Quality indicators for the assessment of Programmes in Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure Studies" ▪ Theory: Constructivism, Social, cognitive and teaching presence, e-learning ladder (Moule, 2007; Salmon, 2000b)
**Section Seven: Anything Else?**
	Q. There is a final query at the end of the interview that allows participants to add or amend a comment to clarify their experience.
	7.1 There may be attributes your system has that you feel are not covered by the questions above and that set it apart from other systems. Please elaborate!

Interview Protocol for Program Directors

'Enhancing the quality of teaching and learning' is the key driver for eLearning development identified by most universities (JISC, 2003).

Introduction:

My dissertation focuses on developing a systematic curriculum framework for distance masters programs in Tourism and Hospitality Management (T&HM). Specifically I am focusing on the population of current programs and the students who have graduated from them.

The purpose of this research is three-fold:

1. First, it is to provide researchers, program designers and educators a first time review of the nature and characteristics of the spectrum of existing online or blended distance graduate T&HM programs worldwide;

2. Second, program analysis combined with relevant literature will identify effective practices and curriculum frameworks in the field;

3. Third, the research will guide the development of a systematic method for integrating pedagogical and technical changes into a comprehensive, flexible curriculum framework for distance program design or revision.

The results of this study will be shared with the academic community. Each of the individual masters distance programs in the areas of T&HM will be included anonymously. Summarised feedback from other programs and your own program graduates will be shared with you.

The information gained in this study will be used to gain a picture of the distance learning landscape of graduate programs in T&HM currently available, and to inform future development, rather than be used to directly compare one institution against another.

There will be an opportunity to explore issues emerging in the course of the process. Your generous offer of time taken to do this interview is much appreciated.

The Interview Questions

1 About the Person providing data

1.1   Title

1.2   Key responsibilities of role
e.g. Teacher (content and delivery), designer, tutor (support), content author or administrative (administration of program), recruitment, marketing

1.3   Background and experience in teaching and learning, including online teaching

2 Program Background

2.3 To set in context, it would be helpful to have a brief summary of how your program evolved.

2.2 Were there specific factors that motivated the creation of your distance program? Select an answer for each one.

	1 strongly disagree	2 disagree	3 neutral	4 agree	5 strongly agree	9 not applicable
2.2.1 Strategic						
a) Fulfil institutional mission and strategic goals						
b) Grow the department						
c) Gap in availability for distance access of this program						
2.2.2 Academic opportunity for teaching and learning						
a) Improve teaching and learning						
b) Complement the on-campus program						
c) Internationalize program						
2.2.3 Innovation combining technology and strategic aims						
a) Reach a new student market						
b) A visionary faculty/staff member						
c) Create program that involves partners/consortia						
2.2.4 Responsiveness to the marketplace and society						
a) Better serve needs of internationalized workplace						
b) To maintain competitive						

	1 strongly disagree	2 disagree	3 neutral	4 agree	5 strongly agree	9 not applicable
advantage over other institutions						
c) Demand for flexible learning choices						
2.2.5 Financial considerations						
a) Generate revenue for school						
b) Received grant money for development						
2.2.6 Other (Please describe)						

3 Student Level

3.1 In your opinion, what attracts students to your program?

3.2 What is the target market for your program?

3.3 In your opinion, are there certain criteria that seem to predict online student success and/or completion? Select an answer for each one.

	1 strongly disagree	2 disagree	3 neutral	4 agree	5 strongly agree	9 not applicable
3.3.1 Faculty/Pedagogy/Androgogy						
a) Faculty academic preparation						
b) Faculty online experience						
c) Teacher/student contact and feedback						
d) Creative use of a variety of teaching methods, materials and aids						
e) Learner-centered teaching/learning						
f) Class discussions						
g) Instructional support						
3.3.2 Technology						
a) Rich multimedia						
b) Technology support						
c) Integrate newest appropriate technology applications						
3.3.3 Student issues						
a) Ability of student to manage personal/professional life						
b) Student motivation and interest						
c) High student grades						
d) Orientation to program						
e) Bonding with fellow students						
3.3.4 Other program attributes						
a) Cost of program						
b) Administrative efficiency						

3.3.5 Other? Please identify						

4 Program Ethos and Emphasis

A philosophy or specific values, link the attitudes and the relationships of a collegiate career field to society, the client, ethical problems and hopes for the future of the field itself (Stark & Lattuca, 1997; Stark, Lowther, Hagerty, & Orczyk, 1986).

These questions are about the values that form the basis of your program's approach to curriculum.

4.3 What is the philosophical emphasis or theoretical perspective that is reflected in your program and courses?
(Please see the Appendix for some suggestions - p. 10)

4.4 What is the principle emphasis of the program for most students?
E.g.
- Personal development – 'Generic' degree that provides a broad understanding of tourism and interdisciplinary skills;
- Professional/Deepening - 'Functional' degree that focuses on particular areas of tourism such as marketing, information systems, or planning;
- Specialized - 'Market/product based' degree that focuses on the development of a particular product or market, requiring expertise in the area.
- Career change?
- Other?

4.5 In your opinion, which of the following specific learning outcomes are important to your program? Select an answer for each one.

	1 strongly disagree	2 disagree	3 neutral	4 agree	5 strongly agree	9 not applicable
4.3.1 Cognitive development						
a) Adaptability						
b) Ability to apply what is learned - practical						
c) Desire to pursue lifelong learning						
d) Leadership: Interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence						
e) Problem solving/critical thinking						
f) Self-actualization						
g) Stimulate creativity & innovation						
h) Understanding of social, economic and political issues						
4.3.2 Professional applications						

a) Competence in finance & statistical analysis						
b) Dynamic business skills						
c) Environmental management						
d) Human resource & cultural competencies						
e) Knowledge of the industry						
f) Management of complex adaptive systems						
g) Marketing						
h) Politics & policy skills						
i) Research						
j) Strategic planning						
k) Sustainability & stewardship skills						
l) Technical capabilities						
4.3.3 Other (Please describe)						

4.4 Values can be viewed as core beliefs endorsed through your curriculum. What would you say are the program values? Select an answer for each one.

	1 strongly disagree	2 disagree	3 neutral	4 agree	5 strongly agree	9 not applicable
4.4.1 Ethical						
a) Ethical behavior - Corporate Social Responsibility						
b) Compensate for past defects and equalize benefits						
4.4.2 Social						
a) Increasing respect and knowledge of diversity						
b) Increase interaction among social strata						
c) Good citizenship						
d) Lifelong Learning						
4.4.3 Market Oriented						
a) Entrepreneurship & consulting						
b) Globalization						
c) Profit						
d) Sustainability & stewardship						
4.4.4 Other (Please describe)						

5 Teaching, Learning, Design and Assessment

5.1 What are the learning activities that your program uses to achieve its desired learning outcomes? (*See* appendix for samples - p.11)

a) Identify main teaching/learning methods within the program.

5.2 Do instructors adopt a variety of assessment methods that apply to students' different learning styles to evaluate student learning? (*See* appendix for samples)
    a) Identify main assessment methods within the program.

5.3 How do you use technology to support the learning activities and assessment?

5.4 Would you say that you have a systematic process for the design of new or redesign of existing programs? (If yes, please describe)

5.5 Does the program have a systematic self-evaluation mechanism? (Describe)

6 Lessons learned

6.3 Successes: In your opinion, is there a specific technology or program format that seems to work particularly well at the moment? That is to say, what are your curriculum design successes?
In respect to:
    Faculty?
    Pedagogy/Androgogy methods and format?
    Students?
    Marketing?

6.4 Lessons learned: What doesn't seem to work particularly well?
Or what lessons have you learned about distance program delivery?
In respect to:
    Faculty?
    Pedagogy/Androgogy methods and format?
    Students?
    Marketing?

7 Anything Else?

There may be attributes your system has that you feel are not covered by the questions above and that set it apart from other systems. Please elaborate!

Many thanks for generously sharing your time

and knowledge!

Appendix

Q 4.1 Core Values

- ***Stewardship:*** sustainability, responsibility and service to the community
- ***Knowledge***: critical thinking, innovation, creativity, networking
- ***Professionalism:*** leadership, practicality, services, relevance, timeliness, reflexivity, teamwork and partnerships
- ***Ethics***: honesty, transparency, authenticity, authentic self
- ***Mutual respect***: diversity, inclusion, equity, humility, collaboration
- ***Empathy:*** Teach students to feel their decisions as potential victims might
- ***Generativity:*** positive aspirations that engender a focus on nonfinancial contributions to our world; on learning how to give as well as take.
- ***Mutuality***: A transcendent education helps students to understand that success is best achieved not in personal gain, but in embracing a common victory
- ***Civil Aspiration***: Civil aspiration helps students want more for their world.
- ***Intolerance of Ineffective Humanity:*** that insensitive decision making, selfishness, a disinterest in those who follow them, and the singular pursuit of wealth define an ineffective human being.

Q 5.1 Teaching and Learning activities & resources

- ☐ Building sense of community/ Collaboration
- ☐ Business, organization or institutional partners/consortia
- ☐ Events and conferences
- ☐ Experiential industry practicum
- ☐ Facilitator for instructor/student support
- ☐ Group projects
- ☐ Problem based learning
- ☐ Role play
- ☐ Self-directed learning/research
- ☐ Social and/or professional clubs or societies
- ☐ Use of on-campus resources

Q 5.2 A Sampling of Formative & Summative Assessment Formats

- ☐ Thesis
- ☐ Case studies
- ☐ Competitions
- ☐ Essays
- ☐ Ethical dilemmas
- ☐ Exams and quizzes
- ☐ Portfolios
- ☐ Presentations
- ☐ Blogs or Wikis

Q 5.3 Technology support tools

- ☐ audio/video components
  - Electronically delivered lectures and classes
  - Lectures prepared using various software
  - Podcasting, or other audio
- ☐ Interactive media

- Synchronous – live – real time interaction
- Asynchronous – e.g. 'threaded' discussion, email, blog
☐ Online resources
- library databases, subscriptions
- digitized readings, copyright reserved materials
☐ ePortfolios

Questionnaire for Add-on programs: Program Team

Dear Add-On Program Team Member,

First, thank you for generously agreeing to participate in this questionnaire during your summer holiday ☺

My doctoral research focuses on developing a practical Curriculum Framework to assist in a holistic design process for distance/blended higher education programs.

A crucial step in revising my model Curriculum Framework is to gather information from you about your teaching experience with Tourism Management (DT406H), Hospitality Management (DT408H) and/or Leisure Management (DT408H) and the programs' future transition to more flexible delivery. This will provide an action research application for me and hopefully a tool that the team may find useful for future use.

To that end, please consider and respond to the following questions listed below.

Thank you.

Polly Rodriguez

1 About the Person providing data

1.1   Title
1.2   Key responsibilities of role
1.3   Background and experience in teaching and learning, e.g.
- **Online teaching?**
- **Curriculum design?**
- **Attendance at Learning & Teaching workshops or programs?**
- **Experience as an online student?**

2 Program Background

2.1   Who would you say is the main target market for your program?
- Is this a fairly static market? (yes /no)
- Would you envisage any changes in the market in the future? (yes /no)
    If yes, please specify.

2.2   In your opinion, what attracts students to your program?
- **What are the main strengths of your program?**

2.3   Changing the program to provide a more flexible delivery is planned.
What, in your opinion, would be the main factors motivating such a transition?
Select an answer for each.

2.3.1 Strategic	1 Strongly disagree	2 Disagree	3 Neutral	4 Agree	5 Strongly agree	9 Not applicable
a) Fulfil institutional/faculty strategic goals						
b) Allow the department/program to grow and evolve						
c) Gap in market for flexible provision of this program						
2.3.2 Academic opportunity for teaching and learning						
b) Increase range and diversity of Learning, teaching and assessment methods						
c) Open or appeal to new international markets						
d) Open or appeal to new local students						
2.3.3 Innovation combining technology and strategic aims						
a) Make more use of increasingly available technologies						
b) A visionary faculty/staff member						
c) Create program that involves partners/consortia						
2.3.4 Responsiveness to the marketplace and society						
a) Better serve the needs of internationalized workplace						
b) Maintain competitive advantage over other institutions						
c) Meet the demand for flexibility – widen access						
2.3.5 Financial considerations						
c) Generate revenue for school/Improve cost-effectiveness						
2.3.6 Other (Please describe)						

2.4. Do you feel a move to flexible delivery would be a positive move for this programme at this time? (Yes/No)
Would you have any concerns about moving to flexible delivery?
- **What would help?**

3 Student Level

3.1   In your opinion, are there certain criteria that seem to predict student success and/or completion in distance/flexible delivery?

Select an answer for each one.

- **For those that you feel have a positive impact upon success, which would be the most important?** (Mark with an asterisk please)

	1 strongly disagree	2 disagree	3 neutral	4 agree	5 strongly agree	9 not applicable
3.1.1 Faculty/Pedagogy/Andragogy						
h) Faculty academic training						
i) Faculty online experience or student experience?						
j) Teacher/student contact and feedback						
k) Effective use of a variety of teaching methods, materials and aids						
l) Learner-centered teaching/ learning						
m) Class discussions online and/or f2f						
n) Instructional support /guidance /feedback on learning						
3.1.2 Technology						
d) Range of rich multimedia						
e) Tech support for using technology, e.g. help desk, induction guide, etc						
f) Integrate newest appropriate technology applications e.g. blogs, wikis etc						
3.1.3 Student issues						
f) Ability of student to manage personal/professional life						
g) Student motivation and interest						
h) High student grades						
i) Orientation to program						
j) Bonding with fellow students						
3.1.4 Other program attributes						
c) Cost of program						
d) Administrative efficiency						
3.1.5 Other? Please identify						

4 Teaching, Learning, Design and Assessment

4.1 What are the learning activities that your program uses to achieve its desired learning outcomes? **Identify main teaching/learning methods within your modules.**

4.2 Do instructors adopt a variety of assessment methods that apply to students' different learning styles to evaluate student learning? **Identify main assessment methods within the program.**

4.3 How do you currently use technology to support the learning activities and assessment?

4.4 Would you say that you have a systematic process for the design of new or redesign of existing modules? (If yes, please describe briefly)

4.5 Does the program have a systematic – either institutional or program specific - self-evaluation mechanism? (If yes, please describe briefly)

5 Lessons learned

5.1 Successes: In your opinion, is there a specific example of best practice that seems to work particularly well at the moment? That is to say, what are your curriculum or module design successes?
For example, in respect to…:
>   Approaches?
>   Traditions?
>   Pedagogy methods and format?
>   Students?
>   Marketing?

5.2 Lessons learned: What lessons have you learned about what doesn't seem to work particularly well?
For example, in respect to…:
>   Approaches?
>   Traditions?
>   Pedagogy methods and format?
>   Students?
>   Marketing?

All Done!!

Many thanks for your help.
After the comments from your fellow Program Team Members have been compiled and analyzed, the draft Curriculum Framework will be revised to incorporate the new data from you and your colleagues and fill any gaps.

As a final step, I would like to send you the proposed design model for your reaction about its usefulness. So hopefully, you will hear back from me in a few weeks with that.
Your assistance is much appreciated.

All the very best,

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Q5's 2008 for the Add-on Programs:

- **Tourism management DT406H**

- **Hospitality management DT408H**

- **Leisure management DT411H**

School of Hospitality Management and Tourism, Dublin Institute of Technology

Part 1: Program details
Chairperson of the program committee is Dr. Ziene Mottiar.

Part 2: Recommendations from the previous annual monitoring report and evaluation of actions taken.
- A program handbook was developed, distributed to all students and has proved to be very useful.
- A session on SPSS was offered to all students in semester 2 to aid with preparation of research for the dissertation.
- The provision of a range of options for Leisure students was a problem again in 2007/08.
- No system through EGB has been developed to calculate Final Awards.

Part 3: Proposed modifications
Nature of modifications (major/minor)
As part of the Review Process undertaken in 2008, the following changes were accepted by the panel:
- The title of DT408 to make it BSc (Hons) Hospitality to keep in line with the changed title of the ordinary degree.
- The final award will now include all modules completed in the programme.
- Students must do three options over the academic year, but they can decide how many to take in each semester. This facilitates more flexibility for the student and increases their option choice.

Rationale for modifications
The title change was made to keep in line with the changed title of the ordinary degree. The decision about the calculation of final award was one made at school level and affects all final year programmes. The final change provides students with a greater level of choice when selecting options and is an issue that has been raised by students and in programme team meetings over the last year. These changes were implemented from September 2008.

Part 4: Performance indicators for the year under review
Admissions statistics for the year

	DT408H	DT411H	DT406H
Projected intake numbers	10	10	10
Actual intake numbers	6	14	14
Numbers who presented at examinations	6	13	14

First destination statistics (of the previous year's graduates)

Number of graduates who gained employment	NA
Number of graduates seeking employment	NA

Student attrition
One student deferred her place on the programme for 2007 following a serious accident in October. Another student sat the exams in the Summer, but did not then re-submit her thesis and an assessment as required by the September supplements.

Sessional and overall pass rates
As per previous years, the overall marks for students were high with 3 firsts overall. In terms of dissertations, for the first year two students failed the dissertation. From a marking point of view this shows a broadening of our marking scale with marks ranging from 33% up to 74%.

Overall comments
Again this year, these groups comprised of academically strong students with much interest and motivation.

Part 5: Key issues for consideration
External examiner and /or Review Panel recommendations, actions to be taken
The external examiner provided a favourable report on the programmes. He commented on how the standard of the dissertation is quite broad with "in some cases little knowledge of what is required of a dissertation and at the other end of the spectrum those who exceed expectations and provide excellent work". He also notes that the feedback on the dissertations is better from some tutors than others and says that more standardization is required. His overall recommendation is that students need to have their choice of dissertation vetted more to ensure sensible choice prevails as to the area studied, and that the student has the expertise to complete the methodology required.

Q6's 2008 for the Add-on Programs

Summary of feedback from staff on modules (form Q6b) with summary feedback from students on modules and institute-wide issues (Q6a & Q6c)
The Q6 forms indicate strong positive feedback from students regarding modules in terms of content and teaching. Two staff members commented on cold classrooms and one on the lack of meeting rooms.

Over the last two years an issue that students have raised, and one which has been spoken about at team meetings, is the fact that t number of students wish to progress from these programmes to do a HDip. Currently DT411H, DT406H and DT408H are not defined as valid entry routes on to the HDip programme. Individual students have attempted to make an eligibility claim, but have not been successful, but it has been suggese4d that we should apply as an institution via Frank MacMahon's office. This would require a letter from the HOS. The programme team has requested that this would happen.

Resource issues
In the year under consideration there was extremely limited choice for those students on DT411H as there were very few Leisure Options available.
Related academic developments, actions to be taken
A number of staff are engaged in various areas of research in terms of supervising undergraduate and postgraduate dissertations, producing journal articles and engaged in consultancy in their field of expertise.

Part 6: Significant developments or special circumstances affecting this year
With a school review this year, staff undertook detailed consideration of the programmes and we met more frequently in order to do this.

Part 7: Quality ratings

	Unacceptable	Acceptable	Good	Very good	Previous report categories
Program in general				X	VG
Staff resources			X		Good
Accommodation		X			Acceptable
Equipment					Na
Teaching standards				X	Very good
Learning environment				X	Very good
Job placement of grads			X		Very good
Overall quality category in previous report					

Part 8: Quality Action Plan
To be included as part of the Faculty Board's overall Action Plan.

Issues to be addressed	Actions required	Individual/committee responsible
Provision of greater level of choice in terms of leisure options for DT411H	Re-introduction of Sports Massage or a similar module	HOS
Heating in rooms	Specified rooms were KOS	Administrative

	and DS2	
A system needs to be put in place through EGB to calculate final awards		Faculty/exams
To attempt to have these programmes identified as designated programmes for entry into the HDip program		Program Tutor/HOS
The issues raised by the external examiner re: dissertations	These will be dealt with by the group looking at the whole area of dissertation in the school as we move forward. Changes to the way we deal with this process are imminent.	

Comments from Programme Committee, BA Tourism & Tourism Marketing Dec 08:
Programme progressing well and issues being dealt with.
Programme operating efficiently and students appear content.

Additional comments:
From the Joint Course Committee meeting 13 Nov '07
- The NQAI framework requires that a Level 8 honours degree program needs a dissertation or a research project. Are the options for independent research within industry instead?
- A module needs 15 enrolled to be viable.
- See *An International Handbook of Tourism Education. 2005,* David Airey, U Surrey - Addresses cutting edge issues such as PhD education, non-formal education, cultural issues in learning, research and teaching, e-learning and e-assessment. It offers practical advice for the design, delivery, evaluation and resourcing of courses and concludes with a reflective agenda of issues for the future.
- Reflection on the importance of ethics and sustainability: Ziene commented that "any course on ethics and professionalism would need to be allocated credits, otherwise it would not be taken seriously by the student body".
- Mary O'Rawe – "We need to identify where our courses lie – i.e. Do we want to be seen as leaders in the field."

Analysis of documentation towards suitability for case study

Brief analysis of the program documents and quality assurance forms indicate

that the program is well-suited to blended delivery per the following characteristics:

Size of program, quality of content, satisfaction of students with content and

instruction, quality and motivation of students, maturity of students.

Evidence:
- Students must do three options over the academic year, but they can decide how many to take in each semester. This facilitates more flexibility for the student and increases their option choice.
- Intake numbers – Each stream of the program has between 6-14 students.
- marks for students were high but two students failed the dissertation
- Academically strong students with much interest and motivation.
- The external examiner provided a favourable report on the programmes
- the feedback on the dissertations is better from some tutors than others and says that more standardization is required.
- Strong positive feedback from students regarding modules in terms of content and teaching.

Program creation

Data collected in 2009.

Institution	Program history
Auburn U	The MSc Food Science & Nutrition with emphasis in Hotel and Restaurant Management started 17 yrs ago as a correspondence program. Auburn promotes the program as the first Hospitality distance program in the US.
Charles Sturt U	Australia's leading provider of distance education with 21,000 students online began the Master of Ecotourism 10 yrs ago as an undergrad program by Rik Thwaites, a visionary faculty member. To encourage students to continue with their studies once enrolled, the program structure allowed for progressive enrolment from Grad Cert to Masters degree.
Columbia Southern U	This private, for-profit institution offers distance degrees only and the Hospitality MBA has been available for 10 yrs and their general MBA for 15 years.
Florida International U	About 8 yrs ago, it was the Dean's idea to keep up with competition and also serve a busy hospitality professional by offering the M.Sc. Hospitality Management in distance format.
George Washington U	AMTA (Accelerated Masters of Tourism Administration) began as off-campus weekend courses in tidewater Virginia in 1998. The current distance program, which evolved into a blended program, is now located on the Washington DC main campus. The degree awarded is the Masters of Tourism Administration with concentrations in Event management, Sustainable destination management, Sports management and Individualized studies.
Queen Margaret U	The MBA Hospitality Management started 10 yrs ago as a correspondence type course. It is offered on-campus and distance. QMU is a small university (5,000+ enrolled) but its growing distance program enrollment is fuelled by cooperative arrangements with partner institutions.
Sheffield Hallam U	Responding to the institutional desire for innovative teaching and learning, the distance MSc. International Hospitality Management was started 10-12 years ago by a visionary faculty member, Dr. Remington. It has now faded from the limelight and recently signed a validation agreement for delivery and administration with an

	external education company.
Southern Cross U	Australia's seventh largest distance higher education institution, the MBA Hotel and Tourism Management and Master of Convention and Event Management distance program was started 18 yrs ago. The Masters has always been delivered in a distance format. Initially it was by correspondence and it is now electronic. Southern Cross U is not located in an urban center.
U Guelph	Targeting mid-career professionals, the Executive MBA in Hospitality and Tourism Management was a natural progression from the on campus program to a blended format. First experimenting in the residential classroom with online learning, they wanted to increase their student reach across Canada and internationally. Building on the institution's strong reputation in T&HM, they are also known for distance education. "With over 50,000 registered students and a huge team of people. They have course designers who are dedicated to work with faculty every time another semester rolls forward."
U Nevada Las Vegas	The Master of Hospitality Administration Executive online program began 8 yrs ago. It was the visionary faculty member John Bowen's concept to have companies pay for the cohorts and have the program tailored for the company executives. This program was dramatically revived and revised over the years by adjusting the length of courses, dropping the cohort concept and being responsive of the needs and preferences of their executive students.
U Ulster	The MSc Cultural Management is 10 yrs old. The program was established to meet local needs and as a response to 1994 Clancy report that identified a specific gap in Cultural Management training. In 2004 the Vice Chancellor and Head of School selected this program to pilot because to increase eLearning provision as part of the institutional strategic plan.

Note: Florida State University did not participate in this descriptive section.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS RELATED TO THIS STUDY

Minding the Roots: Incorporating Values-based Learning in Distance T&HM Masters Curricula. International Society of Travel and Tourism Educators conference, Dublin, Ireland, September 30- October 2, 2008.

Getting to "Go" - Developing a practical framework for Tourism & Hospitality Management Distance Masters Programs of the Future: Background & Preliminary Findings. Presentation at PhD Networking Conference, Exploring Tourism II: Issues in PhD Research, Bournemouth University, England, May 29 & 30, 2008.

Distance graduate education in Tourism and Hospitality Management: Easing into flexible formats with a comprehensive curriculum framework. Poster presented at Contemporary Issues in Irish & Global Tourism & Hospitality, The Tourism Hospitality Research in Ireland Conference, Dublin Ireland, June 16 & 17, 2009.

Managing curriculum change in distance graduate programs. Presentation to graduate distance education faculty and staff at George Washington University, Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Washington DC, June 21, 2010.

Curriculum design approaches for distance Tourism graduate education. Presentation to Hospitality Management and Tourism undergraduate research methods class, Dublin Institute of Technology, Dublin, Ireland, December 8, 2010.