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Types Of Social Support In Distance Education And Academic Performance At A Southwestern Historically Black College And University

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TYPES OF SOCIAL SUPPORT IN DISTANCE EDUCATION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AT A SOUTHWESTERN HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY

BY

JENNIFER MILES

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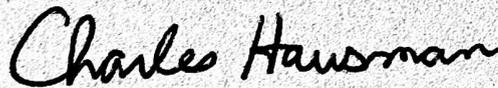
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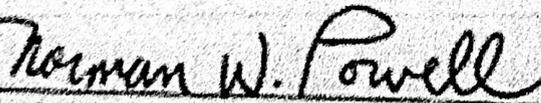
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PERFORMANCE AT A SOUTHWESTERN HISTORICALLY BLACK COLLEGE

AND UNIVERSITY

BY

JENNIFER PAIGE MILES

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Eastern Kentucky University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION

2020

DEDICATION

With the very essence of my soul and all that I am, I dedicate this manuscript to my heartbeat, my soul mate, my joy—my grandmother, Joyce Marie Lancaster Miles. With every smile you've mustered through the tough times, every tear shed, every dance performed, every wandering thought, every "take the Lord with you" and for EACH and EVERY prayer, this could not have been possible without you. You are the true definition of *selflessness*. I pray you never forget how much I love you. Thank you for all you've sacrificed for me and for being my inspiration… WE DID IT!

To my teammate, my mother, Janet Hall—thank you for hanging in there and never giving up, just as I promised you I wouldn't. From the very beginning, you've instilled in me hard work and an appreciation for learning. I dedicate this to your strength and resilience—love you gal!

To my best friend that didn't get the opportunity to see me finish and walk across the stage, I dedicate this work to my father, James Miles Jr. Your heavenly spirit was felt and helped me through the journey. Fly red bird, fly…

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To my true friends: Lare Bridges, Dantrea Hampton, Dionna McDonald, Shameka Owens and Lauren Yates, thank you all for filling my love tank with uplifting calls, funny text messages, and intercessory prayer. Much appreciation is extended to Dr. Beverly Downing and Dr. Penny Smith—thank you both for serving as mentors, believing in my talents and supporting me along this journey. I thank God for you both!

ABSTRACT

As a result of rapid growth in distance education, increasingly more students are enrolling in online courses. Nearly 81% of all U.S. postsecondary institutions offered "at least one fully online or blended course" in 2003 (Jones & Davenport, 2018). Previous research has demonstrated African American students site "convenience" as an influence in enrolling in an online course (Kwun et al., 2012). While online learning offers benefits to both institutions and students (Anderson, 2008), research has also found students may exhibit stress and anxiety as a result of isolation and loneliness caused by distance learning (Duranton & Mason, 2012; Heinman, 2008; Kim, 2011; Muirhead & Blum, 2006). Additional research found online students at HBCUs preferred face-to-face, traditional courses over online delivery and hybrid modalities due to teaching quality and communication difficulty between the teacher and student (Kwun et al., 2012). These tensions are eased when instructors practice social support through the building of community. This explanation, referred to in the literature as Community of Inquiry, or CoI (Garrett et al., 2010), attributes online student success through Social Support Theory (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). The theory is defined as the verbal and non-verbal communication between recipients and providers that reduces uncertainty about the situation, the self, the other, or the relationship, and functions to enhance a perception of personal control in one's life experience (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987). There is a lack of research focused on instructor social support and its effect on online student academic success at HBCUs.

The purpose of this quantitative non-experimental study is to ascertain if online instructor social support is significantly related to online student academic performance

at a Southwestern HBCU. A construct of CoI and grounded in Social Support Theory was used to interpret the results. This study examined three instructor social support predictor variables of the dependent variable, student expected grade. Using a sample taken from the site location, frequency analyses, descriptive statistics, Pearson bivariate analysis, and multiple regression analysis, the research questions posited by this study were answered. Findings provide further evidence of the impact of instructor emotional and informational social support on online student perceived expected grade. Results also indicate instructor instrumental social support was not significant as a determinate of student academic performance. These findings have practical implications and recommendations for higher education distance learning policies and professional development strategies for HBCUs that offer online courses and degrees.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Innovations in technology are having a significant impact on education and society. In an ever-changing environment, technology heavily influences education and vice versa. Holistically, technology has impacted education in the United States through grant-based research; in 2012 over 65.8 billion in federal dollars was allocated to educational research (Perna & Ruiz, 2016). Further, in 2014 the United States Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE) awarded nearly $75 million in grants to twenty-five institutions (Perna & Ruiz, 2016). Many of these grants surround advancements being made in the field of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM). Demonstrating how technological advances impact the current generation, 89% of today's 'digital natives' collectively use social media which in turn influences instructional technology in the classroom (Williams et al., 2012). Most notably, since the late 1990s when virtual courses were first offered in the U.S., more than 71% of degree-granting institutions reported offering at least one online course (Williams et al., 2012). Demands from learners are driving the instructional initiatives offered by national institutions who are benefiting from an estimated $300 billion industry (Sumner, 2000).

In 2015, the Babson Survey Research Group conducted a study tracking online education in the United States which was co-sponsored by the Online Learning Consortium (OLC, formerly SLOAN-C), Pearson, StudyPortals, WCET and Tyton Partners (OLC, 2016). The study found a 3.9% increase in the number of distance

education students taking online courses nationwide and 1/4 of students (28% or 5,828,826) enroll in at least one distance education course (OLC, 2016). The same study found public post-secondary institutions offered online degrees to the largest portion of distance education students, 72.7% of all undergraduate and 30.7% of all graduate-level (OLC, 2016).

Due to the growing demand for alternative learning from those seeking bachelor and graduate post-secondary degrees, various factors that aid student success must be the focus. When advising online students, attributes including patience, understanding and wisdom assist in lowering attrition rates in online graduate programs (Muirhead & Blum, 2006). Computer-mediated tools used to provide a gateway for interaction must also be factored into account. Depending on the medium used (e.g., a course management system) Muirhead and Blum (2006) found that instructors who teach in online environments could ease the stress and anxiety of their students by emailing notes of encouragement, sending personalized messages, and offering practical advice.

Instructor-student communication is key to the establishment of interpersonal relationships, particularly in virtual courses where learning is done through mediated effects. The lack of face-to-face interaction may hinder a student's perception of a feeling of inclusion or performance due to the absence of verbal and non-verbal cues typically present in traditional course environments. Understanding the needs of an online learner is critical to the support of their performance and academic achievement. Feelings of anxiety may be heightened due to technology learning curves, level of comfort and/or lacking and inadequate resources. Heinman (2008) researched the impact of email messages from instructors to students in online courses had on perceived social support,

2

academic satisfaction, academic outcomes and coping strategies (task or emotion oriented). Students who received e-mail messages perceived higher levels of social and academic support and were significantly more satisfied with their academic course than students in the control group (Heinman, 2008).

Conceptual Framework

The framework of being a 'caring teacher or leader' influences social support for learners. Noddings' (2006) article on educational leaders as caring teachers addressed goals of education such as not producing a uniformed product due to student differences, but rather helping students develop holistically. In addition, the goal is not to base the success of education on standardized test scores but developing skills such as "critical thinking, tolerance of ambiguity, concern for the common good, heightened aesthetic sensibility and self-actualization" (Noddings, 2006, p. 340).

Although difficult to measure, teachers should attempt to determine how and why their students want to learn. Caring teachers listen and are responsive (Noddings, 2003) and are more engaged in meeting a student's expressed needs (needs within a person), rather than inferred needs (needs derived from a decision-maker imposed on those said to have them), or seeking a balance between the two (Noddings, 2002). When eliciting motivation, both caring leaders and teachers should utilize intrinsic motivation, rather external motivation, or the 'carrot and stick' theory; or employ the balancing/negotiating strategy. Through collaborative open discussions, thoughtful listening, and invitations to participate, caring leaders can help bring about critical change.

Research has shown convenience, flexibility and autonomy are factors that lead students to choose online programs (Duranton & Mason, 2012). Institutional support is

another important factor in online student success, most importantly course design and support. Duranton and Mason (2012) suggested electronic mediums should be appropriate, such as "audio- and video-conferencing and online forums, which help to minimize learner isolation" (p. 83). Additional instructional support should come from both the instructor and the institution. One example is involving tutors that can aid online learners in achieving learning outcomes. Research conducted by Duranton and Mason (2012) found 50% of surveyed participants had some degree of apprehension or fear of loneliness in online courses compared to traditional courses. Institutions must be proactive in providing student support that promotes peer interaction in a collaborative learning environment.

Typically, in online learning, where constructivist learning is most dynamic among goal-oriented learners, online course design that includes the use of media and internet helps promote knowledge-building in a supportive environment. McLoughlin (2002) posits:

> supportive online environments involve a three-dimensional framework that includes social support (interaction/social presence), task support (teaching) and peer support (community). Effective support must include the encouragement of reflective thinking, provision of social support for dialogue, interaction and extension of ideas with feedback from peers and mentors on emerging issues (p. 152).

When support is adaptable and accessible, online learners are more apt to perform well and achieve academic success. McLoughlin (2002) suggested innovative teaching helps to make education adaptable to all type of learners and allows the learning process

to go beyond the classroom to life-long learning. This experiential value promotes going beyond the facts and allows for reflection and growth.

Statement of the Problem

As institutions of higher education find themselves offering a record number of online, hybrid courses and degree programs to meet the needs of these demands, institutional support that help guide these learners down a path of academic success, persistence, and degree attainment are at the forefront. A goal of an institution is to ensure both online and traditional learners learn through instruction, shared dialogue and collaborative efforts. While social interaction tends to be in its purest form in traditional classroom settings, instructors must be creative in presenting ways for online students to work and think collaboratively. As stated by McLoughlin (2002), collaborative thinking is "the transactional means to inquire, test new information, and apply new ideas" (p. 152). However, we see that in online environments, social support in the collaborative thinking process requires students to exhibit higher levels of self-regulation than those in traditional classrooms (Thompson et al., 2013).

Online students may experience a greater level of burnout and deal with competing demands (e.g, family and work) compared to traditional learners, thus variables such as social, cognitive, and a present instructor are needed to assist those with poor self-regulatory behaviors (Thompson et al., 2013). Researchers found academic achievement was higher in traditional classroom settings due to increased self-regulatory effects (motivation to finish degree and connection to course content), familiarity with content, immediate feedback from the instructor, and fellow students' reaction to verbal and non-verbal cues. Each of these factors were believed to be reasons successful

completion of the face-to-face course occurred (Thompson et al., 2013). Peer support in social network awareness (SNA) supported e-Learning environments is another important factor in student learning. SNA allows the social activities of peers in e-learning to promote informal learning, peer interaction and collaboration. A study performed by Lin et al. (2015) found that online students that demonstrated low-level self-regulating behaviors had better academic achievement with SNA centrality.

Significance of the Study

There is limited research focusing on social support in online environments where 100% computer-mediated instruction is present at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Research of this nature is needed for a number of reasons. First, rates of enrollment and retention of many students of color have declined (Swail, 2003). The combination of a demand for online education and minorities attending HBCUs mean understanding the factors that determine the breakdown in retention and degree attainment will assist institutions in implementing specific social support programs. Secondly, the use of educational instructional technology has dramatically increased over the last decade (Perna & Ruiz, 2016). For this reason, it is important that institutions, especially HBCUs, provide social support to learners in online courses that utilize these types of technologies. Previous research has been conducted in relation to social support through social media (Hwang et al., 2010; Coulson et al., 2007), however research is limited in the area of distance education and student-instructor relationship through social support. Online courses containing a social element result in learners that feel connected, have a sense of community, receive mutual attention and support and are open to

communicating without judgment (Kim, 2011). This type of support assists in eliminating

anxiety and stress that may result from computer-mediated instructional technologies.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research on social support provides a rationale for studying personal

relationships, teaching students about relational processes, and designing intervention

programs for people who experience relational problems (Vangelisti, 2009). The primary

purpose of this study is to investigate online student success and social support, how

valued an individual feels (both perception and reality) , availability of assistance , and

membership in a supportive social network (Kaur, 2014). The following variables will be

factored as an analysis of social support and their impact on student success: level of

online student-instructor interaction, demonstrated patience, level of challenge offered to

the student, and type(s) of feedback given. Given these purposes, the following research

questions will be investigated:

RQ1. Does instructor emotional social support (facilitating discourse)

significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU)?

H1o. Instructor emotional social support (facilitating discourse) does not

significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU).

H1a. Instructor emotional social support (facilitating discourse) does

significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU).

RQ2. Does instructor informational social support (direct instruction)

significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU)?

H2o. Instructor informational social support (direct instruction) does not

significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU).

H2a. Instructor informational social support (direct instruction) does

significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU).

RQ3. Does instructor instrumental social support (design and organization)

significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU)?

H3o. Instructor instrumental social support (design and organization) does

not significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU).

H3a. Instructor instrumental social support (design and organization) does

significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU).

Definition of Terms and Acronyms

For the purpose of providing interpretations of research in this study, the

following definitions are provided:

Blended (Hybrid): course that blends online and face-to-face delivery.

Substantial proportion of the content is delivered online (30-79%), utilizes online

discussions, and typically has a reduced number of face-to-face meetings (Allen et al.,

2016).

Community of Inquiry (CoI): an environment where participants collaboratively

construct meaning and share understanding (Garrison, 2011).

Competency Based Education (CBE): a learning model that combines an

intentional and transparent approach to curricular design with an academic component

that allows for varying time frames to demonstrate competencies where expectations of

learning are held constant. Students acquire and demonstrate their knowledge and skills

by engaging in learning exercises, activities and experiences that align with clearly

defined programmatic outcomes. Students receive proactive guidance and support from

faculty and staff. Learners earn credentials by demonstrating mastery through multiple

forms of assessment, often at a personalized pace (Competency-Based Education

Network (CBEN), 2016).

Correspondence Education: a formal educational process under which the institution provides instructional and exam materials, by mail or electronic transmission, to students who are separated from the instructor. Interaction between the instructor and the student is limited, is not regular and substantive, and is primarily initiated by the student; courses are typically self-paced (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), 2012).

Distance Education: a formal educational process in which the majority of the instruction (interaction between students and instructors and among students) in a course occurs when students and instructors are not in the same place. Instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous. A distance education course may use the Internet; one-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcast, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite, or wireless communication devices; audio conferencing; or video cassettes, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if used as part of the distance learning course or program (SACSCOC, 2018).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs): Colleges and universities that were established prior to 1964 and have the principal mission of educating Black Americans (NCES, 2015).

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS): student enrollment data collected and housed at the National Center for Education Statistics; primary source for information on U.S. colleges, universities, and technical and vocational institutions (IPEDS, 2016).

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs): free, open source educational content delivered in an electronic modality at or outside the institution (Allen et al., 2016).

Online Learning Consortium (OLC): formerly SLOAN-C; the nation's leader in reporting advancements in distance education. Serves as a voice to quality in the online arena through research and offers professional development.

Online [Course]: most or all of the educational content is delivered in an electronic modality with no face-to-face interaction (Allen et al., 2016).

Predominately White Institutions (PWIs): the term used to describe institutions of higher learning in which Whites account for 50% or greater of the student enrollment. However, the majority of these institutions may also be understood as historically White (Brown & Dancy, 2010).

Social Support: the study of social and personal relationships. Social relationships can moderate the effects of stress on individuals' health and well-being; (Psychological) perceived availability of support; (Sociological) degree to which individuals are integrated into a social group; (Communication) evaluation of verbal and non-verbal behaviors that individuals engage in when they are trying to provide someone with help (Vangelisti, 2006, Vangelisti, 2009).

STEM: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics; an acronym to describe a field that is in the spotlight with research geared toward it in the 21st century.

Traditional [Course]: course where no online technology is used—content is delivered written or oral. Also referred to as face-to-face or f:2:2. (Allen et al., 2016).

Web Facilitated: course that uses web-based technology to facilitate what is essentially a face-to-face course; less than 30% of learning is delivered in an online modality. Web-facilitated courses may use a learning management system (LMS) or web pages to post the syllabus and assignments (Allen et al., 2016).

Summary

This study is presented within five chapters. Chapter One provided an introduction explaining the constantly evolving world of higher education and the emergence of online learning. No longer are students solely learning in traditional courses; digital natives are driving the demands for innovative practices to learning. Chapter One further provided the statement of the problem, significance of the study, research questions and hypotheses, and the definitions and acronyms referred to through this manuscript. Due to growth in online learning, academic decision-makers are faced with addressing policies to assist students in learning through alternative modalities. The focus of this study is on HBCUs and the academic performance of students enrolled in online courses. Ensuring quality instruction through shared dialogue and innovative, collaborative efforts are the goals of most post-secondary institutions. Constructivist learning is most dynamic in online learning, where course design and a supportive environment is facilitated by instructors. Chapter Two provides a comprehensive review of literature on distance education, HBCUs, CoI framework and Social Support Theory. Chapter Three provides the methodology of the study with included limitations, delimitations and ethical considerations. Chapter Four will determine the statistical significance of online instructor social support on perceived academic performance among students at a Southwestern HBCU. To conclude, Chapter Five will provide the results of the study and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to examine the intellectual works of social support, specifically its types, from a psychological and cognitive construct. A theoretical and empirical approach to social support allows one to shift the focus from the vastly studied health perspective to education. The guiding theories of the research are delineated. Additionally, the history of distance education is reviewed including its contributions to scholarship, higher education research and online course design. Lastly, the specific demographic of those attending Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and perspectives of teaching online students from diverse cultural backgrounds is a focus of the study due to their higher attrition rates nationwide. Determining the types of social support students need in a highly computer-meditated collaborative learning environment will assist institutions of higher education in lowering attrition rates and increasing online student performance.

This review of literature has been synthesized from a wide array of scholarly sources, thus providing breadth and depth. Aside from major works and publications, much of the reviewed material has been collected from journal articles via database searches (e.g. "social support theory," "social support + distance education," "HBCU + online student performance," etc.). A large number of sources was found within aggregators such as EBSCO, the Academic Search Complete, PsycINFO, the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) and Google Scholar. In addition, Eastern Kentucky University's Interlibrary Loan (ILL) helped facilitate the research process by delivering

original, formal literature and publications, authored directly from practitioners that pioneered their fields.

History of Social Support

Considered the nucleus of interpersonal relationships, social support is a concept that influences an individual's belief of being valued and cared for. Although the definition varies in scope, some theorists believe a broad perspective such as the fulfillment of interpersonal needs in basic form (Kaplan et al., 1997) or messages intended to focus on individual needs that provide comfort, encouragement, reassurance, and help problem solve (Gardner & Cutrona, 2004) serve as satisfactory standards. Others define social support as the perception or experience that one is loved and cared for by others, esteemed and valued, and part of a social network of mutual assistance and obligations (Wills, 1991). These positive behaviors help validate a person's feelings.

The earliest studies of social support appear in the 1970s. There were significant interests in the field, especially in relation to health, having only two articles appearing in the Social Science Citation Index ("social support" search) between 1972 and 1976, later increasing to 43 by 1981 (House, 1987). Rooted in social psychology, researcher James House (1977) attempted to bring context to the broad field by dividing it into three domains, or faces: 1) psychological social psychology, 2) symbolic interactionism and 3) psychological sociology (or social structure and personality).

Psychological social psychology "focuses on individual psychological processes—perception, cognition, motivation, learning, attitude formation and change, etc.—as they operate in relation to social stimuli and situations" (House, 1977, p. 163). Symbolic interactionism was coined by Herbert Blumer (1937) to describe the body of

thought. Years prior in 1934, a group of researchers (George Mead, Thomas Blumer and Evertt Hughes) at the University of Chicago were identified as the "Chicago school" of symbolic interactionism. It sought to "understand how individuals interact with each other using symbols" (House, 1977, p. 166). Psychological sociology, or social structure and personality, attribute to macrosocial structures (e.g. occupations, religion, social classes) and processes, such as urbanization and industrialization (House, 1977).

Social scientists connected the study of social support to stress and health (Etzion, 1984; Thoits, 2010). In terms of social structure, social relationships are categorized into three aspects: 1) their existence or quantity (social integration), 2) their formal structure (social networks) and 3) their functional or behavioral content (social support). Detailed in Figure 2-1, House (1987) depicts the causal relationships between the structure of social relationships (social integration and networks) and their functional content (social support).
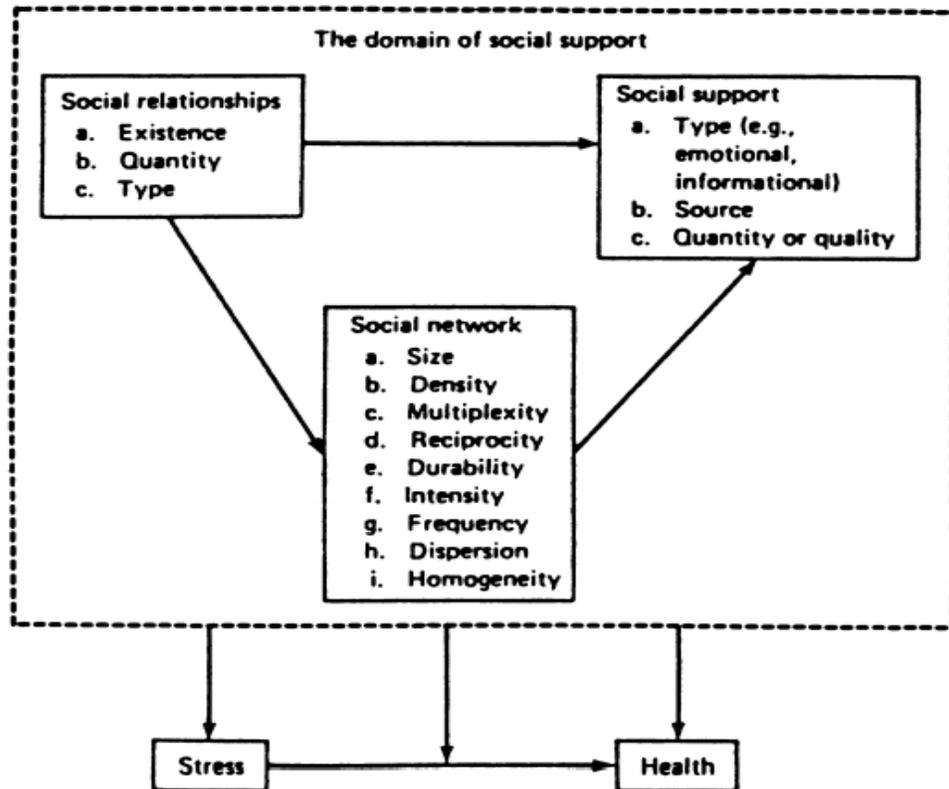
Figure 2-1. A model for studying social relationships, networks and support in relation to each other and to stress and health (House and Kahn, 1985).

Historically, the study of social support is rooted in social relationship research. Many sociological studies found emotional and behavioral stress due to broken social ties as a result of social disintegration due to urbanization and industrialization in European (Simmel, 1950; Thomas & Znanicecki, 1920) and American (Catalano, 1979) societies. As some societies shifted from small, rural communities which encouraged close, intact relationships, the dominance to urbanization caused psychological disorder. In particular, the idea that morale and well-being are sustained through primary group ties, the absence of which may result in a loss of identity, confusion regarding norms and despair, echoes in contemporary discussions of social support (Vaux, 1988).

Social support is also found in psychological studies concerning early social relationships and attachment behaviors (Ainsworth, 1979; Arend et al., 1979; Bowlby, 1969; Crockenberg, 1981; Waters, 1978). Infants use verbal and non-verbal cues as a means of connection. Ainsworth's (1979) longitudinal study found when issues arise during the social interaction between child and caregiver, a resistant or avoidant attachment may occur. Conversely, Crockenberg (1981) posits when social support is established for mothers, this influences the development of sensitivity and responsiveness, which positively affects attachment style. The effect is even greater when the support is available during difficult circumstances. Research focused on animal behavior and early social relationships proved similar results. Harlow (1965) found monkeys that were reared in isolated conditions tend to have serious developmental and attachment style problems. Similar to humans, animals thrive in social relationships, imparted through norms and ties.

Another social scientist that sought to bring understanding to the vastly conceptualized term was Dr. Alan Vaux, Professor Emeritus in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. A longstanding history as a psychology professor at Southern Illinois University, Dr. Vaux (1988) believed social support represented a focal point around the varying social ecological models of distress. Conversely, from an interventionist perspective, social support was a powerful technique to help improve and prevent psychological problems (Vaux, 1988).

In *Social Support: Theory, Research and Intervention*, Vaux (1988) eloquently describes social support in terms of the popular phrase "you are the wind beneath my wings", a popular song written and sung by Bette Midler on the soundtrack to the film

Beaches (Bruckheimer et al., 1988). Vaux (1988) goes on to describe the many

individuals we interact with throughout our lifetime as:

> … a social medium through which we pass. Like the wind, their presence is so
>
> ordinary as often to go unnoticed. Yet like the wind beneath a bird's wings, they
>
> are an essential part of our flight—holding us up, carrying us along, providing
>
> life, allowing us to soar and to glide giving us location and identity, guiding our
>
> movement, and buffeting us into action (p. 1).

Social support is found in every aspect of our lives. We understand social support

through the tangible and intangible; functional processes, the feeling derived through

life's experiences—the ups and the downs—and how we come to experience it all with

others: "The idea underlying social support is both commonplace and immensely rich.

Therein lie both the appeal and promise of the construct and the obstacles to its

systematic study" (Vaux, 1988, p. 1).

The Freudian theory indicates psychological problems such as insecurity and

anxiety stem from early social relationships. A person's anxiety, feelings of isolation and

helplessness can be tied to their social orientation, and seeking affection, independence or

power helps to improve such behaviors (Horney, 1945). When humans pursue

relationships with others, it helps one feel more secure (Sullivan, 1953).

Social Support Theory

Social support has received over fifty years of theoretical examination, resulting

in various, diverse social support theories. The topic of study focuses on the relation

between psychological processes and health. Figure 2-2 depicts the basic premise of

social support theory demonstrating how it can act as a buffer against stress to positively

effect outcomes.
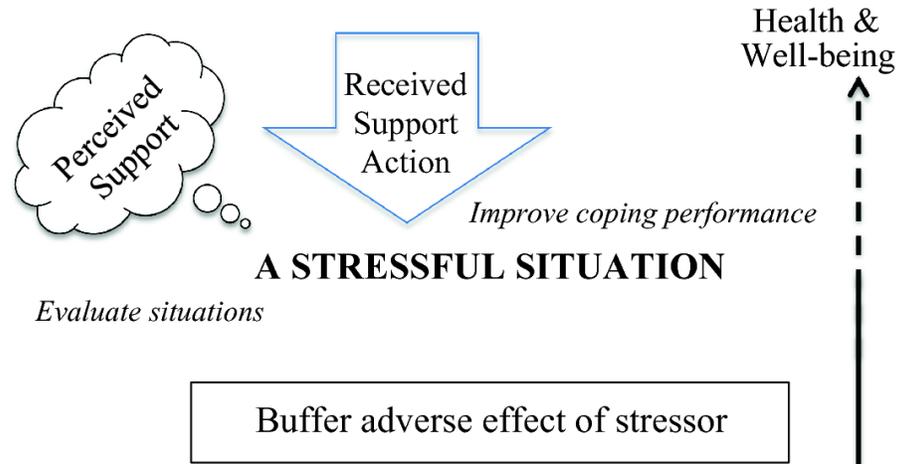
Figure 2-2. Understanding social support (Lam, 2019)

There are differing arguments as to the definitions and components of social

support. This study will utilize Albrecht and Adelman (1987) definition of social

support. It refers to 'verbal and non-verbal communication between recipients and

providers that reduces uncertainty about the situation, the self, the other, or the

relationship, and functions to enhance a perception of personal control in one's life

experience' (Albrecht and Adelman, 1987, p. 19). In an attempt to operationalize the

functions of social support in this study, three types of social support penned by House

(1981) will be used: (a) emotional, (b) informational, and (c) instrumental (most theorists

argued that House's [1981] fourth concept of appraisal support was essentially the same

as informational support). Figure 3 illustrates the conceptual framework for this study.
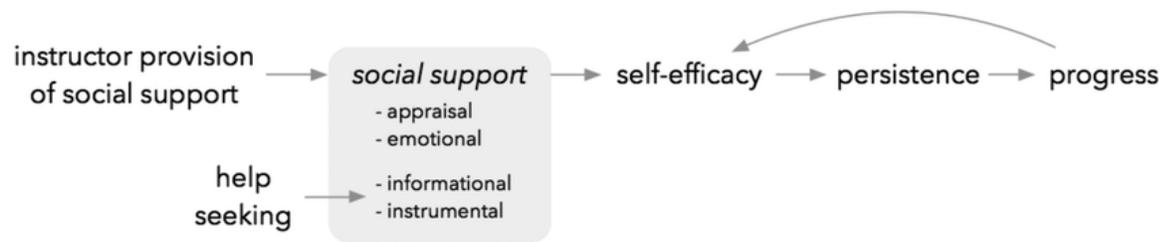
Figure 2-3. Facilitating online social support (Harburg et al., 2018)

Theoretically, Harburg et al. (2018) found that the incorporation of four types of social support (appraisal, emotional, informational, and instrumental) into blended and online communities where project-based learning is present had an impact on the behaviors of students. Specifically, students sought help and bonded to the community (Harburg et al., 2018). Through blended coaching techniques and the use of social support, instructors, coaches and external supporters can help motivate teams.

Types of Social Support

Social support has several taxonomies, based on how and what type of support is given. **Emotional Support** provides empathy, trust and care (House, 1981). Emotional support also involves providing warmth and nurturance to another individual and reassuring them that they are a valuable person for whom others care (Taylor, 2011). **Informational support** occurs when one individual helps another to understand a stressful event better and to ascertain what resources and coping strategies may be needed to deal with it (Taylor, 2011). An example of informational support is advice, problem solving or recommendations. **Instrumental support** involves the provision of tangible assistance such as services, financial assistance, and other specific aid or goods (Taylor, 2011). Providing a meal to someone in need or allowing a college roommate to carpool home for the holidays are examples of instrumental support. See Figure 2-4 for an

illustration of each of the three types of social support. Reference Table 2-1 for the

application of the types of social support in relation to the conceptual framework being

used for this study.

Perception is a large proponent of social support, independent of the varying

taxonomies. While there are many interpretations of the term, perception can be

commonly defined as the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the

senses (Oxford Press, 2018). Through memory, expectation, and a sensory record of

learned things (Gregory, 1987), perception significantly impacts a person's view of social

support. An individual that perceives being cared for combined with the availability of

support from social networks leads to a sense of comfort and being valued (Taylor,

2011).

Social support is measured by function and structure. Wills (1998) posits social

support is measured through the structure of socially supportive networks or the functions

network members provide. Structural social support, often referred to as social

integration, involves the number of social relationships in which an individual is involved

and the structure of interconnections among those relationships (Taylor, 2011). As

outlined in Figure 2-4, measures of structural social support take into consideration the

number of relationships or social roles a person has, the frequency of contact with various

network members, and the density and interconnectedness of relationships among the

network members (Taylor, 2011). Adversely, when attempting to measure the support of

a specific act, researchers define this as functional support which is typically assessed in

terms of the specific functions (informational, instrumental, and emotional) that a specific

member may serve for a target individual; it is often assessed in the context of coping with a particular stressor (Taylor, 2011).
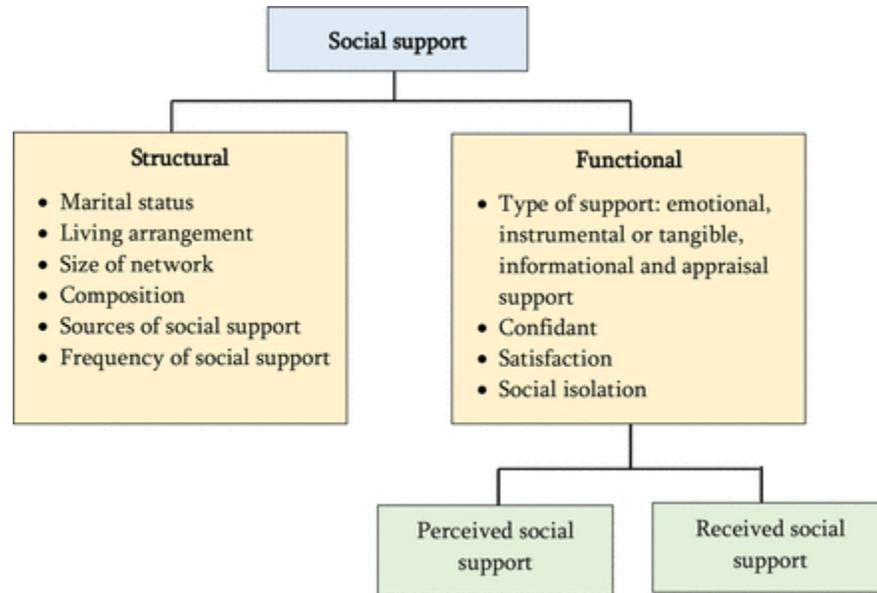
Figure 2-4. Conceptual framework of social support (adapted from Berkman et al., 2000; Cobbs, 1976; Schwarzbach et al., 2014)

The act of support can be performed by individuals sharing social and community ties (Allen et al., 2002), as well as a partner, relatives, friends and coworkers. During times of association, individuals in groups benefit from social affiliation when levels of stress are present (Taylor, 2011). Previous research dealing with mental and physical health concludes the presence of others has long been known to foster adjustment during times of stress (Taylor, 2011).

Considered a special interest within a large interdisciplinary group focused on psychosocial factors, social support can also be applied to various mental, physical health and educational fields. In the context of education, research confirms a strong correlation between college students and academic stress (Brougham et al., 2009; Chiauzzi et al, 2008; Dahlin et al., 2005; Darling et al., 2007; Dyson & Renk, 2006; Economos et al.,

2008; Far et al., 2017; Landow, 2006; Robotham, 2008; Wilks & Spivery, 2010). Stress as a result of the demands of independent learning at a distance can be lessened by receiving support from others in similar circumstances, easing tension and producing positive results. Social support is widely acknowledged as a critical resource for managing stressful occurrences with well over 1,100 research and clinical literatures documented (Taylor, 2011), however there is an insufficient amount of research regarding social support and online education.

Community of Inquiry

Developed during a Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research project entitled "A Study of the Characteristics and Qualities of Text-Based Computer Conferencing for Educational Purposes", Community of Inquiry (CoI) has been a growing collection of studies over the past 20 years (CoI, 2020). Developed by Dr. D. Randy Garrison, professor emeritus at the University of Calgary, Dr. Garrison has published extensively on teaching and learning in adult, higher and distance education contexts (CoI, 2020). Collaboratively, researchers Dr. Marti Cleveland-Innes and Dr. Norm Vaughan helped to develop the CoI Framework as depicted in Figure 2-5.

Garrison's (2010) CoI theory suggests the elements of online education contribute to students' educational experiences. The learning process in an online environment has shifted from information acquisition, to constructing knowledge collaboratively, due to the ease of internet access and emerging technologies (Garrison, 2010). CoI supports the process of online students' thinking collaboratively to construct knowledge. It is here that focus should be on the "process of thinking and learning in a connected world" (Garrison, 2010, p. 8). Online instructors must now create and support a learning process rooted in

critical thinking, while facilitating a sense of community, socially, through emerging

communication technologies.

       The social learning process is no stranger to education history. Hailed as one of

the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century, John Dewey contributed a massive

number of works toward the role of inquiry in human experience (Dewey and Alexander,

1998). Dewey (1933) focused on inquiry as the social process of solving problems and

resolving dilemmas, and believed that inquiry is central to reflective thinking (1938),

being indispensable to the educational transaction (Garrison, 2010).   This perspective of

collaborative learning is one based from practical inquiry, generalized through the

scientific method (Garrison, 2010).

       A few decades later extending the works of Dewey, a researcher by name of

Matthew Lipman (2003) coined the term "community of inquiry". Lipman (2003)

believed critical reflection was important in the learning process, but must be set forth

socially. The reality of knowledge is one where the learning process and construction of

meaning is facilitated through collaboration of thinking in groups, not by groups. From a

technological perspective, the community is defined by the identity of participants in the

group, not the physical location (Garrison, 2010).

Community of Inquiry (CoI) Framework

       The CoI framework "is a process model that focuses on free inquiry where

participants are not constrained by confirmation bias and where they learn as much about

the inquiry process as they do about the content being studied" (Garrison, 2010, p. 55).

That said, students have an opportunity for a deeper learning process, where knowledge

is cultivated through inquiry within a digitally-connected community. CoI factors in the

use of technology for digitally helping create and sustain discourse, access to and

questioning knowledge. Using technological resources to facilitate the learning process

helps educators "take advantage of the connectivity of the digital world and actively

engage learners in collaborative thinking and learning experiences" (Garrison, 2010, p.

54). Because inquiry is a collaborative dynamic, educators must create a supportive

environment of open communication that reflects the contextual conditions for thinking

and learning collaboratively (Garrison, 2010).

As illustrated in Figure 2-5 (also reference Appendix D: CoI Concept Map), the

CoI framework consists of three interdependent core factors: Cognitive Presence, Social

Presence, and Teaching Presence. Each element is crucial to a positive online

educational experience.
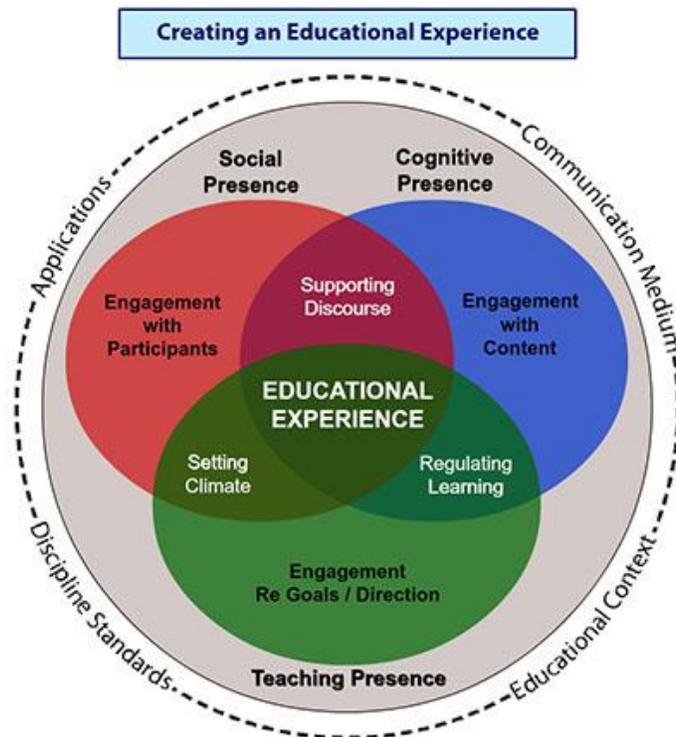
Figure 2-5. Community of inquiry (CoI) framework

Cognitive presence is the extent to which the participants in any particular configuration of a community of inquiry are able to construct meaning through sustained communication (Garrison et al., 2001). Cognitive presence is the core thinking and learning element. The model operationalizes cognitive presence for the purpose of developing a tool to assess critical discourse and reflection (Garrison et al, 2001). Cognitive presence attempts to assess the complex process of constructing meaning reflectively and negotiating understanding collaboratively (Garrison, 2010).

Social presence is defined as "the ability of participants to identify with the group or course of study, communicate purposefully in a trusting environment, and develop personal and affective relationships progressively by way of projecting their individual personalities" (Garrison, 2011, p. 34). While projecting their personal characteristics into the community of inquiry, learners are then showcasing themselves as 'real people' (Rourke et al., 2001). An important component to social presence is the availability and use of instructional technologies supporting the learning process. These digital systems allow for participant engagement, so it be student-student or student-teacher interactions, therefore supporting the social learning process. These applications support discourse between social and cognitive presence, while setting the climate between social and teaching presence.

The final CoI element, teaching presence, is considered "the key to a successful and sustained community of inquiry" (Garrison, 2010, p. 61). Teaching presence is defined as the design, facilitation, and direction of cognitive and social processes for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful and educational worthwhile learning outcomes (Anderson et al., 2001). Because the facilitation of learning requires leadership,

teaching presence sets the climate of the community through engagement and providing direction. When discipline standards are set by an instructor, an effective and efficient process will result within the community. Of the three factors that help to define teaching presence, "facilitation and direction are essential to ensure that discourse does not prematurely converge or inappropriately diverge" (Garrison, 2010, p. 61).

This study will focus on teaching presence and its three categories: (a) design and organization, the planning and preparation of the online course; (b) facilitating discourse, aspects of motivating, encouraging, and promoting student learning; and (c) direct instruction, the teacher's leadership and knowledge. Table 2 provides information on the type of social support, its definition and characteristics, the community of inquiry teacher presence concept that aligns with each social support type, and the evaluation items that correspond to these concepts.

Table 1. Types of social support

Type of Social Support	Definition	Community of Inquiry Parallel Concept	Course Evaluation Example Item
Emotional	Displaying and providing acceptance, care, nurturance, encouragement, and warmth to enhance an individual's feelings of self-worth, self-value, and self-esteem in the face of a problem	Facilitating discourse	The instructor treated me with respect The instructor was fair The instructor motivated me to try harder
Informational	Providing well-informed opinions, advice, affirmation, and constructive feedback as well as knowledge and information, to enhance an individual's understanding of a problem	Direct Instruction	The instructor demonstrated adequate knowledge of the subject matter The instructor explained the material clearly The instructor provided timely feedback on my work
Instrumental	Providing tangible, material resources and services (including time) to resolve an individual's problem or reduce an individual's stress associated with a problem	Design and organization	The instructor was well-prepared for the class The instructor was available during specific office hours or by appointment

Benefits of the CoI Framework

The CoI framework benefits learners by recognizing most people are instinctually

social, thus a motivation exists to connect socially to others (Garrison, 2010). Postulated

in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1970) human motivation is classified as

striving to fill one of five basic needs: 1) physiological, 2) safety, 3) belongingness and

love, 4) esteem (being valued), and 5) self-actualization. "It is clear that a sense of

belonging contributes significantly to motivation" (Garrison, 2010, p. 61). Because

motivation is an emotional response that can influence thinking in a community of

inquiry, it can influence the initiation of and sustain the dynamics within the cognitive

presence (Garrison, 2010).

When learners construct meaning in a community of inquiry, this intrinsically

triggers an emotional reward. Learners feel valued when recognized for their community

contributions. Educators can help facilitate this through a teaching presence of

engagement of goals, direction and feedback. Garrison (2011) found "learning in a

community of inquiry can be inherently satisfying" for students, and "leads to perceived

learning" (p. 61). "The key for sustained motivation and emotional satisfaction is for

participants to identify with the purpose of the learning community and experience a

climate where they feel they are valued participants" (Garrison, 2010, p. 61).

History of Distance Education

The mid-20th century led to a shift in how education was delivered and assessed,

notably through correspondence learning (Baath, 1980; Bittner & Mallory, 1933; Childs,

1949; 1960; 1966; Holmberg, 1960; 1967; Feig, 1932; Wedemeyer, 1961; 1965). The

interests of policy makers and administrators increased as distance education began

directly impacting education and training. Transitioning from a traditional means of

instruction to computer-mediated instruction meant college instructors began to focus on

professional development to equip them with knowledge in online instruction. Distance

education became an opportunity for continuing education for those from all walks of life

including college instructors, medical professionals, corporate leaders and members of

the armed forces (Moore, 2013).

Leaders in distance education research, Moore and Kearsley (2012), define

distance education as "teaching and planned learning in which the teaching normally

occurs in a different place from learning, requiring communication through technologies,

as well as special institutional organization" (p. 2). Moore (2013) points out that the key

word "normally" emphasizes "that in distance education that use of communications

technology is not an option but is a defining characteristic of the teaching-learning

relationship, unlike its use in the classroom where the same technology is ancillary to the

teacher's presence" (p. xv). Moore (2013) also notes within the definition, "planned

learning", should be considered a two-sided transaction where institutions possess the

needed resources in order to deliver effective and efficient teaching for learners to receive

knowledge. Lastly, the term "organization", broadly, speaks to communications

technology, program design, facilitation of learning, administrative and organizational

policies (Moore, 2013).

Historically, online education has transcended through the decades. Pioneers

William H. Lightly and John S. Noffsinger were the first to develop a systematic

description of American correspondence in 1926 (Black, 2013). Years later, a

distinguished researcher from Kansas State University, Gayle B. Childs, received a grant

from the Ford Foundation that launched the first study of educational television (Moore,

2013). As a means to advance research, in the 1960s the Correspondence Education

Research Project (CERP) founded the Correspondence Study Division (CSD) and the

National University Extension Association (NUEA) Their collaborative report was the

first study that found correspondence instruction to be as effective as face-to-face (Black,

2013). The focus on correspondence study unveiled the need for further research in the

areas of communication mediated technologies (electronic mail), course structure, and curriculum design that engage and connect learners.

Distance education research became a global phenomenon. The first publicly funded degree-granting distance teaching university, Open University of the United Kingdom (UKOU), was built on Wedemeyer's communications media research (Wedemeyer & Najem, 1969). Wedemeyer suggested programs were of a higher quality when a variety of communications were used as opposed to a single communications medium or individuals working alone (Black, 2013). This research study revolutionized the concept of distance education in the United Kingdom.

Swedish Börje Holmberg and German Otto Peters helped pioneer distance education theory. In 1960, Holmberg initiated the first European awareness of correspondence study as a pedagogical methodology (Black, 2013). Peters served as a researcher at the Education Center of Berlin and later at the German Institute for Distance Education Research. Peters' research of more than thirty countries and their systems assisted in the development of distance education (Black, 2013). Further research from Wedemeyer (1971) defined *independent study* and helped serve as a foundation for the theory of transactional distance education in the United States (Moore, 1972). Moreover, Moore (1972) published his research on the theory of learner autonomy which was a springboard for future research on self-directed learners who use correspondence study (Black, 2013).

Research in distance education gained steam in the late 20th century. The effectiveness of distance education, educational reforms and socio-economic classifications in developing countries, increased funding for research, and the birth of

large single-mode distance institutions employing specialist academic researchers were all key areas of research (Black, 2013). Initial research focused on comparisons between traditional courses versus mediated distance delivery and the effectiveness of technology and media (Black, 2013); notable distance education research centers began focusing on other areas such as UKOU early investigations into under-represented and disadvantaged populations, resistance to distance education and instructional effectiveness (Glatter & Wedell, 1971; McIntosh et al., 1976).

As research in distance education expanded, so did the contextual opportunities in which practitioners convened. Founded by Moore in 1988, the First American Symposium on Research in Distance Education was sponsored by the American Center for the Study of Distance Education (ACSDE) at the Pennsylvania State University. This event established a national agenda on distance education research (Black, 2013). Much scholarship was compiled in Moore's (1990) book, *Contemporary Issues in American Distance Education.* The ACSDE later published the *American Journal for Distance Education*.

Supporting international efforts, "Research in Distance Education: Setting a Global Agenda for the Nineties" was an event that presented a global perspective on distance education research. Sponsored by the ACSDE and the International Council of Correspondence Education (ICCE), participants from five continents proposed a global research agenda comprised of:

(a) Research on computer conferencing; (b) meta-analyses of researchers' values and assumptions; (c) comparative institutional studies; (d) analyses of students' life experiences; (e) methods and technologies of small island

countries; (f) representation of women in distance education materials; and (g)

influences of planning and personal, institutional, instructional contexts on

student performance (Paulsen & Pinder, 1990, pp. 83 – 84).

While these and other research centers are still in existence, looming threats

specific to aspects of distance education were felt: (a) limited funding, (b) retirement of

founding pioneers, and (c) the co-option of distance education research questions by a

wider population of academic specialists such as computer scientists and information

technologists (Black, 2013).

Because technology is ever-changing and continuously impacts teaching and

learning, it is still important that researchers continue revising the topic. Cleveland-Innes

and Garrison (2010) worked to revise content that positioned how distance education is a

"major player" in education broadly. "Higher education is facing multiple demands for

change where distance education, as an alternative pedagogical and delivery approach,

can be considered in response to some of these demands. For example, distance

education, appropriately designed and delivered, is the closest we can come to

completing the iron triangle of education where all three elements of access, affordability

and quality can operate in tandem" (Cleveland-Innes and Garrison, 2010).

Historically Black Colleges and Universities

John Dalberg-Action (1877) stated: "The most certain test by which we judge

whether a country is really free is the amount of security enjoyed by minorities".

Historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) are degree-granting institutions

established prior to 1964 with the principal mission of educating Black Americans

(NCES, 2015). The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, requires HBCUs to be

"accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting agency or association determined by the Secretary [of Education] to be a reliable authority as to the quality of training offered or is, according to such an agency or association, making reasonable progress toward accreditation" (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2007). In 2002, President George W. Bush's executive order addressed the need for HBCUs to advance the development of the nation's full human potential and equal opportunity to higher education; he also sought the availability of federal programs to these institutions to assist in leveling the playing field. These programs included infrastructure development and acquisitions for instruction and research; student and faculty doctoral fellowships and faculty development, domestic and international faculty and student exchanges and study abroad; undergraduate and graduate student internships; and summer, part-time, and permanent employment opportunities (USDOE, 2007).

To build on this history, the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Executive Order No. 13532 (2010) signed by President Barack Obama, was established to work with a range of public and private departments, agencies, offices, philanthropic organizations, and other entities. The purpose of the order was "to increase the capacity of HBCUs to provide the highest quality education to a greater number of students" (USDOE, 2015). The national goal was to promote excellence, innovation, and sustainability in HBCUs.

Noted as "ebony towers" by Jones and Davenport (2018), African American students gravitate to HBCUs as a sense of empowerment to "express their social and cultural heritage as part of the college experience" (p. 60). HBCUs are credited for their vital role in providing education in an era where African Americans were not given an

equal opportunity at postsecondary institutions. Much of these racial tensions were prevalent in the South during legal segregation in the time period from the Civil War to the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision (Bobo & Fox, 2003). It was rare and unheard of for African Americans to be permitted to pursue a college education prior to the Civil War. Years later, HBCUs struggled to be established, sustained and prosperous. During the Civil War era, most HBCUs were private and funded solely through the efforts of northern White missionaries and multi-ethnic religious groups (Albritton, 2012). Although not large in number, the growth of HBCUs have shown to be the "primary responsibility for the social, political, economic, personal and educational development of the black communities" (Scott, 2000, p. 263).

The first three institutions established for African Americans prior to 1862 were Cheyney University, Lincoln University and Wilberforce College. Congress enacted the First Morrill Act in 1862 which established an endowment fund for land grant colleges, one in every state accessible to every citizen, from the sale of public lands. A few years later, Morrill Act funds were distributed to the states with the intention of fostering educational opportunity for all students, especially newly freed Blacks (NCES, 2004). While the authorization provided a vehicle to assure equal educational access for all citizens, Southern states did not take full advantage of its benefits. Black students were not provided equal educational access until 1890 when Congress passed the Second Morrill Act (AAMU, 1990). This gave birth to the historically black land grant colleges and universities, commonly referred to as the 1890 institutions and located in the sixteen Southeastern states (AAMU, 1990). "In 1900, nearly 4,500 African Americans were

enrolled at HBCUs; by 1938, they numbered 28,000; and by 1953, more than 78,000"

(Jones & Davenport, 2018, p. 60).

HBCUs have a history of challenges. With looming fiscal instability as a result of

cuts from federal and private entities and decreasing enrollment (see Figure 2-6), HBCUs

are driven to consider innovative practices through alternative modalities. Although most

HBCUs are 4-year institutions in the southern United States, they represent a diverse set

of institutions in 19 states, the District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands (NCES,

2004). Although the number of accredited HBCUs has declined since the 1930s (121 to

101), these public and private institutions of higher education are at an all-time peak, both

in terms of fiscal operations and student success. Of these 101 institutions, 27 offer

doctorates, 52 offer master's, and 83 offer bachelor degree programs (NCES, 2019).

In 2015, nearly 300,000 students attended an HBCU

Total enrollment at historicaly black colleges or universities, in thousands

Year	Enrollment
1980	234
1990	257
2000	276
2010	327
2015	293

10 largest HBCUs, by 2015 enrollment

Institution	Enrollment
St. Philip's College	11,200
North Carolina A&T State	10,900
Howard	10,000
Florida A&M	9,900
Jackson State	9,800
Tennessee State	9,200
Texas Southern	9,000
Prairie View A&M	8,300
North Carolina Central	8,000
Morgan State	7,700

Figure 2-6. Enrollment in historically black colleges and universities (Jones & Davenport, 2018) Source: Pew Research, 2017

Review of Instructor Social Support and Student Performance Literature

The effect instructor social support has on students' adjustment to college and academic performance is an important empirical topic that has received a high degree of scholarly attention. Of the contemporary studies that exist, the overwhelming majority have focused on the traditional classroom setting. There is consistent evidence in this body of literature that instructor social support significantly predict numerous academic-related college student outcomes, including student adjustment to academic stress (Far et al., 2017; Wilks & Spivery, 2010), academic wellbeing (Awang et al., 2014; Ruthig et al.; Perry, 2009), academic engagement (Klem & Connell, 2004), academic motivation and self-directed learning (Burt et al., 2013; Lunyk-Child et al., 2001), school and course satisfaction (Tompkins et al., 2016), and retention (Casstevens et al., 2012; Kelly et al., 2012; McEnroe-Petitte, 2011). In these studies, the benefits of faculty social support on student academic-related outcomes were evident among diverse groups of students, including traditional and first-generation college students, students with different majors , and undergraduate and graduate students. However, all studies focused on the traditional classroom and were conducted with predominantly White students or students of the ethnicity specific to the country under examination which limits the applicability of study findings to African American college students taking online courses.

Findings from the empirical literature on instructor social support and student academic achievement are more equivocal in nature than those found in studies examining links between instructor support and academic-related outcomes. A substantial number of relevant studies have been conducted outside the United States. Ugwu (2017) found a significant relationship between perceived faculty support and GPA in a study

with 270 Nigerian first-year college students. Similar findings were noted in the study by Tinajeroet al. (2020) conducted with 149 college freshmen in Spain and Abdullah et al. (2014) in a study with 250 college freshmen in Malaysia. However, these studies were all conducted with college freshman. Different results were found in studies by De la Inglesia et al. (2017) and bin Juadiet al. (2019).In a study conducted with 760 Argentinean freshmen, sophomores, juniors, and seniors, De la Inglesia et al. (2017) found that instructor social support was significantly associated with academic achievement (measured by the number of classes passed versus failed) for females but not males. Findings from Bin Juadi et al. (2019)'s study with 4,281 Malaysian junior and senior business students indicated differential effects of gender and prior academic achievement. The authors found that instructor social support was significantly associated with GPA only among high-achieving female students; instructor social support was not linked to GPA for male students or low-performing students (bin Juadi et al., 2019). These findings suggest that faculty social support may evince a stronger effect on freshmen college students, female college students, and students who are high-achieving. They do not, however, provide any insight with regard to student ethnicity or online education.

There has been substantially less empirical examination of the relationship between faculty social support and student achievement in American samples. Interestingly, the literature that does exist has provided pertinent information with regard to African American students. In a study with 454 Missouri college students, Smith et al. (2017) found that faculty social support was significantly related to GPA for White but not ethnic minority (58% African American) students. However, in a sample of 336

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ethnically diverse (48% African American) first-year college students attending an American southeastern university, Hurd et al. (2016) found significant links between 'natural mentoring' from faculty and student GPA for ethnic minority students. Moreover, the authors found that depression acted as a mediator between the two: higher levels of faculty support contributed to lower levels of depression, which in turn led to higher GPA (Hurd et al., 2016). Other studies utilizing students of color have documented the benefits of faculty social support on student achievement and related outcomes. In a study focusing on African American and Latino college students attending selective colleges, Baker (2013) found that faculty support was significantly associated with higher academic achievement for both ethnic minority groups. Moreover, in an earlier related study by Constantine et al. (2002), results showed that higher levels of perceived faculty social support led to increased perceptions of student cultural congruity in a sample of 151 African American and Latino students.

While "learner support services are … a critical component" for online student academic success and persistence (Ludwig-Hardeman & Dunlap, 2003, p. 1) and "adding the human touch" to the online classroom has been recognized as a necessary skill for online educators (Glenn, 2018, p. 381), there has been very little examination as to whether faculty social support evinces positive effects on student performance within the context of online education. Studies have shown that the quality and strength of online instructor support is significantly predictive of student satisfaction (Eom & Ashill, 2016; Lee, 2020). There is furthermore empirical evidence linking online faculty engagement and support to student course engagement (Husset al., 2015), metacognition (Reingoldet al., 2008), and student persistence (Gaylan, 2013; Moskal et al., 2006) in the online

educational environment. However, a review of literature yielded no study that has examined whether online instructor social support is linked to student academic performance. The closest study to address this topic was conducted by Wei et al. (2014) with 381 Chinese students in online courses. The authors found that increased use of learner-instructor interactive tools was significantly related to higher course grade (Wei et al., 2014). In summary, there exists a gap in the empirical literature regarding the effects of instructor social support on the achievement of African American online students attending HBCUs.

Summary

Chapter Two presented a thorough review of literature surrounding the history of distance education and historically black colleges and universities, or HBCUs. We learned that the landscape of higher education is ever evolving due to technological advancements and innovative approaches. HBCUs, while slow to action, are now moving from resisting to embracing online learning (Jones & Davenport, 2018). A decrease in fiscal support from federal and private entities and declining enrollment have driven HBCUs to consider innovative practices through alternative modalities.

Post-secondary students of the 21st century begin their college career with a level of expectation in utilizing instructional technologies. HBCUs view online learning as a means to help grow enrollment (Jones & Davenport, 2018; NCES, 2015). For these reasons and more, educational leaders and policy makers rush to create policies to support the demands of students learning at a distance. Due to the stress caused by college students experience (Brougham et al., 2009; Chiauzzi et al, 2008; Dahlin et al., 2005; Darling et al., 2007; Dyson & Renk, 2006; Economos et al., 2008; Far et al., 2017;

Landow, 2006; Robotham, 2008; Wilks & Spivery, 2010), when learning at a distance, anxiety can heighten due to feelings of isolation.

Instructors are learning new ways to build community through inquiry in online environments to support students' academic achievement. Community of Inquiry, or the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2001) conceptualizes cognitive, social, and teaching presence and how these factors impact online student success. Through the application of Social Support theory, while rooted in psychological and sociological perspectives, when applied to an educational context, instructors that exhibit emotional, informational and instrumental support impact student performance. Past research on instructor support and academic-related outcomes point to White, Asian and Nigerian students, but none focused on online students at HBCUs. As a basis for further investigation, Chapter Three will consider the CoI framework (Garrison et al., 2001) and provide the methodology for which this study will employ.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Between 2016 and 2018, the proportion of college students taking online courses has consistently grown while enrollment in higher education has declined (Lederman, 2018). Data has shown that over 30% of students take at least one online course per semester and over 15% are enrolled exclusively in online course (Lederman, 2018). However, studies have shown that online education has lagged at HBCUs when compared to other institutions of higher education (Flowers et al., 2012). In addition, a significantly lower number of African American students (attending both HBCUs and non-HBCUs) take online courses as compared to their peers (Flowers et al., 2014). As such, there has been limited research on instructor social support and its effects on student learning outcomes in online courses offered at HBCUs. It is crucial to understand which instructional social support factors help to determine why there is a breakdown in retention and degree attainment, particularly among ethnic minority students (Flowers et al., 2012, 2014).

The purpose of this quantitative non-experimental correlation study is to ascertain if online instructor social support is significantly related to course performance among approximately 300 students who took online courses at an HBCU in Central Texas during 2015-2018. The study will focus on three types of instructor social support which are the three predictor variables of the study: emotional, informational and instrumental social support. The study has one criterion (dependent) variable: student performance in an

online course setting, operationalized as expected grade in the course. This study poses

three research questions, each having associated null and alternative hypotheses.

RQ1. Does instructor emotional social support (facilitating discourse) significantly influence student online course performance in an online course setting among undergraduate students attending a historically Black college/university (HBCU)?

H1o. Instructor emotional social support (facilitating discourse) does not significantly influence student performance in an online course setting among undergraduate students attending a historically Black college/university (HBCU).

H1a. Instructor emotional social support (facilitating discourse) does significantly influence student performance in an online course setting among undergraduate students attending a historically Black college/university (HBCU).

RQ2. Does instructor informational social support (direct instruction) significantly influence student performance in an online course setting among undergraduate students attending a historically Black college/university (HBCU)?

H2o. Instructor informational social support (direct instruction) does not significantly influence student performance in an online course setting among undergraduate students attending a historically Black college/university (HBCU).

H2a. Instructor informational social support (direct instruction) does

significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU).

RQ3. Does instructor instrumental social support (design and organization)

significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU)?

H3o. Instructor instrumental social support (design and organization) does

not significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU).

H3a. Instructor instrumental social support (design and organization) does

significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU).

Population and Sample

In support of research surrounding minority online student success and social

support, the selected site location was an HBCU located in Texas. The institution dates

back to 1875 when the Congregationalists (now known as the United Church of Christ)

worked with the "freedmen," the descendants of slavery, to establish a secondary school.

The college became the sole provider of higher education for African-Americans in

Central Texas until the landmark case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which

launched the period of desegregation (Huston-Tillotson University, 2015). The university is a small, private not-for-profit, faith-based liberal arts institution affiliated with The United Methodist Church and the United Church of Christ. The university is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). The mission of the university is to nurture a legacy of leadership and excellence in education, connecting knowledge, power, passion, and values. The institution, and all those within, take pride in embodying five Core Values of IDEAL, or Integrity, Diversity, Excellence, Accountability and Leadership. Within the past five years, the university has renovated key buildings to help modernize its educational facilities without compromising the natural beauty of the 29-acre campus (Annual Report, 2012).

Fall 2018 enrollment data indicated a total student population of 1,119 (62% female, 38% male). The student population is comprised of approximately 510 undergraduate students who reside on campus and over 609 students who identify as commuter students, high school dual credit earners, or online learners. The HBCU student body is diverse: 65% African American, 27% Hispanic, 5% White, and over 2% international students. The majority of students are classified as freshmen ($N = 364$; first-time freshmen = 223, and freshmen = 141). There are approximately 247 sophomores, 253 juniors and 219 seniors. The mean age of students is 26.7. Seventy percent of students are eligible for financial aid. The university saw a 47% increase in the total number of bachelor degrees awarded and the second highest 4-year graduation rate of 20% for the 2015 cohort, compared to 21% for the Fall 2014 cohort.

The university offers over 24 undergraduate degree programs, a separate Adult Degree Program, and two graduate degree programs. The top 3 ranked programs are: 1) Kinesiology, 2) Business Administration, and 3) Psychology. The student to faculty ratio is 16:1, with the average class size 17. Within the ranks of the 42 faculty, nearly 80% have the terminal degree in their teaching fields. The university has base tuition and fee structure across the board, of which both local, out-of-district, out-of-state, and international students pay $12,569 for tuition, and $2,084 in fees (IR, 2019).

The university earned major academic achievements beginning Fall 2015, one of which was successfully applied and received approval by SACSCOC to start a hybrid Masters of Business Administration program (60% online). This promoted the university to be profiled as a graduate-degree awarding institution. In 2018, the university opened its first off-site location, the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation (CEI). The CEI offers entrepreneurial education, incubator services, and supports women and minorities launch new ventures through classroom instructions and experiential learning.

To support technological advancements and the teaching and learning efforts taking place in both academic and business units, the university erected The Center for Academic Innovation and Transformation (CAIT) in 2018. The CAIT is offers robust enrichment programs that help to enhance the research, professional development, and performance of those student servicing entities. One of the CAIT's objectives is to provide ongoing opportunities and positive educational experiences for both faculty and staff that would address known issues with retention. A major accomplishment of the CAIT is the successful management of the Community Education Initiative with Apple Inc. Through this partnership, the CAIT helped to increase technology by allocating

nearly $205,000 (fair market value) in Apple hardware throughout campus, such establishing two new MAC labs to support online and correspondence education, and student research. The partnership also developed the Golden Apple Teacher Program by which 13 full-time faculty were selected to incorporate Apple resources into traditional and online curriculum. The Golden Apple Teacher Program is designed to inspire and support innovations in teaching and learning, through incorporation of Apple Teacher™ resources that impact instructional technology, research, service and improvements in student engagement. Program tenants center around Apple Teacher Resources, Teaching Innovation, Service, Research and Engagement.

To help grow an online presence, the CAIT positioned the university with Quality Matters and co-facilitated the launch of the new learning management system, Canvas summer of 2019. The CAIT manages the certification of over 26 faculty and instructors in quality online course design through application of Quality Matters Higher Education Rubric. This program is critical in the adoption of a quality assurance process for online and blended learning. Further, the CAIT manages the Canvas Proficiency Assessment Certification, required of all faculty and instructors that teach in alternative modalities (e.g. online, blended, remote, etc.).

Power Analysis

In this study, the sample will be 317 students who took an online course and completed the IDEA evaluation (See Appendix F) for the course during 2015-2018 and represents the general population of students.

An *a priori* power analysis using G*Power (Faul et al., 2009) was conducted to determine the sample size needed for the study. As denoted in Table 3-1, the effect size

set to small ($f^2 = 0.05$), power was set to .90, and the level of significance set to $p <$ 0.05. The sample size needed for the study was determined to be $N = 288$.

Table 2. A priori power analysis findings

F tests – Linear multiple regression: Fixed model, R² increase		
Analysis:	A priori: Compute required sample size	
Input:	Effect size f²	= 0.05
	α err prob	= 0.05
	Power (1–β err prob)	= 0.90
	Number of tested predictors	= 3
	Total number of predictors	= 3
Output:	Noncentrality parameter λ	= 14.40
	Critical F	= 2.64
	Numerator df	= 3
	Denominator df	= 284
	Total sample size	= 288
	Actual power	= 0.90

Instrumentation

The instrument used to measure all study constructs was the Courseval/IDEA course evaluation (IDEA-CE), a short summative assessment instrument adapted for use by the HBCU as its primary end-of-course assessment tool. Courseval was first introduced to higher education in 1997, leveraging both qualitative and quantitative methods to empower academic administrators to uncover actionable insights and make confident decision (Campuslabs, 2017). In 2017, Campuslabs acquired Courseval to further strengthen the "evolving needs for teaching and learning in higher education" (Campuslabs, 2017, p. 1).

The IDEA course evaluation is an adaptation of the IDEA Teaching Essentials Instrument (IDEA-TEI), a student rating of instruction tool developed by The IDEA Center, a non-profit higher educational assessment and research center founded at Kansas

State University in 1975. The purpose of the IDEA-TEI is to collect course feedback

from students which instructors may use to improve the course and instructional methods

(Benton & Li, 2015). The IDEA-TEI is theoretically-informed, with researchers utilizing

Chickering and Gamson's (1987) theory on the seven principles of good practice in

undergraduate education and Hativa's (2001) effective dimensions of teaching model.

The eight core instructional items on the IDEA-TEI emphasize the theoretically-relevant

elements of effective student-faculty interactions, communication and cooperation, active

learning, effective use of time, high expectations of students, and appreciation of student

learning differences. The eight items comprise the cognitive/instrumental and

affective/interpersonal dimensions of effective teaching as posited by Hative (2001). All

study variables were assessed using items or scales from the IDEA-CE. See Appendix E

for Courseval/IDEA survey instrument.

Predictor Variable 1: Instructor emotional social support. The predictor

variable of instructor emotional social support, an interval variable, will be assessed using

the 3-item instructor emotional social support scale on the IDEA course evaluation. The

three items that comprise this scale are "The instructor was fair", "The instructor

motivated me to try harder," and "The instructor treated me with respect" with Likert-

type response coding from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The total scale

score is derived from summing the item scores. Scale scores can range from 2 to 10

points, with a higher score denoting higher perceived levels of instructor emotional social

support. The instructor emotional social support scale has excellent inter-item reliability,

with Cronbach's alphas in the low to mid .90s (Benton & Li, 2015).

Predictor Variable 2: Instructor informational social support. The interval predictor variable of instructor informational social support will be assessed using the 3-item instructor informational social support scale on the IDEA course evaluation. The three items that comprise this scale are "The instructor provided timely feedback on my work," "The instructor demonstrated adequate knowledge of the subject matter," and "The instructor explained the material clearly." All three items have Likert-type response coding, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The total scale score is derived from summing the scores of the items. The scale scores can range from 4 to 20 points, and a higher score denotes higher perceived levels of instructor informational social support. The instructor emotional social support scale has sound inter-item reliability, with Cronbach's alphas in the high .80s to mid .90s (Benton & Li, 2015).

Predictor Variable 3: Instructor instrumental social support. The predictor variable of instructor instrumental social support, an interval variable, will be assessed using the 2-item instructor instrumental social support scale on the IDEA course evaluation. The two items that comprise this scale are "The instructor was well prepared for class" and "The instructor was available during specific hours or by appointment." The two items have Likert-type response coding, from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. The total scale score is derived from summing the scores of the items, and total scale scores can range from 2 to 10 points. A higher score on this scale indicates higher perceived levels of instructor instrumental social support. The instructor instrumental social support scale has sound inter-item reliability, with Cronbach's alphas in the.80s (Benton & Li, 2015).

Dependent Variable: Student online course performance. The dependent variable of student performance will be assessed using the ordinal-coded item, "What grade do you expect to earn in this course?" This item is coded where $1 = F$, $2 = D$, $3 = C$, $4 = B$, and $5 = A$.

Descriptive Variable 1: Student school year. One descriptive variable in this study is the student's school year, a categorical (nominal) variable coded where $1 = freshman$, $2 = sophomore$, $3 = junior$, and $4 = senior$.

Data Collection

Study data is gleaned from course evaluation archival data gathered for the 2015-2018 academic year at the university under examination. The university's Office of Institutional Planning, Research, and Assessment (OIPRA) is responsible for collecting, collating, organizing, and maintaining course evaluations and evaluation data. The OIPRA administrators require that students complete a course evaluation for every class completed during the semester and disseminates the evaluation form online using the password-protected and encrypted student online platform. Figure 3-1 illustrates the notification each student receives by email approximately three weeks prior to the end of the course.

In order to improve the quality of the class and provide a better learning experience for future students, please take time to complete your course evaluations. Your feedback regarding courses and instructors is very important to [university name]. Your comments make a difference in the planning and presentation of the curriculum. The summative results are reviewed by Deans, Department Chairs and instructors to inform institutional improvement processes.

You can complete the course evaluations through [university system]. Please log on to [university system] using your existing password and username. Once logging in, you will be able to access your course evaluations through the "Course Evaluation" link located in the left menu under the "Academics" tab. Your participation in the survey will be kept anonymous from the instructor and staff.

We ask that students evaluate all courses as quickly as possible. In appreciation of student participation, [university name] will give away one prize to a randomly selected course evaluation completer. To be entered into this raffle, you must complete your course evaluations. You will be able to add a raffle entry for each course evaluation you complete.

Thank you for your time and feedback in completing course evaluations!

Figure 3-1. Student course evaluation announcement (Retrieved from https://htu.edu/offices/institutional-research/course-evaluation-page)

If the student has not completed the evaluations one week after the end of the course, a reminder is sent. Students are required to complete the evaluation for all of their courses. OIPRA maintains all course evaluation completed forms and Excel files of evaluation data on password-protected encrypted data files.

Research Design

This study is quantitative in nature. Quantitative research is conducted by following the steps of the scientific method (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016). In quantitative research, theory informs the development of theoretically-aligned research questions which should have associated null and alternative hypotheses (Marczyk et al., 2017). The testing of hypotheses requires the collection of numerical data, often through the use of

validated survey instruments, as well as the statistical analysis of such data (Watson, 2015). The sample sizes of quantitative studies are typically large to ensure the correction interpretation of study findings (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016). The decision to fail or reject the null hypotheses in quantitative studies is determined by the significance of the statistical test(s) conducted for hypothesis testing (Marczyk et al., 2017). This study employs all steps of the scientific method and meets all of the requirements of a quantitative study. Social support theoretical frameworks helped to frame and inform the development of the study research questions and associated hypotheses. Study variables are operationally defined and measured using the validated IDEA course evaluation instrument, and the data collected are numerically coded. The type of statistical analysis used for hypothesis testing is linear regression (LR), with one LR conducted for each of the three research questions. Results from the LRs determine the decision to retain or fail to retain the null hypotheses.

There are different types of quantitative research design (Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016). The three types of designs are: (a) the true experimental design, which involves the manipulation of the independent variable and entails the use of both random selection of participants and random assignment to study conditions; (b) the quasi-experimental design, which involves the manipulation of the independent variable but lacks random selection of participants; and (c) the non-experimental design, which lacks random selection of study participants and has no study conditions (Patten & Newhart, 2017). The true experimental research design is the only quantitative approach in which causality can be inferred (Imai et al., 2013). In this study, the lack of conditions and the inability to

manipulate the independent variable preclude the use of an experimental or quasi-experimental design. This study employs a non-experimental design.

Non-experimental studies are typically classified as either *causal comparative* or *correlational* (Reio, 2016; Rumrill, 2004). Both of these types of non-experimental designs utilize variables that are 'naturally occurring' and cannot be manipulated (Asamoah, 2014). The designs do, however, differ on intent, variable type, and type of statistical analysis. The *causal-comparative* design is used to examine if independent variable groups have significantly different dependent variable scores (Schenker & Rumrill, 2004). In a causal comparative study, the independent variable is always categorical (nominal); the dependent variable is often continuous (e.g., interval or ratio) but can be categorical (nominal). The statistical tests commonly used in causal comparative studies are independent samples *t*-tests and analyses of variance (ANOVAs) (Schenker & Rumrill, 2004). The causal comparative design is not fitting for this study, as its intent is not to examine differences but will instead focus on relationships among study variables.

This study will employ the non-experimental *correlational* design. The intent of the correlational design is used to examine the direction, degree, and magnitude between two or more 'naturally occurring' variables (Asamoah, 2014; Rumrill, 2004). In a correlational study, the independent variable is called the *predictor* variable while the dependent variable is called the *criterion* variable. In a correlational study, the predictor and criterion variables are often continuous (i.e., interval or ratio) (Asamoah, 2014; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2016). This study will examine the strength and direction of the relationship between each of the three predictor variables (i.e., instructor informational,

emotional, and instrumental social support) and the criterion variable of course grade. It is important to make the distinction between the correlational research design and correlational statistics. Correlational studies do require the use of inferential statistics that test relationships (Asamoah, 2014; Reio, 2016), however correlational statistics, such as Pearson bivariate correlations, are too simplistic for such studies. Rigorous correlational studies employ more advanced statistical analyses of relationships, including linear regression models (e.g., linear regression, multiple linear regression, hierarchical multiple linear regression), logistic regression models, and path analysis (Asamoah, 2014; Reio, 2016). The statistic used in this study is linear regression (LR).

Data Treatment

The data used in this study comes from 300 students who took an online course and completed the Coureval/IDEA Student Rating of Instruction (SRI) during the 2015-2018 academic year.   The dataset will be transferred from an Excel file to an SPSS 26.0 data file, and SPSS 26.0 will be used to conduct all statistical analyses. The data analysis plan is sequential in nature.

Data cleaning and organization. The first step in the data analysis plan is data cleaning and organization, inclusive of adjustments made to the data set for missing data and the creation of the three social support scales. The researcher will then utilize the missing value analysis functions SPSS 26.0 to determine missing data status for the remaining cases (i.e., missing at random [MAR], missing completely at random [MCAR], or missing not at random [MNAR]). In accordance with statistical recommendations (Field, 2013; Garson, 2012), cases that have any MNAR data and/or cases missing 80% of data will be removed from the dataset. Linear interpolation will be employed to

replace MAR or MCAR data for cases missing less than or equal to 20% of data. Data organization will also entail the computation of the three instructor social support scales. The scale items will be summed to compute the scales.

Computation of descriptive statistics. The second step of the data analysis plan entails the computation of descriptive statistics for the study variables. The study has two descriptive variables, student school year and course department, both of which are categorical (nominal). The frequencies and percentages for each variable category will be computed and reported. Descriptive statistics calculated for the interval-coded instructor social support scales and the ordinal-coded course grade variable will include the mean, median, standard deviation, and minimum and maximum scores.

Testing of assumptions for linear regression (LR). Linear regression models have assumptions required of the data. The key assumptions to be tested in this study are reliable measurement of study constructs (i.e., inter-item reliability of scales) and lack of multicollinearity among the predictor variables (Ernst & Albers, 2017; Garson, 2012).

Reliable measurement. The first assumption tested is reliable measurement of study scales. The inter-item reliability of the three instructor social support scales will be determined by computing Cronbach's alphas, which measure how well items on the scale 'go together' (Bendermacher, 2010). A Cronbach's alpha between .70 and .79 is considered good, an alpha between .80 and .89 is considered very good, and a Cronbach's alpha of .90 or higher is considered excellent (Bendermacher, 2010).

Lack of multicollinearity between predictor variables. The second assumption tested was lack of multicollinearity among the predictor variables: the variables should not be so highly correlated with one another to the degree that they are measuring the

same constructs (Garson, 2012). *Multicollinearity*, also known as *near-linear dependence*, refers to the high correlation among predictor variables, indicating substantial overlapping variance (Daoud, 2017; Field, 2013). Multicollinearity can greatly distort MLR findings, and in some cases, can prevent the computation of the MLR statistic (Daoud, 2017; Field, 2013). Variance inflation factors should be computed to test for lack of multicollinearity. A VIF that exceeds 4 is indicative of multicollinearity (Garson, 2012).

Hypothesis testing. One multiple linear regression (MLR) was conducted to address each of the three research study questions. Study findings included MLR statistics regarding the overall model as well as each predictor-criterion relationship. The model F value and its associated significance level, with $p < .05$ considered significant, were reported, as was the model R^2 as a measure of effect size. An R^2 between .01 and .13 denotes a small effect size, an R^2 between .14 and .26 indicates a medium effect size, and an R^2 that is .27 or higher suggests a large effect size (Kotrlik et al., 2011). Results also included the standardized beta weight (β) and associated p values (with $p < .05$ indicating significance) for each predictor-criterion relationship. Findings will be augmented with tables.

Assumptions

There are several assumptions that should be considered in this research study. First, in compliance with the site location's accreditation agency, SACSCOC, institutional data processed and managed by the Office of Institutional Planning, Research and Assessment (OIPRA) should be assumed valid, accurate and reliable.

Because the data used was archival in nature, it is assumed OIPRA has performed the necessary reliability checks to help support the credibility of this study.

Second, one should assume that the archival data was derived from students that enrolled in an online course, not traditional. Outlined in the Instrumentation section of Chapter Three, data is compiled from student input on faculty instruction. The administration process, managed by OIPRA towards the end of each semester, is electronic and allows for student input anonymously. Once a student receives an invitation via email, they will use a unique, system-generated code for survey access. It is assumed those that completed the instrument did so in good faith.

It is assumed the theoretical models and conceptual framework applied as the foundation to this study are sound.

Any incentive announced by OIPRA (see Appendix F) to increase institutional responses is assumed by no means to influence student input, thoughts or perceptions of their online course and instructor.

Lastly, we should assume the students used in this study have established self-regulatory factors. "Within the CoI framework, the distributed responsibility from teaching presence has enormous implications for thinking and learning collaboratively, including the development of metacognitive awareness essential to monitor and manage thinking individually and collaboratively" (Garrison, 2010, p. 62). While this study did not focus on cognitive presence, this will be recommended following for continued research.

Delimitations

To support a study of this kind, a few delimitations were made. First, focusing on undergraduate research post-baccalaureate data was eliminated from the study. Because of a graduate program's structure and high grade requirements, the dependent variable "expected grade" and all data pertaining to post-baccalaureate students were eliminated from this study. This helps to prevent skewing of data. To further support the focal of this study, all survey data not coded as online (i.e. traditional and evening course, and adult degree program) were eliminated from the study. Lastly, two aspects of the CoI framework were eliminated from this study (Cognitive presence and Social presence) in order to focus on the student-instructor relationship and how these interactions impact online learning and academic performance. While these items are indeed important to the study of CoI and social support, this will serve as basis for further research. In addition, this research solely focusing on Teaching presence serves as a foundation, relevant to the institution.

Ethical Considerations

In compliance with Eastern Kentucky University's Office of Sponsored Programs and Institutional Review Board (IRB), this study meets all standards required for conducting such an investigation. Per Appendix A, permission was requested and approval granted by those that serve on the review board. In addition, a letter of support was provided from the site location's Institutional Review Board (see Appendix B). To uphold all ethical standards, each of the eight points outlined in the Responsibilities of the Principal Investigator will be followed.

Based upon the research design and methodology of this study, there is no potential harm to students. For this reason, informed consent of those observed was not necessary. All secondary data received lacks any personal identifiable data. Due to utilizing archival data, all data were provided anonymously.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. First, while using a secondary dataset, the researcher was limited to the variables presented in this study. For example, the research items tested for each predictor variable (e.g. "The instructor motivated me" for Emotional Social Support, "The instructor provided timely feedback." for Informational Social Support, etc.), were nearly identical to the CoI Survey Instrument (see Appendix C), however were still limiting. The researcher could not completely replicate all the variables found in the CoI Survey Instrument. While this does not compromise the study, it does limit the number of items being coded to each predictor variable based upon the institution's survey instrument.

In addition, due to using a secondary dataset and instrument, the limitation in reporting students' actual earned grade rather than expected as the dependent variable was presented. The dependent variable of student performance is being assessed using the ordinal-coded item, "What grade do you expect to earn in this course?" This item is coded where $1 = F$, $2 = D$, $3 = C$, $4 = B$, and $5 = A$. The opportunity to conduct an empirical assessment and investigate student's actual earned score would add to the richness of the study. In addition, other demographic data such as race and gender were not collected and could have been mitigating variables.

Summary

Chapter Three discussed the methodology of this study. An explanation of the population and sampling, instrumentation, data treatment, and research design was presented. Each predictor variable was discussed, as well the dependent variable. To support data analyses, the apparatus used was described. Lastly, assumptions, delimitations, ethical considerations, and limitations of the study were explained. Chapter Four will unveil the results of the study through hypotheses testing of each Research Question.

RESULTS

Introduction

With higher education institutions increasingly offering online courses (OLC, 2016), there has been an increased need to examine factors that promote student success within the online milieu. There has, however, been very little examination as to whether faculty social support evinces positive effects on online student performance (Eom & Aschill, 2016; Lee, 2020). The overall purpose of this quantitative non-experimental correlation study was to evaluate the effects of online instructor social support on perceived academic performance among students at a Southwestern HBCU. The study focused on the relationships between three types of instructor social support (i.e., emotional, informational and instrumental social support) and students' expected course grade. This study explored the following research questions:

RQ1. Does instructor emotional social support (facilitating discourse) significantly influence student online course performance in an online course setting among undergraduate students attending a historically Black college/university (HBCU)?

RQ2. Does instructor informational social support (direct instruction) significantly influence student performance in an online course setting among undergraduate students attending a historically Black college/university (HBCU)?

RQ3. Does instructor instrumental social support (design and organization)

significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU)?

The purpose of Chapter Four is to present and review study findings. The opening

sections of the chapter provide descriptive statistic information on the study variables,

including the descriptive variable of students' school year. The sections that follow

provide statistical results with regard to covariate testing and the testing of the lack of

multicollinearity assumption for multiple linear regression (MLR). The penultimate

section focuses on MLR results, with information provided for each of the three research

questions. The chapter concludes with a summary of findings.

Findings

After first establishing communication and support for this study (see Appendix

B), an institutional research administrator from the HBCU's Office of Institutional

Planning, Research and Assessment provided the researcher course evaluation data from

the spring 2015 to the summer 2018 for the variables analyzed in this study. Data were

provided in a single Microsoft Excel file that contained 14 spreadsheets: the data

dictionary and 13 corresponding with the academic semester data were captured. The

study's dataset contained 11,771 records. During data collection, spreadsheets totaling 14

records corresponding to the Adult Degree Program were excluded from the study

because this program does not offer online courses and operates a separate enrollment

management process than traditional undergraduate programs (i.e. rolling admission).

The Adult Degree Program is operated by Helix, a 3rd party enrollment management

company. The elimination of this data resulted in 11,757 data records being reviewed. The researcher then filtered all records for any course code labeled "50" or higher, the codes for all online course sections 50 to 59. The final number of cases in the dataset that underwent statistical analyses totaled 317.

Data were input into IBM Statistical Product and Service Solutions (SPSS) Version 26 to facilitate frequency analysis and descriptive analysis for variables. This allowed for the minimum, mean and standard deviation to be determined. A multiple linear regression was conducted for hypothesis testing. The null and alternative hypotheses for this study were:

H1o. Instructor emotional social support (facilitating discourse) does not significantly influence student performance in an online course setting among undergraduate students attending a historically Black college/university (HBCU).

H1a. Instructor emotional social support (facilitating discourse) does significantly influence student performance in an online course setting among undergraduate students attending a historically Black college/university (HBCU).

H2o. Instructor informational social support (direct instruction) does not significantly influence student performance in an online course setting among undergraduate students attending a historically Black college/university (HBCU).

H2a. Instructor informational social support (direct instruction) does significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU).

H3o. Instructor instrumental social support (design and organization) does

not significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU).

H3a. Instructor instrumental social support (design and organization) does

significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU).

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were conducted on the descriptive variable of student school

year, the predictor variables of instructor emotional, informational, and instrumental

social support, and the dependent variable of student performance.

Student school year. The first set of descriptive statistics, frequencies and

percentages, concerned the descriptive variable of *Student School Year* (see "*What is

your classification?*" in Appendices E and G). This categorical (nominal) variable was

coded as 1 = *freshman*, 2 = *sophomore*, 3 = *junior*, and 4 = *senior*. The frequencies and

percentages are illustrated in Table 3. Out of the total sample of 317 students, the

majority of students were sophomores ($n = 167$, 52.7%) and almost a fourth were juniors

($n = 75$, 23.7%). Fewer students were freshmen ($n = 61$, 19.2%) or seniors ($n = 14$,

4.4%).

Table 3. Frequencies & percentages: Student school year (*N* = 317)

	Frequency	*Percentage*
Freshman	61	19.2
Sophomore	167	52.7
Junior	75	23.7
Senior	14	4.4

Instructor social support predictor variables. The study had three predictor variables: instructor emotional, informational, and instrumental social support, measured using composite scales of items on the IDEA survey. The instructor emotional social support scale was comprised of three items: (a) The instructor treated me with respect, (b) The instructor was fair, and (c) The instructor motivated me to try harder. The instructor informational social support scale contained three items: (a) The instructor demonstrated adequate knowledge of the subject matter, (b) The instructor explained the material clearly, and (c) The instructor provided timely feedback on my work. The instructor instrumental social support scale had two items: (a) The instructor was well-prepared for the class and (b) The instructor was available during specific office hours or by appointment. All items had Likert scoring, where 5 = *strongly agree*, 4 = *agree*, 3 = *neutral*, 2 = *disagree*, and 1 = *strongly disagree*. Item scores were summed to derive the composite scale scores, and a higher score is associated with higher levels of perceived instructor social support.

Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alphas for the three instructor social support scales are provided in Table 4. The mean score for the 3-item instructor emotional social support scale was *M* = 13.14 (*SD* = 2.24), and scores on this scale ranged from 3 to 15 points. The mean of 13.14 was indicative that students, on average, 'agreed' that the

instructor provided emotional social support. The mean score for the 3-item instructor

informational social support scale was $M = 12.98$ ($SD = 2.48$); scores ranged from 3 to 15

points. As denoted by the mean of 12.98, students, on average, 'agreed' that the

instructor provided informational support. The 2-item instructor instrumental social

support scale had a mean of $M = 8.37$ ($SD = 1.84$), and scores on this scale ranged from 2

to 10 points. Based on the mean of 8.37, students, on average, 'agreed' that the instructor

provided informational social support.

The Cronbach's alphas were computed to determine the inter-item reliability of

the three instructor social support scales, and results are presented in Table 4. All three

scales had sound inter-item reliability, with the instructor emotional social support scale

having a Cronbach's alpha .71, the instructor informational social support having a

Cronbach's alpha of .82, and the instructor instrumental social support having a

Cronbach's alpha of .70.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics: Instructor social support ($N = 317$)

	M	*Md*	*SD*	*Min*	*Max*	*Cronbach's alpha*
Instructor Emotional Social Support	13.14	14.00	2.24	3.00	15.00	.71
Instructor Informational Social Support	12.98	14.00	2.48	3.00	15.00	.82
Instructor Instrumental Social Support	8.37	9.00	1.85	2.00	10.00	.70

Student performance dependent variable. The study had one dependent

variable, student performance, which was operationalized as expected course grade.

Descriptive statistics for expected course grade are presented in Table 5. The mean score

was 4.15, equivalent to a B, while the median was 5.00, equivalent to an A. The standard

deviation was 1.09. Of the total sample size ($N = 317$), the majority of students taking an

online course expected to receive an A ($n = 166$, 52.4%), while almost a fourth expected

a grade of B ($n = 74$, 23.3%). Fewer students expected a grade of C ($n = 48$, 15.1%), D (n

$= 18$, 5.7%), or F ($n = 11$, 3.5%).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics: Student course performance ($N = 317$)

Variable	M	Md	SD		Frequency	Percentage
Expected Course Grade	4.15	5.00	1.09	A	166	52.4
				B	74	23.3
				C	48	15.1
				D	18	5.7
				F	11	3.5

Testing of Covariates

It was necessary to determine if student school year needed to be included as a

covariate in the MLR model for hypothesis testing. Four dummy-coded variables were

created, where 1 = *yes* and 0 = *no* for each respective school year (i.e., Are you a

Freshman? 1 = yes and 0 = no). Pearson bivariate correlations were then conducted

between the online student's school year status and their expected grade. The results

from the correlational analyses are presented in Table 6. None of the correlations were

significant. Being a freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior was not significantly

associated with expected course grade; none of the significance levels were less than .05

(i.e., freshmen: $p = .06$, sophomore: $p = .46$; junior: $p = .37$; and senior: $p = .96$). As

such, none of the dummy-coded variables needed to be included as control variables in the multiple linear regression analysis for hypothesis testing.

Table 6. Pearson bivariate correlations: Student school year and expected course grade (*N* = 317)

	Expected Course Grade
Are you a freshman? 1 = yes, 0 = no	-.11
Are you a sophomore? 1 = yes, 0 = no	.04
Are you a junior? 1 = yes, 0 = no	.05
Are you a senior? 1 = yes, 0 = no	-.00
	.

Testing of the Lack of Multicollinearity Assumption

As the study had three predictor variables measuring conceptually-similar elements of instructor social support, it was important to assess if they showed multicollinearity, that is, if the variables were so highly correlated with one another that they measured the same construct. To test for lack of multicollinearity, variance inflation factors (VIFs) were computed. A VIF that is 4.00 or higher indicates multicollinearity while a VIF less than 4 denotes a lack of multicollinearity (Field, 2013; Garson, 2012). The VIFs for the three instructor social support variables are presented in Table 7. None of the VIFs for each instructor social support variable exceeded 4.00 (i.e., emotional social support VIF = 3.27, informational social support VIF = 2.90, and instrumental social support VIF = 2.17). As the variables do not show multicollinearity, all three

instructor social support variables were entered collectively as predictors of expected

course grade in the MLR analysis for hypothesis testing.

Table 7. Lack of multicollinearity between predictor variables

	VIF
Instructor Emotional Social Support	3.27
Instructor Informational Social Support	2.90
Instructor Instrumental Social Support	2.17

Hypotheses Testing Results

One multiple linear regression (MLR) was conducted to address the three research

questions. MLR, commonly used in correlational studies, is used to examine "the roles

that multiple" predictor variables "play in accounting for variance in" one dependent

variable (Nathans, Oswald, & Nimon, 2012). The MLR approach "is direct and

conceptually simple, less restrictive than multivariate correlation techniques, and suited

to problems involving binary-coded information" (Bottenberg & Ward, 1963, p. 140). In

the MLR, the three instructor social support variables were entered collectively as

predictors of expected course grade, the dependent variable. The overall MLR model was

significant, $F(3,313) = 153.05$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .60$. Results from the MLR model are

provided in Table 8 and are followed by a review of the bivariate results specific to each

research question.

Table 8. Multiple linear regression: Instructor emotional, informational, and instrumental social support predicting expected course grade ($N = 317$)

Variable	B	SE B	β	p
Instructor Emotional Social Support	.11	.03	.23	<.001
Instructor Informational Social Support	.22	.03	.50	<.001
Instructor Instrumental Social Support	.06	.03	.10	.074

Note. Model: $F(3,313) = 153.05$, $p < .001$

Hypothesis Testing: RQ1. The first research question was, "Does instructor emotional social support (facilitating discourse) significantly influence student online course performance in an online course setting among undergraduate students attending a historically Black college/university (HBCU)?" Results from the MLR showed that instructor emotional social support was significantly associated with expected course grade, $β(317) = .23$, $p < .001$. As students' perceptions of higher instructor emotional social support increased, so did their expected course grade. Due to the significant finding, the null hypothesis failed to be retained.

Hypothesis Testing: RQ2. The second research question was, "Does instructor informational social support (direct instruction) significantly influence student performance in an online course setting among undergraduate students attending a historically Black college/university (HBCU)?" Results from the MLR showed that instructor informational social support was significantly related to expected course grade, $β(317) = .50$, $p < .001$. As students' perceptions of higher instructor informational social support increased, so did their expected course grade. Due to the significant finding, the null hypothesis failed to be retained.

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Hypothesis Testing: RQ3. The third research question was, "Does instructor instrumental social support (design and organization) significantly influence student performance in an online course setting among undergraduate students attending a historically Black college/university (HBCU)?" Results from the MLR were not significant: instructor instrumental social support was not significantly associated with expected grade, $\beta(317) = .10$, $p = .074$. Based upon the non-significant finding, the null hypothesis was retained.

Summary

The purpose of this quantitative, archival, non-experimental study was to determine if three instructor social support variables (i.e., emotional, informational, and instrumental) were significantly associated with student performance, as measured by the variable of expected course grade, among a group of online students attending a Southwestern HBCU. Data were collected by the host school, with the researcher initially receiving a large Excel file. The researcher reduced the data set to those students who took an online course between 2015 and 2018, and she then transferred to Excel file to an SPSS 26.0 data file. SPSS 26.0 was used to conduct all study statistical analyses.

The data set was comprised of end-of-course evaluation data from 317 undergraduate students taking an online course at the HBCU between 2015 and 2018. Descriptive findings showed that (a) the majority of students were sophomores (52.7%); (b) expected, on average, a course grade of B; and (c) 'agreed' that the instructor provided emotional, informational, and instrumental social support. Point biserial correlation analyses, conducted for covariate testing, indicated no significant associations between students' school year and expected course grade. VIFs were computed to

determine if the three instructor social support variables displayed multicollinearity. None of the VIFs exceeded 4.00, indicating that the data met the assumption of lack of multicollinearity, which allowed for the computation of one MLR to address all three research questions. Results from the MLR showed that both instructor emotional and informational social support were significantly associated with expected course grade: as students' perceptions of instructor emotional and informational social support increased, so did their expected course grade. There was not, however, a significant relationship between instructor instrumental social support and expected course grade.

This concludes Chapter Four. The results are examined in detail in Chapter Five that follows, allowing for a summary explanation of findings. A discussion surrounding the findings will be presented and tied to the overall importance of the study. These discoveries will help guide online academic policy, specifically persistence and retention strategies of undergraduate students that enroll in online courses. In addition, findings will allow for communication on possible professional development opportunities geared toward distance learning faculty. Lastly, implications and recommendations on future research will be conferred.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Postsecondary education has changed: since the 1990s, increased attention has focused on distance learning (Jones & Davenport, 2018). With support from the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the first online courses were piloted in 1993 and grew substantially to 571 online courses and 300 full online degree programs by 2001 (Jones & Davenport, 2018). With over 72% of all national undergraduate students taking at least one online course (OLC, 2016), higher education leaders and policy makers must deepen the discussion of how to support these students. The number of students not taking an online course continues to decrease, down 434,236 from 2012 to 2013, and 390,815 from 2013 to 2014 (Allen & Seaman, 2016). Among higher education administrators, 77.1% believe that online course offerings are critical to the long-term success of the institution (Allen & Seaman, 2016).

Comprising just 4% of all colleges and universities in the nation (Jones & Davenport, 2018), HBCUs have historically done tremendous work to educate African Americans but have lagged behind with regard to distance education (Brown & Dancy, 2010). While an increasing number of HBCUs have begun to offer online courses as a means to help increase enrollment within a competitive market (Jones & Davenport, 2018), there remains a gap in the literature on the benefits of online education and its effect on student success specific to HBCUs. This study addressed this gap in the higher education empirical literature with regard to online education. The overall purpose of this study was to better understand if, and if so, to what extent instructor emotional,

informational, and instrumental social support significantly influenced online student

academic performance at a southwestern HBCU. The intent of the study was to widen the

door of investigation surrounding instructor-student online relationships and academic

success. This study investigated the following questions:

RQ1. Does instructor emotional social support (facilitating discourse)

significantly influence student online course performance in an online

course setting among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU)?

RQ2. Does instructor informational social support (direct instruction)

significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU)?

RQ3. Does instructor instrumental social support (design and organization)

significantly influence student performance in an online course setting

among undergraduate students attending a historically Black

college/university (HBCU)?

Interpretation of Findings

The dataset used in this study was comprised of data from 317 subjects, all of

which were non-identifiable to specific students who took one or more online courses at

the HBCU between the spring of 2015 and the summer of 2018. The majority of students

were sophomores (52.7%) and juniors (23.7%). The reason for high percentage of these

two student years was likely due to online course offerings: sophomores, and to a lesser,

extent, juniors may have had a larger selection of online courses from which to choose

(e.g., general requirement courses and courses specific to a major). The course options may have been fewer for freshmen (19.2% of the sample) and seniors (4.4% of the sample). Covariate testing indicated that students' school year statuses were not significantly associated with their expected course grade.

Findings further showed that the students reported high levels of perceived instructor emotional, informational, and instrumental social support, with mean scores indicating that the students 'agreed' that the instructor was emotionally, informationally, and instrumentally supportive. While perceptions of instructor social support were relatively high, the student ratings of the instructor scores are similar to those found in the empirical course evaluation research conducted at HBCUs (Kwun, Alijani, Mancuso, & Fulk, 2012; Otieno, Ngwudike, Vanerson, & Ngwudike, 2013; Trimble & Murty, 2017). The average expected grade for students was a B and the median was an A. Moreover, 52.4% of the students expected to receive a grade of A. The expected course grade (mean of B, median of A) was very similar to the expected course grades reported for students in online course evaluation research, which has documented an average expected grade of A- to A (Eiszier, 2002, Joyce, 2017) and may be indicative of grade inflation (Stroebe, 2016).

The primary goal of the study was to determine if three types of instructor social support (i.e., emotional, instrumental, and informational) were significantly associated with student academic performance in a sample of online HBCU students. MLR findings showed that two of the dependent variables, instructor emotional and informational social support, were significantly related to expected course grade. These findings indicate the importance of instructor emotional social support characteristics (e.g., fairness,

respectfulness, and advocacy) and emphasize the role that the instructor plays in engaging and effectively communicating with students, indicators of instrumental social support. In contrast, instructor instrumental social support showed no significant relationship with expected course grade. The lack of a significant relationship between instructor instrumental social support and expected course grade was unexpected, especially as the mean score for this scale was similar to the mean scores on the instructor emotional and informational social support scale. It may have been an issue of measurement. The instrumental social support scale was comprised of two items that gauged students' perceptions of the instructor being prepared for class and available during office hours or by appointment. Teacher preparedness and availability may be less important factors and/or too tangential to affect grades among online students.

The collective effects of three types of instructor social support (i.e., emotional, instrumental, and informational) on online student academic performance has not been addressed in the higher education literature. Indeed, there has been little examination of the relationship between general instructor social support and academic performance among online students attending a HBCU. Findings do, nonetheless, correspond to the existing albeit minimal body of research on this topic. Studies have documented the benefits of faculty social support on student achievement and related outcomes among students of color in traditional classroom settings (Constantine et al., 2002; Hurd et al., 2016). There is, moreover, empirical evidence that the quality and strength of online instructor support is significantly predictive of not only student course grade (Wei et al., 2014) but also student satisfaction (Eom & Ashill, 2016; Lee, 2020), course engagement

(Huss et al. 2015), metacognition (Reingold et al., 2008), and student persistence (Gaylan, 2013) in the online educational environment.

Limitations

Limitations are inevitable within the field of research. There is no way for a scientist not to experience, nor be confronted with limits of some sort when conducting research. There were limitations in this study. The use of an archival dataset of existing IDEA data limited the operationalization of study variables. The measurement of instructor emotional, instrumental, and informational social support was specific items that comprised the IDEA survey. Another limitation worth noting was the use of data regarding students' expected grade, rather than their actual earned grade. The survey instrument did not capture student earned grade data, as the dataset had no identifiable data for students. In addition, additional demographic (e.g., age, race and gender) data were not collected. The use of the student's actual earned score as well as their demographic information would have added to the richness of the study. There was an additional limitation specific to the study design: the study was correlational, and as such, findings cannot be said to be causal. Nevertheless, this study was an important starting point that provided a springboard towards the exploration of online student success through CoI and social support at HBCUs.

Implications

Study findings demonstrated the importance of instructor emotional and informational social support on students' academic performance. It may benefit the HBCU to provide training and professional development for online instructors to strengthen their emotional and instrumental support skills. Professional development

opportunities that focus on strategies to teaching culturally diverse students in online settings, appreciative advising and emotional intelligence would be beneficial.

This study uses the term "online" in terms of students; for instance, "online student" is implied the same understanding as a student that participates in an online course. Because the site location does not offer online degree programs, it is implied within this study that online student is not one that is enrolled within an online degree program, rather enrolled in an online course. This term of use may have different implications should the study be applied to institutions different than the site location.

Recommendations for Future Research

While massive amounts of research confirm growth in distance learning programs and the number of courses offered online, in contrast, those that actually facilitate the learning feel otherwise. Less than one-third of Chief Academic Officers report their faculty accepts the value and legitimacy of online education (Allen & Seaman, 2016). Institutions with large online enrollments (10,000 or more) report 60.1% of faculty accept alternative learning modalities, while college and universities with little to no online offerings show 11.6% of faculty accept the value and legitimacy of online education (Allen & Seaman, 2016). This study determined instructor social support, specifically emotional and informational factors, help account for student academic success. For these reasons, future research would help examine the disconnect between the perceptions of those that facilitate online learning, and how they come to demonstrate social support to students.

The CoI theoretical framework was employed for this study. When individuals engage collaboratively in purposeful critical discourse and are allowed to personally

reflect to constructs presented in the online course, these factors support academic success. Because this study solely focused in on one of the three CoI elements, *teaching presence*, it is recommended future research is conducted on the remaining two elements in regard to the academic performance of online students enrolled at HBCUs. Research of this magnitude will seek to understand how African Americans identify their online course as a 'community' (*social presence*). Further, placing attention on African American students' perceptions of what it means to construct and confirm meaning through sustained reflection and discourse (Garrison et al., 2000) in online courses at HBCUs will allow for depth and understanding of their method of self-regulating learning in an educational community.

At the time this manuscript neared completion, the world began to experience a pandemic, called the Coronavirus disease, or COVID-19. The new strain of coronavirus, originating in Wuhan, China (WHO, 2020), infected over 4.16 million people and caused nearly 283,218 deaths worldwide (The New York Times, 2020). As of early May 2020, the number of U.S. deaths surpassed 80,000. Top government officials at the state and federal level placed a stay home order to help prevent the further spread of COVID-19 (Mervosh et al., 2020). This pandemic caused an immediate shutdown among various industries, of which, all sectors of education felt brutal impacts. Over 1.23 billion learners are out of school and 70.6% of the world's student population are affected by school closures (UNESCO, 2020). The majority of States have mandated school closures, including until the end of the academic year in June. Some States, however, have recommended but not mandated the school closures (UNESCO, 2020). These actions have widened the learning inequalities, especially among vulnerable populations.

With the closure of all primary, secondary and post-secondary schools, private and public, educational leaders sought to move education to online and remote learning. These effects weighed heavily on fiscal, operational and technological systems. Many challenges have ensued, such as but not limited to: the transition of all academic disciplines to online modalities, educating instructors through rushed professional development with strategies to teach at a distance, mental and physical support to all learner types, including ADA, providing support to disadvantaged students lacking resources to participate in online learning, and pressures to technological infrastructures to support such heavy volumes of internet presence. This study provided research on the stressors online students in post-secondary education often experience. With this said, recommendation on future studies focused on the impact of COVID-19 on online students is plausible.

To determine what factors promote online student success within online degree programs, research analysis should be conducted both cross-sectionally and longitudinally over time. Research of this magnitude will provide helpful data geared towards graduation rates where cohorts are tracked. Due to methodological limitations of this study, it is recommended future work of this kind provide additional measures of learning and interest.

Conclusion

HBCUs have had an arduous history, with administrators, faculty, and staff working tirelessly to meet the academic standards and fiscal stability seemingly present among their PWI counterparts. While continuously working to defend their relevancy, meeting global demands and creating a culture supported by technology, they still stand

resilient (Jones & Davenport, 2018). In an effort to stay competitive, meet market

demands and increase enrollment, HBCUs are offering an increasingly number of online

courses and degrees. As HBCU policy makers continuously carve out plans for online

learning, one question must remain at the forefront: what factors must be met to support

African American students' academic achievements in online courses? HBCUs with

dedicated instructors that build a sense of community through online collaborative

engagement and inquiry are succeeding. Online courses where students can openly reflect

on constructs, without judgement, help to solidify the learning process. This research

shows that when emotional and informational social support is present, online students at

HBCUs excel.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A:

IRB Approval

IRB Approval Notification: Protocol Number #1481

Hello Jennifer Miles,

Congratulations! The Institutional Review Board at Eastern Kentucky University has approved your **IRB Application for Exemption Certification** for your application entitled, "**Social Support and Academic Performance in Distance Education at a Midwest Historically Black College and University (HBCU)**." Your approval is effective immediately and expires three years from the approval date.

Exempt status means that your research is exempt from further review for a period of three years from the original notification date if no changes are made to the original protocol. If you plan to continue the project beyond three years, you are required to reapply for exemption.

Principal Investigator Responsibilities: It is the responsibility of the principal investigator to ensure that all investigators and staff associated with this study meet the training requirements for conducting research involving human subjects and follow the approved protocol.

Adverse Events: Any adverse or unexpected events that occur in conjunction with this study must be reported to the IRB within ten calendar days of the occurrence.

Changes to Approved Research Protocol: If changes to the approved research protocol become necessary, a description of those changes must be submitted for IRB review and approval prior to implementation. If the changes result in a change in your project's exempt status, you will be required to submit an application for expedited or full IRB review. Changes include, but are not limited to, those involving study personnel, subjects, and procedures.

Other Provisions of Approval, if applicable: None

Please contact Sponsored Programs at 859-622-3636 or send email to lisa.royalty@eku.edu with questions.

For your reference, we have included feedback on your application that was submitted during the review process.

View Application

APPENDIX B:

Letter of Support

Date: 2/19/2018

PI: Jennifer Miles

Program: Educational Leadership and Counseling Education

Institution: Eastern Kentucky University

Title: Social Support and Academic Performance in Distance Education at a Midwest Historically Black College and University (HBCU).

Re: IRB Exemption Approval for Protocol Number 2018-00040

Dear Ms. Miles,

In accordance with Huston-Tillotson University research policies and regulations, the Research Standards Committee and Institutional Review Board (IRB) has approved the above referenced research study for the following period of time; *2/19/2018 to 2/19/2019*. If the research will be conducted at more than one site, you may initiate research at any site from which you have a letter granting you permission to conduct the research. You should retain a copy of the letter in your files. It is to be executed in accordance with the protocol approved by your institution(s) and also by the Huston-Tillotson University Research Standards Committee and Institutional Review Board.

Please note that the Huston-Tillotson University Research Standards Committee and Institutional Review Board has not obtained the Federalwide Assurance (FWA) from the United States Department of Human and Health Services Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP). Therefore additional approval is needed by an appropriate FWA approved Institutional Review Board for research funded by any federal agency considered under the "Common Rule." Huston-Tillotson University Research Standards Committee and Institutional Review Board does, however, rely upon OHRP for guiding research standards and policies.

Exemption category of approval:

☒ Research involving the collection or study of existing data, documents, records, pathological specimens, or diagnostic specimens, if these sources are publicly available or the information is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

Note: This research study has received support from HT's Office of Institutional Planning, Research and Assessment.

Responsibilities of the Principal Investigator:

1) Report immediately any unanticipated problems or adverse events resulting from this research to the Research Standards Committee and Institutional Review Board at both your institution(s) and Huston-Tillotson University at the time of occurrence.

2) Submit for review and approval by the Research Standards Committee and Institutional Review Board at both Huston-Tillotson University and your institution(s) all modifications to the protocol or consent form(s). Ensure the proposed changes in the approved research are not applied without prior review and approval, except when necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject. Changes in approved research, implemented without IRB review and approval, and initiated to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subject must be promptly reported to the Research Standards Committee and Institutional Review Board at both Huston-Tillotson University and your institution(s). Such changes will be reviewed to determine whether the modifications were consistent with ensuring the subjects continued welfare.

3) Report any significant findings that become known in the course of the research that might affect the willingness of subjects to continue to participate.

4) Ensure that only persons formally approved by the Research Standards Committee and Institutional Review Board at both Huston-Tillotson University and your institution(s) enroll subjects.

5) The approved protocol for administration of the informed consent (as documented) is to be used for all subjects. Use only a currently approved consent form submitted. Note: approval periods are for 12 months or less.

6) Protect the confidentiality of all persons and personally identifiable data, and train your staff and collaborators on policies and procedures for ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of subjects and their information.

7) Submit a Continuing Review application for continuing review by the Research Standards Committee and Institutional Review Board at both Huston-Tillotson University and your institution(s). The Continuing Review Application must be submitted, reviewed and approved, before the expiration date.

8) Include the Huston-Tillotson University Research Standards Committee and Institutional Review Board study number on all future correspondence relating to this protocol.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Carlos M. Cervantes, Huston-Tillotson University committee member of the Research Standards Committee and Institutional Review Board by phone at (512) 505-3095 or via e-mail at cmcervantes@htu.edu.

Sincerely,

Carlos M. Cervantes, PhD.
Interim Chair, Research Standards Committee and Institutional Review Board
Huston-Tillotson University

APPENDIX C:

Community of Inquiry Survey Instrument

Community of Inquiry Survey Instrument (draft v14)

Teaching Presence

Design & Organization

1. The instructor clearly communicated important course topics.

2. The instructor clearly communicated important course goals.

3. The instructor provided clear instructions on how to participate in course learning activities.

4. The instructor clearly communicated important due dates/time frames for learning activities.

Facilitation

5. The instructor was helpful in identifying areas of agreement and disagreement on course topics that helped me to learn.

6. The instructor was helpful in guiding the class towards understanding course topics in a way that helped me clarify my thinking.

7. The instructor helped to keep course participants engaged and participating in productive dialogue.

8. The instructor helped keep the course participants on task in a way that helped me to learn.

9. The instructor encouraged course participants to explore new concepts in this course.

10. Instructor actions reinforced the development of a sense of community among course participants.

Direct Instruction

11. The instructor helped to focus discussion on relevant issues in a way that helped me to learn.

12. The instructor provided feedback that helped me understand my strengths and weaknesses relative to the course's goals and objectives.

13. The instructor provided feedback in a timely fashion.

Social Presence

Affective expression

14. Getting to know other course participants gave me a sense of belonging in the course.

15. I was able to form distinct impressions of some course participants.

16. Online or web-based communication is an excellent medium for social interaction.

Open communication

17. I felt comfortable conversing through the online medium.

18. I felt comfortable participating in the course discussions.

19. I felt comfortable interacting with other course participants.

Group cohesion

20. I felt comfortable disagreeing with other course participants while still maintaining a sense of trust.

21. I felt that my point of view was acknowledged by other course participants.

22. Online discussions help me to develop a sense of collaboration.

Cognitive Presence

Triggering event

23. Problems posed increased my interest in course issues.

24. Course activities piqued my curiosity.

25. I felt motivated to explore content related questions.

Exploration

26. I utilized a variety of information sources to explore problems posed in this course.

27. Brainstorming and finding relevant information helped me resolve content related questions.

28. Online discussions were valuable in helping me appreciate different perspectives.

Integration

29. Combining new information helped me answer questions raised in course activities.

30. Learning activities helped me construct explanations/solutions.

31. Reflection on course content and discussions helped me understand fundamental concepts in this class.

Resolution

32. I can describe ways to test and apply the knowledge created in this course.

33. I have developed solutions to course problems that can be applied in practice.

34. I can apply the knowledge created in this course to my work or other non-class related activities.

5 point Likert-type scale

1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree

Source: Arbaugh, J.B. et al. (2008)

APPENDIX D:

Community of Inquiry (CoI) Concept Map
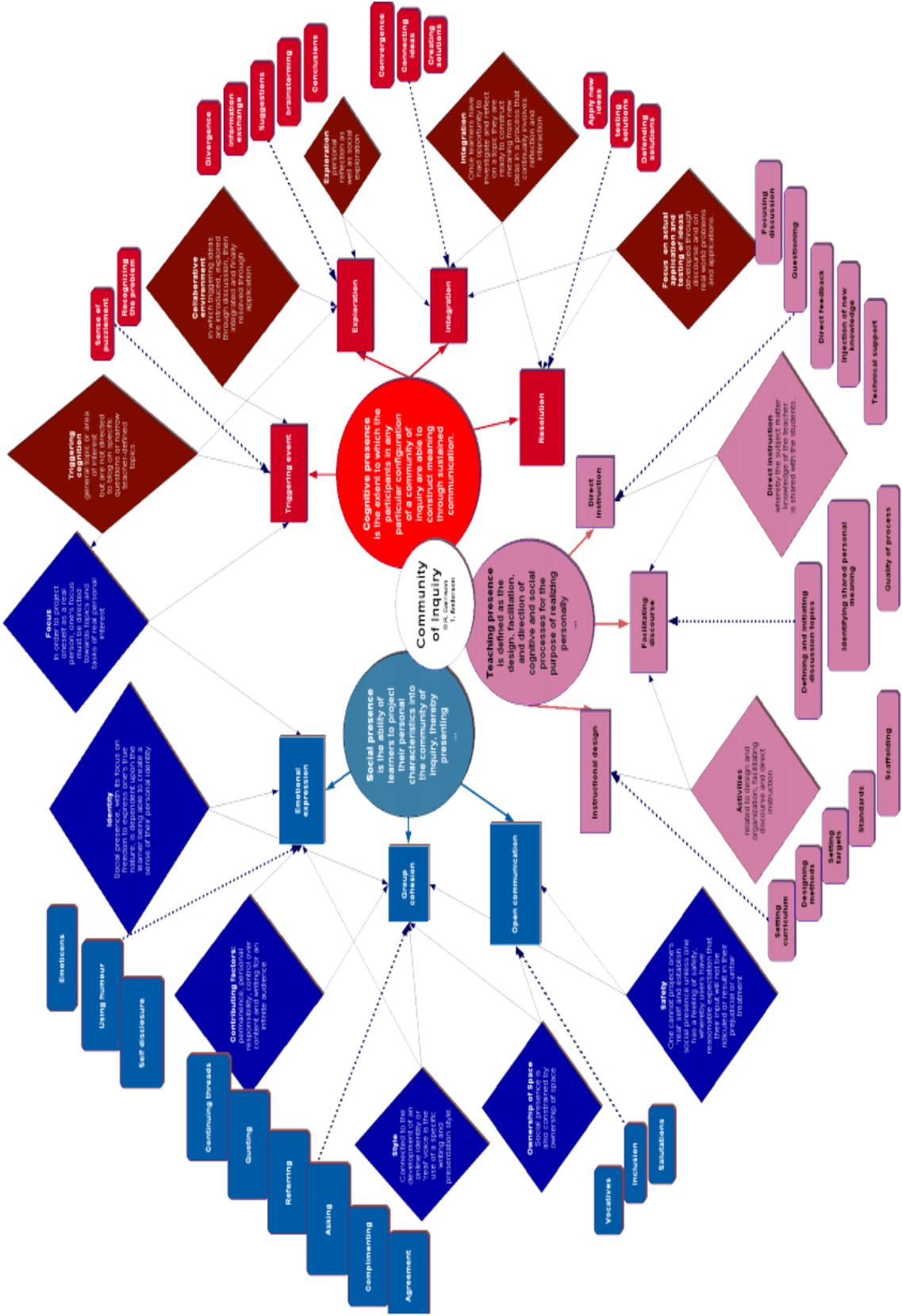
Community of Inquiry. Garrison & Anderson, 2001
Concept Map credited to Joop van Schie, 2008

APPENDIX E:

Student Evaluation Instrument

Huston-Tillotson University
HT

⚙️ Setup   💬 Survey   📊 Reports   ℹ️ Imports   ❓ Help

Question Selection: SP 2019 Traditional

[Return to List]

≡ Course Questions

🔲 **General Questions**

Selected	Question	Response Type
✅	This course was intellectually stimulating.	5pt. Likert: SA - SD w/ Neutral
✅	The course was well organized.	5pt. Likert: SA - SD w/ Neutral
✅	This course increased my understanding of concepts and/or skills in the field.	5pt. Likert: SA - SD w/ Neutral
✅	What did you like most about this course?	Long Answer
✅	What did you like least about this course?	Long Answer
✅	Please provide additional comments here.	Long Answer

≡ Demographic Questions

🔲 **General Questions**

Selected	Question	Response Type
✅	Is this course required for your major?	Yes/No
✅	Is this course required for your minor?	Yes/No
✅	What is your classification? [Classification Updated]	6 pt. Likert: Freshman - Graduate
✅	How many times were you absent from class (including excused absences)?	5pt. Likert: Never - Four or More
✅	How many hours each week did you prepare for this course outside of class time?	5 pt. Likert: 0-2 Hrs -> 12+ Hrs
✅	What grade do you expect to earn in this course?	5 pt. Likert: A - F

≡ Instructor Questions

🔲 **General Questions**

Selected	Question	Response Type
✅	Rate the overall performance of your instructor.	5pt. Likert: Excellent - Very Poor
✅	The instructor provided timely feedback on my work.	5pt. Likert: SA - SD w/ Neutral
✅	The instructor demonstrated adequate knowledge of the subject matter.	5pt. Likert: SA - SD w/ Neutral
✅	The instructor explained the material clearly.	5pt. Likert: SA - SD w/ Neutral
✅	The instructor was fair.	5pt. Likert: SA - SD w/ Neutral
✅	The instructor was well prepared for class.	5pt. Likert: SA - SD w/ Neutral
✅	The instructor motivated me to try harder.	5pt. Likert: SA - SD w/ Neutral
✅	The instructor was available during specific office hours or by appointment.	5pt. Likert: SA - SD w/ Neutral
✅	The instructor treated me with respect.	5pt. Likert: SA - SD w/ Neutral
✅	How might the instructor improve this course in the future?	Long Answer
✅	Please provide additional comments here.	Long Answer

[Return to List] ❓   Cannot Edit - This survey is or has been active.

APPENDIX F:

Student Evaluation Announcement

Course Evaluation Reminder
Huston-Tillotson University

Hello Roland,

FA19 Course Evaluations are now open.

Please log into https://my.htu.edu Under "Academics" tab, you will see the "Course Evaluations" link in the left menu.

Listed below are the courses that you still need to complete.

Course Num - Sec	Course Name	Responsible Faculty	Survey Open	Survey Close
MTH 101 - 112	Mathematics 101	Adams, Henry Smith, Joan	Dec 16 12:00 AM	Jan 16 11:59 PM
BIO 101 - 40	Biology 101	Adams, Henry Smith, Joan	Dec 16 12:00 AM	Jan 16 11:59 PM
CHE 101 - 2	Chemistry 101		Dec 31 12:00 AM	Jan 22 10:30 AM

Course Num - Sec	Course Name	Block	Site	Survey Open	Survey Close
MED 402 - 15	Medical Clerkship 402	Sample Clinic	2-week rot	Jan 1 12:00 AM	Jan 17 11:59 PM

Your opinion matters and quite valued. Thank you!

Serena Yan
Institutional Research Analyst

Support email: xyan@htu.edu
Access via mobile device or computer

courseval

APPENDIX G:

Survey Data Dictionary

category	question	resp_type	choices
Course Questions	This course was intellectually stimulating.	Radio	0=No Response; 5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree
Course Questions	The course was well organized.	Radio	0=No Response; 5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree
Course Questions	This course increased my understanding of concepts and/or skills in the field.	Radio	0=No Response; 5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree
Course Questions	What did you like most about this course?	Memo	
Course Questions	What did you like least about this course?	Memo	
Course Questions	Please provide additional comments here.	Memo	
Demographic Questions	Is this course required for your major?	Radio	0=No Response; 2=Yes; 1=No; -1=Not Applicable
Demographic Questions	Is this course required for your minor?	Radio	0=No Response; 2=Yes; 1=No; -1=Not Applicable
Demographic Questions	What is your classification?	Radio	0=No Response; 1=Freshman; 2=Sophomore; 3=Junior; 4=Senior; 5=Post-Bacc./ATCP; 6=Graduate; -1=Not Applicable
Demographic Questions	How many times were you absent from class (including excused absences)?	Radio	0=No Response; 5=Never; 4=Once; 3=Twice; 2=Three Times; 1=Four or More Times
Demographic Questions	How many hours each week did you prepare for this course outside of class time?	Radio	0=No Response; 1=0-2 Hours; 2=3-5 Hours; 3=6-8 Hours; 4=9-11 Hours; 5=12 or more Hours
Demographic Questions	What grade do you expect to earn in this course?	Radio	0=No Response; 5=A; 4=B; 3=C; 2=D; 1=F
Instructor Questions	Rate the overall performance of your instructor.	Radio	0=No Response; 5=Excellent; 4=Above Average; 3=Average; 2=Below Average; 1=Very poor
Instructor Questions	The instructor provided timely feedback on my work.	Radio	0=No Response; 5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree
Instructor Questions	The instructor demonstrated adequate knowledge of the subject matter.	Radio	0=No Response; 5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree
Instructor Questions	The instructor explained the material clearly.	Radio	0=No Response; 5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree
Instructor Questions	The instructor was fair.	Radio	0=No Response; 5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree
Instructor Questions	The instructor was well prepared for class.	Radio	0=No Response; 5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree
Instructor Questions	The instructor motivated me to try harder.	Radio	0=No Response; 5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree
Instructor Questions	The instructor was available during specific office hours or by appointment.	Radio	0=No Response; 5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree
Instructor Questions	The instructor treated me with respect.	Radio	0=No Response; 5=Strongly Agree; 4=Agree; 3=Neutral; 2=Disagree; 1=Strongly Disagree
Instructor Questions	How might the instructor improve this course in the future?	Memo	
Instructor Questions	Please provide additional comments here.	Memo	

CURRICULUM VITAE

Jennifer Paige Miles

Email: jenniferpmiles@gmail.com

Current Position:	Director, Center for Academic Innovation and Transformation
	Sophomore Class Advisor
	Huston-Tillotson University
Rank:	Assistant Professor
Tenure/Nontenure:	Nontenured
Department/Division:	Academic Affairs and Office of Sponsored Programs
Previous Positions:	Online Programs Director
	Competency Based Education (CBE) Project Director
	Assistant Professor of Communications
	Kentucky State University
	August 2005 – October 2017
Rank:	Assistant Professor
Tenure/Nontenure:	Nontenured
Department/Division:	Office of Distance Education

KEY AREAS

Academic Affairs, Adult Education, Appreciative Advising, Communication, Competency Based Education, Distance Education Policy, eLearning, Faculty Development, HBCU, Higher Education, Instructional Design, Instructional Technology Integration, ITV, Journalism, Land Grant, LMS Administration, NDA/Dance Team, NPHC, Professional Development Leadership, Program Development, Project Leadership, Public Speaking, Research, Staff Development, State Authorization, Student Affairs, Team Building, Title III, Training Consultant, TRIO Programs

EDUCATION (Areas of Specialization)

- Ed.D. Higher Education Leadership and Policy Studies, Eastern Kentucky University.
  - May 2020
- Ph.D. Communication, University of Kentucky. May 2013, 21 hours completed
- M.S. Communication, Murray State University. August 2005
- B.S. Business Administration, Murray State University. December 2002
- B.S. Computer Information Systems, Murray State University. December 2002
  - All AACSB Accredited

POST EDUCTION & CERTIFICATIONS

- Online Facilitator Certified (OFC), QualityMatters MarylandOnline®, February 2017
- Certification of Social & Behavioral Research [Human Subjects], CITI Program 2017
- SMART (Board) Technologies Certified, May 2015
- Coordinator Certification, QualityMatters MarylandOnline®
- Internal Review Board (IRB) Certificate: Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative, University of Kentucky, February 2013
- Professional Grant Development Certificate, Grant Training Center, University of Louisville 2012
- Certificate in Distance Education: System Planning and Management Track
  Indiana University, 2009
- Certified Course Peer Reviewer, QualityMatters, MarylandOnline®, March 2007
- M.B.A, 15 hours complete, Murray State University, August 2005

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

August 2007 – October 2017	Assistant Professor, Communication Division of Literature and Language Program Kentucky State University
August 2013- May 2014	Adjunct Assistant Professor, School of Education Kentucky State University
August 2005- August 2007	Instructor, Area of Speech, Theatre & Communication Division of Fine Arts. Kentucky State University
January 2005-2009	Adjunct Instructor, Area of Communication Bluegrass Community and Technical College
January 2003-August 2004	Graduate Teaching Assistantship, School of Business (Marketing, Management, CIS), Murray State University
August-December 2003	Lab Instructor, CIS, School of Business Murray State University

TEACHING HISTORY

ASP 466	Intercultural Communication in Caribbean (Study Abroad)
CIS 100	Introduction to Computers
COM 101	Introduction to Communication
COM 181	Basic Public Speaking
EDU 203	Multimedia and Computer in the Classroom
JOU 366	Broadcast Announcing
SPE 103	Interpersonal Speech Communication
SPE 103-V	Online Interpersonal Speech Communication
SPE 200	Public Speaking
SPE 302	Interracial and Intercultural Communication
SPE 302-V	Online Interracial and Intercultural Communication
SPE 310-V	Persuasive Communication
UNV 101	University Orientation

FACILITATED TRAINING HISTORY

Canvas (Content, Assessments, Customization, etc.)	188 workshops as of May 15, 2020
Instructional Technologies (varies)	154 workshops as of May 15, 2020
Blackboard (Content, Assessments, Customization, etc.)	5122 workshops as of September 2017
Blackboard Mobile Application	310 workshops as of September 2017
Bookshelf by VitalSource eTextbook Portal	329 workshops as of September 2017
CampusLabs IDEA Student Electronic Rating System	241 workshops as of September 2017
Quality Matters: Applying the Standard Rubric	422 workshops as of September 2017
Smarthinking Tutoring	422 workshops as of September 2017
Video Conferencing Software (Zoom)	210 workshops as of August 2017
CourseSignals Academic Early Alert System	90 workshops as of August 2016
Courseval eRating System	132 workshops as of August 2016

ACADEMIC / PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS / SPECIAL PROJECTS

March 2019 – present	Project Manager: Apple Inc. Community Education Initiative partnership; $1 Million project (Technology Implementation, Capital Improvements, Scholarships) Huston-Tillotson University
June – December 2019	Interim Director, Center for Academic Excellence Huston-Tillotson University
August 2018 – October 2019	University lead: Yes We Must Coalition Huston-Tillotson University
Summer 2017	Lead ITV Conferencing and Training Center Renovation
Spring 2017	Technology Support Lead: School of Nursing Accreditation Commission For Education in Nursing (ACEN) Kentucky State University
November 4, 2016	Executive Planner: KABHE and Central Kentucky Diversity Consortium - MOSAIIC Afternoon Conference Kentucky State University
October 2016 – 2017	Competency Based Education Project Director; Title III Grant Kentucky State University
Fall 2015	Interactive Television and Videoconferencing Manger Kentucky State University
Fall 2015	Blackboard Learn Managed Hosting Committee Kentucky State University
Fall 2015	Project Manager: Blackboard 9.1 Mobile Learn Implementation Kentucky State University

Summer 2015	Project Manager: Follett Discover LMS Implementation Kentucky State University
Spring 2015	Project Partner: LiveText Assessment Campus Rollout Kentucky State University
August 2014 – May 2015	Interim Director Instructional Improvement and Faculty Development Kentucky State University
Spring 2014	Student Success Collaborative Partner Wal-Mart Foundation, AIHEC, HACU, and NAFEO Kentucky State University
Spring 2014	SACS 5th Year Management Accreditation Review: Project Team Kentucky State University
Winter 2014	Project Manager: Banner and Blackboard LMS Integration Kentucky State University
Fall 2014	Designed/Creator of New Faculty Professional Development eSite Kentucky State University
November 2013	School of Education SACS Accreditation Review: Campus Technology Lead Kentucky State University
March 2013	State Advisor: Franklin County Public Schools Operation Preparation Frankfort, KY
March 2013	General Education Online Design Academy, Facilitator Kentucky State University
March 2013	General Education Online Design Academy, Facilitator Kentucky State University
November 2012	Project System Manager: CoursEval Online Faculty Evaluations Kentucky State University
Summer 2012	Project System Manager: Blackboard 9 LMS Upgrade Kentucky State University
March 2012	State Advisor: Franklin County Public Schools Operation Preparation Frankfort, KY

Winter 2011	Project Internet Manager: Pilot Winter Intercession Semester Kentucky State University
Summer 2011	Pilot Professor –Study Abroad Trip: West Indies Islands Kentucky State University
Summer 2010	Project Manager: BBS Cyberconference Kentucky State University
June 2009 – May 2015	Online Project Manager: QEP AWA Retention Program Kentucky State University
January – April 2009	Chair, Speech Communication Search Committee Position of Professor of Speech Communication, Tenure Track Kentucky State University
January – December 2009	Coordinator of Faculty Incentive Program Kentucky State University
August – December 2008	Project Manager: Online Faculty Assessment Student Assessment System Kentucky State University
August 2008	Weave Online® OCDE Programs SACS documentation Kentucky State University
July 2008	Project Manager Special Education Program Learning House transition Kentucky State University
August 2007-2013	Online Programs Coordinator Kentucky State University
August 2004 – Summer 2005	Assistant Director of Speech and Debate Union Murray State University

NONACADEMIC PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

- IT Intern, Pella Windows Corporation. Murray, Kentucky   Summer 2004
- Business Manager, Nutritional Services, Murray State University   2003 – 2004
- Conference Project Manager: Central Kentucky Diversity Consortium
     November 4, 2016

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT / TRAINING ACTIVITIES / CONFERENCES

- Council for Opportunity in Education/TRIO Federal Programs, Washington, D.C. Feb 8-10, 2005
- CPE Faculty Development Conference, Lexington, KY. May 14-15, 2007
- Leadership Workshop—Dealing with Unacceptable Employees, Kentucky State University, 2007
- Etiquette Training, **Facilitator** —Kentucky State University Student & Teachers, 2007
- State Wide Blackboard Community System Administration Training, UK, Lexington, KY August 10, 2007
- 13th Annual Sloan-C Conference on Online Learning, Orlando, FL Nov. 7-9, 2007
- QualityMatters MarylandOnline® Peer Review Training, Western Kentucky University,
- March 10, 2008
- Helping Students Succeed Webinar, Blackboard CMS, June 5, 2008
- KCPM Online training, **Facilitator**, Kentucky State University, August 2008
- Active Shooter and Campus Violence Workshop, Kentucky State University, 2008
- Statewide QualityMatters MarylandOnline® training, **Facilitator**, Kentucky State University, Sept 25, 2008
- Governor's 4th Annual Empowerment Conference , Lexington, KY, August 18, 2008
- 14th Annual Sloan-C Conference on Online Learning, Orlando, FL November 5-8, 2008
- Blackboard CMS Training Workshops, **Trainer**, Kentucky State University, Frankfort, KY
- Quality Enhancement Plan – August 2007 to September 2009
- KCPM Online training, **Facilitator**, Kentucky State University, December 4, 2008
- SOS Phase I and II Comprehensive Training, Kentucky State University, February 26, 2010
- Quality Matter Conference, Baltimore, MD, June 2009
- National Science Foundation Day, NSF Proposal, Merit Review, and HER, KSU, December 10, 2010
- Making Course-Embedded Assessment a Reality Webinar, Blackboard CMS, August 16, 2011
- Thrivals 4.0 Idea Festival, Louisville, KY, September 21, 2011
- Location, Location, Location—Striving for Excellent in Datacenter Management Webinar, Blackboard CMS, September 28, 2011
- Flickr Training (University of Kentucky eXtension), September 27, 2011
- Drupal eXtension Training (University of Kentucky eXtension), September 30, 2011
- Collaborate Integrations for Learn Webinar, Blackboard Collaborate CMS, November 1, 2011
- KABHE Northwest Region Summit, University of Louisville. Louisville, Kentucky November 4, 2011
- Connect and Engage with Mobile Students Webinar, Blackboard Collaborate CMS, November 15, 2011
- Course Evaluation Date in Distance Learning Program Accreditation Webinar, Blackboard Collaborate CMS, November 17, 2011
- Kentucky State University Retention and Graduation Elevation Initiative (KSURGE), January 9-10, 2012
- Blackboard World 2012 Conference, New Orleans, LA, July 2012
- Blended and Virtual Learning Frontier Webinar, October 2, 2012
- Civility in the Classroom, University of Pittsburg Facilitator, September 11, 2014
- The Kentucky Convergence Conference, University of Louisville, November 13-14, 2015
- Student Support Summit, Council on Postsecondary Education, Louisville, KY, March 30-31, 2015
- LMS Vendor Showcase, Council on Postsecondary Education, April 9, 2015
- 2015 Pedagogicon Conference, University of Louisville, May 22, 2015
- SMART Technologies Training, May 27-28, 2015
- LiveText Assessment and Collaboration Conference, Nashville, TN July 12-15, 2015
- Blackboard World 2015 Conference, Washington, DC July 20-24, 2015
- Courseval Site Conference, Chicago, IL September 23-25, 2015
- 2016 Kentucky Student Success Summit, Louisville, KY April 4-5

- Competency Based Education Convening and CBExchange, Arizona, October 18-21, 2016
- Diversity in Leadership Symposium, Kentucky Transportation Cabinet, October 27, 2016
- 2016 Pedagogicon Conference, University of Louisville
- Blackboard World 2016 Conference, Las Vegas, NV July 12-16, 2016
- 2017 Kentucky Student Success Summit, Louisville, KY April 3-4
- 34th Annual Conference, KABHE, Berea, KY, March 30-April 4, 2017
- Competency Based Education Convening, Nashville, TN, May 1-3, 2017
- 2017 Institute for a College-Going Commonwealth, Bowling Green, KY, June 8-9
- Ascendium Grant - 2019 College-Employer Partnerships Convening, Augsburg University, Minneapolis, MN, September 19-20, 2019
- 2019 Competency Symposium, The Ohio State University, May 20-21, 2019
- HigHER Conference, AT&T Executive Education Center, Austin, TX, June 4, 2019
- Texas Conference for Women, Austin, Texas, October 24, 2019

MEMBERSHIP OF LEARNED/PROFESSIONAL BODIES

- Board Member, Frankfort Arts Foundation 2007 – present
- Texas Quality Matters Consortium 2018 – current
- Competency Based Education Advisory Board 2016 – 2018
- State Authorization Workgroup, Council on Postsecondary Education 2014 – 2018
- State Authorization Network (SAN) 2014
- Faculty Development Workgroup, Council on Postsecondary Education 2013 – 2015
- Distance Learning Steering Team, Council on Postsecondary Education 2007 – 2018
- Course Management Systems Workgroup, Council on Postsecondary Education 2007 – 2018
- Kentucky Instructional Designer Association (KyIDA) 2013-2014
- Quality Matters
- Sloan-C: Council on Distance Education
- American Distance Education Consortium (ADEC)
- Association of Information Technology Professionals
- Alpha Kappa Psi Professional Business Fraternity
- Pi Kappa Delta National Speech and Debate Organization

MEMBERSHIP OF UNIVERSITY COMMITTEES / ACTIVITIES

- Professional Development Committee Chair, Huston-Tillotson University, 2019 – present
- Student Persistence Sub-committee, Co-Chair, Huston-Tillotson University, 2019 – present
- Campus Technology, Library Learning Resources Committee, Huston-Tillotson University, 2019 – present
- Academic Council, Huston-Tillotson University, 2019 – present
- Convocation and Assemblies Committee, Huston-Tillotson University, 2019 – present
- Employer Advisory Committee, Huston-Tillotson University, 2019 – present
- Handle Your Business Committee, Huston-Tillotson University, 2019 – present
- International Student Committee, Huston-Tillotson University, 2019 – present
- Scholarship Sub-committee, Huston-Tillotson University, 2019 – present
- Distance Learning Advisory Committee Director, 2017
- I.C.E.L.L. Executive Council, Kentucky State University, 2016, 2017

- Intersession Planning Committee, Kentucky State University, Winter 2011
- Speech Communication Search Committee, Kentucky State University, Fall 2011
- Greek Advisory Steering Committee, Kentucky State University, 2011-2015
- Al Letson Planning Committee, Kentucky State University, Fall 2011Faculty Senate 2005-2008
- Speech Communication Search Committee Chair, Kentucky State University, Spring 2009
- Homecoming Committee, Kentucky State University. 2007 - 2016
- Faculty Senate Professionals Concerns Committee 2006-2007
- Golden Girlz Spring Dance Team, Advisor, Kentucky State University. 2005-2016
- Student/Staff Technology Advisory Board, Murray State University. 2001-2002

PROFESSIONAL / CIVIC AWARDS & RECOGNITIONS

- Goldring Foundation "Go For the Gold" recipient, 2012-2017
- Who's Who Among America's Universities, Murray State University. 2002-2005
- Guest Speaker for United States of America Congress Briefing, Council for Opportunity in Education, Washington, D.C. February 2005

SPECIAL TASKS/ PRESENTATIONS

- Concurrent Workshop Presenter, "Past, Present, and Future of the HBCUs"
  LINKS Western Area Conference, June 7, 2019, Austin, Texas
- Affinity Groups Presentation, Academic Leadership Development Institute,
  Kentucky Council on Postsecondary Education, May 19, 2017
- Planned and directed 2016 NW Region Meeting of KABHE, MOSAIIC Afternoon mini-conference with The Central Kentucky Diversity Consortium, Kentucky State University, November 4, 2016
- Channel 10 Commentator for KSU Homecoming Parade. 2007, 2009-10, 2012-2015
- Guest Speaker for TRIO Regional Meeting—Council on Education, April 23, 2015
- Director, Frankfort's Youth Summer Dance Camp   2006 – 2014
- Judge, Miss Franklin Country Pageant   November 12, 2011
- Creation and Editor of *Greek Village* , KSU monthly NPHC Newsletter, 2011
- Interviewer for KSU & FAF Florence LaRue Performance, Channel 10 Station, 2010
- KSU 5th Annual President's Scholarship Gala, Narrator, Tribute to Dr. Carl H. Smith. 2009
- Career Development and Interview Skills Seminar, Upward Bound, KSU June 23, 2009
- Honors Convocation Moderator, Kentucky State University, May 2008
- Creator and Editor of 2000-2007 KSU Online Course Fact Book—Manipulation of Graphical Statistics