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Fostering creativity skills in online MBA programs: perceptions of MBA alumni

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FOSTERING CREATIVITY SKILLS IN ONLINE MBA PROGRAMS:

PERCEPTIONS OF MBA ALUMNI

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction

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by

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DEDICATION

  This dissertation is dedicated to my wife Yasmin Orlando, who stood by me through this entire research process. Through the late nights and long hours, she has supported me every step of the way. She is the foundation of my success.

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VITA

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M.A. • Sport Management
University of San Francisco • May 2008
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B.A. • History
California Lutheran University • August 2005

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Faculty of Sport Management • UCSB Exercise and Sport Studies Department
Goleta, CA • July 2014 – present
Taught upper division undergraduate students of the ESS Sport Management program with a comprehensive understanding of the numerous and assorted roles of a sport manager, as well as the investigation of contemporary sport management issues in relation to the basic principles and problems associated with the planning, organizing, leading, and controlling of various types of sport-related programs. Courses were additionally designed with a special emphasis on a student's readiness for change as a leader, understanding of the culture where the change is to occur, and the steps necessary to critically and creatively cause sustainable change. This also included a student's ability in leading projects, making smarter decisions, and grasping leadership tendencies.

Courses Taught:
- ESS 130: Sport Administration
- ESS 160: Current Issues in Sport Management

Adjunct Instructor • UCLA Summer Discovery Program
Westwood, CA • June 2013 – present
Planned and orchestrated one 6-week, one 5-week and four 3-week courses in providing students with a basic knowledge and understanding of the principles, processes, and strategies related to the business side of sports and entertainment, as well as the role of marketing in contemporary society, business enterprise, and in the non-profit sector.

Courses Taught:
- Principles of Sport Business
- Principles of Marketing

Guest Speaker • Pepperdine University Graziadio School of Business and Management
Westlake Village, CA • April 2014 – present
Taught MBA graduate students of OTMT 678 (Managerial Creativity and Innovation for Leadership) the current state of higher education in the United States and its criticism for its lack of creative practice in strengthening students to visualize creatively. This session provided a combination of engaging dialogue on elements that foster creativity skills in conjunction with team challenging exercises highlighting key concepts of understanding and applying creative thinking abilities.

> **Session Taught:**
> • The Impact of Education on Creativity

Workshop Presenter • MiraCosta College Emerging Leaders Institute
Oceanside, CA • April 2011 – present
Taught and conceptualized a series of one and two-hour workshops dedicated to helping MiraCosta College students become prominent and well-prepared leaders in their community. Lesson delivery included lecture with self and team building exercises to stimulate responsive strategic leadership and critical thinking.

> **Courses Taught:**
> • Communication Skills and Conflict Resolution
> • Creating Networks
> • Public Speaking
> • Vision and Goal-Setting

Workshop Presenter • California State University of Long Beach Leadership Academy
Long Beach, CA • November 2010
Facilitated and composed a two-hour workshop focused on cultivating leadership excellence by developing student leadership potential for practical and professional application. Workshop delivery emphasized theoretical instruction and applicable exercises to the awareness and comprehension of dealing with alpha tendencies in the workplace.

> **Course Taught:**
> • Alpha Male and Female

HIGHER EDUCATION ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

Associate Editor Marketing • Grand Canyon University Journal of Non-Significant Differences
Phoenix, AZ • September 2012 – present
Developed and applied creative marketing initiatives in steering journal promotion, as well as enticement to manuscript submissions. Sustained quality assurance and standards for media promotion in correlation to current trends and advantages of peer-reviewed online journal marketing.

Advancement Gift Analyst and Matching Gift Coordinator • Pepperdine University Advancement Gifts & Records
Malibu, CA • April 2011 – November 2012
Evaluated all pertinent information in order to add or update demographic, biographic, and gift information in Raiser's Edge: link memberships, events, and proposals to appropriate gifts. Responsible for accurate recording of gifts received by the University, including auditing amounts, values (stocks, property, and gifts-in-kind), and designations to appropriate account numbers for proper stewardship of donor's gift. Coordinated the completion and mailing of gift forms for all matching gifts received by the University.

Curriculum Advisor • Pepperdine University Executive Education Singapore Project
West Los Angeles, CA • June 2011 – August 2011
Reviewed and edited all standardized competency documentation for the Singapore Workforce Development Agency. Revised competency units to address the skills and knowledge required for effective senior management: *Fostering Business Relationships*, *Achieve Results*, *Engage People*, *Personal Effectiveness*, and *Conflict Resolution*. Conceptualized and formatted competency materials to be published via Training Vision for mass distribution.

Graduate Assistantship • Pepperdine University GSEP Marketing
West Los Angeles, CA • November 2010 – April 2011
Managed social media outlets (Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter), wrote press and news releases for GSEP website, as well as selective articles for Colleague magazine. Compiled prospective student reports from Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database system.

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Articles:
Orlando, M.D. (2012). Socialization: Psychological affect on gender conflict within the American workplace. *International Journal of Arts and Sciences, 5*(6), 321-328.

Orlando, M. (2012). Fostering creativity in higher education. *Review of Higher Education and Self-Learning, 5*(14), 54-61.

Orlando, M. (2012). Leadership implications and ethical solutions of athletic directors in producing a successful Division I-A football program. *Review of Management Innovation and Creativity, 5*(14), 81-87.

Orlando, M. (2012). The ultimate fighting advocacy for sport safety and recognition. *International Journal of Social Health Information Management, 5*(10), 58-66.

Peer-Reviewed Conference Proceedings:
Orlando, M. (2013). A Change Plan for Sustainable Giving Opportunities in Ensuring the Preservation of a University Brand. In R.K. Singh, & Review Committee (Eds.), *Global Conference on Education: Vol. IV, 2013 Proceedings* (pp. 124-137). Riverside: University of Riverside.

Orlando, M. (2011). Fostering creativity in higher education. In D. King, K. Dyer, & Reviewers Task Panel (Eds.), *International Handbook of Academic Research and Teaching: Vol. 20. 2011 Proceedings* (pp. 289-295). Nashville: Intellectbase International Consortium.

Orlando, M. (2011). Leadership implications and ethical solutions of athletic directors in producing a successful Division I-A football program. In D. King & Reviewers Task Panel (Eds.), *International Handbook of Academic Research and Teaching: Vol. 20. 2011 Proceedings* (pp. 364-368). Nashville: Intellectbase International Consortium.

Orlando, M. (2011). The ultimate fighting advocacy for state sanctioning and sport recognition. In D. King, K. Dyer, & Reviewers Task Panel (Eds.), *International Handbook of Academic Research and Teaching: Vol. 20. 2011 Proceedings* (pp. 47-52). Nashville: Intellectbase International Consortium.

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Paper Presentations:
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Orlando, M.D. (2012, May). *Socialization: Psychological affect on gender conflict within U.S. organizations*. Paper presented at the meeting of the International Journal of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, MA.

Orlando, M. (2011, December). *Fostering creativity in higher education*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Intellectbase International Consortium, Las Vegas, NV.

Orlando, M. (2011, December). *Leadership implications and ethical solutions of athletic directors in producing a successful Division I-A football program*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Intellectbase International Consortium, Las Vegas, NV.

Orlando, M. (2011, December). *The ultimate fighting advocacy for state sanctioning and sport recognition*. Paper presented at the meeting of the Intellectbase International Consortium, Las Vegas, NV.

Orlando, M.D. (2008, May). *MMA: The ultimate fighting perception*. Paper presented at the meeting of the University of San Francisco Sport Management Symposium, Orange, CA.

CONSULTING & PROFESSIONAL MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE

Symposium Chair:
Orlando, M.D. (2012, May). Session Chair. In J. Bonnici (Chair), *3rd International Journal of Arts and Sciences Conference: Harvard University*. Symposium conducted at the meeting of the International Journal of Arts and Sciences, Cambridge, MA.

Orlando, M. (2011, December). Session Chair. In R. Davis (Chair), *Intellectbase International Consortium Academic Conference*. Symposium conducted at the meeting of the Intellectbase International Consortium, Las Vegas, NV.

Organizational Leadership Consultant • J & J Sports Facilities LLC (Ventura County Arena)
Camarillo, CA • October 2011 - March 2012
Successfully wrote and implemented business plan and marketing strategies for 2012 that generated the highest gross ($382,000,) and net profits in the company's 10-year history; focused on increasing multiple sport team counts, arena sponsorships, retail, birthday parties, sport camps, and clinics. Developed company policy and procedures to broaden product functionality, as well as performed multiple on-site functions, including participant registration, and sport league and tournament coordination.

>   **Key Business Plan Components:**
>   - Forecasted quarterly projections and set monthly goals.
>   - Prioritized and project-managed sport arena renovations and repairs, which reduced and saved company over $25,000 in annual expenses.
>   - Created and or oversaw all league tier systems, youth divisions, and multiple sport programs in assuring recreation quality and client retention.
>   - Delegated grassroots marketing components for upcoming league sessions and regional tournaments.
>   - Established free publicity partnerships throughout the surroundings communities to increase brand awareness.

ABSTRACT

With companies seeking to increase organizational efficiency while promoting prosperous growth, creativity has become one of the most important leadership qualities sought after by employers. This has put a demand on Masters of Business Administration (MBA) graduates to possess creative skills, as well as a dependency for MBA students to acquire a quality MBA education. Although business education has entered into new domains of online learning, the criticism remains that business education does little to foster or strengthen students' creativity skills. Thus, with the evolution of online education arises a need to research the effectiveness of creativity within these new domains. This phenomenological study analyzed MBA alumni's perceptions about the fostering of creativity skills within an online MBA program. A qualitative study was conducted with 25 participants from 3 separate U.S. and internationally based online MBA programs in order to gain insight into the needed improvements and or positive instructional design elements, facilitation practices, and technological media tools that foster creativity in online MBA programs. This study addressed the following research questions through the lens of MBA alumni:

1. What are alumni perceptions regarding facilitation (of instructors) that either enhance and or stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program?

2. What are alumni perceptions regarding instructional design elements (exercises, assignments, and or activities that are built into curriculum) that either enhance and or stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program?

3. What are alumni perceptions regarding technological media that either enhance and or stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program?

Among the findings of this study was the discovery of several themes that concur with experiences that foster creativity skills in online MBA programs:

1. Informal and flexible instructors and course content equates creative learning opportunities.

2. Various active facilitating methods foster a learning process.

3. Latitude of creative learning is enhanced by the freedom and flexibility of students' choices.

4. Program content and delivery are driving factors in incorporating new knowledge and or creativity skills.

5. Technological media tools and opportunities that are driven by the student lead to the learning and practicing of creativity.

Chapter 1: Introduction

By the Numbers

According to the Graduate Management Admission Council's (GMAC) *2013 Corporate Recruiters Survey: Hiring Report*, 75% of Master of Business Administration (MBA) graduates project to be hired by more than 900 companies in 50 countries worldwide (Asia-Pacific, United States, and Europe). With companies seeking to increase organizational efficiency (meet economic challenges, reduce costs, and improve productivity) while promoting prosperous growth (expanding and diversifying consumer outreach; Graduate Management Admission Council [GMAC], 2013b), creativity has become the most important and sought after leadership quality with which to infuse an enterprise (IBM Global Services, 2010; "What Chief Executives Really Want," 2010). Correlating with IBM's *Global Chief Executive Officer Study* (2012b), 1,709 Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) from 64 countries in 18 industries ranked the ability to innovate (51%) as an essential organizational attribute to maximize their workforce, prioritizing it over industry leadership (40%), stability (37%), financial rewards (31%), and work flexibility (24%). Not surprisingly, recruiters and CEOs alike have rated creativity as a top 10 desired quality for final hiring decisions, as well as a top three most critical personality characteristic for an employee's future success (GMAC 2012b; IBM Global Services, 2012a). Forecasting this rise in demand for MBA graduates to possess creative capabilities, the expectations of desired outcomes for global companies have become dependent on the quality of an MBA student's education.

Currently, there are a multitude of opportunities via which a student can obtain an MBA degree. For example, the *Official MBA Guide* (2013) stated that there are more than 1,100 (profit, non-profit, accredited, and non-accredited) universities worldwide (North America,

South America, Central America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia) hosting more than 2,000 MBA programs. Institutions promoted and featured in the guide include 515 full-time MBA programs (2-year), 125 accelerated MBA programs (1 year to 20 months), 633 part-time MBA programs, 193 executive MBA programs, and 156 online MBA programs. Despite the massive listing of over 1,600 global MBA program formats, only 687 of these institutions possess business accreditation from the *Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business* (AACSB International, n.d.), "known, worldwide, as the longest standing, most recognized form of specialized/professional accreditation an institution and its business programs can earn" (para. 1).

U.S. colleges and universities predominantly offer the most AACSB accredited MBA programs in the world (463), dominating the market share by 70% (AACSB International, 2013). In addition, approximately 50% of all U.S. MBA degree granting institutions are AACSB accredited (AACSB International, 2013; Murray, 2010). For this reason, AACSB accreditation is significant to advancing the quality of U.S. business education for more than half of 250,000 students that enroll in a MBA program, as well as the 100,000 plus that are awarded a MBA degree annually (Murray, 2010). Furthermore, maintaining AACSB accreditation has also challenged the rigorous internal educational standards of U.S.-based institutions, which has propelled 50 MBA programs into the *Financial Times* 2013 Top 100 Global MBA Rankings ("Global MBA Rankings," 2013).

Based on various publications (*U.S. News & World Report, Business Week, Forbes,* and *Financial Times*), U.S. MBA programs have achieved renowned academic recognition through an assortment of criteria. This includes such factors as graduation rates, best practices, accreditation, class size, retention rates, admission selectivity, peer reputation, job placement

rates, post-MBA salaries, diversity of faculty and students, return on investment (ROI), faculty

credentials and training, student services, and technology support. Moreover, student and

corporate surveys are often used to shed insight on the demand and value of MBA degrees

delivered in full-time, part-time, executive, and online formats. Although these perceptions can

vary from person to person, a variety of data points speak to the diversification of program

formats and its impact upon the preferences and reputations of the business school landscape

(GMAC, 2012a).

Most U.S. business schools today offer a variety of MBA degree options. Not

surprisingly, contemporary enrollment of MBA programs is mostly driven by on-ground formats.

According to AACSB International (2013), full-time and part-time formats constitute 82% of all

MBA programs (44.6% full-time and 55.4% part-time). However, a growing option via which

MBA students are choosing to obtain their business education is an online format. Based on

current application trends from 527 global MBA programs (two-thirds U.S. and 34%

international), online MBA formats have reported a 66% increase in applicant volume, exceeding

all other MBA formats by more than 17% (GMAC, 2012a). Additionally, with the reported

application increases, full-time and part-time online MBA programs are now seeing a surge in

enrollment percentages over executive MBA education formats. Presently, online MBA

programs capture 9.6% of total MBA enrollment, whereas executive programs average 8.4%

(AACSB International, 2013).

The Online MBA Offering

For much of the 20th century, community colleges, state colleges, and mid-level

universities strategized to emulate a group of elite research institutions in advancing knowledge,

as well as impacting social and economic welfare (Christensen & Eyring, 2011). Although at

first the model steadily transformed colleges into universities, preserving knowledge and educating students, they began to face disruptions from innovations of technology, in addition to the lack of sufficient aid to support university-wide initiatives. With tuition only covering two-thirds of university expenditures, charitable resources struggle to fulfill the necessary overages. The imposing effects have put universities in the difficult position of administering layoffs and departmental cutbacks. Thus, the result could inhibit upon prospective students, which research a university based on whether it remains relevant, distinctive, and consistent to the student experience and confirmed expectations (McNally & Speak, 2011).

Institutional funding is considered a part of the national university ranking criteria established by *U.S. News and World Report* (Morse, 2013). This funding is crucial, as nearly 1,700 public and private nonprofit colleges (one-third of nationwide universities) have been on an "unsustainable financial path," and an additional 28% are "at risk of slipping into an unsustainable condition" (Blumenstyk, 2012, para. 1). According to Christensen and Eyring (2011), universities are no longer able to rely solely on tuition increases, fundraising, accreditation, and taxpayer collections. Thus, they warned universities, "If they cannot find innovative, less costly ways to performing their uniquely valuable functions, they are doomed to decline, high global and national rankings notwithstanding" (p. xxv). This is in response not only to new, unprecedented costs to universities, but also to the emergence of new competitors (for-profit and non-profit online MBA programs) that offer more convenient cost advantages of administering and implementing online learning practices to their institutions.

Based on GMAC's (2012a) *Application Trends Survey Report*, 51% of 527 MBA programs saw a decrease in applications for full-time two-year MBA programs: the largest application drop in comparison to any other MBA program format. According to Michael Horn

(as cited in Damast, 2012), executive director at Innosight Institute, a variety of second tier and third tier MBA programs are seeking creative and ground-breaking opportunities to increase tuition revenues while also reversing the declining trend of full-time MBA applicants. Paralleling the actions taken by universities in the 20th century to remain relevant, more universities today are adopting online formats in order to present themselves as more cutting edge, contemporary, and state of the art. For example, regarding implementing an online MBA program, David Smith (as cited in Damast, 2012), Associate Dean of Academic Affairs at Pepperdine University's Graziadio School of Business and Management, stated , "We feel if we do this well it will help strengthen our brand and reputation, help our on-ground programs, and give us a strong market presence" (para. 6).

Since the dawn of the 21st century, the popularity of online MBA offerings has grown simultaneously with the recommendations supplied by the Spellings Commission, which assisted some of the regulatory measures amended to the Higher Education Opportunity Act (U.S. federal governments body of law that funds higher education) in 2008 (Spellings, 2006). The reauthorization of the act required the U.S. Department of Education to circulate an annual report on how institutions were being financially supplemented, requiring universities' submission of "standardized information of student profiles, tuition, expected living costs, average graduation time, and graduation success rates" (Christensen & Eyring, 2011, p. 206). In turn, the act upheld the restriction of the U.S. Department of Education from setting standards and measures on educational performance (Higher Education Opportunity Act, 2008). Despite this prohibition of federal interference in learning outcomes, "the U.S. Education Department has issued new regulations to keep distance educators in check, and has pressured the groups that accredit

colleges and universities to keep a tighter rein on those that offer online courses" (Kelderman, 2011, para. 3).

Although online courses have been available for more than 25 years, several factors are responsible for the recent increase in interest and matriculation in online programs (Aslanian & Clinefelter, 2013). According to Seaman (2011), 75% of 2,500 U.S. colleges and universities "report that they see increases in demand for online courses and programs as a result of the current economic downturn" (p. 8). From the perspectives of 1,500 students who recently enrolled, currently enrolled, or were planning to enroll in a online program (undergraduate, graduate, certificate, or licensure program), 68% reported that they prefer studying online based on options to balance work, family, and school, whereas 64% attributed their choice to the convenience of studying anytime and anywhere (Aslanian & Clinefelter, 2012). Regardless of these explanations, in Eduventures' (2012) perspective, "there is a connection between sustained adult concern about cost and time barriers in higher education, and the lack of momentum over time in adult preference for online delivery, and perceptions of online quality" (p. 8). In other words, preferences for online learning (conveniences) are waning by the long-term participation of online students who realize that their success depends upon the broader value and return of a quality education (Eduventures, 2012; GMAC, 2013a).

Statement of the Problem

The current state of business education in the United States has been criticized for its lack of creative practice in strengthening students to visualize creatively (Baker & Baker, 2012). Glenn (2011), in particular, claimed that learning from a quality curriculum has become an afterthought, as business students' main focus is driven by attaining a high waged position, whereas universities are more induced by their business programs accumulating money. Based

on findings from Arum and Roska (2011), faculty members' overload of research requirements and serviceability are inhibiting upon the very staple of university mission statements that were derived in producing learning capacities:

> Lectures in higher educational institutions are required to produce competent graduates, ensure that standards are met, and ensure that the necessary technical knowledge is acquired so that graduates can effectively contribute to the workforce and, at the same time, meet the academic criteria demanded by accrediting universities, educational authorities, and economic advisors representing industries. (Teo & Waugh, 2010, p. 206)

Livingston (2010) concurred that universities have to reorganize the application of pedagogical designs so they can reconfigure their purpose as places of learning rather than places of teaching.

Since the 19th century, critics of higher educational practices have been concerned with business education being one-dimensional with the teaching of technical skills, instead of incorporating a richer understanding for students to enact creative thinking abilities (Gregg, 2011). Based on research from Schmidt-Wilk (2011), classroom opportunities for students to manufacture novel ideas are scarce, as faculty struggle with ways to evaluate student creativity. As such, Petocz, Reid, and Taylor (2009) found that business schools are not emphasizing the importance of creativity to students in relation to their academics and aspiring professional vitality:

> The effort is necessary because the nature of human civilization today is changing more quickly than our educational methodologies-more and more, we prepare students who must function fully in a world where understandings and expectations morph more quickly than a student's ability to comprehend them, much less to react and adapt to them. (Harding, 2010, p. 52)

Although business education has entered into new domains of online learning, the outcry remains that higher education does little to strengthen students' creative abilities, and thus organizations are unfairly left with the results (Synder, 2003).

Currently, there are 207 nationally and regionally accredited (recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation and the U.S. Department of Education) online MBA programs in the U.S. alone (OnlineMBA Guide, n.d.) and an estimated 990,000 students are currently enrolled in an online MBA program (Damast, 2012). However, in spite of their present growth and continued newness, online MBA programs are struggling to gain acceptance in terms of their perceived quality and value. Exacerbating the situation, members of Congress exposed accreditors' negligence and complacency in reporting academic fraud and deception in online programs in order to make online academics seem comparable to those of face-to-face classes (Kelderman, 2011). Liu, Magjuka, Bonk, and Lee (2007) concurred, as "instructors seemed to resort to technology as a solution, whereas the students stressed the importance social activities as a solution to heighten the level of social presence and collegiality in online courses" (p. 20). Thus, with such a large emphasis on the need for creativity in the workplace, criticisms of business education, and the continuing growth of online MBA programs, concerns have arisen regarding whether a virtual format can foster the creativity of MBA students, preparing them to be the next wave of creative and innovative leaders.

The search for creative talent in MBA programs has been a recurring theme for CEOs and businesses. As mentioned previously, prospective employers can put more value on MBA students who possess creative skills and critical thinking capabilities (McIntyre, Hite, & Rickard, 2003). For instance, of the key school criteria employers use to decide where to conduct on-campus recruitment, quality of MBA students ranks number one at 78%, overshadowing

reputation of school (37%), depth of talent pool (35%), and alumni influence (32%). Another significant determination of this study was that quality of curriculum was the third most important factor companies consider when selecting business schools at which to recruit (GMAC 2012b). Not surprisingly, with the massive expansion of online MBA programs, employers are now evaluating whether online MBA degrees can be valued the same as MBA degrees obtained in the traditional fashion (face-to-face environment).

In a study conducted by Bailey and Flegle (2011), 11 out of 20 hiring managers in the state of Wisconsin perceived that not all MBA degrees should be valued the same. The reasoning behind these beliefs was influenced by a university's accreditation, teaching and learning automations, prevailing graduation rates, and lack of student work experience. Even more concerning, half of the participants also indicated that an online MBA degree was not of equivalent value to a traditional MBA degree. Based on various perspectives, hiring managers stated that traditional MBA formats possessed better opportunities for student interaction, a greater value for robust discussions, as well as a better educational setting for more serious students. Although these perceptions were generalities in the acceptance of an online MBA degree, it would correlate pedagogical insight to comparable perceptions given forth among online instructors and students (see Chapter 2).

Statement of the Purpose

According to Livingston (2010), creativity in higher education "is neither foreign nor new to our students" (p. 59). Creativity is manifested through students' utilization of the Internet, cell phones, and computers, but less so in the classroom. Oddly, some universities have yet to embrace the concept of utilizing students' creative abilities through technology. Instead, pedagogical restraints on curriculum instruction have prohibited creative opportunities for

students to express themselves. Only a few studies (Morrow, 2010; Ransdell, 2009; Silvian, 2000) have explored creativity within the scope of online and or distance learning, as well as attempted to reveal the impact of creative instruction experienced by both faculty and students. Even more limited is the review of creativity in online business education and its impact upon online MBA programs. In a study conducted by Mintu-Wimsatt, Sadler, and Ingram (2007), MBA student perceptions were weighed in relation to an online marketing course and its ability to foster creative thinking. Although the study concluded the exposure of fostered creative instruction amongst these students, it remains only a snapshot of an online MBA course versus the impact of an overall online MBA program.

The purpose of this study was to examine a broad perspective of various online MBA alumni's perceptions about creativity in an online MBA program. With the evolution of online education arises a need to research the effectiveness of creativity within these new domains. This will continue to measure whether a student's creativity will dwindle, rise, or remain stagnant while he/she participates in an online MBA program. It will also create awareness as to whether online MBA programs can foster creativity skills for future business students and their working environments.

Research Questions

In an attempt to understand how creativity is fostered in an online MBA program, I will apply the following research questions through the lens of MBA alumni:

1. What are alumni perceptions regarding facilitation (of instructors) that either enhance and or stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program?

2. What are alumni perceptions regarding instructional design elements (exercises, assignments, and or activities that are built into curriculum) that either enhance and or stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program?

3. What are alumni perceptions regarding technological media that either enhance and or stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program?

Significance of the Topic

Since the turn of the 21st century, many scholars have focused on creativity, resulting in the production of over 10,000 published papers, established journals, and books (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010). However, on a global scale, the importance of creativity implementation remains less emphasized among higher education institutions in Western countries (Teo & Waugh, 2010). Moreover, and as mentioned previously, explorations of creativity in U.S. higher education are also very vague within the domain of online learning environments.

With the rise of online MBA programs, organizations are seeking graduates with creative skill sets that will make them think as if "tomorrow is less predictable" (Sawyer, 2006, p. 76). As such, two main trends are raising the current growth of research toward organizational creativity: the first is to successfully adapt to ever changing work environments, while the second is being prepared to think in creative ways that yield innovation (Florida, 2002; Puccio & Cabra, 2010). According to Moran (2010), "creative persons, institutions, and inventions are touted by politicians, leaders, educators, and the media as 'saviors' for the ills of society" (p. 76). In retrospect, organizational survival has become dependent on an employee's creativity in producing solutions to modern society's challenges and needs (Puccio & Cabra, 2010; Sawyer, 2006).

This study is significant in updating and bridging the gap of creativity research, not only in higher education, but also in terms of the vast demands and ever-changing domain of online business education. Through perceptions of various alumni, common themes were found in terms of whether the fostering of creativity enhances and or stifles creativity skills in an online MBA program. This will create awareness and insight to the needed improvements and or positive instructional design elements, facilitation practices, and technological media tools that foster creativity in both for-profit and non-profit institutions that have established or will establish an online MBA program. Also, this study will build upon the lack of research that highlights business students' and or alumni comprehensions of creativity concepts in relation to their scholarly work and professional career (A. Cropley, 2001; Petocz et al., 2009). Thus, shared experiences from alumni will widen the perspective to the perceived value of an online MBA program in regard to its ability to prepare students to "demonstrat[e] creativity in problem finding and solving, to have a well developed ethical stance, to be able to contribute to their company's position on sustainability and sustainable development, and to display a high level of cross-cultural understanding" (Petocz et al., 2009, p. 409).

Key Definitions

Active Learner: Active learning is the process of interacting and reflecting in applicable work as both an individual and in a group (Sweet, Carpenter, Blythe, & Apostel, 2013).

Continuity: Continuity refers to the vertical reiteration of major curriculum elements. This means that over time the same kinds of skills will be brought into continuing operation (Tyler, 1949).

Convergent Thinking: Convergent thinking is the production of a rational response for a given problem (Guilford, 1968).

Creativity: There are various interpretations of the meaning of creativity. For the purposes of this study, and in accordance with Dellas and Gaier (as cited in Jackson, 2006b,), "personal creativity is the ability to use imagination, insight, intellect, as well as feeling and emotion, in order to move an idea from its present state to an alternate, previously unexplored state" (p. 8).

Divergent Thinking: Divergent thinking refers to the multiplicity of responses produced (Guilford, 1968).

Domain: "Domains are in turn nested in what we usually call culture, or the symbolic knowledge shared by a particular society, or by humanity as a whole" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 28).

Elaboration: Elaboration is the review and finalizing of details in an already well-constructed product (Guilford, 1968).

Field: "To have any affect, the idea must be couched in terms that are understandable to others, it must pass muster with the experts in the field, and finally it must be included in the cultural domain to which it belongs" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 27).

Flexibility Factors: Two different factors: spontaneous flexibility (to freely think conceptually) and adaptive flexibility (redefining procedures in order to solve problems; Guilford, 1968).

Fluency Factors: Differentiated among three factors: ideational fluency (the collection of ideas dispersed within a certain timeframe), associational fluency (thinking through analogy), and expressional fluency (bracketing original ideas into arrangements; Guilford, 1968).

Innovation: An innovation is an original, new, and or important idea, process, product, and or technology that is applied and immersed into a market or society (Frankelius, 2009).

Integration:

Integration refers to the horizontal relationship of curriculum experiences. The

organization of these experiences should be such that they help the student increasingly

to get a unified view and to unify his behavior in relation to the elements dealt with.

(Tyler, 1949, p. 85)

Online MBA program: An online master's degree in business administration program is a

solely Internet-based learning environment in which students primarily learn independently

through various technological tools that facilitate course information and instruction. Program

formats vary between accelerated 1-year and traditional 2-year durations ("How Do Online MBA

Programs Work?" n.d.).

Organizational creativity: "The creation of a valuable, useful new product, service, idea,

procedure, or process by individuals working together in a complex social system" (Woodman,

Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993, p. 293).

Originality: Originality is a fresh perspective, ideology, or concept.

Perception: Perception is the awareness and identification of elements experienced in an

environment.

Person: "Someone whose thoughts or actions change a domain, or establish a new

domain…What counts is whether the novelty he or she produces is accepted for inclusion in the

domain" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 28). "Covers information about personality, intellect,

temperament, physique, traits, habits, attitudes, self-concept, value systems, defense

mechanisms, and behavior" (Rhodes, 1961, p. 307).

Press: "Press from pressures is defining such interactions between persons and

environments" (Kozbelt, Beghetto, & Runco, 2010, p. 25).

Product: "The creative product is a tangible item, product, response, or finished idea. It is the end result of the creative process, influenced by the press (environment)" (Kaufman, 2009, pp. 23-24).

Process: "Theories focused on the creative process aim to understand the nature of the mental mechanisms that occur when a person is engaged in creative thinking or creative activity" (Kozbelt et al., 2010, p. 24).

Sequence: "Sequence as a criterion emphasizes the importance of having each successive experience build upon the preceding one but to go more broadly and deeply into matters involved" (Tyler, 1949, p. 85).

Key Assumptions

This study operated under the following assumptions:

1. Research participants (online MBA alumni) will honestly share their experiences regarding instructional design elements (exercises, assignments, and or activities that are built into curriculum), facilitation (of instructors), and technological media that either enhance and or stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program.

2. The participants will honestly share their insight as to whether online MBA programs can prepare business students with creative leadership skill sets for the modern workplace.

3. Data gathered from the online MBA alumni will yield an accurate textual description (significant statements or themes) and structural description (experiences and situations that have influenced their perspectives) to the study.

4. Selected online MBA alumni will all have relevant experience to the research
    questions proposed in this study so that the researcher can bracket a common theme
    (i.e., conduct phenomenology research).

Limitations of the Study

This phenomenological study is aimed at online MBA alumni and their perceptions towards the fostering of creativity skills in online MBA programs. Requests for gaining access and permission to conduct the study came through contact from LinkedIn groups and emails to online MBA program directors. Data were gathered through personal interviews of online MBA alumni from AACSB accredited online MBA programs that have an established alumni community. In particular, the collection of data and reflection of common themes was shared through experiences of instructional design elements, facilitation, and technological media that may or may not have fostered creative thinking abilities. Therefore, this study was limited in scope by the ability to ensure all collected data would come from alumni of multiple programs. Few groups on LinkedIn encompass a large population of alumni from different online MBA programs. Furthermore, there were no guarantees that a significant differentiation of alumni would be available to participate at the time of the study.

Additional limitations could have emerged through the use of LinkedIn as the main tool to verify legitimate online MBA alumni. Online MBA network groups, especially those that host a variety of former students from different programs, had to be reviewed and selected carefully to ensure that each individual had experienced the phenomenon of being a former student in online MBA program, especially with the exposure of creativity through instructional design elements, facilitation, and technological media. Otherwise, the data could have yielded skewed results that are incongruent with the study's intentions. Additionally, problems with verifying

sampling could have narrowed the demographics of participants in terms of age and gender; however since this study is the first of its kind, there is no known significance to this necessity in evaluating themes of creativity in online MBA programs.

Theoretical Framework and Summary

The concepts and frameworks regarding creativity fluctuate in their meaning and nature, as well as their ability to be nurtured within a variety of environments and domains. Over the course of several decades, influential frameworks have progressed in fostering creativity in higher education including, but not limited to, Karakas's (2011) practice-based teaching and learning model centered on positive organizational scholarship, Respress and Stevens's (2011) model focused on flexible pedagogical deliveries, and Hargrove's (2011b) three basic principle model emphasizing learning through the creative process. Additionally, there are also complimentary models (Conrad & Donaldson, 2012; Dirksen, 2012) in engaging students in an online setting, in addition to characteristics of creative leaders (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005) that facilitate student energy. In conjunction with this study, certain creativity models can relate to different experiences among students, and thus all are appropriate for the conceptual design of this study.

Chapter 2 utilizes Tyler's (1949) *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* to categorize the saturation of creativity and online learning models, and research into the following areas:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?

2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?

3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?

4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (p. 1)

More specifically, Tyler's principles guided the study in reviewing creativity frameworks that eliminate learning blocks and fears among students, as well as offering ways to organize learning objectives in effectively teaching creativity. This will be followed by a cross comparison of business education research that has acquired results on learned creativity and student engagement in online practices.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The main theme associated with this study is creativity perceived by alumni in their online MBA programs. To better understand whether a virtual environment can expose and enhance creativity to its students, this literature review will evaluate two separate but related disciplines. The first portion of this literature review will focus on the historical background of creativity research and its progressive application into higher education. A timeline from a comparative analysis of past studies and perspectives will explain the obstacles to teaching creativity to defining creativity so it can be nurtured and fostered in educational settings. Furthermore, the investigation will review creativity frameworks, detailing the elimination of learning blocks and fear among students while modeling trust to incorporate a learning culture of reasonable and clear expectations. This will be concluded by the organizing of learning objectives to purposely teach creativity through problem-solving activities and exercises.

The remaining portion of the literature review will highlight creativity research in business education, mainly encompassing perceptions and attitudes of online learning, as well as the perceived quality of online MBA programs. The majority of the studies collected and examined will concentrate on past theories and statistical data in amplifying the factors (online course interaction, facilitation, design, and delivery mediums) that affect the positive and or negative perceptions of online MBA programs and its courses. This section will also emphasize the important ingredients and recommendations that can support online MBA student satisfaction: in other words, rationalizing the plausible conditioning elements that may allow students to successfully learn creativity in an online domain. It will also illustrate how this study will be further conducted.

Historical Background on Creativity Research

Scholarly work on creativity did not truly blossom until 1950, when J. P. Guilford advocated the need for research during his presidential address at the American Psychological Association (Haring-Smith, 2006; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2007). Based on his count, before 1950, only 186 entries out of 121,000 indexed in the *Psychological Abstracts* pertained to the subject of creativity (Guilford, 1950). To Guilford's (1950) concern, the 0.2% of research had anchored the progression of comprehending and or monitoring creative activity. By extending awareness of this neglected subject, he challenged his fellow psychologists to explore the social importance of learning creativity from a scientific perspective, as well as its impact upon various industries seeking to discover and to develop invaluable creative talent and ideas.

Over the next two decades, research towards the cultivation of creativity would progress from being considered innate from intelligence to being influenced by an individual's personality, interests, attitudes, and environmental domains (Anderson, 1959; Barron, 1955; Fromm, 1959; Ghiselin, 1963; Guilford, 1950, 1959, 1963, 1967, 1968; Koestler, 1964; Maslow, 1959; May, 1959; Mooney, 1963; Patrick, 1955; Rogers, 1959, Sinnott, 1959; Taylor, 1964). This approach to creativity challenged the favored notion that a high intelligence or IQ was the dominant factor in producing creative talent. In response, numerous studies established new scientific explorations that correlated personality traits to the enhancement and nature of creativity (Haring-Smith, 2006). These various results advanced and emphasized the role of learning as a key differentiating criterion between biological creativity and psychological creativity (Anderson, 1959).

Traits of creative persons. When Guilford (1963) called for the need for creative research, he never dispelled the disposition that intellect was non-existent from creative thinking.

However, he conveyed from his studies of scientists and developmental research personnel that intellectual abilities only determined the individual's ability to do, while motivation and environmental opportunities influenced what the individual would do. In theory with Eyring (1959), "even the gifted individual, however, requires a stimulating environment, including freedom from distractions which deflect attention from the question at issue, and freedom from an authoritarian society which prevents unbiased inquiry" (p. 4). Fromm (1959) added that people transcend in response to their environments and its happenings through "self-awareness, imagination, and creativeness" (p. 51). Mooney (1963) concurred by correlating creative production to an environment that cultivates care of its creative talent. This assertion supported the notion that creative prowess was not dependent on genetic change, but rather a genetic constitution of varied responses and reactions from a stimulating environment (Sinnott, 1959).

According to many writers (Anderson, 1959; Barron, 1955; Fromm, 1959; Koestler, 1964; Maslow, 1959; Rogers, 1959), the ideology of self-actualizing creativeness manifested from the process of social learning. For example, Barron (1955) depicted the nature of originality as a "highly organized mode of responding to experience, including other persons, society, and oneself" (p. 485). Koestler (1964) concurred that the creative act cannot produce something out of nothing:

> It uncovers, selects, re-shuffles, combines, synthesizes already existing facts, ideas, faculties, skills. The more familiar the parts, the more striking the new whole. Man's knowledge of the changes of the tides and the phases of the moon is as old as his observation that apples fall to earth in the ripeness of time. (p. 120)

As Fromm (1959) eloquently stated, "Education for creativity is nothing short of education for living" (p. 54).

Elaborating on this concept, Anderson (1959) asserted an individual's "personality [was] one's rate of psychological growth in social situations" (p. 128). In other words, he conceptualized that creativity optimization was a defining feature of six propositions of personality development:

- Self-differentiation and integration transpires through the confrontation and free interplay of differences (persons or groups of persons).

- Confrontation through both positive and negative relationships expresses an individual's ability to think, feel, believe, and desire.

- Social integrative behavior (harmony) is achieved through discovery of common purposes with others and with invention of means for attaining them.

- Learning is the ability to yield and or abandon ideas for new emerging ones.

- Differentiating general experiences learns to see similarities and differences between perceptions.

- The developmental process is positive and free from interpersonal conflict and psychological stress. (pp. 124-126).

Anderson labeled learning as the "activity-between" (p. 128), and described interacting as the process by which an individual would transact, bestow empathy, and or relate. Although profound in the realm of social learning, Anderson also stressed that an individual's willingness to be open-minded was just as important as the environment that permitted the creative opportunity.

Additional corresponding theories from Fromm (1959), Maslow (1959), May (1959), and Rogers (1959) characterized self-actualizing creativeness as the openness to experience, whereby an individual embraces his or her innate capacities to expand, develop, and mature beyond

abstractions, expectations, and stereotypes, as well as the mysterious unknown. In the nature of creative interests, Rogers found that an individual creates primarily out of personal satisfaction. He stated, "The most fundamental condition of creativity is that the source or locus of evaluative judgment is internal" (p. 76). Fromm (1959) described being creative as conditional upon one's ability to be puzzled, focused, and courageous, as well as to willingly accept conflict and anxiety caused by polarity. He strongly advocated that creativity was formed on the basis of possessing the right attitude that every human could achieve. While Rogers and Fromm differed between interests and attitudes, their respective opinions emphasized the driving force of personality development in relation to identifying and measuring creative talent.

       Early frameworks for creative talent. Since the beginning of creativity research, the theoretical frameworks to identify and or measure the nature of creativity have taken on a variety of perspectives. For instance, Ghiselin (1963) and May (1959) asserted that creativity was merely steered by a need, choice, and or passion to drive its pre-configurative awareness, performance, and implementation. As such, "it is from this spontaneous toying and exploration that there arises the hunch, the creative seeing of life in a new and significant way" (Rogers, 1959, p. 76). From a similar and more detailed angle, Patrick (1955) further substantiated Wallas's (1926) original construct that the creative process was characterized by four stages: preparation, incubation, illumination, and revision or verification. In his deliberation, the first two stages of preparation and incubation were critical for an individual to gather and learn relative information (the issue), which allowed opportunities to readjust mental outlooks, modifications, and configurations. Patrick described the remaining two stages (illumination and revision/verification) as additional phases of applied solutions with the prospect to reevaluate, learn, and verify. By emphasizing two cycles of creative thought, he believed "learning is

modification of response by practice and fixation and operates after the goal has been reached

the first time and the creative thought is over" (p. 69).

In line with the learning infrastructure in which creative individuals excel, Guilford

(1968) conceptualized analytic techniques to differentiate, as well as measure, creative thinking

abilities. He comprised the psychological model *Structure of Intellect* in identifying two distinct

forms (divergent thinking and convergent thinking) of creative thinking. Moreover, the model

implied that "learning is primarily the achievement of information" (p. 106). Either way of

divergent or convergent thinking was a process of acquiring, retaining, and or generating

information by associating given information, "whether from ideas, of stimuli, or of stimuli and

responses" (p. 106). Resembling how intelligence is measured with an IQ test, convergent

thinking meant a sensible, controlled answer per given problem, while divergent thinking could

be based on open-ended solutions accessed from intuition, thinking flexibility (evaluation), and

or memory (Guilford 1959, 1967, 1968). Based on his extensive investigations, Guilford (1950,

1959, 1963, 1967, 1968) found that more individuals exhibited creativity through divergent

thinking rather than convergent thinking. This meant that creativity was more likely to emerge

from brainstorming and or mind mapping of learned and applied information (products and

contents), requiring a cognitive evaluation of an individual's knowledge. As a result, Guilford

coupled divergent thinking with creativity through several dimensions of fluency, flexibility,

originality, and elaboration.

The test to define and measure fluency was based on the quantity of appropriate ideas

presented. To Guilford (1968), fluency factors were differentiated by the rate of ideas within an

allotted time frame (ideational fluency), the completion of one's ability to apply thinking by

analogy (associational fluency), and the organizing of ideas into classifications (expressional

fluency). Flexibility thinking was contrived to gauge an individual's aptitude to modify the use, comprehension, strategy, and or direction of a given objective. Newer interpretations were scored by an individual's capacity to think with a high level of free flowing abstraction (spontaneous flexibility) and or alteration to tasks in approach, strategy, and conceivable solutions (adaptive flexibility). The basis for elaboration was contingent on the amount of detail an individual conveyed, while originality was the comparative deviation of unique ideas from a collected sample. To this distinction, Guilford (1968) hypothesized that traits and characteristics of creativity were subjected to "scanning one's stored information" (p. 105).

It was to this advocacy that Maslow (1959) first conjectured that individuals obtained their peak life experiences through exposure to different life encounters. Guilford (1968) further asserted "that the creative disposition is made up of many components and that its composition depends upon where you find it" (p. 99). Taylor (1964) also followed suit with this notion by stating, "creative people in different fields may have different personal characteristics" (p. 28). For example, Taylor stressed that different personalities could be linked to various types of creative thinking:

> Liking for ideas versus people versus things, tendencies toward socialization and interpersonal involvement, introversion versus extroversion, commitment to primary versus secondary thought processes, impulse control (suppression versus expression), and surgency versus desurgency. (p. 28)

Taylor felt that "creativity or creative performance in different fields should be studied in order to help identify potentially creative individuals for each type of activity" (p. 46). To this point, Taylor deemed that knowledge of creative individuals in relation to their respective fields would assist other prospective individuals who may be compatible.

Nurturing Creativity in Higher Education

Research on creativity in education during the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s primarily examined the naturalistic side of creativity, in which the cognitive process was seen as either being stimulated or restricted by an individual's environment. Early studies from Torrance's (1962, 1965, 1969) and Getzels and Jackson's (1962) measurement of elementary and high school students' ability to perform and demonstrate creativity broke barriers of research procedures not yet seen. Although the reasonable establishment in testing and finding characteristics of highly creative students was groundbreaking, the allusion for the nurturing of creative talent was far from clear. According to MacKinnon (1968a), implications of creative research came in response to conclusions that students' creative potential was being neglected, if not discriminated against, in all levels of American education.

Conversely, colleges during this period were also being questioned in terms of whether they were educating for creativity, since prior to the late 1950s these institutions showed very little interest in its importance (MacKinnon, 1968a). With perpetual innovation and progression of business enterprises, the recruitment of, need for, and dependence on creative brainpower had developed it into a necessary competence (Eisenhower, 1964). To this concern, President Eisenhower (1964) advocated, "America is not now meeting (and gives no sign of being able to meet) this monumental need for highly trained creative specialists who can move freely and confidently to the outermost limits of knowledge and extend those limits" (p. 4). Eisenhower, Friedman (1964), and MacKinnon (1968a) transferred responsibility onto colleges (especially graduate programs) to stop teaching students as merely students, and instead increase and supply students with the leading edge of creative training, learning, and ideas to become specialists in their respective fields.

Obstacles to teaching creativity. Based on research from Heist and Wilson (1968), the major focus of concern among creative students apparently is centered on what faculty members do or fail to do, both directly in their interactions with students in and out of the classroom and indirectly in their roles as formulators of policy and structure. (p. 194)

In other words, the effects of nurturing creative talent were influenced both positively and negatively by a faculty member's manifestation of instructional goals, curriculum content, standards of excellence, and methods of evaluation and grading. Additionally, Heist and Wilson acknowledged that one of the most fundamental predicaments among numerous college faculty members was that while most of them were experts in their respective fields of study, many were amateurs in their capabilities as actual teachers. Sears (1964) concurred, as he believed graduate programs had become insecure with their judgments as to how to train a student's level of creative talent because of the lacking criteria to successfully train.

During this era, Ewing and Stickler (1964) found that only 91 universities offered courses on teaching at the collegiate level, as well as other areas of higher education. To counteract the deficiency of educational programs and faculty training, Hallman (1978) suggested that "the effective teacher must invent his own creative techniques as a part of the specific, ongoing teaching operations in the classroom" (p. 222). Otherwise, Hallman and Sears (1964) exclaimed the traditional, authoritarian classroom environment would continue to hinder the encouragement of the creative thought processes and its intellectual flexibility. Hallman described the following obstacles as precursors for faculty and colleges to avoid or be aware of:

- Pressure to conform: these pressures may take the form of teacher-chosen goals and activities, standardized routines and tests, or an inflexible curriculum.

- Authoritarian attitudes and environments repress the creative potential of young people.

- Ridicule and similar attitudes destroy feelings and self-worth in students and therefore have a tendency to block off creative efforts.

- Rigidity of personality inhibits creative expressions. Inflexible defense mechanisms and compulsive fears on the part of teachers are common defenders.

- Rewards as grades arouse defensive attitudes on the part of the pupils and to that extent threaten inventiveness.

- Quest of uncertainty is filtered by teachers who demand right answers, who insist on what they themselves want in the way of responses, who demand predetermined solutions.

- Overemphasis on success drains off energies from creative processes and focuses them upon outcomes.

- Hostility toward the divergent personality-rigid defense mechanism.

- Intolerance of the play attitude in connection with schoolwork characterizes the environments, which stifles creativeness. Innovation requires freedom to toy with ideas and materials, encouragement to deal with irrelevancies, and permission to dip into fantasy and make believe. (pp. 220-222)

In challenging the stasis of creativity in university classrooms, early scholars (Hallman, 1978; Heist & Wilson, 1968; MacKinnon, 1968a, 1968b; Sears, 1964) expressed that faculty needed to implement a non-authoritarian intellectual environment of educational experiences that encourage students to think abstractly ("opportunities for the manipulation of objects and ideas" [Hallman, 1978, p. 220]) so that each student's different type of creative potential had the

opportunity to develop. In retrospect, by the 1980s, creativity research would progress in

nurturing creative activities within different domains (Sternberg, 1988). However, for the

remainder of the 20th century, community colleges, state colleges, and mid-level universities

strategized to emulate a group of elite research institutions in advancing knowledge (Christensen

& Eyring, 2011) predicated upon a pedagogy focused on faculty's domineering lectures and

instruction (Clegg, 2008; Nixon, 2004). The result, Freeman (2006) believed, was that

universities of the 21st century were still manufacturing reactive students that are assessed based

on grade honors from mastered memory and recall knowledge, which has anchored the ability

for students to develop critical thinking and applied synthesis (Clegg, 2008).

Based on findings from Jackson (2006a), the inhibiting of creative education has been

directed by instructors' constrained curriculum designs and hesitant facilitation of creative

thinking practices. From additional perspectives, 95.5% of National Teaching Fellows felt

higher education hindered student creativity based on poor teaching and assessment, saturated

classes, managerialism, and stress of failure (Fryer, 2006). Regardless of these explanations, the

field of facilitating creativity is not absent, but rather universal in its application (Jackson, 2006a;

Sweet et al., 2013):

> Much of it, however, is domain specific-education is interested in gifted and talented
>
> programs, psychology and the natural sciences concern themselves with the development
>
> of creativity in the brain, business focuses on creative problem-solving (CPS) and
>
> innovation, and the arts in general deal with creative products and processes. (Sweet et
>
> al., 2013, p. 1)

In spite of this, none of these disciplines have constructed a comprehensive and or completed

pedagogical process for creative studies (Sweet et al., 2013).

In his TED lecture on *How Schools Kill Creativity,* Sir Ken Robinson (2006) stated that students were not growing into their creative potential, but rather being educated out of being creative. To the growing dismay of educators, "by the time our students reach higher education they are already in a state of relative creative stasis" (Freeman, 2006, p. 92).

> Research shows that, at age five, a child's potential for creativity is 98%. By the age of
>
> ten, that potential has dropped to 30%; at fifteen, it is just 12%; and by the time we reach
>
> adulthood, our creativity potential is said to fall to a mere 2%. (G. Robinson, 2000, p. 7)

Robinson's argument was made on the basis that student children had the creative potential to be more carefree in taking risks because they did not comprehend the capacity of what it meant to be wrong. However, by the time those students reached maturity, they were taught to be frightened of the consequences that came with being wrong or incorrect.

Although not all students are equally potentially creative (Freeman, 2006) and vary in creative development through a lifespan trajectory (Tsai & Cox, 2012), creativity "is an ability that seems to diminish commensurate with the number of years devoted to formal education" (Gibson, 2010, p. 608). To raise the development capacities of student creativity, in the last decade there has been "a shift of interest to it becoming a standard graduate attribute of a higher education degree" (Pollard, 2012, p. 2). The peaking interests in creativity as an attribute within higher education have become more responsive to the obstacles that have hindered its implementation. Educators are now emphasizing that the status quo of higher educational learning is no longer effective in meeting the student demands for new delivery methods of creative academics (Evans, 2009), as well as progressive fast-paced societal changes to technological, economic, social, political, and civil environments (D. Cropley & Cropley, 2010; Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; McWilliam, Hearn, & Haseman, 2008; Puccio & Cabra, 2010).

At an education summit, Oklahoma College Presidents Roger Webb and Mike O'Neal stated, "Those in higher education must take the lead in encouraging creativity on their campuses and producing graduates capable of competing in a 21st-century society" (Evans, 2009, p. 12). Patricia Wynd (2011) concurred, "we must teach our students a major perception shift-to think like members in a boardroom, not as sophomores in college" (p. 103). As a result, the campaign for fostering creativity into higher education has brought forth a challenge to traditional curriculum standardizations and routine academics. Today, newer interpretations have come forth, likening creativity to an athletic ability; "if all individuals have the potential to be creative and if creativity is a process that can be dissected and therefore taught, then colleges and universities can work to create curricula, pedagogies, co-curricular programming, and a general institutional environment to support creative development" (Haring-Smith, 2006, p. 24).

Defining creativity in order to teach creativity. Definitions of creativity can be as broad as labeling ways to use it in the classroom. According to Kaufman (2009), the meaning of creativity is vast and goes beyond a basic definition and concept of divergent thinking. In other words, creativity can be interpreted in many different ways, such as a beautiful piece of artwork, an ingenious computer program, an *a-ha* sensation when an individual comprehends what to do next, how a creative person acts, or the outcome of shared ideas that are exchanged between a group of people. Although many of these definitions vary in context, Plucker and Makel (2010) viewed creativity as part of a world of "similar, overlapping, and possibly synonymous terms (e.g., imagination, ingenuity, innovation, inspiration, inventiveness, muse, novelty, originality, serendipity, talent, unique)" (p. 48).

The variation is compounded by the fact that creativity involves a multitude of

definitions, conceptualizations, domains, disciplines that bear on its study, empirical

methods, and levels of analysis, as well as research orientations that are both basic and applied – and applied in varied contexts. (Kozbelt et al., 2010, p. 21)

In the realm of creativity research, myriad of related terms and definitions of creativity are vaguely used, as well as avoided for its extensive meanings (Plucker & Makel, 2010). However, "creativity is often considered in terms of which aspect or facet of creativity they emphasize" (Kozbelt et al., 2010, p. 24). For example, scholars (Fasnacht, 2003; Harding, 2010; Schmidt Bunkers, 2009) have described creativity as a revelation (spawning of a sudden idea or concept), invention (a birth of something unique), and reincarnation (improving on an existing concept). Regardless of approach, Harding (2010) added that " being creative is fundamentally about advancing change in or about something" (p. 51). In a parallel perspective, Kaufman and Sternberg (2010) expressed that the understanding of creativity is based on a creative response that is novel in its approach (three components), as well as good in nature and relevance:

1. Creative ideas must represent something different, new, or innovative.

2. Creative ideas are high quality.

3. Creative ideas must also be appropriate to the task at hand or some redefinition of that task (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2010, p. xiii).

Traditionally, creativity research has evolved into using innovative methodologies in evaluating the creative person, process, product, and press (interaction between an individual and his/her environment; Kaufman, 2009; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2007; Kozbelt et al., 2010). Originally coined as the *4 P's* by Mel Rhodes (1961), creativity was seen as pertaining to the mental process ("operative in creating ideas") influenced by the ecological press on the person making a specific product both new and useful (p. 307). About 30 years later, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1996) described creativity as a process of flow, in which responsive feelings

revealed an intensified engagement in an experienced activity. The similar theoretical beliefs shared by both Rhodes and Csikszentmihalyi showed that creativity was a reaction to stimulus. For example, creativity could be driven by novelty (a creative idea or course of action that separates itself from the status quo) and or effectiveness (an achievement after working on something aesthetic, artistic, or spiritual; A. Cropley, 2001).

To properly clarify the procession in how the enactment of creativity could be constructed, Csikszentmihalyi (1996, 1999) stressed that creativity only existed in the essential interaction among a domain, the field (experts that serve as gatekeepers within a domain), and a person. He advocated this importance within his *Systems Model* by explaining:

> Creativity occurs when a person, using the symbols of a given domain such as music, engineering, business or mathematics, has a new idea or sees a new pattern and when this novelty is selected by the appropriate field for inclusion into the relevant domain…Creativity is any act, idea, or product that changes an existing domain into a new one. And the definition of a creative person is: someone whose thoughts or actions change a domain, or establish a new domain. (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 28)

In other words, the *domain* defined the space the person created, which was dictated by a culture of symbolic knowledge, rules, and procedures. Second, the *field* represented the gatekeepers who approved of and affirmed any new idea or product to be accepted within that domain. Thus, a *person* could only enact creativity in pre-existing domains and fields (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, 1999).

Equally within the format of higher education, the domain (subject discipline) resembled the interface of stimulating curriculum experiences by which students' creativity can be exploited (Jackson, 2006c). The field (instructor) acts as the conductor to provide and support

the finest conditions for creative learning (Jackson & Sinclair, 2006), as well as judging its outcomes of products and performances. Interwoven are the people (student learners) whose diverse experiences are aroused and motivated by a instructor's pedagogical approach (Jackson, 2006c). As stated by Jackson (2006c), "Each learner brings a unique set of experiences and subjectivities to draw upon: their personal psychology, imagination, knowledge, talents and attitudes" (p. 204). However, a person cannot be creative unless he/she is exposed to the rules of that domain and legitimized by the field for their "novel contributions" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 29). Therefore, in order for creativity to exist successfully, the field must mentor and or advise a person in being creative (Kaufman, 2009), that he/she may adapt and expand upon his/her work in being "recognized, preserved and remembered" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, p. 28).

Building upon Csikszentmihalyi's *System Model*, scholars (A. Cropley & Cropley, 2009; Runco, 2007; Simonton, 1990) have added additional criteria to the *4 Ps* of creativity (person, process, product, and press). According to Runco (2007), beyond the recognizable creative person, everyday creativity reflected *potential* within a host of others who possess such abilities. However, such creative potential required educational opportunities and additional forms of support before being able to function creatively (Kozbelt et al., 2010). This followed precedence with Simonton's (1990) belief that creative individuals must be *persuasive* in order to enact change within a domain. The recognition of being creative was an attribute of that individual being persuasive.

Fostering creativity among college and graduate students who have creative potential has emphasized a greater responsibility upon the creative individual (i.e., the professor) to persuade it within the classroom or domain. For instance, "the teacher is often considered the creative force of the classroom and is accorded considerable power and influence" (Moran, 2010, p. 75).

Although professors may not be as visible as the students, their performance can "set up expectations between two entities" (p. 75). Per se, a *role* of a professor can be thought of as having three interrelated dimensions:

1. Involves a position within a social network that links it to other positions.

2. Involves a function that has an effect on the wider community. It serves or contributes in some way to a greater system.

3. Involves a purpose that incorporates values, orient goals, and drives behavior. It provides meaning and direction. (p. 75)

In this case, the professor provided a connection through creative deliverables of "knowledge and information for students to absorb, perform, and enjoy" (p. 75). The end result showcased "purposeful dimensions" in how the value of creative leadership can change and improve a domain (p. 76).

The value that comes with the practice of creativity involves not only a change, but also a deliberate challenge to the status quo of a domain. To A. Cropley and Cropley (2009), this involves a revolutionary type of change that differs beyond an evolutionary passage of time, and cannot be accomplished accidentally through a compilation of misunderstandings. Sequentially layered within their differentiated model of creativity signified two additions to the interactions of the 4 P's of creativity. First, this begins with the *problem* and or task to be completed within a domain or press. Once identified, creativity would take shape in the how (ability and process) and the where and when (press) made by whom (person or group) making the what (product; Kaufman, 2009). After the result and output of the creative process (product) would come the enactment of the *phase,* which involved the remaining stages in realizing a product (A. Cropley & Cropley, 2009).

According to A. Cropley and Cropley (2009), the application of the six steps from the differentiated model of creativity provided innovational and exploitation opportunities through "deliberate insertion of the effective novelty from the lower level into a functioning system" (p. 26). Reiterating the interacting factors among the person, process, and press, the production and generation of a variety of effective and novel products were "affected by non-cognitive factors such as motivation or self-image, as well as physical environment and the people in it" (p. 26). Schmidt Bunkers (2009) proposed that creative individuals were virtuous as a result of their attitude toward the problems that faced them. Thus, innovative and visionary thinkers understood that fostering creativity started with taking risks, fighting resistance, and regulating a developmental process.

> The importance to society of generation of useful practical products in technology, business, administration, production and delivery systems, and so on strongly implies that vigorous attempts need to be made to foster their production, especially in school-level and higher education. (D. Cropley & Cropley, 2010, p. 313)

Despite the fact that the assessment of creative products has had a lesser focus within the writings of literature, it does, however, make a case that measuring a product's creative aspects provides educational benefits that far exceed the investigation of either the person, process, or press (Plucker & Makel, 2010). This was affirmed by Kozbelt et al. (2010), as assessing the creativity of a product permits "considerable quantitative objectivity, and they are often available for viewing and judging, so interrater reliability can be readily determined – two substantial advantages" (p. 24). In addition, assessing the end results of creative products enables a 360 degree reflection of "manual and thinking skills and techniques, values and attitudes, personal properties, and motives and self-image acquired as a result of experience and education"

(A. Cropley & Cropley, 2009, p. 26). D. Cropley and Cropley (2010) stated that a pedagogy

focused on the generation and assessment of creative products will:

> Encourage students to build up a fund of knowledge (Preparation), encourage and train
>
> them to identify problems (Activation), teach them to generate novelty (Generation), help
>
> them recognize possible solutions (Illumination), show them how to evaluate candidate
>
> solutions (Verification), encourage them to take verified solutions available to other
>
> people (Communication), and help them deal with feedback from the external world
>
> (Validation). (p. 314)

In summary, creativity encompasses many interrelated components that define its

meaning, as well as its ability to be taught. Helson (1996) asserted that there is no Unitarian

model that applies to all highly creative people; however, there are those who make it easier or

harder to develop such abilities. "The expression of personality often depends on the setting or

climate in which an individual resides" (Kozbelt et al., 2010, p. 25). In other words, the

relationship among the person, the activity (process), and its press define what the activity is for.

> What comes afterwards is a piggybacking of ideas, synthesizing of key information, a
>
> glimmer (a conscious reaction that something we have just barely touched on) of deep
>
> listening or deep reading, and judging (as critical thinkers do not have to be creative, but
>
> creative thinkers have to learn to judge) and assessing what is being created (Blythe &
>
> Sweet, 2011, p. 10).

Consequently, the special criterion of creativity has led to a broader educational prowess in that

it:

- Is applicable in other apparently unrelated situations (transferable to other situations

  regardless of whether the creative person intended it to happen).

- Introduces a new way of conceptualizing a whole area or opens up new approaches to existing problems (germinal).

- Demonstrates the existence of previously unnoticed problems and suggests the need for new work (seminal).

- Lays a foundation for the later innovations for which the original novelty is necessary (foundational). (A. Cropley & Cropley, 2009, p. 26)

In addition, it has focused on the reinitiating and incrementing of creativity frameworks.

Frameworks for Fostering Creativity

As mentioned previously, the current state of creativity in higher education has garnered more negative than positive reactions (Evans, 2009; Freeman, 2006; Livingston, 2010; Robinson, 2006; Wynd, 2011). However, it is important to note that several educational frameworks are extremely proficient at promoting student creativity and critical thinking. The success of these educators begins with flexible teaching methods. Guilford (1968) believed that educators who were spontaneous and adaptive with their flexibility could be clearer in how they interpreted a task, approached a strategy, or found plausible solutions. In essence, the application of creativity to lectured information appears to spark a proactive originality in students.

The creative approach in higher education is often displayed through alternative suggestions, encouraged expression of ideas, and tolerated humor (A. Cropley, 2001). For example, research conducted by Reynolds, Stevens, and West (2013) found "that creative assignments provide numerous opportunities for students to extract deeper learning and insights from what they are learning" (p. 52), as well as "enhance student engagement and thus promote greater content learning" (p. 53). Furthermore, establishing creativity can protect against the age-related deterioration of intellectual functioning, preserving speed of information processing,

the size and accessibility of working memory, and the ability to apply attention selectively (A. Cropley, 2001). To this end, "emphasizing creativity can shift student thinking beyond memorization towards higher-level thinking such as analyzing, synthesizing, and evaluating" (Kiener & Ahuna, 2011, p. 112). Moreover, applied creativity has the ability to shift student perceptions on how one does things, as well as to shape and influence pedagogy (Kiener & Ahuna, 2011).

Based on Tyler's (1949) theoretical framework regarding *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, the rationale for creativity as a "functional instrument" (p. 1) in higher education has become inexplicitly integrated from that which the institutions and their educators seek to attain. According to Gallagher (2013), university lecturers' perceptions of creativity and its essential purpose can differ amongst schools, contingent on whether they encompass a prejudice of academic rigor to commercialism. This means the need for creative thinking in higher education classrooms could be driven by the necessity for creative solutions to the multifarious problems in today's global society (Reynolds et al., 2013) or by "focusing on what we want the graduates of universities to be, and not just on what we want them to know" (Livingston, 2010, p. 62). Either way, in order for an educational program to be designed successfully and for constant efforts toward enhancement to be made, it is essential to have a commanding understanding of its intended goals (Tyler, 1949).

Eliminating learning blocks and fears. One of the dilemmas that educators face in developing a curriculum and a plan for instruction suitable to meeting the objectives of fostering creativity is having sufficient experience as an educator. Jackson (2006a) labeled instructors as being faulty in teaching creativity based on their lack of research and inability to integrate and facilitate creative thinking activities. As stated by Sweet et al. (2013), "instructors are usually

more comfortable teaching information, ideas, and concepts rather than processes" (p. 65).

Reynolds et al. concurred (2013), as they found that "all too often in postsecondary education,

especially professional education, instructors are focused on teaching specific skills versus

focusing on the process of learning" (p. 58). Although students are required to show creative

thinking attributes, it is however rarely clarified within instructors' learning objectives and or

assignment assessments (Jackson, 2006a). These similar perspectives are quite pertinent in

regard to what Tyler (1949) discussed as being adaptive to learning experiences that are

ineffective or the development of its solutions being non-reactive to productive learning.

In conceptualizing an educational environment that could engage students while

stimulating them to think systematically about creativity, institutions need to think about the

educational experiences that can provide such a framework. Per Tyler's (1949) second step in

developing curriculum and plans for instruction, educational experiences have to coincide with

the desired goal. In this case, the "learning experience refers to the interaction between the

learner and the external conditions in the environment to which he can react" (p. 63). Thus,

educators have stressed that teaching creativity starts with eliminating learning blocks that may

hinder its potential for a creative climate (A. Cropley & Cropley, 2009; Glassman, 2011; Schank,

2011; Sweet et al., 2013).

Pursuant to Sweet et al. (2013), distinctions have been made between what it means to

teach creatively (focusing on clever methods that instructors use to heighten student interest and

learning) and teaching for creativity (focusing on the student learner); however, little attention

has been paid regarding several important questions addressing how to achieve an effective

teaching-learning paradigm:

- What needs to be part of the learning space in order to optimize creativity in students?

- Is the current pedagogy of active learning sufficient to deal with creativity instruction, or is it time for a new paradigm that addresses active learning's weaknesses?

- What is the role of the instructor in a creative studies classroom?

- How do the instructor and student interact in a creative studies classroom?

- What is the most effective distribution of authority?

- Does a pedagogy of creativity differ from that of any other subject?

- Is it possible to develop a pedagogy of creativity that also works in disciplines where accreditation necessitates instruction in basic concepts, skills, and facts?

- Can a pedagogy appropriate for the academic environment work in the corporate arena? (Sweet et al., 2013, pp. 1-2)

Based on findings by A. Cropley and Cropley (2009), Glassman (2011), Sawyer (2006), and Sweet et al. (2013), a multitude of pedagogical barriers are offsetting students by instilling a sense of nervousness and fear when they participate in a class setting. The reason for this problem has been linked to a mixture of confining environments, "both physical (facilities and resources) and social (opportunities and affordability of people who can generate novelty, approval and disproval offered by other people)" (A. Cropley & Cropley, 2009, p. 173). For example, ideas presented by students can be refuted by other students or faculty who make a negative inference under the guise of playing devil's advocate, underestimating work, or supplying honest constructive criticism (Edwards, McGoldrick, & Oliver, 2006; Glassman, 2011). Such criticisms prevent students from continuously doing what they are capable of doing (A. Cropley & Cropley, 2009), which spoils the environment for creative thinking to occur (Glassman, 2011). As stated by Glassman (2011), "only the toughest risk takers will volunteer to share the first-stage, half-baked ideas that most of us have" (p. 43).

Corresponding to the findings of Sweet et al. (2013), students may develop several fears within a "risk-tolerant classroom" (p. 65) that can transfer to their lack of participation: fear of the unknown, fear of chaos, fear of unintended consequences, and or fear of social embarrassment. Fear of the unknown occurs when students are unsure of the size of the new classroom or how to "play by the new rules" (Sweet et al., 2013, p. 65) of the environment, whereas fear of chaos arises when certain students interpret high risk-tolerance classroom settings as a lack of classroom organization and command. Moreover, fear of unintended consequences emerges when students refuse to participate in a risk-tolerant atmosphere because they are unable to predict the outcome of their involvement, whereas fear of social embarrassment is the anxiety some pupils feel when thinking about fitting in to such a permissive environment.

The compounding of fear experienced in a class setting creates unnecessary building blocks to the cognitive strengths of one's own mind (A. Cropley & Cropley, 2009). Sweet et al. (2013) highlighted that taking risks depends on how much flexibility and freedom an instructor will permit the students. For example, the intolerable class setting that crushes conformity pressures students' ability to relax in handling a flow of ideas, as well as let their imagination loose, ultimately resulting in fear of giving the wrong answer. Furthermore, the cognitive factors that drive student creativity become lost as a result of a one-sided approach to analytic thinking, which:

- [Assumes] that new problems must be attacked from existing perspectives.

- [Imposes] limits on the way a problem is looked at, more or less from habit.

- [Assumes] that there is always a single, best answer, if we can only spot it.

- [Assumes] that the solution can only take a certain form. (A. Cropley & Cropley, 2009, pp. 213-214)

Modeling Trust, Culture, and Expectations Educators' responses to eradicating the learning blocks that inhibit students' creative thinking include refocusing curriculum and facilitation practices based on humanistic qualities of empathy and trust. Tyler (1949) emphasized the importance of empathy, suggesting that the instructor put himself/herself in the student's place. As A. Cropley (2001) reflected, "returning to novice status requires doing without the confidence in one's own power that arises from sovereignty in an area and without the status and respect from others that are part of being acknowledged expert" (p. 94). In turn, eliminating the hierarchy structure between professor and student permits a creative climate of attitudes and behaviors that foster the exchange of each and every person's idea during problem solving exercises (Glassman, 2011).

As originally prescribed by A. Cropley (2001), creative productivity has become a recipe for certain psychological characteristics that are necessary or at least favored among students. To conquer the fear of what is new and different, students desire a way to feel protected against the sensitivity of problems that arise. Although they are willing to revert to a novice status (both cognitively and socially), they want to avoid the obstruction of creative thought inflicted by stringent logic or the status quo. Based on findings from Adriansen (2010), students advocated the lessening of PowerPoint presentations and lectures in favor of an explorative teaching approach, which affords more student participation and creative discovery. This yearning for creativity is tailored by the mental toughness to accumulate new knowledge, which creates the ability to minimize fear of working with others.

In reference to Respress and Stevens (2011) and Sweet et al. (2013), the guidelines to enact risk in a class setting must be properly communicated on the amount of *risk tolerance* allotted, as well as the ability to leverage class direction between faculty and student. Respress and Stevens have warned that students bring to a class setting a precognitive notion of past learning experiences, such as "fear of failure, intimidation, inadequacy, and suspicion" (p. 100). For instance, students may not be used to the freedom of creative tolerance and may need encouragement, as well as praise for even the smallest of contributions (Sweet et al., 2013). Hence, in building a positive creative learning environment, Respress and Stevens developed a model they felt prioritized the "mastery of content knowledge, pedagogic delivery flexibility, and ease of use" (p. 100):

- The professor must conspicuously create an environment of trust, confidence, and safety that students may risk opening up to a new dimension of learning practices.

- Trust begins with trust. Professors open communication style help students to establish a certain level of ease, trust, and comfort with the professor and other students. Sharing personal experiences creates chemistry and a sense of community; a safe and healthy learning milieu. (p. 100)

Similarly, scholars have emphasized that instructors need to demonstrate a learning environment where creativity can take on different views and perspectives, including revealing personal observations of what creativity means to their instruction, philosophy, and professional scholarship (Jackson, 2006c; Jackson & Sinclair, 2006).

From another perspective, there are other traits that can assist students to be proactively creative, beginning with an understanding of individual limitations. Per Edelson and Malone (1999), not every student can be considered a creative genius; however, being creative can enrich

intelligence and growth, yielding a more rewarding life. In addition, students must be able to recognize creative abilities which they can adapt behaviorally. Hence, "the development of creativity on the part of the student will depend upon changed attitudes of both teacher and student" (Guilford, 1968, p. 186). Based on Glassman's (2011) *I.P.N.C. model*, both students and faculty can indicate their interests (I) in a creative idea, and in "what [the] proposer thinks about it, followed by all the positive (P) comments you can muster" (p. 50). The (N) represents all the negative comments applied as concerns toward the idea presented, which translates to a curiosity (C) among the class in assisting with and solving its probable issues.

With awareness, resistance to "overcoming institutional inertia and stagnation" (Edelson & Malone, 1999, p. 9) may occur in an attempt to apply creativity. As mentioned previously, students find new ideas disconcerting and "do not know the direction the idea will take or whether it will get there" (Glassman, 2011, p. 50). Thus, Glassman (2011) recommended that by avoiding deterring comments and or spoilers (e.g., "that has already been done or attempted"), the interaction of commentary between students and teachers can facilitate progress in the same domain for creative learning. For example, Almedia, Teixeira-Dias, and Medina (2010) found that "students' questions can be used as an indicator to identify and characterize students' positioning along the 'creativity continuum', allowing a teacher to conceive, design and implement strategies according to his/her students' characteristics and needs" (p. 100):

1. When ideas are flawed, trust the student. Consider that the new idea has merit.

2. Do not discourage the person and other students from bringing you ideas and proposals in the future. You want to encourage idea sharing.

3. You do not want this student to leave feeling resentful because you rejected his/her idea.

4. You want this student to tell you about his or her idea without feeling defensive, or under pressure. (Glassman, 2011, p. 50)

The importance of student perceptions draws on the diverse experiences of creativity that showcase students' needs, comprehension, interests, and overall unique abilities (Jackson, 2006c). Jackson (2006c) found that student perceptions voice whether the expectations given forth by instructors (who attempt to connect original opportunities for combining and synthesizing the creative process) are well understood by all students. For instance, Reid and Petocz (2010) found that students and instructors viewed creativity as generated upon by both roles and practices within different disciplinary subjects. In a study conducted by Oliver, Shah, McGoldrick, and Edwards (2006), students from two separate institutions and over 17 disciplines had a difficult time interpreting a common shared framework for creativity that cross-referenced all disciplines. In contrast, Edwards et al. (2006) and Reid and Petocz discovered that numerous instructors only incorporated certain creative attributes that were practical in their discipline. Thus, instructor perceptions have yielded new meanings of the use of creativity and its differences among various academics (Edwards et al., 2006). Furthermore, perceptions among students and instructors have brought insight into whether a higher educational environment influences, encourages, and or stifles students' creativity and their personal approaches to learning (Jackson, 2006c).

As discussed previously, cultural variables are highly influential in developing creativity based on a non-controlling premise and open environment (Bernacki, 2000). Reid and Petocz (2010) proposed that robust discussions about creativity and its practicalities, processes, and products could yield opportunities for students to showcase creative attributes. However, in developing students' creativity, instructors have to first comprehend the complexities of its

meaning and usage in teaching within various academic and professional disciplines (Jackson & Sinclair, 2006). Once an instructor is prepared and can identify with each student's creative capabilities, his/her pedagogical methods of learning assessments and evaluations should nonetheless reflect creative knowledge (Heist & Wilson, 1968). As a result, steps for fostering and nurturing creativity in higher education can be associated with the following:

- Allowing time for creative thinking;

- Rewarding creative ideas and products;

- Encouraging sensible risks;

- Allowing mistakes;

- Imagining other viewpoints;

- Encouraging explorations of the environment;

- Questioning assumptions;

- Refraining from evaluating/judging;

- Fostering cooperation rather than competition;

- Offering free rather than restricted choices;

- Encouraging dissent and diversity;

- Setting students up for success rather than failure;

- Requiring little if any rote learning. (De Souza Fleith, 2000, p. 148)

Therefore, through an organized framework of ambiguity and a commitment to humanistic education, students can think beyond the oppressed scope of some universities that staple bureaucratic rules of academic instruction (Clegg, 2008).

Organizing learning objectives to teach creativity. According to Tyler (1949), the three major criteria in organizing effective learning objectives are *continuity*, *sequence*, and

integration. Continuity refers to the assortment of curriculum elements that provide recurring opportunities for skills to be practiced and developed, whereas its sequence builds upon an increasing breadth of successful experiences (broader perspectives of operation skills and analysis). After each higher-level learning experience is achieved, integration corresponds to the development of these concepts into relationships ("skills, attitudes, and the like") of other subject fields (Tyler, 1949, p. 86). This was highly adaptable to Knowles et al.'s (2005) *8 Propositions of Creative Leaders* (see Appendix A), which states that steps one and two of creativity begin with creative leaders who offer challenging opportunities while involving their students "in every step of the planning process, assessing needs, formulating goals, designing lines of action, carrying out activities, and evaluating results" (p. 258).

> Transforming the ability to think creatively into the ability to act creatively requires an enormous amount of patience from all segments of an educational institution, such as faculty, administration, other students, parents, and alumni, because the school is one place where the proverbial "opportunity to fail" is paramount in the learning process. (Harding, 2010, p. 53)

Conceptualizing and implementing creativity into higher education has become a process of change. Harding (2010) believed that creativity and change are mysteriously linked based on an evolutionary aspect of humanity that motivates change in which imagination inspires creativity, meaning that "imagining change requires thought and leading change requires creative behavior" (Harding, 2010, p. 52). Relatable to Knowles et al.'s (2005) steps six and seven, creative leaders commit to the process of continuous change, as well as emphasize satisfaction within the learning objective. As a consequence, preparation for facilitating creativity means to

change and manipulate the educational environment in enhancing the student experience (Tyler, 1949).

Purposes of teaching for creativity. The process of change for educators is based on the shared idea of inserting creativity into curriculum and its facilitation, requiring a cooperative participation in its achievement (Rautiainen, Nikkola, Raiha, Saukkonen, & Moilanen, 2010). As proposed by Schank (2011), there are *eight rules* all educators should abide by in avoiding traps that may hinder the fostering of creativity (see Appendix B). Rules one and two emphasize that a professor should never be the sole provider of factual information and assessment. As mentioned previously, instructors often test and assess students on lectures and grades, which shifts the student perception on attaining goals and suspends learning. For example, "instructors sometimes put students in groups and failed to monitor their internal workings through direct observation or assessment instruments such as one-minute papers, self-surveys, and rate-your-fellow-participants surveys" (Sweet et al., 2013, p. 9). Schank (2011) recommended that students need to learn what is true through their "discovery, failures, and repeated experience;" (p. 174), charging professors to aid students in achieving their particular goals and allow them to reflect on whether or not they succeeded.

To utilize a pedagogical model for fostering creativity, a learning domain must first support and strengthen disciplinary knowledge and skills (Jackson, 2006c; Jackson & Sinclair, 2006). As asserted by Jackson and Sinclair (2006), students are inhibited in learning creativity if they are not well-informed and stimulated about the rules of the environment in which to achieve it. In conjunction with Schank's (2011) rule eight, instructors should never assume that students are listening to what is being conveyed, emphasizing the responsibility "to force students to come to sensible conclusions by confronting what they already believe with stuff that is

antithetical to those beliefs" (p. 181). Thus, encouraging and enhancing student creative capabilities and their comprehensions are dictated by the creative experience the instructor proposes, but is achieved by the student's self-reflection (Schank, 2011). Jackson (2006c) recommended that the purposes of teaching creativity be conceptualized in a number of ways:

- Enrich students' overall experiences with interesting, challenging and motivating activities.

- Improve students' capacity to learn by solve challenging problems and perform within a disciplinary and or program-learning context.

- To help students to develop as more rounded and complete individuals and to help them to develop their creative capacities, self-identity, and self-efficiency.

- Improving students' metacognition - their self-awareness and capacity for self-critical evaluation of their own creativity and its effects. (p. 207)

Problem-Focused Learning

Focused on the purpose of the active learner, Schank's (2011) rules three through seven assert that professors should have reasoning behind student enlightenment. This starts with the professor teaching practice ahead of theory and factual knowledge, because, as Schank acknowledged, "One can gain a lot of knowledge about what doesn't work while still practicing and still produce nothing worthwhile" (p. 176). For example, Schank's rules four, five, and seven warn professors to not teach anything or assign anything unless it can be easily explained, creates its own explanations, and or can be produced. He believed doing so "matters because self-generated explanations are remembered more easily than explanations that we are told" (Schank, 2011, p. 179). Moreover, this philosophy aligns with Tosey's (2006) three generating

conditions that remove tensions when practicing for creative competencies with certainty and obedience:

1. *Clear constraints* so each student is supported as well as challenged during their developmental process.

2. Allow students to *connect* with instructors by giving feedback and negotiating the social construction of activities, environments, and knowledge.

3. Initiate and *develop wider conversations* through the creative process, its practice, assessments, and evaluations.

In addition, the collection of feedback allows instructors to refine and implement changes to their curriculum and facilitation approaches (Jackson & Sinclair, 2006).

The development, integration, and utilization of problem-focused curriculum incorporates a series of short creative exercises throughout a course that focus and develop students' "opportunity recognition, idea generation, and idea evaluation" in enhancing creative thinking abilities and skills (Karpova, Marcketti, & Barker, 2011, p. 63). Research from Reynolds et al. (2013) showed that 93% of students enjoyed working with creative assignments or projects, emphasizing that problem-focused learning enables students to research issues they feel are worthy of investigating, and that they are interested in not only its resolution, but also the prospect of conceptualizing something new and original (Jackson, 2006a). Furthermore, the assortment of creative assignments and projects were valued among students by virtue of their ability to facilitate content learning in the classroom as well as to transfer into career and life skills (Reynolds et al., 2013). As noted by Tyler (1949), "The definition of experience as involving the interaction of the student and his environment implies that the student is an active participant, that some features of his environment attract his attention and it is to these that he

reacts" (p. 64). Hence, the integration and usage of such creative exercises provides essential practice of various conditions not so easily identifiable or experienced by students in solving issues or matters of conflict (Tyler, 1949).

Based on theory, the comprising of innovative ideas are a result of 99% intellectual exertion and 1% stimulation in creative behavior (Gallagher, 2013). Within this premise, there lies an apparent paradox between the processes of thinking creatively as well as critically. Adriansen (2010) stressed that divergent thinking leans on the creative quantity of ideas, where quality is not such an important factor; however, the convergent phase facilitates the narrowing of those creative ideas, when being critical becomes the essential tool. Similar to Knowles et al.'s (2005) rule five of creative leaders, the reward of creativity is to allow others to experiment (whether succeeding or failing) in critically understanding creativity and its innovative results. As such, "reflection, critical analysis, critical evaluation [and] synthesis" (Raiker, 2010, p. 138) are constituents of creativity.

A variety of models and or techniques are available in learning creativity critically. For example, Gallagher (2013) presented four key techniques in fostering the development of creativity and innovation skills among business students. The first two practices would encourage the open-ended processes of *brainstorming* and *mind mapping*, which permit every student an opportunity to bring awareness while taking risks with a thought (whether rational or bizarre in nature) that may be pertinent and or can be linked to the problem being investigated. After organizing the results generated from creative thinking, skill three implies the importance of students applying *metaphors* to their findings. As explained by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), "The essence of metaphors is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (p. 5). Gallagher (2013) believed metaphors were a good way to help students

comprehend insightful information, as well as share and express opinions, attitudes, and feelings. The final technique in driving creativity is *attribute listening*, which is exercised on the purpose and practicality of others (friendliness versus restrictiveness) in building new products and or services needed.

Following along with the significance of metacognition, Hargrove (2011b) categorized three main principles that would construct the metacognitive skills needed in optimizing creative potential. The first step is educating students on how to solve problems creatively by identifying and recognizing their own creative strengths and or weaknesses, as well as strategies that may or may not work in certain situations. The second step focuses more on the creative process than the end result, which builds upon the declarative knowledge (what) to incorporate areas of procedural (how) and conditional knowledge (when and why). Some of these approaches include, but are not limited to, *design thinking* (a comprehensible learning process of eradicating ideas, to plan and solve any and all related issues, while creating and discovering new prospects prior to the final result), *framing context* (reevaluating areas of the problem that are ignored, which could strengthen the proposed result), and formulating a *metacognitive blog* (the supplementation of a student's progression of his/her creative potential through writings, sketches, ideas, and discussions). The final step is for students to become comfortable enough to express their feelings with the ever-changing conditions that may come with practicing creativity. As Hargrove stated, "Creative thinkers are often reflective thinkers and have a flexibility of thought to make choices based on their own experiences and the experiences of others" (p. 48). Thus, the accumulation of metacognitive knowledge provides students with awareness before applying certain creative skills to infinite problem-solving scenarios.

As expressed by both Gallagher (2013) and Hargrove (2011b), there is a significant distinction between thinking and acting creatively. Defined by Harding (2010), to think creatively is to envision solutions to unsolved questions, as well as to test such a theory judiciously. In contrast, to act creatively is to become comfortably conscious (being responsible for producing either a positive or negative result) of an innovative solution applied in a real-world setting. Moreover, Raiker (2010) conceded that, regardless of whether an individual thinks and or acts creatively, both principles are intertwined in the progress of learning to be creative. In other words, reflection means enabling the creative process to critically analyze and evaluate the non-existence and or improvement of a creative product.

Furthermore, according to Hargrove (2011a), with the passing of each generation, it is imperative for the next cohort of students to be more proficiently and capably prepared both technically and professionally than their antecedents. Correlating with Schank's (2011) rule six, cementing students' skill sets after their culmination of studies equips them in giving newer perspectives to complex problems that need attention (Jackson & Sinclair, 2006). Additionally, it helps society, organizations, and the like to identify individuals with unique creative aptitudes that can solve such pressing issues (Reynolds et al., 2013; Sawyer, 2006):

> Subject, in the university world, is a euphemism for profession. When a professor teaches, he is teaching how things work in his profession and he is teaching the basics of being in that profession. But a percentage of students are not looking to become professors. So what they are learning is unlikely of use to their lives. Subject goals are almost never truly held. But cognitive process goals are nearly always truly held if the student is working on real things. (Schank, 2011, p. 178)

These rules also correlate with Knowles et al.'s (2005) steps three, four, and eight of creative leaders, accentuating the importance of individuality and the power of self-fulfilling prophecy. In other words, this stresses the importance of individuals having certain strengths, talents, interests, and goals that can lead learning strategies, which in turn can increase students' confidence while giving them a platform from which to tackle attainable goals and skills.

Creativity Research on Online MBA Programs

Today, the transferability of creativity skills within a modern society has pushed a greater emphasis on research regarding and comprehension of the subject. This is especially prevalent in the business sector of the world, where "in order to survive, organizations must provide solutions to society's changing needs, and the increased pace of change places a premium on employee's creativity skills" (Puccio & Cabra, 2010, p. 146). The attention to finding well-trained, creative, and innovative leaders has been directly linked to the current period of post global economic crises (including unemployment, legislation reforms, and financial restructuring) and economic recovery (expanding domestic markets, exports, and foreign investments; Flew, 2006; Mihai-Yiannaki, & Savvides, 2012; Shannassy, Kemp, & Booth, 2010). Pink (2005) has labeled this creative transition as the dawning of the conceptual age, where the economy now seeks inventive and empathic ideas over the prior information age's emphasis on linear and logical thinking. As such, scholars believe that future prosperity is rooted in the reliance on faster change, so opportunities may exist in new products, services, technologies, new markets, consumers, lifestyles, beliefs, and knowledge (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Florida, 2002; Smith-Bingham, 2006). Otherwise, many corporations may become blinded by the comforts of stability, which creates a domino effect in bankruptcy, dissolution, and fear of a national economic crisis (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006).

More than ever, MBA graduates all over the world are being sought out to lead and contribute to creative initiatives proposed by organizations that can respond to the rapid globalization of economic competition, in addition to the technological advances in social systems (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Sawyer, 2006). According to Craft (2005), the increasing implementation of information and communications technology has put a greater emphasis on graduates possessing creativity capabilities. As such, creativity in education has evolved in importance over the last 20 years and is now perceived as an essential criterion in education. For example, Shannassy et al. (2010) reviewed two Australian MBA programs, highlighting new course designs emphasizing topics of strategic management, teamwork, and collaboration that enhance the practice and knowledge base of creative leadership. In addition, Flew (2006) researched three leading Chinese MBA programs in their transformation of identifying creativity as an essential attribute for a 21st century market, which in turn is predicated on preparing the rise of a new middle class as knowledge contributors. To this distinction, Oklahoma Christian University President Michael O'Neal (as cited in Evans, 2009) stated that students are no longer competing against each other domestically, but rather are doing so on a global scale.

As a result, the desired attainment for organizational creativity has become synonymous with, as well as expected of, worldwide university graduates (Petocz et al., 2009); however, limited studies have been conducted examining the quality of and or satisfaction with business students' learning creativity, let alone the perceptions of its graduates (Mihai-Yiannaki, & Savvides, 2012). With the exponential rise of online MBA programs in recent years, existing literature on whether online MBA programs can foster creativity among their students or graduates is extremely limited in scope. As found by Petocz et al. (2009), creativity is rarely examined, and is infrequently discussed as a profound principle in business education

coursework; yet obtaining student perceptions may provide insight to the ways students understand and utilize creative thinking. In one of the rare studies conducted by Mintu-Wimsatt et al. (2007), online MBA student perceptions suggested that creativity can be fostered based on "subject matter and the instructor, course format and structure, and grades associated with the creativity element" (p. 328). Ultimately, this finding followed in line with the assertions of Tyler (1949), who believed that "The process of evaluation is essentially the process of determining to what extent the educational objectives are actually being realized by the program of curriculum and instruction" (p. 106). Although Mintu-Wimsatt et al.'s study gave insight into the consensus that an instructor is responsible for fostering and or enhancing creative thinking, other studies have lent broader perspectives to instructional design elements, facilitation, and technological media that satisfy and or disrupt student learning in an online domain.

Online MBA student perceptions. Historically, research on student satisfaction in online MBA programs has been primarily studied as a one-dimensional construct (reviewing a single course or particular discipline; Arbaugh, 2001). However, more recent studies conducted in the last several years have revealed a multitude of factors in determining student satisfaction toward online management education. For example, according to Endres, Chowdhury, Frye, and Hurtubis (2009), faculty practices, learning practices, course materials, student-to-student interaction, and online tools are various dimensions that affect students' perceptions. Particularly, the students from this study emphasized that "application of course material, learning critical thinking skills, and providing a thought provoking course" (p. 309) are critical aspects that attribute to the positive and or negative recommendations of faculty, courses, and the encompassing university. Parallel studies have also brought forth newer perspectives to online

instructional design, instructor facilitation, and program benefits, as well as insight to technological barriers and course improvements.

In a mixed method study conducted by Kim, Liu, and Bonk (2005), "second-year students from a public online MBA program exhibited perspectives to their overall online learning experience" (p. 338). Of 102 student responses, 70% described their overall online experience as "excellent, good, rewarding, effective, satisfied, and enlightening," while 93% agreed (and or strongly agreed) that they were satisfied "with the quality of online courses" (p. 338). Most of these perceived benefits to online learning were directly linked to the flexibility of attending classes, developing virtual team skills, and possessing constant access to instructors through a greater online presence. Conversely, despite these benefits, 60% of students found online courses were more challenging than face-to-face classes. Barriers that impacted online learning included the lack of human interaction and working in virtual teams. Although many students adapted to these concepts by their second year, the results indicated the significance of supporting and facilitating group work for the quality and effectiveness of online MBA courses.

From a comparable study of students from 40 different class sections within an online MBA program, Arbaugh and Rau (2007) found that "participant interaction was significantly associated with perceived learning" (p. 80). In addition, the results also revealed that course design and delivery media primarily drove student satisfaction. This emphasized that "media variety was a negative predictor of perceived learning, but a positive predictor of delivery medium satisfaction" (p. 81). Students asserted that delivery media should not overload or impede learning objectives. In other words, that students felt the utilization of multimedia must be technological savvy for all users, as well as time manageable under distance learning

circumstances. Thus, Arbaugh and Rau questioned whether overused media or media that is not relevant to course learning could hurt the interaction, as well as the satisfaction of learning in a virtual environment.

Investigating deeper into the impact of online facilitation and instructional design, Lee, Lee, Liu, Bonk, and Magjuka (2009) explored fully employed online MBA students' perceptions of case-based learning. Yin (1994) defined case-based learning as an "empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident" (p. 13). Interestingly, Lee et al. found that 87% percent of students asserted that "case-based learning fostered the application of newly learned concepts and skills into practices to develop critical thinking skills" (p. 182). The only major concern reported was that the level of student engagement varied (27 courses with different instructional purposes) by case design and presentation formats: class discussions, self-case studies, individual write-ups, role-playing, and team projects (most predominant in the study). This was based on 37% of the students who believed case-based learning was not properly facilitated as a result of the lack of instruction to support knowledge building. As a result, Lee et al. implied "that students learn effectively as long as online case-based learning activities are carefully designed and managed;" that is without pedagogical and technological barriers (p. 185).

Congruently, there are other examples in which the execution and delivery of pedagogical objectives in an online MBA course has produced both positive and negative reviews. For example, in Gullett and Bhandar's (2010) evaluation of using blogs in an online MBA course, the majority of international online students agreed that blogs contributed to their opportunities for self-learning, self-expression, and creative learning. Then again, many of the

same students felt blogs were non-user friendly as a result of the difficulty in tracking new

material, which caused frustration and discouragement. From a similar study on increasing

online interaction in an online MBA program, Watson (2010) found that more than a third of

online students were dissatisfied with the quantity and quality (mundane responses, lacked depth,

and or desired a deeper engagement) of e-Communities discussions. When the students were

asked "how they might feel if the MBA units were redesigned to encourage greater interaction

between students," 70% applauded such a change, claiming it would improve their learning

experience (p. 74).

Based on past studies and reports, there are a variety of reasons for which students have

become unsatisfied with their online learning experience. Scholars believe building satisfied

online learning communities has been strongly predicated upon the demand for quality

instruction, facilitation, and presence by its professor (Arbaugh, 2001; Conrad & Donaldson,

2012; Ivancevich, Gilbert, & Konopaske, 2009; Shea, Li, Swan, & Pickett, 2002). For instance,

certain scholars have asserted that perceived effectiveness of an instructor's communication,

delivery methods, and technological training influences positive interaction among online

students (Arbaugh & Hwang, 2006; Schramm, Wagner, & Werner, 2000; Shea, 2006). Lovvorn,

Barth, Morris, and Timmerman (2009) claimed that the rapid pace and newness of online MBA

programs have anchored the instructor's inability to learn and properly utilize instructional

technology. Arbaugh (2001) concurred, stating, "newer online instructors may not have the

command of the delivery medium that more experienced instructors have, and longer courses

may make that inexperience more apparent" (p. 48).

Online instructor and creative curricula conclusions. To appease the 21st century learner, online instructors must be conscious that there are three separate learning orientations of online students:

> There are goal-oriented learners who use education as a means of achieving some other goal; activity-oriented learners, who participate for the sake of the activity itself and the social interaction; learning-oriented participants, who seek knowledge for its own sake. (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 64)

Additionally, some students enroll in online programs with different levels of commitment and self-direction. Based on the studies listed previously, many instructors integrate their own learning methods. Consequently, online learning domains must be able to teach all students with achievable goals, which enacts a progression of increased self-confidence and positive feedback from the online instructor (Conrad & Donaldson, 2012). In the same regard, facilitating students' creativity requires an array of assignments that will provide self-awareness, foster reflection, and enact student creative thinking with confidence in risk-taking (Jackson, 2006c). With the need for creativity in online MBA programs, the question remains whether online instructors can successfully implement, facilitate, and deliver (through technological media) instructional design elements that can foster creativity among business students.

Relating to Conrad and Donaldson's (2012) *Phases of Engagement Model*, in order to engage students within an online domain, online instructors must first allot time for students to become familiar with the course expectations. This includes students connecting with one another through applied technological media, non-graded tasks, and icebreaker introductions. However, according to Tosey (2006), excessive connectivity of "social networks (discussion forums and groups) creates excessive information flow and interferes with the emergence for

creativity" (p.). Thus, Dirksen (2012) suggested that eliminating a restricted course flow of required lesson plans and resource accessibility permits students to navigate reference materials when needed, and also helps novice learners develop better technical competencies.

Furthermore, to improve the quality of online MBA courses, both instructors and students must have compatible expectations (Bedi, 2006). As found in prior research, an effective online learning environment is dependent upon the communication between the online instructor and its students (Cavanaugh, 2009; Conrad & Donaldson, 2012). This is especially pertinent to fostering creativity in online MBA programs. As mentioned in this literature review, "making the curriculum about interpersonal exchange opens the experience for every student to express, share, and test his or her creative instinct" (Livingston, 2010, p. 60). Correspondingly, an online instructor must maintain and sustain engaging learning objectives to assist in the accumulation of student knowledge (Conrad & Donaldson, 2012; Draves & Coates, 2011).

Conrad and Donaldson (2012) have proposed that an online instructor must conceptualize and occupy a less intrusive position so that students may become responsible for creating their own active learning domain of acquired objectives and perspectives. Designed for the student, "motivation and active learning work together synergistically, and as they interact, they contribute incrementally to increase engagement" (Barkley, 2010, p. 7). For example, according to a study conducted by Craft, Chappell, and Twining (2008), pedagogy that focused on scaffolding and modeling "co-participative, dialogic, and co-constructive activity, through building, sharing and evaluating of provocations" initiated and supported "dialogic debate, both face to face and online" (p. 241). When students co-facilitate their own learning opportunities, it shifts the learning domain from students guiding course related interactions to the online instructor lending an outside perspective (Conrad & Donaldson, 2012). Moreover, it allows

students to showcase their creative abilities through challenging situations while debunking and or validating claims (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Jackson & Sinclair, 2006). To this end, it transforms the student learner by not only achieving creative thinking abilities, but also by adopting a leadership role in engaging the next learning opportunity that arises (Jackson, 2006c).

Summary

As discussed in this chapter, there are many key frameworks that go into the fostering of creativity skills in higher education. These include but are not limited to eliminating learning blocks and fears; modeling trust, culture, and expectations; organizing learning objectives; and integrating problem-focused learning. However, additional sets of criteria factor into teaching effectively in an online learning environment. As expressed through perceptions of online MBA students, existing barriers are different from the traditional advantages of face-to-face learning. For example, criticisms towards instructors' level of experience with online teaching has in some cases derailed the effectiveness of class discussions, self-case studies, individual write-ups, role-playing, and team projects. Hence, an online format requires online instructors to comprehend how the use of technological media can either over saturate or diminish learning engagements. Thus, for purposes of this study, research was conducted to bridge the lack of literature regarding whether creativity can be fostered in an online learning environment. More importantly, it will yield insights into whether an online MBA program can foster creativity skills among business students.

Chapter 3: Methodology

There is no proposed test or evaluation consensus that is considered the single best method for assessing creativity (Simonton, 2012). As previously indicated in Chapter 2, research regarding creativity in higher education has been conducted using a variety of perspectives including, but not limited to, inquiries on curriculum design and instruction to enhance student creativity. Although explorations of creativity in higher education are diverse, they are minimal within the domain of online learning environments. As referenced within Chapter 1, only several studies (Morrow, 2010; Ransdell, 2009; Silvian, 2000) have researched the integration of creative learning practices within online learning formats. Even fewer studies have been conducted on creativity within online business education, let alone its exposure to online MBA programs (Mintu-Wimsatt et al., 2007). In consequence, with the lack of creativity research towards online MBA programs, to what degree can an online MBA program prepare business students with creativity skills for the modern workplace?

In an attempt to understand how creativity is fostered in an online MBA program, the researcher explored the following research questions through the lens of online MBA alumni:

1. What are alumni perceptions regarding facilitation (of instructors) that either enhance and or stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program?

2. What are alumni perceptions regarding instructional design elements (exercises, assignments, and or activities that are built into curriculum) that either enhance and or stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program?

3. What are alumni perceptions regarding technological media that either enhance and or stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program?

This chapter explains the phenomenological methodology for this research, describing the process of the proposed sample, strategy of gathering data, validity and reliability of

instrumentation, and description of proposed data analysis processes. This will be followed by the researcher's plan to submit to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and further summarization before conducting research.

Research Design

This phenomenological study analyzed alumni perceptions on fostering creativity skills within an online MBA program. Supported by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), phenomenological studies are "the clearest way to examine the main facets of what happens in the mind" (p. 25). The study was directed through a qualitative inquiry utilizing Moustakas's (1994) psychological phenomenology approach, which places more focus on participant experiences rather than on the researcher's interpretation. The reasoning behind this type of phenomenology is "to take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon under examination" (Creswell, 2007, p. 60). Hence, the application of psychological phenomenology was used to gain descriptions of the experiences of online MBA alumni's exposure to creative thinking throughout an online MBA program. In addition, each of the three research questions was purposely made broad to invite a greater range of contexts or situations that influenced the alumni's perceptions. Once all of the data were collected, the respondents' creative learning experiences were analyzed and categorized thematically from a combination of textual descriptions (what the alumni experienced) and structural descriptions (correlating conditions that may or may not have impacted creative learning; Creswell, 2007). Thus, common experiences identified presented an underlying structure as to what alumni perceived regarding instructional design elements, facilitation, and technological media that fostered creativity skills in an online MBA program.

Data Source Selection and Procedures

The next step in conducting this phenomenological study was finding online MBA alumni who could appropriately share and articulate their experiences regarding the phenomenon

of learning creativity in an online MBA program (Creswell, 2007). Currently, global comprehensive listings of online MBA programs via the web can vary based on a variety of criteria. For example, the *Official MBA Guide* (2013) lists 156 online MBA programs covering the regions of North America, South America, Central America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. Although considered a broad listing of worldwide online MBA programs in comparison to other website listings, information displayed on the *Official MBA Guide i*s provided solely by the schools themselves. As a result, many online MBA programs may remain unlisted, and others may be listed incorrectly based on conflicting blended formats (a split percentage of face-to-face meetings and online learning) that are not 100% traditionally online learning environments. Moreover, many online MBA programs have different accrediting bodies (regional accreditation, professional accreditation, and distance learning accreditation), which has swayed the perceptions of quality among program rankings, as well as prospective employers seeking alumni from respectable institutions (see Chapter 1).

Therefore, there were many options by which this phenomenological study could have gathered and collected data (e.g., by region, by accreditation). However, because of the continued growth of online MBA programs, some online MBA programs were too new to sample data, which for this particular study equated to a less experienced program with a lower pool and or non-existence of established alumni. As Creswell (2007) warned, "The more diverse the characteristics of the individuals, the more difficult it will be for the researcher to find common experiences, themes, and the overall essence of the experience for all participants" (p. 122). Thus, it was important for the researcher to avoid the plausible complexity of selecting from newer online MBA programs that may not have fit the overall criterion sample of experienced online MBA alumni.

To collect data for this study, the researcher chose to utilize a purposeful criterion sampling strategy in the selection of online MBA programs and its alumni. The first objective was to search for online MBA programs that were accredited by AACSB. As detailed in Chapter 1, the AACSB is "known, worldwide, as the longest standing, most recognized form of specialized/professional accreditation an institution and its business programs can earn" (AACSB International, n.d., para. 1). According to Accredited Online Schools & Colleges (n.d.), U.S. colleges and universities have the largest known worldwide pool of 102 AACSB accredited online MBA programs. However, the researcher also attempted to gain access to international AACSB online MBA programs as part of this study. Creswell (2007) suggested, "A hallmark of all good qualitative research is the report of multiple perspectives that range over the entire spectrum of perspectives" (p. 122). Additionally, multiple perspectives of online MBA alumni provided insight to the accusations made against U.S. business education and its lack of teaching and strengthening students' creativity (Baker & Baker, 2012).

The second phase in the data source selection process entailed filtering out all AACSB accredited online MBA programs that were founded within the last year. Duration of an online MBA program can vary from either a traditional 2-year format to a 1-year accelerated format. Since this study was seeking perceptions of online MBA alumni, it was important to note that certain newer AACSB accredited online MBA programs did not have established alumni communities. As a result, the researcher only included online MBA programs that had at least one graduated class, assuring the researcher a course of action for sampling experienced, diverse, and plentiful online MBA alumni.

The third phase in the data source selection process was determining the size disparity between online MBA programs and alumni needed to satisfy a phenomenological study.

Recommended by Polkinghorne (1989), a researcher should conduct interviews with a range of five to 25 individuals who have experienced the phenomenon in question. "On the other hand, phenomenology requires at least some understanding of the broader philosophical assumptions…so that the researcher, in the end, can forge a common understanding" (Creswell, 2007, p. 62). For instance, the researcher needed plentiful online MBA alumni that had spent a sufficient amount of time within an online MBA program to decipher an overall experience of creative learning opportunities. Otherwise, a sample that was too narrow would have made it difficult to bracket alumni experiences into a more comprehensible theme or themes.

Based on Mason's (2010) study on sample sizes in qualitative research, among 25 phenomenological theses, the mean of participants used (total number of participants divided by the number of studies) was 25, whereas the median was 20 (middle value amongst participants) and the standard deviation was 19.9 (squared root of the variance). Following these parameters for this phenomenological study, a proposed sample of a minimum of 25 online MBA alumni was selected from AACSB accredited online MBA programs. The total number of online MBA programs represented within this study was determined after obtaining alumni participation. Furthermore, with the newness of this research, demographic screenings (e.g., work experience, gender, age) had no bearing on the selection of participants. All interviews administered were facilitated through an online format (see Data Gathering Procedures), which remained consistent with the environment in which alumni learned, communicated, and collaborated.

Obtaining Access and Backup Plan

In obtaining access to online MBA alumni for this study, the researcher utilized two means of contact to establish rapport with online MBA programs. The first method for requesting this purposeful sample of online MBA alumni was through the use of LinkedIn

Groups, which "provide a place for professionals in the same industry or with similar interests to share content, find answers, post and view jobs, make business contacts, and establish themselves as industry experts" (LinkedIn, n.d.a, para. 1). In particular, the researcher searched for alumni groups of U.S. and international online MBA programs that corresponded to the prerequisite of possessing an AACSB accreditation.

To establish initial contact with several online MBA alumni groups through LinkedIn, the researcher sent an *inmail* (LinkedIn's ability to contact anyone with no introduction required) request to the group's assigned owner, manager, or moderator (LinkedIn, n.d.c). Based on the parameters of LinkedIn, the founder of the online MBA alumni group is considered the owner. However, the owner may assign a member to be manager and or moderator in assisting with the management and or responsibilities of the group:

- Group owners: have control over membership, discussions, settings, subgroups, rules and more. They can also transfer ownership of a group to another group manager.

- Group managers: have the same access to the group as the owner except they can't close or transfer ownership of the group.

- Group moderators: limited to monitoring discussions and comments and managing submission and moderation queues. They can also feature a discussion. (LinkedIn, n.d.b, para. 3).

As such, the researcher understood that only an owner or manager could grant access to the online MBA group.

The second method in seeking the purposeful sample of online MBA alumni came through email requests of online MBA program directors. Similarly to utilizing LinkedIn, the researcher only emailed those online MBA programs that corresponded to the prerequisite of

possessing an AACSB accreditation. Also, the researcher did not submit duplicate requests between LinkedIn groups and emails to program directors of the same online MBA programs. Therefore, only if LinkedIn did not have an established online MBA group did the researcher switch to emailing the online MBA program directors directly.

It is important to note that each written inmail and email request provided a generic explanation of the purpose of this study. However, if none of the responses were favorable in granting access, or if the data collection of online MBA alumni was weak, the researcher would have taken a step back to revise the data source selection. This would have commenced with extending the search to non-AACSB accredited online MBA programs. Through various online MBA program listing websites, the researcher would have profiled several regionally accredited U.S. and international online MBA programs from several countries/regions that had an established alumni community. As noted by Littlefield (n.d.), U.S. regional accreditation is the most widely accepted type for online MBA programs, spanning across six agencies: Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), North Central Association of Colleges and Sciences (NCA/HCL), Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Another option, if needed, would have been to review other online MBA programs that were solely accredited through the Distance Education and Training Council (DETC) Accrediting Commission, a national accrediting body for only distance education institutions.

Instrumentation

To obtain and write a comprehensive description that represented the *essence* of student creative learning in an online MBA program, a streamlined plan of interviews steered the

bracketing of online MBA alumni experiences. The interview questions used in this study

addressed three keys areas of fostering creativity within an online educational setting. These

experiences underlined the following structure of research questions:

1. What are alumni perceptions regarding facilitation (of instructors) that either enhance
   and or stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program?

2. What are alumni perceptions regarding instructional design elements (exercises,
   assignments, and or activities that are built into curriculum) that either enhance and or
   stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program?

3. What are alumni perceptions regarding technological media that either enhance and
   or stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program?

The qualitative nature of the study exchanged a dialogue between the researcher and alumni from

AACSB accredited online MBA programs to draw conclusions pertinent to the study.

Other open-ended questions were asked, however the design of the three main questions,

"[led] to a textual description and a structural description of experiences, and ultimately

[provided] an understanding of the common experiences of the participants" (Creswell, 2007,

p. 61). As stated previously, each question was designed to investigate whether instructional

design elements, facilitation, and technological media fostered or stifled creativity skills in an

online MBA program. The interview questions were direct and simplified, allowing each

participant to give either a good, neutral, or negative account. Also, each question was

constructed to build upon the data of an overall experience of creativity in an online MBA

program, not pinning or extracting from certain areas that may (instructional design elements,

facilitation, and technological media) or may not have had an impact on creative learning.

Provided subsequently is a matrix of the instrumentation that corresponds to each of the research questions for this phenomenological study. In the formulation of the interview questions, the researcher incorporated the key points emphasized through the theoretical frameworks illustrated in Chapter 2. As such, the interview questions focused on the following areas, as applied and perceived within an online learning environment: facilitation approaches and experience of instructors, organizing and integrating instructional design elements (exercises, assignments, and or activities that are built into curriculum), and technological media used (see Table 1).

Table 1

Research Questions and Interview Questions

Research Questions	Interview Questions
1. What are alumni perceptions regarding facilitation (of instructors) that either enhance and or stifle creative learning in an online MBA program?	1. Please share your experiences on how online instructors facilitated learning opportunities? Can you give specific examples? 2. Please explain how online instructors facilitated the learning process? Were there any other experiences that had an impact on your learning curve?
2. What are alumni perceptions regarding instructional design elements (exercises, assignments, and or activities that are built into curriculum) that either enhance and or stifle creative learning in an online MBA program?	3. Please share your experiences on how much creative freedom and or flexibility you had in tackling exercises, assignments, and or activities? Can you share how you expressed creativity in your online classes? 4. Do you feel that exercises, assignments, and or activities were constructed to broaden your creativity skills? If yes, can you give some examples of these activities?
3. What are alumni perceptions regarding technological media that either enhance and or stifle creative learning in an online MBA program?	5. What technological media did your online MBA program use for instructional purposes? Could you give some examples on how technological media was used in the learning process? 6. Do you feel technological media was used effectively in the learning and practicing of creativity? What in particular makes you feel this way?

Validity of the instrument. The validation strategy used for this study came from an external peer reviewer not affiliated with or assigned to this study. The reviewer selected was a Chief Technology Officer from a Southern California based unified school district with over 6 years of experience in educational technology, curriculum design, and instructional technology. An unaffiliated online MBA program director was considered; however, the researcher wanted to avoid any bias or plausible threats to the external validation of the study that could have undermined the goal of translating each alumnus's experience into comparable themes. Therefore, weekly debriefing sessions were coordinated between the reviewer and the researcher in evaluating the instrumentation of the study that may warrant any misuse and or sensitivity to the participants prior to its use. Also, each debriefing session was co-logged via written accounts from both the reviewer and the researcher to keep a historical account of the exchanges, as well as their accountability for the study. Thus, the reviewer provided a peripheral check to this study by ensuring that each question was unbiased, clear in content, and deliverable in a convenient fashion to obtain fair interpretations from online MBA alumni.

Data gathering procedures. As explained in the *Obtaining Access and Backup Plan* section, soliciting participation of online MBA alumni was predicated upon obtaining access from an online MBA program director and or owner/manager of a LinkedIn online MBA alumni group. Once permitted, the researcher used two primary methods in soliciting alumni participation. In the first method, either an online MBA program director and or owner/manager of a LinkedIn online MBA alumni group was asked to forward a constructed email from the researcher notifying his/her respective alumni to the nature and purpose of the study (see Appendix C). This was followed by the researcher sending follow-up emails to interested participants, which included another review of the purpose of the study, the amount of time

expected for the interview to be completed, an offer of a transcribed report of the interview, and further explanations regarding the use of the results (Creswell, 2007; see Appendix D). Moreover, all interested participants were informed that each interview would be conducted via the Internet since multiple online MBA alumni from various destinations would be participating (see following sections). After the participants agreed to participate in the study, they were guided to sign, scan, and email back an informed consent form detailing the intent of the study (see Appendix E).

Once a line of communication was formalized with prospective participants, participants were guided to perform their specified interview through the Internet via a privatized *join.me* account. The use of join.me granted the researcher a virtual meeting tool that was intuitive and accessible to anyone without an account, allowing the researcher to connect with participants by sending schedule reminders, in addition to conducting the interviews through Internet calling. In conducting each interview, the researcher sent a link to the participant's corresponding email with a selected date and time.

The facilitation of all interviews was conducted through a structured, yet open-ended format (see *Instrumentation*). Expected timeframes for each interview ranged from 30-60 minutes. This ensured fairness to participants in voicing their opinions, since most online MBA programs have alumni residing in various parts of the world. Furthermore, documentation was captured and recorded for each interview via *ScreenFlow*, a screencasting and video editing software designed for the Mac OS X operating system. After all data were gathered, the researcher transferred each ScreenFlow interview into a separate file, which were stored under a designated computer folder. However, in case of any technical mishap, an additional audio recording device was used simultaneously to gather any data that may have been missed.

Next, each ScreenFlow file was transcribed into an individual Word document by the researcher so that transcriptions were manageable for a narrative analysis and coding procedures (see *Data Analysis Strategy*). Once the data were evaluated, all related materials (i.e., transcripts, detailed notes) were locked in a safe, while ScreenFlow and Word document files were secured by a password lock. In addition, all data supplied were kept confidential and excluded any sort of personal identification within the study.

Reliability of the instrument and data analysis strategy. To give a fair and objective view of the data collected from online MBA alumni, the researcher utilized a triangulation reliability method of "corroborating evidence from different sources to shed light on a theme or perspective" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). The researcher employed two blind coding staff members that had no affiliation, no prior knowledge, and no expectation of this study. The selected coders were both experienced academic scholars and researchers; one had a master's degree in communication with an emphasis in leadership and rhetoric from a private university, and the other was a second-year law student from a tier 1 law school. As part of the study's intercoder agreement, the coders assisted the researcher in several phases of analyzing the recorded perceptions given by online MBA alumni. As Creswell (2007) stated, "there is flexibility in the process, and researchers need to fashion an approach consistent with the resources and time to engage in coding" (p. 210). Thus, the researcher and coders agreed upon conceptualizing a color-coded visual matrix via a whiteboard of themes that represented the coding analysis of all three independent coders (see following sections).

The initial phase of the data analysis process began with the organizing and managing of ScreenFlow data collected from online MBA alumni. Although computer qualitative software programs were considered for organizing and analyzing the data for this study, the researcher

and coders concurred they would be more comfortable conducting the analysis through a hand coding process. As mentioned previously, each interview was transcribed via a Word document. Once the researcher completed this phase, three copies of the transcribed interviews were printed, organized individually into folders, and stacked into three piles. After that, each pile was disbursed to each coder for an individual narrative analysis, as well as interpreting key generalizations that could be significant to their review. During this process, the researcher and the coders applied their first cycle of decoding to all transcribed manuscripts. Once each coder deciphered a core meaning from each responded question from alumni, a short phrase code was used to symbolically describe a summative and or suggestive attribute (Saldana, 2013). The purpose of this method was to allow the researcher and coders to interpret the data fairly without any bias or influence from the group.

After the researcher and the coders finished, the group met to review the interpretative codes. Through a collaborative effort between the researcher and the coders, each code was thoroughly examined and defined. The goal for the group was to narrow and merge similar codes into a more manageable list of master codes that could be applied during additional cycles of review. According to Saldana (2013), in the aftermath of the first cycle of decoding, many codes are refined, relabeled, and or dropped, as well as rearranged and reclassified into different and or new categories. Once the meeting was adjourned, the researcher and the coders again returned to their manuscripts for an individual second cycle of coding. This provided an additional opportunity to find repetitive code patterns that could be categorized by similarity, difference, frequency, sequence, correspondence, and causation (Saldana, 2013).

After reviewing each manuscript, the researcher and the coders met again to render a fair collaborative decision as to whether the same code applied to each passage. Recommended by

Huberman and Miles (1994), coders should agree to establish at least an 80% ratio on each coded

passage. More specifically, the researcher and coders organized and reduced the transcribed data

from online MBA alumni "through a process of coding and condensing of codes" (Creswell,

2007, p. 148). Once the encoding process was established, the researcher and assigned coders

collaboratively categorized each code under several sub-categories (e.g., instructional

experience, proposed activities) that were placed beneath the three main categories of fostering

creativity skills through facilitation, curriculum design, and technological media (see following

example):

- Category 1: Facilitation
  - Subcategory 1: Instructional Experience
    - Code: to be determined

Each category was listed on a white board using a color scheme to organize the associated

categories and subcategories of codes. The utilization of the whiteboard assisted in the visual

categorization of experiences shared while constructing lists without having saturated or

overlapping perceptions (Creswell, 2007).

Creswell (2007) recommended that categorizing codes should not exceed more than 25-

30 categories, making it easier to reduce and combine information into five or six themes, when

appropriate. According to Saldana (2013), "A theme is an outcome of coding, categorization, and

analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded" (p. 13). As such, the researcher and

coders wrote phrases and or sentences that best described the significant processes of what

alumni experienced and how they experienced learning creativity in an online MBA program.

The researcher presented the resulting themes in Chapter 4.

IRB Review

  In requesting clearance to proceed with this phenomenological study, the researcher submitted a proposal for exempt review from the IRB. First, all participants and online MBA programs remained confidential within this study. In addition, prior to any conducting of interviews, each participant was supplied with a detailed consent form outlining his/her privacy and protection throughout the course of this study, including the interview process, coding procedures, and its findings. Furthermore, all consent forms disclosed the voluntary nature of this study.

Chapter 4: Results

Study Participants and Overview

This chapter provides a detailed analysis of how creativity skills were fostered in online MBA programs through perceptions of online MBA alumni. Twenty-five participants spanning three separate online MBA programs shared their experiences based on the following research questions:

1. What are alumni perceptions regarding facilitation (of instructors) that either enhance and or stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program?

2. What are alumni perceptions regarding instructional design elements (exercises, assignments, and or activities that are built into curriculum) that either enhance and or stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program?

3. What are alumni perceptions regarding technological media that either enhance and or stifle creativity skills in an online MBA program?

In addition, alumni perspectives given on behalf of this study are depicted from the subsequent criteria:

- Twelve of the 25 participants were affiliated with an international based online MBA program with a U.S. regional accreditation.

- Seven of the 25 participants were affiliated with a U.S. online MBA program with an AACSB accreditation.

- Six of the 25 participants were affiliated with a U.S. online MBA program with an International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education accreditation.

Furthermore, overall perspectives supplied by graduating year came from 10 alumni from 2014, eight from 2013, three from 2012, one from 2011, one from 2008, and two from 2006.

Results

The following section presents perception data in relation to the three research questions associated with this study. As discussed in Chapter 3, interviews were conducted via join.me and audio recorded via ScreenFlow to gather perceptual insights regarding the fostering of creativity in online MBA programs. All participants from three separate online MBA programs responded to the best of their knowledge and reflection of experience. However, it is important to note that some alumni from earlier graduation dates had difficulty answering specific questions regarding the name of certain technological tools. As such, certain participant quotes were selected to concisely and effectively explain experiences that lent to overall codes, categories, and themes. However, all data were treated equally as having worth to this study and to the compilation of lists used in developing themes.

Data Analysis Process

The first stage in the review of the collected data involved the researcher transcribing each interview into a Word document. Once the researcher completed this task, each transcription was printed three times and compiled together into three separate bound booklets for disbursement to the two blind coders. During the first session of data review, the researcher and two coders combed through each transcription looking for key quotes that best depicted each alumnus's experience of facilitation, instructional design elements, and technological media that either enhanced and or stifled creative learning in an online MBA program. After the first wave of listing an array of codes and or significant statements, the researcher and the two coders discussed their initial round of findings and clarified any unclear issues pertaining to the transcriptions. This helped the researcher and coders define, merge, and manage their codes into a master list to be applied to further stages of the data analysis process. Subsequently, the

researcher and the two coders conducted one more coding session through each transcription to make proper updates and changes to similar codes, as well as to correct any improper codes given under certain sections.

In the next stage of the data analysis process, the researcher and the two coders met at Pepperdine University's Westlake Campus to discuss the outcome of their last coding session. The researcher and two coders decided on each code prior to utilizing the whiteboard in the categorization of codes. Otherwise known as the horizontal depiction of codes (Creswell, 2007), the researcher stood near a whiteboard while the two coders recited each code from all three transcription booklets. Starting with interview question one under the subset of research question one, both coders told the researcher each code that was listed. As each code was spoken, the researcher wrote it on the whiteboard. This process was repeated for research questions two and three. In organizing each code under each interview question/research question, the researcher assigned the following colors using a dry erase marker:

- Research question one (interview questions one and two) was written with the color black;

- Research question two (interview questions three and four) was written with the color green; and

- Research question three (interview questions five and six) was written with the color blue.

Once finished, the two coders walked to another whiteboard and awaited instructions from the researcher on how to categorize the codes.

For the third stage in the data analysis process, the researcher instructed the two coders to write down the three corresponding main categories associated with the study: facilitation,

instructional design elements, and technological media. Under these categories, the researcher

then advised the two coders to write two additional sub-categories under each category. The first

sub-category was the textual description (what happened) in regard to alumni perceptions. The

second sub-category under each category was labeled *how it happened* (structural description).

After all categories were established, the researcher directed the two coders to write the

appropriate codes from his whiteboard under each sub-category. Once each code was transferred

under the master categories, the researcher and two coders created additional sub-categories that

fell under the textual and structural descriptions. For example, for research question one, the sub

categories under textual descriptions were listed as flexible and non-flexible, describing key

components that led to enhancement and or restraint of creative learning:

- Facilitation
    - How it happened
        - Flexibility of instructor
            - Strategic thinking sessions
            - Group-oriented case studies
            - Forums/discussions
            - Self-paced/self-discovery
            - Additional resources (readings/media)
            - Surveys
            - Simulations
        - Non-Flexible (-)
            - Required participation
            - Textbook-orientation
            - Conventional/structured (meeting expectations)
            - Non-collaboration

Through a thorough observational examination, the researcher and the two coders crosschecked,

validated, and reduced (ensuring non-repetitive and or overlapping statements) codes associated

with each interview question. Any and all redundant codes that were applied similarly to each question or could have been addressed more appropriately under a different question were categorized and grouped appropriately into informational units (Creswell, 2007). This assisted the researcher and the coders in not only identifying the *what* and *how* of experiences, but also the pros and cons of experiences.

In the fourth and final stage of the data analysis process, the researcher wrote composite descriptions (themes) of the overall experiences of participants by reviewing the textual and structural descriptions. In addition, delving deeper within these themes, the team also reviewed observations of the impact of how instructors facilitated creative learning opportunities through student self-study, collaborative group work, and class study environments.

Themes

As a result of this process, the following themes emerged:

1. Informal and flexible instructors and course content equates creative learning opportunities.

2. Various active facilitating methods foster a learning process.

3. Latitude of creative learning is enhanced by the freedom and flexibility of students' choices.

4. Program content and delivery are driving factors in the incorporation of either new knowledge and or creativity skills.

5. Technological media tools and opportunities that are driven by the student lead to the learning and practicing of creativity.

Research Question One

In accordance with research question one, the researcher sought to discover alumni

perceptions regarding facilitation (of instructors) that either enhance and or stifle creative

learning in an online MBA program. Based on responses facilitated forth in interview questions

one and two (Please share your experiences on how online instructors facilitated learning

opportunities; Please explain how online instructors facilitated the learning process), the

following themes emerged:

1. Informal and flexible instructors and course content equates creative learning

   opportunities.

2. Various active facilitating methods foster a learning process.

Informal and flexible instructors and course content equates creative learning

opportunities. The basis for this theme was initially coded and categorized into two areas: the

what and *how* experiences of facilitation (of instructors) that either enhanced and or stifled

creative learning in an online MBA program. In regard to what (textual descriptions)

participants experienced, the results were varied and dependent upon the instructor and or

course. Codes of instructor experience and or course adaptability to an online format and

creative learning were the main criteria by which the courses were structured and delivered

formally and or informally. Informal class environments had more experiences of creative

learning, while formal protocols led to more task-oriented experiences.

Furthermore, based on participants' responses, the way in which instructors facilitated

related to the creation of flexible and non-flexible atmospheres. This was driven by three

different class environments: of self-study, collaborative, and class-study. As such, instructors'

flexibility encompassed codes of strategic thinking sessions, simulations, surveys, class

discussions, group-oriented case studies, and self-paced learning discoveries, whereas non-flexible structures had experiences related to required participation, non-collaborative, textbook oriented, conventionally structured learning environments. Only experiences that embodied and or combined an informal and flexible instructor/course content resulted in participants' positive experiences of creative learning. The following sections will present the experiences perceived amongst participants: instructor/course dependent, facilitation flexibility versus non-flexibility, and facilitated environments that led to creative learning.

Instructor/course dependent. Based on various perspectives, successful creative learning opportunities were driven by two main factors: those instructors who applied an informal approach to their curriculum, as well as course content encompassing enough flexibility to enable creative thinking skills. However, in addition to these perspectives, all participants agreed that facilitating creative learning successfully is dependent upon either the instructor's online teaching experience and or the course itself being well suited for an online format. Following this premise, one participant shared, "Accounting was actually an extremely difficult course to deal with in an online setting. It might have been the instructor, it might have been the material, and it might have been both. I'm not sure." Stated similarly by another participant, "Some instructors tailored their content or were able to tailor their approaches. Some course materials just really didn't lend themselves very good to online teaching in general."

Regarding this notion, many participants contrasted courses for either being linear in nature or being more multi-disciplinary and broad. As noted by one participant, "The ways that we learned in each course were very different. But the dividing line was usually on the type of learning that you were doing." Based on these experiences, another participant said:

I'm sure, there's quite a few skills that are taught in addition too – and some of them are, and I don't know a better way to describe it, they would be tacit skills like accounting, like operations, manipulating statistical programs. So these are things that can be taught in a frank fashion, and they're skills that are applied in the broad context.

On the other end of the spectrum, many of the participants believed some instructors were better than others in translating course materials into an online format. One of the participants expressively stated, "There were others who you could tell were a little more tech savvy and were able to work the quote unquote virtual room better than others." Of those varying degrees of success, one participant believed that some instructors tried hard to translate the in-classroom experience to how things were done online.

You could tell that even though the professor had done it similarly in the classroom because he told us that there were some similarities to how he'd done it in the classroom… he had taken the time to actually adapt what he was doing and how he was doing it and what his approach was to the online format.

Relating to this perspective, another participant corroborated that instructors varied in their approach to how each course was structured and how it functioned.

It depended on the actual class or subject or discipline if you'd like. But, you know, it varied over two years of the online course. And actually, we covered all of those – working in isolation or independently, working in groups, and working in a classroom as well. Um, I guess, the classroom was very structured and it depended on the tutor, or professor, or faculty member. They had different ways of working. Some of them were extremely structured and expected you to write your classroom entry even down to APA

format. Others were very informal and very flexible, and the classroom was treated like a

forum. I guess it depends on the individual, which approach works best for them.

Facilitation flexibility versus non-flexibility. This perception that an informal/flexible

course structure compared to a formal/inflexible course structure would set the trend by which

creative learning opportunities were facilitated in an online setting. For example, one participant

discussed how courses differed in structure:

> In an accounting class we would do managerial accounting, learning, and that kind of
>
> thing. The types of tools that were used were far more based on read this chapter and
>
> then do this worksheet. Whereas, in a class that had a far more broad nature, many of the
>
> ways of teaching were far more case based. They discussed the ways that successful
>
> companies had pursued problems either through creative problem solving or through tried
>
> and true methods. So there was a variety and they were usually dispersed across those
>
> two different lines of the content.

Another participant noted, "For your tacit knowledge items like accounting and such, we would

read and do and for the more broad, multidisciplinary ones we would read how other people did

it and then discuss how we would have done it ourselves."

Many participants found that courses such as marketing adapted easier to an online

format, fostering creativity skills through strategic thinking sessions. As illustrated by one

participant, the learning and application of new skills were drawn from the ability that marketing

possesses broad contexts, stating, "They draw from many different fields and have many

different disciplines that kind of fold into them." Related to that notion, another participant said,

"The marketing class that we'd had, despite being remote, instilled simulations that we ran,

which called for a good amount of creativity, whether outside the class meeting, during group

work, it promoted strategic thinking." Yet another participant advocated for a marketing course

and its instructor:

> I really enjoyed the way the professor for the marketing course facilitated it. It was really
>
> creative and dynamic. It was really, as you say, open ended, and sharing little bits of
>
> experience, or directing students to additional information or resources that they could
>
> explore for themselves and then come back and share their thoughts. So, that particular
>
> faculty member who was very creative and motivating for me was, a great learning
>
> experience. The others that were more, shall we say, conventional, um, I found that in
>
> fact de-motivating.

  Facilitated environments that led to creative learning. As participants emphasized,

courses such as marketing were successful in an online format due to instructors who were

creative, dynamic, and open-ended with information and resources so that students could learn

creatively, explore, and share experiences related to the content. As such, the importance in how

instructors facilitate creative learning opportunities appears to be strongly dependent on how

they utilized learning environments of student self-study, collaborative group work, and or class

forums. According to the participants, learning environments are a key component of the various

ways in which creative learning was enabled in an online MBA program. Moreover, it would

correlate the importance in how self-study, collaborative, and class study environments

broadened aspects of confidence, improved social skills, and taught information: elements of

modeling trust, culture, and expectations to teach creativity skills (see Chapter 2).

  Self-study. Of those instructors that provided additional resources for student self-study,

many participants applauded how it assisted their own self-discoveries and online competence.

They really kind of gave us the tools and said here, you know, work with this, and figure

it out. But they didn't just leave us hanging, because a lot of us had to access the Internet

from work and a lot of us had already been out of school for so long. Like when I was in

school, there was no Internet. When I was in my undergraduate degree, there was no

Internet. Um, so I guess they gave us the tools and gave us some ideas and said go for it.

Another participant advocated,

The research has been very active compared to an in-classroom learning process. Being

able to read and research at the same time in the own pace has really enabled a strong

connection to the subject and able to focus on the own learning pace.

In agreement with this opinion, another participant stated, "Self-study based learning

opportunities gives you guidance in where to go and what to research, and keeps the class on

topic."

Collaboration. Another avenue in facilitating creative learning opportunities was

through collaborative group work, to which participants attributed many benefits and powerful

results. As one participant noted, collaborative group work yielded a sense of creative skills in

not only the projects assigned, but also how the groups would work with one another.

I would actually say that we had to be more creative and we were more creative since it

was online. We learned all kinds of collaboration tools to use and we were better at

divvying up work and that sort of thing. We got creative in those senses – kind of

utilizing the technology and really leveraging everybody.

From another angle, a few participants felt the creative learning process helped improve aspects

of social interaction. As one participant shared, "They really wanted to build that teamwork and

do the forced teams where you don't really have a choice who you work with and what not. And

make that forced interaction and really gain the social skills." Another added that collaborative group work enabled confidence in working with others.

It really made everybody contribute more equally because it's kind of in the group setting, you'll always have that person who doesn't speak up or that one person who speaks up too much. It was definitely interesting to see the difference between the two methods and how it did bring everybody out of their shells online.

Class study. In expanding upon the benefits of class study, many participants found that instructors bringing new reference materials such as peer reviewed articles and journals to the class was very beneficial to the fostering of creative thinking skills. One alumnus endorsed the process for giving students a voice, stating, "It expressed how we found it relevant or agreed with it or not. It also showcased our opinions and perspectives from different global cultures from within the program. Very interesting!" Another participant applauded online class study's ability to give opportunities to those who were soft spoken or were physically intimated by others. In addition, one participant found it important in extending different views on subject matter, noting, "So what was nice actually was when the conversation could open. That was cool because then everybody could post something different, a different view on the subject based on our experience and based on our research."

Summary. In summary, many participants shared that the flexible use of different tools and environments sparked ideas, creating new platforms and new ways to solve problems. They also revealed that instructors being more informal with their approach in facilitating learning generated more opportunities for students to think creatively and critically. For example, one participant was drawn to how some instructors were less formal and more flexible in encouraging students' creativity skills.

Certainly with me the more informal approach works best for me because I was able to

focus on the content and the subject rather than having to get bogged down with a lot of

formality. So that for me I guess was the most creative because it really focused on the

subject matter rather than sidelining or derailing with having to check my work, you

know, before I even entered comments or entered the conversation I was considering

myself more with the formality than with what really mattered to me which was the

learning process.

The reality was that many instructors differed in how they created and facilitated their learning

environments. Some required an inflexible and conventional task-oriented learning environment

based on meeting expectations, whereas others permitted strategic thinking sessions via group-

oriented cases studies, forums and discussions, self-paced learning and self-discoveries, applying

new material and resources, and situational learning aspects and simulations. Participants stated

emphatically that student self-study, collaborative group work, and class study had no direct

impact on enhancing or hindering the fostering of creativity skills, but rather that the

development of creativity skills is predicated upon the instructor who applies an

informal/flexible creative learning opportunity.

Various active facilitating methods foster a learning process. Similarly to theme one,

this theme was also formulated under the headings of what and how participants experienced

facilitation (of instructors) that either enhanced and or stifled creative learning in an online MBA

program. The foundation—or what participants experienced in the facilitation of the creative

learning process—was based upon codes related to an instructor's comfort and confidence in

teaching in an online format. Most notably, the emphasis was that good facilitators were those

who utilized various teaching methods and problem-focused learning to foster creativity skills

(see Chapter 2). Thus, how participants experienced good facilitation in the creative learning process was notably split between active and non-active instruction. Active facilitation was defined by the following codes: engaging, dynamic, responsive, accessible, supportive, sharing experiences, encouraging, motivating, guiding, interactive, involved, outspoken, and challenging. In comparison to non-active facilitation, codes of neglectful, quiet, and non-engaging burdened not only the opportunity, but also the process to creative learning. The following sections will present the experiences perceived amongst participants: instructor comfort and confidence, active versus non-active facilitation, and accessibility and involvement. Related to the literature review, all are essential criteria for teaching creativity skills (see Chapter 2).

Instructor comfort and confidence. Based upon the previous theme, facilitating the creative learning opportunity may only be half the task in getting students engaged, enthusiastic, and motivated about their learning experience. As such, the approach by which the instructor attempts to facilitate the learning process often determines the learning outcome. As all participants observed, some instructors were highly active in being supportive as well as making learning comprehensible, whereas other instructors were perceived as inexperienced, facilitating the learning process via a one-sided point of view. This perspective is depicted in one participant's mixed perceptions:

> …Experience was greatly impacted by the facilitator. We had the same one for two different courses…She was motivating, supportive, consequent when necessary, but very enthusiastic and one could feel it through. Now on the other end of spectrum, we had the Asset Management course, badly designed to start with, which started as a marketing course for 6 weeks, taught by a purely finance lecturer with no real experience. Plus, she was giving us her summary with her points of view.

From a similar angle, another participant contrasted instructors who could create a communal learning environment with others who were more isolated and preferred to speak with students individually:

> Some professors had an open forum for students to exchange ideas and prior experiences. Facilitators were good at asking follow-up questions and giving feedback. Others were very different…we had ten modules and each one had a different facilitator, except one was used twice. We had nine different facilitators and some of them were very present and asking us to read more, opening the subject, opening the discussions, taking one idea from one of the students and really sending back questions. That was very interesting. Some of them were a bit more quiet. They were just commenting individually.

Active versus non-active facilitation. Although a few participants had mixed experiences with online instructors, others had a more predominantly negative experience. As one participant negatively expressed, "In my opinion out of 11 courses, I only had one active professor. Actually maybe two." Another participant's experience was rather shaky based on instructors that did not participate and translate learning effectively in an online platform.

> Again, online learning is a collaborative experience. I have had instructors who did not participate within the class almost not at all. I received a grade and moved on. Those experiences made me feel as though I wasted my time and money. I often wonder is it really worth it and do students know this type of learning requires dedication on both student and instructor. Online instructors follow a curriculum just as well as in class instructors, but there is a unique quality online instructors must acquire in order to facilitate the learning process...collaboration.

Engagement became another issue for one participant, as he/she perceived that only one instructor was able to connect to the entire class.

> We had one set who were very much by the book. Particularly the ones who were trying to teach us how to write in an academic fashion, um, you know, making sure that we followed all of the principles. Then we also had a Human Resources instructor who really engaged every single student. Particularly the one third, one third, one third students, the one third who are really enthusiastic, one third that can be swayed to be enthusiastic or just to kind of drop off and just get by, or we have the one third who really struggled in getting to engage. But I think he was the only one who really was able to engage 100% of the class and that was about 15 people.

It should not be assumed that all instructors were non-active in facilitating the learning process. Actually, the majority of participants were able to share at least one experience of at least one instructor that was active in his/her various teaching methodologies, which produced a level of learning. Of those methods, one in particular that stood above the rest was the level of accessibility and involvement from the instructor himself/herself. One participant who had mixed experiences of how instructors engaged students stated emphatically, "Some talked to you, some talked with you." On par with this notion, another participant spoke of the importance of an instructor being technologically savvy, stating, "Knowledge of tools and accessibility are key. Some were able to transcend that, while others just pushed you through."

Accessibility and involvement. As discussed by many participants, instructors' availability for discussions after class and outside of office hours to answer questions was another key to creative learning in an online course. For example, one participant tied instructor accessibility to learning motivation:

In courses where the instructor didn't give timely feedback the discussions died down and students lost interest to actively contribute reducing the learning opportunity. In courses where online instructors responded to students' posts or comments in a timely manner it motivated and influenced the student and others to contribute more actively.

Another participant supported instructor accessibility, stating, "That level of facilitation and availability I think transcends the format. It doesn't matter whether it's online or an in-person instruction period. Availability is key." Equally, one participant believed immediacy from instructors influenced students to interact more online.

The best thing about online learning was the immediacy and 24/7 connections to your study group and often your instructors. Connected via online learning platform and other online services, you could exchange information and ask questions at any given time and somebody would be around to answer.

Sharing experience. Beyond mere accessibility, many participants applauded instructors for their application of concepts that could be applied within a current field. The majority of participants found this engaging and passionate quality expansive to the learning process, yet narrow enough to apply and provide value for an individual. Labeling this teaching method as *applicable learning*, one participant stated,

Tying back specific concepts to the field that you currently work in and doing those in ways that were broad enough to capture most people's attention and be applicable to most people, but also narrow enough that they were valuable lessons.

Additionally, drawing on prior knowledge from not only instructors but also students was another effective learning tool. One participant stated, "Each of the students had to introduce life

or business examples into the course. The instructor was trying to pull these experiences out and make sure that they were relevant to the current course." From another participant's experience:

> The classes where the professors were less formal because it was more, you know, here's the material we're going to cover, but here is how it works in my job. So it was a little more fun when you had someone who wasn't a professor because they were a little more liberal with how they taught it.

Challenging students. Another active teaching method that engaged students in the learning process was challenging students by inviting them to exchange thoughts, ask questions, and refer students to extra articles on a particular subject. One participant stated, "Probing questions in the post, request for further supporting material, or references for an argument helped me go into more details and get better insights on the topic." Another participant positively reflected, "You make your posting and then the instructor comes back to you and tries to challenge you and sometimes asking you to read extra articles on that particular subject. That was best." Providing a continuum for the school of thought, one participant shared, "Some active instructors provided reference articles requesting students on their respective views based on research, whereas some went even a step ahead and provided newer topics for discussion." A great example by another participant:

> I have had one online instructor who actually collaborated with us students as if they too were a student. Posting a discussion in the thread and collaborating with almost each student was the norm with this instructor. I did not feel as though this was an instructor but a fellow student interacting with the class. It was wonderful.

Summary. In summary, many participants acknowledged that an instructor's involvement and responsiveness was critical to the learning experience. Summarized clearly by one

participant, "Some were more involved than others. When they did, the better learning environment we had." In addition, the perception of good online instruction that facilitated the learning process encompassed a multitude of active attributes, such as being engaging, dynamic, responsive, accessible, supportive, motivated, challenging, interactive, and encouraging. These characteristics pushed students to contribute actively. As one participant shared, "Good online instructors master the art to get the students to learn from each other while interacting online."

Other key elements shared by participants included how instructors applied immediate application for new knowledge, whether from drawing on prior knowledge, or by asking questions, providing resources, and making connections between student contributions. As one participant noted, "The ones that were very interested about what they did were the ones that we tended to, I think, learn the most from. They went the extra mile and that extra mile really mattered." Another participant elaborated on this idea, stating, "The good ones asked a lot of questions, provided up-to-date and relevant articles and links and also managed to make connections between contributions of different students that then led to discovery of new knowledge."

Research Question Two

Building upon research question one, the researcher wanted to learn about the following in addressing research question two: what are alumni perceptions regarding instructional design elements (exercises, assignments, and or activities that are built into curriculum) that either enhance and or stifle creative learning in an online MBA program. In accordance with perceptions shared in interview questions one and two (please share your experiences on how much creative freedom and or flexibility you had in tackling exercises, assignments, and or

activities and do you feel that they were constructed to broaden your creativity skills), the following themes were constructed for research question two:

3. Latitude of creative learning is enhanced by the freedom and flexibility of students' choices.

4. Program content and delivery are driving factors in the incorporation of new knowledge and creativity skills.

Latitude of creative learning is enhanced by the freedom and flexibility of students' choices. Participants described the fostering and use of creativity skills within a formal and informal course structure as a semi rigid process due to the inconsistency of certain instructors/courses, permitting certain freedoms in being more creative than others. In particular, how the majority of participants experienced creative freedom and or flexibility with instructional design elements was based on the categorization of student choices. More specifically, codes of having the autonomy of assignment choices, use and navigation of sources, flexible topics, and presentation styles resulted in the perceptions of being challenged, having fun discussions and competition, creating independence, utilizing management skills, and drawing on prior knowledge. The breadth of what Tyler (1949) referred to as continuity, sequence, and integration correlated strongly to the organization of learning objectives to teach, practice, and develop creativity skills (see Chapter 2). Ultimately, codes associated with formal course structures aligned with task oriented assignment deadlines and parameters. Thus, the latitude of creative learning was accentuated via the level by which students were permitted input and choices. The following section will illustrate in more detail experiences perceived by participants: using creativity skills within parameters and the power of student choices.

Using creativity skills within parameters. In line with the prior two themes, the amount of creative freedom and or flexibility that participants had in tackling exercises, assignments, and or activities was strongly dependent upon the instructor's facilitation of course content. According to the majority of participants, the range of creative freedom and flexibility in course work was a semi rigid process. In describing writing restrictions, one participant shared, "There were quite a few limitations because you have the number of words…the other limitation is that there always had to be references, [because] sometimes you want to say your way."

Although writing assignments and deadlines were structured and often strict, according to many participants, a sense of independence in completing the tasks was flexible. One participant shared the following about his/her self-study experience:

> The exercises had basic outlines on the grading assignments and a structure was provided for some assignments. Otherwise the exercises were purely creative in content and based on the reading and articles researched and found on the online library. In other words, based on individual capacity to research with all the necessary tools provided by the school.

In the following, more comprehensive example, one participant described a similar situation of having freedom of choice in tackling assignments, such as answering discussion questions, and paper topics, as long as course aspects were evident.

> In our weekly discussion groups we had a lot of choice about which questions we wanted to answer. So we were free to choose which one we wanted to do. And also for our final dissertation project, that was entirely up to us as to what subject matter we wanted to do and discuss. We had to have the approval of our tutor, but also the way we approached it

was for our own thinking process and making sure that our depth of knowledge came through in the paper.

Power of student choices. As noted previously, most participants agreed that the power of choice drove the creative learning process. However, there were a variety of avenues by which participants were afforded creative flexibility and freedom of choice. For instance, one participant described that his/her creativity was expressed through the flexibility to access and explore different technological media, stating, "The power of the Internet and their library…that's where the learning occurs. If you discover new things, new thoughts, things that you were thinking of, you'll find it in some academic article." Concurring with this premise of personalized creative thinking and learning, another participant believed that:

Online students have the most valuable freedom in tackling exercises, assignments, and activities. The Internet is at their fingertips. I expressed creativity in my online classes by researching, trial and error and many, many mistakes. I would research topics based on the assignment and brainstorm ideas...One might say they could do as much in a regular brick and mortar classroom. True, but would they have all the opportunities of sitting at home at their convenience to email and research?"

Another approach one participant believed allowed him/her to express his/her creativity in online courses was through situational learning situations.

The creativity was in the communication where you can challenge professionally a peer in the your class. The input and output from the whole class has an increased learning effect as it can be done in their own time line and not same as in a classroom. It enables quiet achievers to be heard and not overpowered by dominant characters in a classroom setting.

In an additional perspective, one participant felt that his/her creativity manifested in the use of management skills to complete projects.

> The creativity part was in how are we going to tackle this big project and make it work.
> Uh, so you got to get creative. You know, you just use your management skills because
> this is a program where most of us are already working…I'm in senior management, so
> you just basically use your work mode kind of operation attitude and experience to get
> the project done. So the creativity part is going back to what you know how to do.

Presentation style flexibility. The most shared approach in how participants expressed their creativity skills was motivated by open-ended collaborative group projects and exercises. One participant shared this positive perception about the importance of integrating creativity into group work:

> We did a fair amount of collaborative group exercises. Some of which were pretty cool.
> Those kind of things are neat. They build excitement and they're fun. They promote
> creativity in a grand sense and I think things like that, like the ability to perform
> creatively, even though it might not have been perfect…definitely have their place in
> there. It allowed group members to kind of get the juices flowing for lack of a better way
> of saying it. And I consider that to be pretty important too.

In another example, one participant explained how the choice in presentation method and topic selection encouraged not only engagement, but also creative freedom in the courses.

> The presentation method was always very open. I can think of one in particular that was
> a marketing course through which the professor mentioned either by omission or directly,
> that we could present this topic, or the way that we would do it, in any way that we

wanted to towards the class. It just had to be presented. It didn't have to fit inside of a

time bound interval.

In a more specific illustration, one participant discussed the creative ways his/her group

performed an assigned presentation:

So we ended up with individuals who presented as if it was a live TV show. We had

people that presented as if it was a news program. And it was all about getting a message

across to stakeholders. That specific way was pretty cool.

Interestingly, another participant spoke about how expressing creativity skills through group

presentations opened his/her thought process, stating,

It can be frustrating if you're someone who thrives on structure. But I found a group that

was very creative and could take a very open ended idea and then set an outline and do

whatever and then I could pick up and really fill in the details."

Topic and assignment flexibility. As flexible presentation styles fostered creative

presentations of material, collaborative group work exercises also challenged peers to embrace

being creative in solving problems. Many participants had great experiences showcasing their

creativity skills through working with business plans and course subject simulations. One

participant shared the impact of creatively putting together a comprehensive plan from start to

finish:

We had to actually come up with a business plan for – and that included coming up with

staffing plans, resourcing, 5 year projections, and since the professor had run a business

himself and gone through this process, defend our business plans and our presentations to

get funding for our funding requests. Which was a pretty interesting way to go about

doing it.

Another participant gave insight into the enjoyment of competing against fellow classmates through case-based simulations:

> The marketing class that we took had a marketing simulation that was done online and we had various companies that we were a part of and we were competing against each other. It was adapted very beautifully for the online format. That was actually pretty enjoyable and we got to compete and see who did the best. Who had the highest profits and sold the most widgets. Um, broke into new market segments and all that other kind of good stuff. That was actually a hell of a lot of fun.

In an additional positive experience, yet another participant spoke about his/her creative freedom through the culmination of a Capstone project:

> A lot of the classes, like my marketing classes, you got to pick or you got to create a new product, talk about different companies, and different marketing tactics. And the Capstone, I created my own product. It kind of built on that throughout the entire class and the final paper ended up being a culmination of all papers I wrote, creating this product, identifying my market, you know, creating an initial marketing plan for that launch for that product, and then expanding on it after it's been established to grow sales in like an international level.

Summary. In summary, the importance of students having flexible and creative input through assignment choices, use of sources, topic selection, presentation styles, and discussions resulted in the challenging of peers, engaging conversations, independence, and utilizing and drawing from students' prior knowledge. It even showed participants' ability to express their creativity skills within certain strict parameters of task-oriented deadlines and assignment

guidelines. According to one participant's point of view on being self-creative under academic restrictions:

> It was structured in a way that you understood what the perimeters were and you understood certainly what the academic road map was. But it wasn't so structured that you felt like you weren't able to have a sense of independence. And I have to say that the online course for me really did give me a tremendous sense of independence, which is how I learn and how I apply myself.

Described further by another participant, "Giving students the latitude to choose and present topics allows them to remain far more engaged because it's not just another paper and PowerPoint presentation…that was kind of neat. These were ways that fostered creativity in our programs." Relating to the previous statement, another participant believed that complete flexibility and freedom to express creativity in the approach to completing assignments and learning was a standard requirement of his/her online MBA program.

> Actually the freedom and flexibility was complete and required by the program. I think this is how the program gave me its benefits, much more than the actual subjects that we studied. Creativity was expressed on how an individual assignment was tackled and judged by the instructor.

Thus, beyond the fact that some instructors were strict with the parameters of course content, certain freedoms were permitted with good reason. As one participant summarized, "It is possible to express your creativity through the topics you pick or how you interpret topics. Most instructors gave us enough flexibility and encouraged wide reading and usage of diverse sources, so long as they were academic."

Program content and delivery are driving factors in the incorporation of new knowledge and creativity skills. Reiterated from the other themes addressed within this study, the influential factor of instructors and or course content has distinctly determined the process by which creative learning is not only processed, but also broadened. Based on participant views, certain instructors did not care enough about the fostering of creativity skills as an MBA specialization or it was not incorporated into the program's academic model. Additionally, several participants also stated that certain courses are hard to apply creativity skills to, such as accounting and finance. However, the majority of participants reported experiencing, in one form or another, exercises, assignments, and or activities that were constructed to broaden creativity skills. Interestingly, the results varied by way of learning method. For example, codes of shared personal/professional experiences, improved writing, situational learning (role play and simulations), ambiguous learning, analytical thinking, and flexibility were all attached to the positive reinforcement and results that stem from the fostering of creativity skills. Discussed subsequently are perceptions of participants' accentuating the various ways by which creativity skills were broadened and new knowledge was incorporated.

Instructor, course, and program dependent. The perceptions on whether exercises, assignments, and or activities were constructed to broaden creativity skills were a mixed bag experiences. Many participants once again believed it was on the basis of an instructor's facilitation method, while others felt it was also dependent upon the course content being non-flexible in practice. According to one participant, instructors demonstrated varying levels of engagement, which resulted in varying levels of broadening personal creativity skills; "…Not constantly and not even consistently. I think that the creative experiences that we had were based very much upon the openness, commitment, and confidence of the instructor and were not

really a solid part of the program's core." In another participant's opinion, "Dependent on the course. So hard to put a real-life situation to certain courses. There is no creative plan to a financial statement." From another angle, another participant shared that certain management principles do not need creativity skills:

Some of the fields are really not fertile soil for creative thought. Accounting is one of those and I keep bringing up that because it's something that you need to know, but it's not a field that being incredibly creative is important to. So I would say that to varying degrees they were included, but it wasn't a consistent undercurrent of the program.

Mixed on opinion, one participant considered that it was a combination of instructor and course content, "...Rooted in manufacturing principles, there were some professors that actually went out of their way to try to break that out and broaden it up some. There were some that stuck a little bit rigidly to the source material." Emphasized further by another participant:

Was I allowed to be creative by and large, yes…but, in a lot of those cases, there was good reason for it because they were a little bit more black and white to begin with. Like your earning statements, the way you're calculating those, they're either going to be right or wrong. So people who get creative with finance and accounting, they usually go to jail.

Methods that broadened creativity skills. Notwithstanding the limitations imposed by both instructors and course content, many participants agreed that, in essence exercises, assignments, and or activities broadened their creativity skills. However, participants shared many different interpretations in regard to the specificity in terms of how that creativity skill was enhanced. Some participants believed their creativity skills were enhanced and generated through critical thinking and articulating ideas.

As one participant stated, "Assignments had us articulate our ideas in a structured and comprehensive form. So the creativity mostly happened around enhancing and generating our critical analysis skills." Moreover, another participant asserted that critiques from weekly posts from fellow peers forced students to think and write creatively, stating, "You have to, you have to be a thinker. I mean, you got to think, and you write. And then you write your thoughts out. So that's creativity. What you're thinking of." Another participant concurred with this sentiment, noting, "It depends how you define creativity. I'm not so sure about it in the sense of artistic, but exercises, assignments, and other activities certainly sharpened my critical thinking skills and made my writing better."

Ambiguous learning. An additional perspective that two participants shared regarding the way their creativity skills were broadened was through course work being intentionally and or unintentionally ambiguous and purposefully challenging. One participant described how working alone (neglected by his/her instructor) made for an empowering experience through self-learning, understanding, and increased creative ability:

> If it had not been for the 2 years before, the 2 years of the whole entire MBA courses…I got so much out of it. It gave me such a tremendous sense of my own understanding and ability that based on that as a foundation, I was able to do the final dissertation with little to no guidance or support.

Similar in perspective and experience regarding ambiguous learning, another participant stated, "Assignments were given without providing any books or papers for us to rely on. We had to research and be creative in order to find information and complete the assignment."

Shared personal/professional experiences. Based on the interview data, another perceived manner by which participants claimed their creativity skills were broadened was

through collaborative work environments. A few participants observed that their creativity skills were built on the shared communal learning environment of different backgrounds and professional experiences. The following quote from one participant exemplifies this experience:

…Group work was a classic way to broaden our creativity skills. Time management, cultural difference, location difference with time zones (one person was in the US, one in Thailand, and one in Australia), and different strengths…with 8 weeks a completed paper had to be put together and affected everyone's result. If we would not have been creative in our approach versus a traditional structure, we would never have achieved it.

Moreover, according to another participant, collaborative work environments also challenged peers in the creative thinking process.

It was very interesting to share our experience, but remain critical…not just base our discussion on personal experience, but also having a back up. Because it's easy for us outside these assignments and the discussions…to say, oh yeah I believe this. I do believe this way because I've done it for the last 10 or 20 years. But you can't just base it on your personal experience, you have to do your research...because within the classroom we would challenge each other also.

Incorporation of new knowledge. Although the processes of analytical thinking, ambiguous learning, and collaborative environments have all enhanced participants' creativity skills, one participant described his/her experience more based on accumulating new knowledge, stating, "I would say that they were designed to broaden our creativity as such, however it was mainly expanding our knowledge base rather than being creative." Coinciding with this premise of new knowledge versus broadening creativity skills, two participants shared examples of how assignments helped expand not only their knowledge base, but also broaden their creativity skills

in their approach to assignments. In one participant's experience of using new media applications:

> Yes, I feel exercises, assignment, and or activities are constructed to broaden my creativity skills. An example of this is for our final, we had to create an ePortfolio. There are many ways we can tackle this and be as creative as we would like. I used Google Sites, which was so easy and actually quite fun.

Based on a similar experience, another simply added:

> There were so many things about PowerPoint I didn't know how to do. I knew how to do straight forward slides with words and once in a while I pasted in some clip art, but these people were into animation and pulling in links to other software products that we had. So, I think that the assignments were designed to kind of make us think outside of the box.

Summary. In summary, the construction and broadening of new knowledge and creativity skills in exercises, assignments, and activities depended heavily upon an instructor and course delivery. This was evident in the various ways participants enhanced their creativity skills through course work. For some, being analytical with assignments and peer critiques in discussion forums helped facilitate and challenge participants to think and write more creatively. Intentionally or unintentionally ambiguous situations led a few participants to rely on their own creative abilities. Furthermore, working with different backgrounds and strengths (both personally and professionally) fostered ways to think and work creatively in completing tasks and projects. Lastly, flexibility in exercises resulted from acquiring new knowledge, as well as being creative in different ways.

Perhaps these findings are best summarized by one participant on how program delivery and course content augmented his/her creative thinking process:

I would definitely say they were constructed to broaden creativity. Myself personally, I had a lot of technological skills going in. I have a graphic design background, a programming background, and I have a strong presentation based background. As well as being a businessperson, I mean, you're always dealing with all the normal tools, such as Excel and all the add-ons that come with Excel and Access and that sort of thing. So I personally didn't get more creative with my skill set I would say. What I did get more creative with was applying that skill set to solve business problems. I keep kind of coming back to the same point, but it really was. What I came out of the MBA with is tying together all of your different skills in a way that solves the problem that gets the job done that sells the product or does whatever it is you're trying to do. I would say, that's how I pushed my creativity personally.

Research Question Three

Lastly, the researcher proposed research question three to reveal alumni perceptions regarding technological media that either enhance and or stifle creative learning in an online MBA program. Based on responses facilitated in interview questions five and six (What technological media did these online MBA programs use for instructional purposes and was the media used effectively in the learning and practicing of creativity), the following theme emerged:

5. Tools and opportunities that are driven by the student lead to the learning and practicing of creativity.

Similarly to how other themes were constructed in this study, experiences were categorized by the type of technological media used, in addition to how they were effectively used in the learning and practicing of creativity skills. According to the 25 participants

associated with the three separate programs, all utilized Blackboard as their main technological hub. Beyond the scope and use of Blackboard, the integration of other technological media and their use was prevalent in online learning, including links and resources such as library databases, YouTube videos, Voice Thread, Screencasts, and Skype.

However, participants emphasized that technological media did not lend to the enhancement and or stifling of creativity skills, but rather it was the student who used technological media through opportunities in the learning and practicing of creativity skills. Through various descriptions, the creative use of technological media developed through embedding links, presentations, document collaborating, co-authoring, and co-editing. However, many participants asserted that programs had missed opportunities in utilizing technological media to foster creativity skills, such as lack of media access, lack of training, and functionality of restricted media. The following section contains perceptions of participants' experiences with Blackboard and the implications of technological media use in regard to the learning and practicing of creativity skills.

The use of Blackboard and other media. As discussed in the previous four themes, participants offered some examples of how technological media played a role for instructional purposes: writing and posting into online forums, researching and accessing library databases, class discussion using case studies and simulations, and collaborating with fellow peers for group projects and assignments. Interestingly, for these exercises, assignments, and activities, all of the three programs that drew participants for this study used Blackboard as their main and comprehensive online learning mechanism. As one participant depicted, "My MBA program used Blackboard as our platform for utilizing our student portal. Within this platform we used such media as YouTube, Screencasts, Jing, PowerPoint, VoiceThread, and many more." Explained in more detail by another participant, "YouTube videos were required to watch

occasionally and additional reading from the school library. That usually correlated to the chapters that we read that week."

An additional participant concurred, "Some videos with interviews of professionals are provided"…and "the online libraries provide access to many traditional research papers. The teachers also provided additional links to medias from other sources when relevant." Moreover, the overall observation of many of the participants regarding the use of Blackboard was "for a lot of the document sharing and forums," "for oral retraction with the instructors and also with our weekly discussions," and for weekly assignments and peer communication.

Negatives. Regarding the use of Blackboard, there was a slight split with respect to participants' positive and negative experiences. From some, the utilization of Blackboard was perceived as non-engaging, limited in use, and or difficult to use when needed. As one participant stated, "We used Blackboard for, that was kind of the more boring. Where the syllabus would be posted and we had some forums where we had to participate in." Yet another presented an experience with technological issues in Blackboard:

> It was really a hindrance when Blackboard went down to do updates. We get a good
>
> amount of notice when Blackboard was going to be down, but…it is a hindrance when
>
> the only day you have to work, Blackboard is not working. Sometimes even with days
>
> when it was not suppose to be down, you go on it, and it's not working. So it does cause
>
> a problem when you have a due date and its not working for you. You don't get your
>
> assignments in and your professor says sorry you had all this time to do it. So, when
>
> there are technological difficulties and the professor was not understanding of this, it
>
> caused a problem.

Adding to the difficulties associated with using Blackboard, one participant found it hard to work with Blackboard Collaborate, administrating handoffs and cues for online group

presentations, stating, "The first couple presentations we had to do online as a group were difficult because it's hard to do handoffs when you can't make eye contact with somebody." Another limitation regarded by a participant was the lack of functionality in connecting with peers, noting, "Blackboard for discussions does not allow multiple window openings. Hard to go back and forth in exchanging ideas, as well as communicate."

Positives. In contrast, other participants found Blackboard very useful in its use of the learning process. For example, a participant shared how an instructor facilitated an online classroom with the use of Blackboard Collaborate, stating, "You could raise your hand or step out, that's what you can do, you know, surveys like in class polls or whatever." In another participant's experience, "Forums I loved, we were all posting our weekly responses to the weekly question. From there would stream some long discussion sometimes. It was quite pleasing to participate in the start of one of those actually." Another participant stated, "This was a good medium as it was structured by week, discussion topic, et cetera, so I could refer back at anytime I wanted to. I was very happy with this." Furthermore, in terms of integrating the beneficial use of library databases, one participant shared:

> ...For each module, they would give you articles to go find. They'd tell you where, what
>
> to go get it, so you have to go download that. That process is nice because it teaches you
>
> how to go find things. They give you the article, you have to go to the library and get it.

It was clear from many participants that Blackboard provided a variety of opportunities to not only absorb information, but also express their thoughts, have discussions, learn from others, ask questions, and receive feedback.

Students drive creativity, not technology. Tailored to the idea that technological media neither hindered nor enhanced creativity skills in an online MBA program, many participants expressed that it was the students who were the true proprietors of creativity skills. According to

one participant's creative use of technological media in connecting everyone to work together online, "I am of the opinion that creativity is going to stem more from the people using it, and what people put into it and how active people try to be within it." Similarly, another participant stated, "Because ultimately it's the person behind it that drives the creativity and the technology is merely the vessel. If it's a shitty vessel, obviously you're not going to get far.

In relation to how technological tools do not make one creative, but rather allow one to be creative, one participant explained:

> Yeah, I see Blackboard as a tool you can either be creative with it or not. It has some pretty straight parameters, but not when it came to actually completing the assignments. It gave me the opportunity to go away and be resourceful and creative on my own. And then come back into the formal structure and apply that creativity. So, I don't think that it necessarily encouraged me to be creative, but it gave me the tools that allowed me to go away and be creative.

Another participant stated:

> I think professors used it to varying degrees of fostering creativity…They didn't really use the tools that the web is capable of for any instructional or for many instructional purposes. Most of the creative use of the medium was done by students in presentation or in one form or another, embedding YouTube links in a really important time or putting together a Survey Monkey to get people thinking about what they feel about a specific item or two. I think those were really the end and the beginning of them.

In reasoning that instructors facilitated courses with the premise of recall knowledge, the participant added:

…I think it's easiest said that they took old school teaching methods of lecture and quiz

and receipt of knowledge and they just put them on the web…Instead of seeing the web

as a brand new medium and learning what it was capable of and then planning a class

around it.

Missed opportunities. Many participants agreed that the limitations and missed

opportunities of technological media used could have lent to the learning and practicing of

creativity. As advocated by one participant for the incorporation of visual learning (e.g., Khan

Academy and YouTube videos):

I think there's a lot of other resources they could have incorporated into different topics

to really expand on the creative learning experience to help get the creative juices flowing

and to really open up people's understanding of different topics...As opposed to sitting

down and reading a really dry textbook, which puts me to sleep if, it's not engaging.

Another participant described the lack of technological media resources used for creative

learning as a missed opportunity, stating, "I think it was good, but more technology could have

been used; video chats, Google hangouts with people, more simulations. Also, the online

learning platform could have done a technology revamp."

Lack of training. Contributing additionally upon the missed opportunities to learn and

practice creativity skills within an online format, a few participants were frustrated over the

deficiency of preparation or training regarding the use of technological media. In regard to

understanding how Blackboard functioned, one participant declared that the process was

debilitating, stating, "The first few weeks we were really struggling how to use it and understand

the full scope of it. So, in the beginning it was a bit frustrating...everybody struggled. We would

spend hours on stuff that was not necessary." Frustrated over the lack of efficient training and

acclimation to Blackboard, another participant stated, "I think they should spend a bit more time to give a few tricks on how to use the platform or train us properly so we could waste less time." As exemplified by yet another participant's experience:

> I really do not believe technology media was used effectively in my creative learning. I feel as though if I knew how to use all the technological media it could have served my purpose better. For example, one assignment asked us to create a Voki and present an activity. I tried so hard to use this technology, but I just could not figure the ins and outs. I knew how to make a Voki, but could not figure out how to display it in the classroom. I asked but received no help. I used an alternate choice of technological media instead. If we had the required knowledge not only knowing how to use the technological media, but more importantly how to save it and bring it into the classroom, it would have been a much more exciting learning experience.

Summary. In summary, the learning and practicing of creativity skills stemmed from students' ability to not only utilize technological tools, but also be aware of when opportunities arose to integrate their creativity skills. One participant shared the following experience of how technological media assisted his/her progression of creativity skills:

> With regard to learning and practicing creativity, media was a big plus since it was not easy to scroll through zillions of articles in a physical library. In a traditional classroom, the creativity happens only during classroom hours, whereas in online learning, you read and ponder throughout the day at your convenience. Plus, studying online assists in implementation of learning as you progress through the class and courses.

Emphasizing importance of student responsibility to enact creativity skills through technology, one participant stated, "Practicing of creativity is based on your own research and contributions."

Another participant concurred, "In order to get through these online classes, you need your creativity. So you are using yourself."

Essence

Based on the five overall themes related to this study, the fostering of creativity skills in online MBA programs is prevalent and mostly student-driven, but depends on a variety of parameters and conditions. From data related to research question one, the majority of participants shared the feeling that instructors that taught courses beyond a conventionally structured, task-oriented environment produced better learning vehicles that developed creative thinking skills; however, they shared that the ability to do so depended on either an instructor's experience and whether the course was adaptable to an online format. For example, perceived confidence and comfort of instructors performing in an online format was dependent on how involved they were in fostering the creative learning process, yet all agreed that active instructors who were engaging, motivating, and challenging supported the application of new knowledge. The grey area of creative learning seemed to be at the mercy of the learning environment being flexible enough to permit such opportunities to learn creativity skills.

Despite the shared opinions of inconsistent experiences among instructors and courses, the majority of participants affirmed that students possessing freedom and flexibility regarding exercises, assignments, and activities created independence in selecting sources and topics, having a voice among peers, and established management skills. In contrast, mixed perceptions revealed a divide in terms of how online MBA programs more so negatively or positively increase information rather than broaden creativity skills. Emphasized with the use of technological media, participants acknowledged that using technological media effectively for

learning and practicing creativity is more about students' managing, learning, and challenging their technological abilities, and is less about how it was facilitated.

With that being said, the fostering of creativity skills in an online MBA programs appears to be a two-part process: instructors introducing opportunities for creativity skills, with follow through from students. This process strongly relies on the attentiveness of both instructors and students to interact consistently. As stated by one participant:

It is up to the student to grasp these learning opportunities and use them to the best of their ability. Online instructors most likely do not have face-to-face interaction with their students so these instructors are only able to comprehend students' learning opportunities by visual interpretation.

Thus, when instructors can establish an informal/flexible learning environment that motivates and engages students, there exists the greater possibility for students to take the next step in enhancing their creativity skills.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

The purpose, design, and supervision of this phenomenological study was to examine online MBA alumni's perceptions about the fostering of creativity skills in online MBA programs. As discussed in the previous chapter, a sample of 25 online MBA alumni from both U.S. and international based online MBA programs was interviewed regarding their perspectives on how creativity skills were fostered in online MBA programs. As noted previously, alumni perspectives reflected experiences from three different online MBA programs associated with three separate accreditations (U.S. regional accreditation, AACSB accreditation, and International Assembly for Collegiate Business Education accreditation). Moreover, shared perspectives were from alumni associated with the following graduate years: 2014, 2013, 2012, 2011, 2008, and 2006. In the aftermath of data validation by the researcher and two fellow coding staff members, several themes coinciding with experiences that foster creativity skills in an online MBA program were determined:

1. Informal and flexible instructors and course content equates creative learning opportunities.

2. Various active facilitating methods foster a learning process.

3. Latitude of creative learning is enhanced by the freedom and flexibility of students' choices.

4. Program content and delivery are driving factors in the incorporation of either new knowledge and or creativity skills.

5. Technological media tools and opportunities that are driven by the student lead to the learning and practicing of creativity.

This chapter will summarize several key areas of this phenomenological study and its importance to creativity research related to online MBA education, including an overview of the conceptual design for this study, the data shared and their connections to preceding literature, as well as recommendations for conducting future research.

Theoretical Framework and Conceptual Design

Concepts and frameworks related to creativity are vast, in terms of not only its meaning and nature, but also the way it is nurtured within an assortment of domains. For the conceptual design of this study, several influential frameworks and models showcased in Chapter 2 were appropriate to the criteria in defining creativity to teach creativity in higher education. This included, but was not limited to Guilford's (1968) Structure of Intellect model explaining the dimensions of convergent and divergent thinking; Csikszentmihalyi's (1996, 1999) Systems Model emphasizing the enactment of creativity being driven by the essential interaction between a domain (subject discipline), a field (instructor), and a person (student learners; Jackson, 2006c; Jackson & Sinclair, 2006); and A. Cropley and Cropley's (2009) six step differentiated model that built upon the 4 P's of creativity (person, process, product, and press) by first identifying a problem within a domain (subject discipline) and concluding the creative process through a final phase in realizing the product (physical item, novel contribution, and or accomplished idea; Kaufman, 2009).

As indicated throughout the literature review, additional influential frameworks and models were also showcased in the proposed criteria for fostering creativity in higher education. For instance, works by Hargrove (2011b), Jackson (2006), Karakas (2011), Knowles et al. (2005), Respress and Steven (2011), Sweet et al. (2013), and Schank (2011) all lent insights to the needed alterations of pedagogical barriers that often exist and derail student creative learning.

Additionally, as well as equally important, complementary models from Conrad and Donaldson (2012) and Dirksen (2012) explained ways by which students can be engaged and stimulated in online education. The formulation among these concepts was critical to the design in explaining methodologies that foster creativity skills in an online platform.

In steering the multitude of creativity and online learning frameworks was the utilization of Tyler's (1949) Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction. As illustrated throughout Chapter 2, corresponding literature was categorized in accordance with Tyler's four key areas:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?

2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?

3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?

4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (p. 1)

This ensured proper categorization of creativity literature and research under the subsets of eliminating learning blocks and fear among students, as well as organizing learning objectives to effectively facilitate creativity. More importantly, it assisted the researcher in not only devising the appropriate research questions, but also streamlining the plan of interview questions that gave online MBA alumni opportunities to assert the essence of whether or not the fostering of creativity skills was evident in online MBA programs. As such, the three key areas that emerged in comprehending the fostering of creativity in online MBA programs were: through the efficiency and experience of educators, the development and administering of instructional design elements (exercises, assignments, and or activities) that were built into curriculum, and the utilization of technological media. These three areas were the driving force in composing, acquiring, and carving out descriptions that characterized the experiences of online MBA alumni's creative learning in online MBA programs.

Data Summary and Connections to Preceding Literature

As indicated in Chapter 4, the essence extracted from the overall five themes showed that the fostering of creativity skills in online MBA programs exists solely based on the parameters and conditions that permit it. Interestingly, this single statement concurs heavily with Csikszentmihalyi's (1996, 1999) Systems Model, in which the enactment of creativity can only exist by the instructor of the subject discipline who allows and approves students' creative opportunities. In other words, the first four themes that were drawn from research questions one and two (informal and flexible instructors and course content yield creative learning opportunities, various active facilitating methods foster a learning process; latitude of creative learning is enhanced by the freedom and flexibility of students' choices, and program content and delivery are driving factors in the incorporation of new knowledge and creativity skills) emphasize the essential interaction that must occur among a domain, a field, and a person.

Domain. Based on alumni's perspectives, domains that successfully promoted creative learning opportunities were driven by those instructors who employed an informal approach to curriculum and whether the course content itself was adaptable enough to enact creative thinking opportunities. As stated by Jackson and Sinclair (2006), this begins with the instructor properly communicating the rules of domain for students to learn, practice, and achieve creative skills. Relating to Conrad and Donaldson (2012), this allows students in an online domain to connect, as well as become accustomed to the use of technological media to enact the creative process. In contrast, the lack of flexibility and or freedom among students creates a domain wired to the inability of allowing imagination, ideation, and creativity to illuminate (Sweet et al., 2013). It is important to reiterate that there were instances where alumni associated non-flexible domains

with confinements of required participation, non-collaborative work, and textbook-oriented learning objectives.

In line with course dependency, alumni discussed the problematic issues regarding certain courses being transferable to an online format. For example, courses such as accounting and finance were depicted as non-creative based on their premise, whereas marketing and other open-ended course subjects allowed a greater range of explorative creative opportunities. Although this provided insight into the possible disparity of course construction, there are very few studies preceding this research that can verify this assumption definitively. As discussed in Chapters 1 and 2, studies on creativity research in online MBA programs and online education in general are rare. In one the few extant studies conducted by Mintu-Wimsatt et al. (2007), online MBA student perceptions held that the fostering of creativity skills could be achieved based on the subject matter, instructor, domain construct, and evaluation. However, and previously exclaimed, their study was limited in scope, only looking at a single marketing course. Thus, the interest in and focus of looking strictly at course content and creativity skills would be highly recommended.

Field. Another important aspect of exploring student creative learning is the conduction of the field (instructor). As noted by the majority of alumni, instructors with perceived confidence and comfort in teaching in an online format was a telling sign as to whether they taught their courses with a greater sense of flexibility. In parallel fashion, the fostering of creativity in higher education is also dependent on whether the instructors themselves can ensue power, be influential, and persuade it (Moran, 2010). As illustrated by Jackson and Sinclair (2006), the field is the gatekeeper in modeling trust, providing support, and tailoring a culture that not only embraces creative learning, but also moderates its creations. Key codes that

accentuated these feelings from alumni were active instructors that were encouraging, engaging, interactive, motivating, dynamic, supportive, responsive, accessible, and challenging. Thus, as alumni agreed based on their respective experiences, the fostering of creativity skills begins with involvement from the instructors themselves. Similar to findings by Schank (2011), the development of a student's creativity skills is only facilitated by the instructor who encourages the creative experience.

Furthermore, most alumni illustrated that not all instructors were involved, let alone saw the potential to even enact creative learning in an online format. The result of this non-active facilitation method (instructors who were neglectful, quiet, and non-engaging) hindered the opportunity to process creativity skills for many alumni. As noted by A. Cropley (2001), creative productivity is heavily aligned with students feeling safeguarded to the process. In accordance with Respress and Stevens (2011), students have a plausible predisposition of fear and inadequacies that is shaped by prior learning experiences and situations. Thus, based on the results of this study, instructors that were successful in fostering creativity skills did so through a variety of mechanisms that steered the creative learning process. Such mechanisms included, but were not limited to, sharing personal stories, soliciting questions and resources, and inviting students to interact and learn together online. In alignment with findings by to Conrad and Donaldson (2012) and Draves and Coates (2011), successful online instructors shift the learning domain into the hands of the students while maintaining and sustaining from the perimeter. This finding concurred with findings by other scholars who believed that in order for creativity skills to be enhanced, they instructor had to demonstrate a domain where creativity could be learned and viewed through various perspectives, instruction, philosophies, and scholarship (Jackson, 2006c; Jackson & Sinclair, 2006).

Person. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1996, 1999), a person can enact creativity only if the domain and field exhibit enough freedom and or flexibility to enhance it. As revealed in the study, the majority of alumni experienced certain creative autonomy by way of choice, including flexibility and freedom to assignment choices, presentation styles, navigation of source materials, discussion forums, in addition to exploration and use of technological media. Relatable to Schank's (2011) eight rules (see Appendix B), students should be just as much in the forefront as instructors in regard to the creative learning process: by experiencing the realms of successful discoveries, as well as failure, firsthand. Conrad and Donaldson (2012) believed that students taking responsibility for establishing their own creative and active learning domain was only made possible by the less intrusive position of the online facilitator. As such, Knowles et al. (2005) stated that students must be involved in every step of the construction, integration, and evaluation of the creative learning process (see Appendix A). Hence, alumni emphasized that the flexible use of instructional design elements sparked creative learning from exercises, assignments, and activities, such as strategic thinking sessions, simulations, surveys, class discussions, group-oriented case studies, and self-paced learning discoveries.

However, it is important to note that some alumni felt their online MBA programs primarily supplied information through these various curriculum techniques more so than actually enhancing their creativity skills. For example, some alumni revealed that the fostering of creativity skills in an online MBA was a two-part process. The first part was instructors introducing the opportunity, which then had to be managed, challenged, and completed by the student through the use of technological media. Correlating with findings by Gallagher (2013), Harding (2010), and Hargrove (2011b), thinking and acting creatively are two separate phases. In other words, to think is to envision and evaluate, whereas to act is to become consciously

aware and responsible of the result. Correlated with these findings, Hargrove (2011b) and Jackson's (2006) recommendations for optimizing creativity skills are formulated on the following bases:

- Educate and enrich students not only with challenging and engaging activities, but also by assisting them to identify their own creative strengths and weaknesses in their strategic thinking process.

- Improve students' capacity to learn declarative knowledge (what), as well as to build upon procedural (how) and conditional knowledge (when and why).

- Help students become more confident, comfortable, and complete creative leaders, as well as more self-aware and expressive to the ever-changing domains and evaluations of creative practice.

Thus, the fostering and broadening of creativity skills can be a product of intentionally and unintentionally ambiguous and challenging course work. Based on alumni perceptions, it is the instructors who establish the flexibility of the domain, but it is the students who become aware of and adaptable to its opportunity, leading to the learning, practicing, and enhancement of creativity skills.

Product. Based on numerous scholars (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996, 1999; Kaufman, 2009; Kaufman & Sternberg, 2007; Kozbelt et al., 2010; Rhodes, 1961), a *product* is the end result of the creative process by which a physical item, invention, response, and or accomplished idea is the output. In regard to alumni's perceptions of technological media that either enhance or stifle creative learning in an online MBA program, the response and or finished idea is that tools and opportunities that are driven by the student lead to the learning and practicing of creativity. In other words, many alumni felt technological media was not the source for enhancing creativity

skills, but rather it was the student's use that lent to the creative process. This is an interesting correlation with what other scholars (Csikszentmihalyi, 2006; Sawyer, 2006) predicted as an essential attribute among MBA graduates to lead creative initiatives for various organizations within an expansive globalization of economic competition through new ground of technological advancements. Added amongst Csikszentmihalyi (2006), Florida (2006), and Smith-Bingham (2006), future prosperity in business depends on keeping up with rapid trends of new products and markets, social changes, and the technologies that delivers its new knowledge.

Although many alumni described the creative use of technological media through the opportunities of embedding links, creating engaging presentations, document collaborating, co-authoring, and co-editing, others also insinuated that missed opportunities in utilizing technological media to foster creativity skills were a result of lack of media access, lack of training, and poor functionality of restricted media. In particular, many participants were disappointed in the vague use and integration of additional technological media sources such as video chats, Google hangouts, simulations, and YouTube links. Additionally, many participants were frustrated with the lack of training and or assimilation regarding assigned technological media, such as Blackboard, as well as its functionality for distance learners who were new to its use. Drawing a parallel to previous research on online MBA student perceptions, Arbaugh and Rau (2007) found that the oversaturation of technological media was perceived as a negative predictor of learning. Interestingly, these opinions were rooted in the fact that multimedia use must be technologically savvy and time manageable for all types of students. As emphasized by Conrad and Donaldson (2012) and Merriam et al. (2007), different students possess many different learning orientations (goal-oriented, need for social interaction, and knowledge enhancement), in addition to different levels of commitment and self-direction.

Summary. In review of this phenomenological study, it is evident that creativity skills can be fostered in an online MBA program. However, it is a process driven not only by the adaptability of course content, but also by online instructors who permit its flexibility to practice and learn the skill set. In wake of the pre-existing conditions set forth by the domain (online MBA program) and field (online instructors), the students (people) become the drivers of the creative process through its presented tools and opportunities. Interestingly, it is not surprising that, like creativity, students and online instructors are one and the same. For example, the ways in which students can learn and practice creativity skills can vary based on the environmental constructs of parameters and conditions. Likewise, students and online instructors can also vary in their confidence and comfort levels in terms of how they learn and progress within online education. Thus, expansion of the study regarding learning creativity skills and online education can take on many new forms in future research.

Recommendations for Future Research

As depicted throughout this phenomenological study, very little research has been done regarding the fostering of creativity skills in online MBA programs, let alone online education and higher education in general. The significance of this study was to update and bridge the gap of creativity research between higher education and the expansive domains of online education. However, this study is severely limited in scope by only giving a snapshot of the existence of learning creativity skills in an online MBA program. As such, the researcher recommends further investigations to be conducted in building upon this study's results and the comprehension of fostering creativity skills in online MBA programs, as well as higher education and online education. The following areas to be discussed include: analyzing faculty and staff training of online MBA programs in preparation for facilitating and fostering creativity

skills, cross-examination of different technological media that either impact and or equate the fostering of creativity skills, and further research on a larger sample of online MBA programs and an examination of the results to determine whether the programs enhance and or stifle the fostering of creativity skills.

Analyzing faculty and staff training for online MBA programs in preparation to facilitate and foster creativity skills. Recommendations for further research on analyzing faculty and staff training in online MBA programs may confer a greater understanding of the preparedness of online instructors, staff members, and or the program itself in their ability to devise curricula to foster creativity skills. This could provide insight into the variations of experiences among online instructors and their levels of confidence, competency, and or comfort in teaching online. Additionally, the study could produce a model of what training methods have been helpful in transitioning and preparing online instructors to successfully foster creativity skills in an online format.

Cross-examination of different technological media that either impact and or equate the fostering of creativity skills. Recommendations for further research cross-examining technological media and their effect on the fostering of creativity skills could be helpful to the ever-changing domain of online business education. As illustrated in this study, Blackboard was the main technological vehicle for learning objectives across all three online MBA programs. Moreover, many online programs were limited in their incorporation additional technological medias. It is critical to discover what tools other online MBA programs and other online educational programs use to foster creativity skills for online students. Furthermore, such studies may lend to the use of technological media that are more user-friendly and easier to learn for both students and online instructors whom are not technologically savvy. Lastly, such research

could also provide data regarding the overall perceptions about and preferences for certain technological media to be used in online education.

Study of a larger sample of online MBA programs, and an examination of the results to see whether the programs enhance and or stifle the fostering of creativity skills. This study was limited based on the number of online MBA programs that were represented. As highlighted in Chapter 1, there are more than 100 online MBA programs spanning across several countries (North America, South America, Central America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia), and that number is only based on those programs that contacted the site to be listed (Online MBA Guide, 2013). Thus, this study only gives a small voice to the greater population pool of online MBA education. It is further recommended that additional online MBA programs be recruited in gathering a bigger picture of whether an online format can foster creativity skills. It will also serve in clearing up accusations, critiques, and or criticisms on online MBA education that come from narrow based sources that cannot properly speak for the masses.

Contribution and Significance to Creativity Research

In conclusion, this study serves as a contemporary investigation that contributes to updating the field of creativity research regarding not only online business education, but also the importance of fostering creativity skills in higher education. As emphasized in the preceding chapters, creativity is now considered a top 10 desired hiring characteristic, a sought after quality among leaders, as well as a perceived top three attribute for employees' future success (GMAC, 2012b; IBM Global Services, Institute for Business Value, 2010, 2012a; "What Chief Executives Really Want," 2010). Thus the expectations and need for creativity skills among MBA graduates have become standard. However, as illustrated in Chapter 1, some have claimed that business education does not foster creativity skills among its students (Baker & Baker, 2012; Glen, 2011).

Moreover, criticisms have also prevailed over the new domains of online MBA programs and their value in comparison to traditional face-to-face formats (Bailey & Flegle, 2011).

Prior to this study, there has been little research pertaining to the fostering of creativity skills within areas of online higher education, let alone online business education. This is specifically evident within the realm of U.S. business education and its domain of online learning. Thus, the main significance and contribution of this study is the finding that, in certain instances, online MBA education and its instructors have provided quality instruction for online MBA students and its alumni in learning creativity skills. This is not to assume that the fostering of creativity skills occurs in all online MBA programs (based on the small sample of three online MBA programs and their associating alumni that participated in this study); rather, it broke ground against negative generalized statements that have not conducted enough supporting research to support such claims.

An additional contribution and significance of the study is its impact on the existing literature and academic knowledge of fostering creativity skills in online business education. More specifically, it has yielded insight into the instructional design elements and technological media that positively enhance, as well as negatively prohibit, the fostering of creativity skills in online MBA programs. For example, insights into the positive and negative utilization of technological media have broadened the scope of students' different levels and technological competencies. As such, missed opportunities for integrating additional technological media, lack of training in getting all students assimilated into the online domain, and limitations of assigned media that led to functionality issues in enabling students to express and exchange thoughts, having discussions with peers, learn from others, and ask questions expose a needed adjustment.

Moreover, the study lends to the significance and importance of permitting student flexibility and freedom in their creative learning process. In theme five of the study, it was found that students drive creativity, and not technological media in the enhancing of creativity skills. In other words, technological tools become the compass for the opportunity to learn and practice creativity. Furthermore, in theme three, the latitude of creative learning was heavily predicated upon the flexibility, freedom, and power of student choices. For example, students possessing influence over assignment choices, navigation of sources, flexibility in topic selection, and presentation topics opens a two-fold approach for online students to enact creative thinking in completing a task and also to obtain new knowledge of technological skills by the mere use of it. Thus, this study is a significant starting point for many online MBA programs seeking to establish and or improve their comprehensive curriculum, as well as properly acknowledge learning differences among students and their ability to adapt to an online learning environment.

The last major contribution and significant finding from the study has a direct impact on the professional practice of online facilitation and teaching methods. As discussed previously, allowing flexibility and freedom for students to explore their creative capabilities begins and ends with the online instructor. Emphasized in almost every aspect of the interview responses, participants referenced in one way or another the importance of their instructor being formal or informal in their facilitating approach. For instance, certain online instructors imposed a non-flexible domain, where learning was facilitated through a non-collaborative textbook oriented instruction. On the other end of the spectrum, there were also certain online instructors that incorporated a more informal domain where students connected with material through simulations, surveys, and class discussions.

A few participants disputed that certain course content had much to do with the ability or inability to foster creativity skills, especially in an online domain. From multiple perspectives, many participants felt courses such as accounting and finance could not lend themselves to creative practice since the material is rooted in tacit skills in comparison to broader subject matter, such as marketing, where the nature of such courses was more creative, dynamic, and open-ended. Although, it is important to note that a few participants in the study applauded those online instructors who taught courses like accounting with more creative approaches. This did not mean the subject matter necessarily lent itself to creative practice; however, the presentation of the material in creative and unique ways opened up more student engagement and interest in the subject matter.

Additionally, those online instructors who were successful in the facilitation and practice of creativity skills adapted accordingly to the online domain. Comfort and confidence were repeated themes observed among alumni and an essential characteristic of the success of facilitating not only creativity skills, but also being an effective instructor. Results from the study showed a few instructors who brought aspects of the face-to-face experience into an online domain by being more accessible, continually challenging students, as well as sharing personal stories in building a level of trust and culture among the class. Also, many online instructors were also successful in the fostering of creativity skills by understanding the difference between face-to-face environments and an online domain. The multiple uses of self-study, collaboration, and class study sessions additionally infused trust between the students and the instructor, allowing students to feel more confident in interacting with other students and the instructors socially. As highlighted throughout the study, in addition to being found in preceding literature, an effective online learning domain has to be co-dependent beyond the communications between

the online instructor and its students (Cavanaugh, 2009; Conrad & Donaldson, 2012). Thus, the significance of the study is that online instructors need to comprehend the importance of being confident, trained, and adaptable to the online domain in facilitating creative learning opportunities with engaging and dynamic characteristics, while allowing students to have self-discoveries of utilizing their creativity with the subject material.

One criticism shared in the study is the claim that online MBA programs do not care enough about the specialization and or integration of creativity skills as a key component of the programs' core and academic model. Although this perspective comes from a small sample, it is important for online MBA programs to keep sight of the importance of the student learner and his/her needs in learning in the online format. Poor assumptions of online instructors who believe they can either easily adapt or merely teach from afar without any interaction, commenting, or steering of material is the very reason why negative criticisms are coming to the forefront of business education and its value in an online domain. Then again, this perception does not paint an entire picture of the ability and success that has occurred in fostering creativity skills in an online MBA program.

This study is significant in depicting certain criteria that are needed in successfully facilitating courses and fostering creativity skills in an online domain. The next step and hope is that these alumni can take the creativity skills they have learned and developed and effectively apply them to life and business situations they will face in the future.

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APPENDIX A

Malcolm Knowles's 8 Propositions of Creative Leaders

(The following propositions regard the behavioral characteristics of creative leaders)

1. Creative leaders make a different set of assumptions (essentially positive) about human nature from the assumptions (essentially negative) made by controlling leaders.

2. Creative leaders accept as a law of human nature that people feel commitment to a decision in proportion to the extent that they feel they have participated in making it. Creative leaders, therefore, involve their…students in every step of the planning process, assessing needs, formulating goals, designing lines of action, carrying out activities, and evaluating results (except, perhaps, in emergencies).

3. Creative leaders believe in and use the power of self-fulfilling prophecy. They understand that people tend to rise to the expectations of others…The good teacher's students are convinced that they are the best students in school.

4. Creative leaders highly value individuality. They sense that people perform at a higher level when they are operating on the basis of their unique strengths, talents, interests, and goals than when they are trying to conform to some imposed stereotype…As teachers they strive to tailor the learning strategies to fit individual learning styles, paces, starting points, needs, and interests of all the students.

5. Creative leaders stimulate and reward creativity. They understand that in a world of accelerating change, creativity is a basic requirement for the survival of individuals, organizations, and societies. They exemplify creativity in their own behavior and provide and environment that encourages and rewards innovation of others.

6. Creative leaders are committed to a process of continuous change and are skillful in managing change. They understand the difference between static and innovative organizations and aspire to make their organizations the latter.

7. Creative leaders emphasize internal motivators (achievement, recognition, fulfilling work, responsibility, advancement, and growth) over external motivators. They take steps to minimize the dissatisfiers but concentrate their energy on optimizing the satisfiers.

8. Creative leaders encourage people to be self-directing. (Knowles Holton, & Swanson, 2005, pp. 256-262).

APPENDIX B

Roger Schank's 8 Rules on How Not to Teach

(Mistakes and Rules)

Mistake #1: Assuming that there is some kind of learning other than learning by doing.

Rule #1: A teacher should never tell a student anything that the teacher thinks is true.

Mistake #2: Believing that a teacher's job is assessment.

Rule #2: A teacher should never be the ultimate judge of the teacher's own students' success.

Mistake #3: *Thinking there is something that everyone must know in order to proceed.*

Rule #3: Teach practice first, theory and facts second (if you must teach theory and facts at all).

Mistake #4: Thinking that students are not worried about the purpose of what they are being taught.

Rule #4: Don't teach anything unless you can easily explain the use of learning it.

Mistake #5: Thinking that studying can replace repeated practice as a key learning technique.

Rule #5: No homework unless that homework is to produce something.

Mistake #6: Thinking that because students have chosen to take your course, they have an interest in learning what you plan to teach them.

Rule #6: Try teaching students things they actually may need to know after they leave school.

Mistake #7: Correcting a student who is doing something wrong by telling him what to do instead.

Rule #7: Help students come up with their own explanations when they have made a mistake.

Mistake #8: Thinking that a student remembers what you just taught him.

Rule #8: Never assume that a student is listening to what you are saying or that what you are saying really matters. (Schank, 2011, p. 173-181).

APPENDIX C

Email and LinkedIn Post Communication: Participant Invitation

Subject: Interview Invitation for Research Study
Date: TBD
To: Online MBA alumni
From: Mark Orlando

Dear alumnus,

My name is Mark Orlando, a current doctoral student at Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology, where I am carrying out an investigation of alumni perceptions towards the fostering of creativity in online MBA programs. With permission from your online MBA program and/or online MBA LinkedIn group, your insight and value will provide much needed information about learning creativity skills in online MBA programs.

In regards to the interview itself, your participation is strictly voluntary. Please be aware that there is no direct compensation for this participation. However, a potential benefit is the possibility of adding information that is pertinent to the overall perceptions of learning creativity skills in an online MBA program. Moreover, the only foreseeable risks attached to this study is the time it will take to coordinate and conduct the interview. Also, the interview may cause certain emotions based on your experiences of learning in an online MBA program.

Expected interview times should only take thirty to sixty minutes to complete and will be scheduled at your available convenience. Additionally, interviews will be conducted through the Internet via a privatized join.me link, which will be sent to your email. For those whom are not familiar with join.me, its purpose is to provide a virtual meeting tool that is intuitive and accessible to anyone without an account. Please note that the interview questions will focus around the following three areas of facilitation, instructional elements, and technological media that enhance creativity skills in an online MBA program.

You have the right to refuse any proposed question at any given time. Additionally, in answering any of the given proposed questions, there are no right or wrong answers. There are a number of opportunities for you to advocate your feelings towards the fostering of creativity skills in an online MBA program. Please note that all information will be used for research purposes only. However, if you choose not to participate, in no way, shape, or form will it reflect on you or the affiliated online MBA program in which you are associated.

If you are willing to participate in this study, please email me at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ and I will respond with an attached informed consent form. Please note that each interview and its results will be treated with absolute confidentiality. Information identifying the respondent and or your affiliated online MBA program will not be disclosed under any circumstances. All information gathered will be secured during the time of study and destroyed upon its completion.

Additionally, at your request, an offered transcribed report of your interview will be available directly to you.

If you have any questions regarding your participation in this study, please contact me at your convenience. Moreover, if you have any questions regarding your rights as a study participant, please contact Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis, Chairperson of the Graduate School of Education and Psychology and Professional Institutional Review Board, Pepperdine University, 6100 Center Drive Los Angeles, CA 90045 (310) 568-5600.

I appreciate your time in assisting me with this study.

Thank you and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Mark Orlando
Researcher
Pepperdine University

APPENDIX D

Email and LinkedIn Post Communication: Participant Interest

Subject: Interest in Participating
Date: TBD
To: Online MBA alumni
From: Mark Orlando

Dear (Name),

Thank you for your interest in wanting to participate in my study on alumni perceptions towards the fostering of creativity skills in online MBA programs. As stated in my initial invitation, your insight and value will provide much needed information about learning creativity skills in online MBA programs. In addition, attached is an informed consent form to be read at your leisure outlining the nature of the study and your rights as a participant. Furthermore, please read below regarding some key criteria that is associated with participating with this study:

- Participation is voluntary and there will be no direct compensation.

- Interviews will be administered through a join.me link, so a computer or laptop will be necessary to participate. Headsets are recommended, but not required for proper hearing purposes.

- Interview times will take thirty-sixty minutes to complete.

- Please note that the interview questions will focus around the following three areas of facilitation, instructional elements, and technological media that enhance creativity in an online MBA program.

- Foreseeable risks include time to coordinate and conduct the interview, as well as possible emotions surrounding your experiences of learning in an online MBA program.

- You have the right to refuse any proposed question at any given time.

- Your interview and its results will be treated with absolute confidentiality.

- You may request a transcribed report of your interview to be sent directly to you.

To schedule or if you have any questions regarding your participation in this study, please email me at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or call me at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ at your convenience. Also, please let me know the best way to communicate, whether through email or phone. Moreover, if you have any questions regarding your rights as a study participant, please contact Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis, Chairperson of the Graduate School of Education and Psychology and

Professional Institutional Review Board, Pepperdine University, 6100 Center Drive Los Angeles, CA 90045 (310) 568-5600.

I appreciate your time in assisting me with this study.

Thank you and I look forward to receiving your consent form.

Sincerely,

Mark Orlando
Researcher
Pepperdine University

APPENDIX E

Informed Consent for Participation in Interview Research

This informed consent form volunteers my willingness to participate in a research study conducted by doctoral student Mark Orlando from Pepperdine University Graduate School of Education and Psychology. I understand that the study is designed to gather information about perceptions towards learning creativity in an online MBA program.

1. I understand that my participation in this study is strictly voluntary and that I will not be directly compensated for my time. Also, I am aware that I may withdraw or discontinue participation at any given time during the interview process. If so, I am also aware that my unwillingness to participate will have no penalty on me or my relationship with my affiliated online MBA program.

2. I understand no disclosure or deception of data outside of my study will place any participant at risk of criminal/civil liability or damage to their financial standing, employability, and reputation. As such, the study does not present more than a minimal risk to participants, which includes time to coordinate and conduct the interview, as well as possible emotions surrounding their experiences of learning in an online MBA program.

3. I understand the interview will ask question regarding facilitation approaches and experience of instructors, organizing and integrating instructional design elements (exercises, assignments, and or activities that are built into curriculum), and technological media used in learning in an online MBA program. If, however, I feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview, I have the right to instantly decline to answer a question and or quit from the interview entirely.

4. I understand that the interview will last approximately thirty to sixty minutes in length. I also understand that I will need a computer and or laptop with an Internet connection to participate. Additionally, I am aware that the interview will be recorded via ScreenFlow and an audio tape recorder. If, however, I do not want to be recorded, I forfeit my participation to be part of the study.

5. I understand that my name will not be identified, nor will the online MBA program that I am affiliated with, in any information supplied and or gathered that can be useful for this study. Furthermore, I am aware that my participation is confidential and will remain secure as part of this study. All data used will be subjected to the to standard data use policies, which protect the confidentiality of individuals and institutions.

6. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Studies Involving Human Subjects: Graduate and Professional Schools IRB at Pepperdine University. For any questions or comments regarding this study, please contact the researcher Mark Orlando at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. In addition, if you have any questions regarding your rights as a study participant, you may contact Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis, Chairperson of the Graduate School of Education and Psychology and

Professional Institutional Review Board, Pepperdine University, 6100 Center Drive Los Angeles, CA 90045 (310) 568-5600.

7. I understand I have the right to obtain a transcribed report of my interview to be sent directly to me, if desired.

8. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

9. Since this study is being conducted via the Internet, I understand I will be sent a copy of this consent form once signed by the researcher.

_____ My Signature   Date_____

_____ My Printed Name

For further information, please contact:
Mark Orlando at either ██████████████████████ or ████████████

_____ Date

_____ Signature of the Researcher

APPENDIX F

Pepperdine University IRB Approval

PEPPERDINE UNIVERSITY

Graduate & Professional Schools Institutional Review Board

May 29, 2014

Mark Orlando
Protocol #: E0314D07
Project Title: Fostering Creativity Skills in Online MBA Programs: Perceptions of MBA Alumni

Dear Mr. Orlando:

Thank you for submitting your application, *Fostering Creativity Skills in Online MBA Programs: Perceptions of MBA Alumni,* for exempt review to Pepperdine University's Graduate and Professional Schools Institutional Review Board (GPS IRB). The IRB appreciates the work you and your faculty advisor, Dr. Allen, have done on the proposal. The IRB has reviewed your submitted IRB application and all ancillary materials. Upon review, the IRB has determined that the above entitled project meets the requirements for exemption under the federal regulations (45 CFR 46 - http://www.nihtraining.com/ohsrsite/guidelines/45cfr46.html) that govern the protections of human subjects. Specifically, section 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2) states:

> (b) Unless otherwise required by Department or Agency heads, research activities in which the only involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the following categories are exempt from this policy:

> **Category (2) of 45 CFR 46.101**, research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: a) Information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; and b) any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

In addition, **your application to waive documentation of informed consent has been approved.**

Your research must be conducted according to the proposal that was submitted to the IRB. If changes to the approved protocol occur, a revised protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB before implementation. For any proposed changes in your research protocol, please submit a **Request for Modification Form** to the GPS IRB. Because your study falls under exemption, there is no requirement for continuing IRB review of your project. Please be aware that changes to your protocol may prevent the research from qualifying for exemption from 45 CFR 46.101 and require submission of a new IRB application or other materials to the GPS IRB.

A goal of the IRB is to prevent negative occurrences during any research study. However, despite our best intent, unforeseen circumstances or events may arise during the research. If an unexpected situation or adverse event happens during your investigation, please notify the GPS IRB as soon as possible. We will ask for a complete explanation of the event and your response. Other actions also may be required depending on the nature of the event. Details regarding the timeframe in which adverse events must be reported to the GPS IRB and the appropriate form to be used to report this information can be found in the *Pepperdine University Protection of Human Participants in Research: Policies and Procedures Manual* (see link to "policy material" at http://www.pepperdine.edu/irb/graduate/).

6100 Center Drive, Los Angeles, California 90045 ▪ 310-568-5600

Please refer to the protocol number denoted above in all further communication or correspondence related to this approval. Should you have additional questions, please contact Kevin Collins, Manager of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at gpsirb@peppderdine.edu. On behalf of the GPS IRB, I wish you success in this scholarly pursuit.

Sincerely,

Thema Bryant-Davis, Ph.D.
Chair, Graduate and Professional Schools IRB

cc: Dr. Lee Kats, Vice Provost for Research and Strategic Initiatives
        Mr. Brett Leach, Compliance Attorney
        Dr. Mark Allen, Faculty Advisor