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**Meeting Students' Needs and Expectations in a Culturally Diverse
E-learning Environment: A Case Study**

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**Meeting Students' Needs and Expectations in a Culturally Diverse
E-learning Environment: A Case Study**

by

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Dedication

To my children, Andrew and Karissa, who are forever my most cherished accomplishment.

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**Meeting Students' Needs and Expectations in a Culturally Diverse
E-learning Environment: A Case Study**

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The increased growth of online instruction has been well documented by various studies. As the result of the proliferation of online instruction, students from outside of the United States are now able to obtain an American education without having to leave their home country. While online course designs have been well researched and documented to identify best methods and practices to enable optimum learning achievement, providing online instruction to non-US educated students generates the question of how a culturally diverse student body adapts and/or adjusts to an American-style instruction.

The purpose of this study is to conduct an exploratory qualitative research to investigate how students from an Asian learning culture adapt to an American online learning environment and to determine whether the various instructional design

theories and practices that are widely accepted as best practices in the United States and incorporated into the instruction designs for this Marketing Management hybrid course are also as well-received by students from a different learning culture. From the five categories emerged from the research data: (1) students' background, (2) perceived benefits, (3) essential skills, (4) supports expected and/or received, and (5) sense of community, the researcher proposed a framework that encompasses the students' process of adapting to online learning. Within the process of adapting to online learning, conditions such as students' backgrounds and expectations influenced the various learning strategies that students adopted in order to realize the benefits from the online learning experience.

Information gathered from this study may provide those involved in online education - decision makers in academic, business, and professional organizations considering an overseas online instruction strategy - an added awareness of how different learning cultures may influence the quality of an online learning experience. Additionally, for a specific target audience, this research study may further validate the learner-centered approach for instruction designs. For students who may be contemplating online learning as an option, this study may provide a deeper understanding of what is entailed in an online learning environment - the contributing actors and factors that affect the quality of an online learning experience.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The U.S. Department of Education defines online education as “a formal education process in which the student and instructor are not in the same place. Thus, instruction may be synchronous or asynchronous, and it may involve communication through the use of video, audio, or computer technologies, or by correspondence (which may include both written correspondence and the use of technology such as CD-ROM)” (Parsad, Lewis, & Tice, 2008, p. 1). Similarly, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB International), an accrediting agency for higher education degrees in business and accounting, characterizes online learning as where “the learner works alone or in a group, guided by study materials arranged by the instructor from a location apart from the students. Students have the opportunity to communicate with an instructor with the aid of a range of media (such as text, telephone, audio, video, computing, and Internet technology, etc)” (AACSB International, 2007,p. 4). Online learning also has been called distance learning, electronic learning or e-learning due to the use of a computer or electronic device in the learning or teaching process (E-Learning & Technology, 2008). Indeed, it is further noted that the growth in online learning has been spurred on by the advancements of computer technologies which allow for more sophisticated learning management systems being created (Harris, Yanosky, & Zastrocky, 2003). Shachar and Neumann (2003) contended that

This growth accelerated significantly during the 1990s with the use of computer-mediated learning technologies, e.g., two-way interactive video; two-way audio and Web-based asynchronous communication; and online

or offline Internet Web-based instruction (Phipps and Merisotis, 1999; Ponzurick et al., 2000; Sherry, 1996; Wernet et al., 2000; Setaro, 2000). Advancements in increasingly flexible technology have enabled the Web's visual, interactive nature to transform the traditional campus classroom-instructor system into a variety of different and innovative forms of instructional dissemination and to decentralized locations (Hall, 2002; Ponzurick et al., 2000) (p. 3).

More succinctly, Volery and Lord (2000) pointed out that online learning consists of two distinctive elements: “a heavy reliance on technology” and “self-learning” (p. 217). In an online learning environment, “self-learning” means that the learner has greater control over their own learning experience with features such as self-pacing, sequence of instructional materials, the content of instruction, and the amount of instruction to be absorbed during a learning session (Volery & Lord, 2000). The primary characteristic of an online learning environment is that it is typically available to learners anytime and anywhere there is an Internet service available. According to Mills and Harvey (2005), some common key characteristics have emerged to define what constitutes an online learning environment:

... students learn at a time that suits them from a location of their choice, normally without being required to attend the institution that offers the program. This mode of learning is flexible, allowing access to education to students who are geographically isolated or whose work or family commitments conflict with attending an institution to study at fixed times and places. Distance education uses a wide range of mechanisms (separately or in combination) to deliver learning materials: print materials delivered by mail, television and radio broadcasts, and the Web. Students and teachers communicate using mail and telephone, and increasingly, through email and online forums (p. 44).

With the advancement of computing technology which has provided a more enriched online learning experience to the learner, the growth of online instruction and enrollment in higher education have been noticed and thus is well documented by various studies. For example, the U.S. Department of Education's study of higher education institutions indicated that 43 percent of two and four year colleges and universities offered Web-based courses (Parsad, Lewis, & Tice 2008). Alfred P. Sloan Foundation financed a study in 2007 entitled *Online Nation: Five Years of Growth in Online Learning* to collect data from over 2,500 colleges and universities and to analyze the planning and practices of online learning of higher education institutions. The 2007 Sloan Foundation study indicated that 73 percent of all public institutions are now classified as engaged (offering online courses) or fully-engaged (offering online courses and considering online learning as a strategic mission for their institutions). The Sloan Foundation study further revealed that 35 percent of higher education institutions consider offering online courses is "strategic for their institutions and they have fully incorporated online into their formal long-term plan" (Allen & Seaman, 2007, p. 10). Additionally, the data collected showed that 69 percent of academic leaders expect online learning to grow; 83 percent institutions forecast that online enrollments will continue to increase - an increase of almost 10 percent in online enrollment from 2006 to 2007; at least 80 percent of the course content were expected to be delivered online; and over a four year period from 2002 to 2006, the two-year associate's institutions showed an

online enrollment growth rate of 24 percent as compared to 6.9 percent growth for baccalaureate's and 19.6 percent growth for master's level (Allen & Seaman, 2007).

However, as also noted in the Sloan Foundation study, while the demand for online learning from students residing within the US is still increasing, the enrollment growth rate as compared from 2002 to 2006 shows a more gradual and stabilizing increase. The research data indicated that the schools that are already fully engaged in online education with a strategic mission and long-term plan that includes online education

“...have already produced the greatest growth over the last four years” and that “the number of potential online students [in the US] is finite, and at some point the ability of colleges and universities to add and expand online courses and programs will be reached” (Allen & Seaman, 2007, p. 14).

Thus, for the schools that have been adding or expanding online courses and/or degree programs, the challenge is what should be done in order to foster the continued demand for online learning. As a product, an American higher education is a desirable endeavor but it is also increasingly more expensive. In a Global Higher Education Report 2005 sponsored by Educational Policy Institute, the United States' education costs are ranked among the highest, second highest after Japan, at 26 percent of GDP per capita (Usher & Cervenak, 2005, p. 16) and the education costs continue to rise from 2003 to 2007. For example, Texas' post-secondary tuition and fees have been increasing at a total rate of 53 percent from 2003 to 2007 (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board, 2008, p. 28). In considering the overseas students as the potential target audience to

enroll in online learning, one favorable factor is well-known: globally, it is generally acknowledged that a higher education degree from an American institution is held in high regards: “more than 650,000 international students were enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities in 2009” (Chandler, 2010). American universities historically dominate the list of Top 100 World Universities (Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2007).

For one American university that is located in a major city in Texas, its School of Business has been progressively developing online business courses over the years and now is able to offer a graduate degree of Master in Business Administration (MBA) completely online for US students. The next logical step in fostering a continued demand for online education while still keeping the education costs affordable for the potential students is to provide such educational opportunity via online learning to the overseas student population who can remain in their home country. Through a cooperative degree program agreement developed between this American university’s School of Business and a Vietnam university located in Ho Chi Minh City, students in Vietnam begin their Masters level course-works for one year in Vietnam and then have the option of completing the remaining second year course works either in Vietnam or in the United States of America.

In support of this cooperative Master degree program agreement, a graduate-level Marketing Management course was designed as a hybrid or blended learning course to offer to the students in Vietnam in the Spring semester of 2008. There was a rationale behind designing this Marketing Management course as a hybrid rather than completely

online for the students in Vietnam. While an online course has at least 80% of its content delivered online, the 2008 Sloan Foundation study entitled *Staying the Course: Online Education in the United States, 2008* indicated that a course is defined as blended or hybrid online learning when 30% to 79% of the course content is delivered online (Allen & Seaman, 2008, p. 4). Specifically, hybrid or blended learning is defined as

“...courses in which a significant portion of the learning activities have been moved online and time traditionally spent in the classroom is reduced but not eliminated. The goal of hybrid courses is to pair the best features of face-to-face teaching with the best options of online learning to promote active and independent learning and reduce class seat time” (Hybrid Learning, n.d., online home page).

As a whole, the education culture in Vietnam falls within the objectivist paradigm where the instructor is considered to be the owner of knowledge and whose responsibility is to transfer that knowledge to the students. The students in Vietnam are conditioned to be the passive participants and they expect to be led by the instructor in acquiring new knowledge. Information extracted from Wikipedia about education practices in Vietnam provides a clearer picture of a teacher-centered environment where students graduated from colleges but are unprepared for the work force:

The entire higher education system is facing several crises such as out-of-date course curricula, a lecturer-centered method of teaching and learning, research activities separated from teaching activities, a big gap between theory and practice that leads to a large number of graduates being unable to find a job, and the fact that degrees from Vietnamese universities are not recognized worldwide. There is, therefore, a huge demand for quality educational services.

Teaching methods delivered in the public school system are very teacher-oriented. You will find that the students are quite studious and very disciplined in the classroom. The more successful students are those who can absorb the given material and transfer the knowledge to their

notebooks as in class debate is not entirely welcome in every class. This is a sharp contrast to western classroom settings where participation and challenging of materials has a greater focus.

Students are arranged by class number and do not move from classroom to classroom between classes. They also stay together as a small group for their entire elementary, junior-high, or high-school levels in one location per grade. The teachers are the ones who float from classroom to classroom making it difficult for the Vietnamese teacher to establish a room of their own. This is where western students develop much needed social skills; whereas the Vietnamese students develop a stronger group bond. The end result though, is the severe shyness in many Vietnamese when introduced to a new group of people and the need to interact. It becomes even more apparent at the university level (Education in Vietnam, n.d.).

Contrasting those education practices in Vietnam with how the American online learning environment is structured, Ragan (2004) postulated that

Advances in instructional technologies and a renewed interest in changing the dynamics of an instructional event continue to influence the way we design and develop educational systems. Changes are being called for in the way we think about the role of both instructor and student. Within both the distance education and general education framework, new standards are being defined based on a student-centered curriculum, increased interactive learning, integration of technology into the educational system, and collaborative study activities (paragraph 2).

Given this understanding in the differences in learning cultures and practices between Vietnam and the US, providing the students in Vietnam with a completely online course which is built on a basic foundation of self-directed learning would not be suitable. Thus, as a transitional step, the Marketing Management course was structured as a hybrid 6-weeks course, consisting of a 5-weeks online learning portion and a 1-week in class with the instructor and myself as teaching assistant. The online learning portion was hosted by WebCT, a learning management system, and the instructors traveled to Ho

Chi Minh City in Vietnam to conduct the in-class portion. The hybrid business course was designed based on the American business education's standards of practices for online learning that follow the guidelines of the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (AACSB International), an accrediting agency for higher education degrees in business and accounting. According to AACSB International, to be considered as meeting the guidelines for higher education in business, online learning must provide the learners with the opportunity for interactions with both instructor and other learners:

“The most effective learning is highly interactive, and schools are expected to show that such interactions take place as a normal part of the learning experience of students in degree programs... Student involvement in the formulation and solution of business or management problems... Continuing tutorial support including frequent student recitations... Opportunities for continuous interaction through technology-based learning... Mentored reflection on problem solving and issues resolution activities... Group-based activities assigned in classes or designed into extracurricular or governance activities... Continuing informal group activities” (AACSB International, 2006, p. 53-56).

Accordingly, the Marketing Management hybrid course contains features such as live chats and asynchronous discussion boards to promote interaction; written assignments and self-testing to encourage convergent thinking; clear grading rubrics for participation was developed; human tutors being made available to students; and students are required post their answers to the debate questions as well as to participate in debating with other students' responses. Complete instruction designs for the course will be discussed in details in Chapter III – Methodology.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Offering an American online/hybrid business course to students in Vietnam presents two challenging issues: the shift in perspective from instructor-centered to learner-centered education and the introduction, therefore expected, adaptation of American learning culture for students in Vietnam. Thus, the purpose of this study is to conduct an exploratory qualitative research in order to investigate how students from an Asian learning culture adapt to an American online learning environment and to determine whether the various instructional design theories and practices that are widely accepted as best practices in the United States and incorporated into the instruction designs for this Marketing Management hybrid course are also as well-received by students from a different learning culture. Following are the research questions for this study:

1. How do the students in Vietnam adapt to the American instruction in a graduate-level online learning environment?
2. What are the needs and expectations of the students in Vietnam who enroll in this Marketing Management online learning environment? Do the American online instructional designs which incorporate various elements deemed to be desirable practices in American published literature, meet these students' needs and expectations?
3. Which instructional design features and strategies contribute the most to student satisfaction and student interaction?

Significance of the Study

Along with the broad access to the world at large via computer technology, the pervasive availability of the Internet has made it possible for people to gain educational experiences that traditionally can be prohibitive due to geographical or financial limitations. The information gathered from this study may provide those involved in online education - decision makers in academic, business, and professional organizations considering an overseas online instruction strategy - an added awareness of how different learning cultures influence the quality of an online learning experience. Additionally, the fact that this research study is target-audience specific as well as learning cultures specific may further emphasize the validity of learner-centered approach for instructional designers. For students who may be contemplating online learning as an option, this study may provide a deeper understanding of what entails in an online learning environment - the contributing actors and factors that affect the quality of an online learning experience.

The following literature review section will provide an overview of instructional design and the best practices as currently being utilized for online business courses in higher education; the learning theories and instructional design models that provide the foundation for designing an American online learning environment; and the influences of culture in learning outcomes.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

As postulated by Volery and Lord (2000), online learning consists of two critical aspects: “a heavy reliance on technology” and “self-learning” (p. 217). Thus, for an online learning environment to be effective, much is dependent upon how instruction is designed to meet a target audience’s needs. Designing for online instruction is defined as “the systematic process of translating general principles of learning and instruction into plans for instructional materials and learning” where deliberate decisions regarding instructional strategies must be made in order to achieve the educational objectives and goals (McNeil, 2008). Since this research study is about the design of an online business course for the overseas students, background literature related to instructional design as a discipline will be examined in this chapter to provide grounding to the research questions of this study. The review of literature consists of three sections. The first section provides an overview of instructional design for online business education. The second section examines the learning and design theories that provide the foundation for instruction designs. The third section presents the theories and empirical research that identifies the influence of cultures in learning.

Overview of Instructional Design for Business Education

ONLINE INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN - ELEMENTS AND GUIDELINES

According to Grandzol and Grandzol (2006), the continued growth in “popularity and acceptance of online education as an effective, efficient educational medium creates both an opportunity and a threat for a college of business.....Therefore, the question is

not whether a college of business should pursue online education, but rather, how it should strategically respond to this growing challenge” (p. 1). Specifically, at issue is how an online learning course should be designed effectively?

Through working experiences with the W.P. Carey School of Business online education initiatives, Rungtusanatham, Ellram, Siferd, and Salik (2004) posited that for the design and delivery of online learning to be effective: first, instructional design should be categorized among the four learning models - Overview Model, Overview Model with Feedback, Technical-Skills Model, and Managerial Learning Model; secondly, for each online education model, issues related to content, delivery, and learning should be the “governing” factors (Rungtusanatham et al., 2004, p. 102). For example, guiding issues such as how content should be organized; which technological methods should be utilized to deliver the instruction to students; and how the learning pace should be controlled must be taken in consideration. For the purpose of helping “institutions effectively match intended educational goals to the appropriate type of online distance education to pursue” (Rungtusanatham et al., 2004, p. 103), a topology was developed by Rungtusanatham et al. (2004) which outlines four learning models and differentiating factors of online education to meet the intended education goals (see Table 1). Although not as clearly outlined in the topology, Rungtusanatham et al. (2004) also suggested that for each educational level – undergraduate, graduate, and executive; an appropriate choice of online education model combined with the right decisions for content-related issues, delivery-related issues, and learning-related issues should enhance the quality of online instruction. As an example of how flexible the typology can be utilized in various combinations of education level, instruction model, and differentiating

factors; Rungtusanatham et al. (2004) cited the Overview Model and Overview Model with Feedback as being applicable to

“...some aspects of all levels of education. From a *content-related* perspective, both types may be used in executive education as an introduction to a topic, or to help the learner decide if he or she wants to enroll in a full course that is conducted either as an online course or face-to-face. In either undergraduate or graduate education, the Overview Model or Overview Model with Feedback can be useful for “lectures” presented in the form of readings, either as part of an online class or as a traditional face-to-face class. This is relatively straightforward to prepare from a *delivery-related* perspective. In the Overview Model with Feedback, students may be given the opportunity to ask questions about the readings, either online or when the class meets face-to-face. From a *learning-related* perspective, this format is better for single-loop learning objectives where one-way communication is sufficient or for areas that are not controversial or difficult, unless this approach is paired with an ability to ask questions and discuss issues. However, if such extensive interaction is required, the intended learning now extends beyond a simple overview, toward a managerial learning approach” (p. 112).

Table 1

A Typology of Four Online Distance Education Models (Rungtusanatham et al., 2004, p. 108).

Differentiating Factors	Overview Model	Overview Model with Feedback	Technical-Skills Model	Managerial Learning Model
<u><i>Content-Related Issues</i></u>				
Knowledge Depth	Introductory	Introductory	Skills Competency	Skills Competency & Managerial Decision Making
Content Development Approach	Faculty or Design-team Driven	Faculty or Design-team Driven	Design-team Driven	Design-team Driven
Content Change Flexibility	Low	Low	Low but more so than previous two models	High
<u><i>Delivery-Related Issues</i></u>				
Interactions Level	None to Limited	Limited	Limited	High
Interactions Flexibility	Low	Low	Low	High
<u><i>Learning-Related Issues</i></u>				
Double-Loop Learning Opportunity	Minimal	Minimal	Average	Maximal
Learning Pace Control	Student or Faculty	Student or Faculty	Student or Faculty	Primarily Faculty

The typology created by Rungtusanatham et al. (2004) represents a matrix of instructional design models and the differentiating factors entailed for each model. It also promotes a customized combination approach rather than a one-size-fit-all practice in designing for online instruction. Thus, along with identifying elements characterized for designing online learning as postulated by Rungtusanatham et al. (2004), Ragan's set of guiding principles and practices further addresses the how-to treatments of an educational event and the management of supporting tools and services. As an outcome of the ongoing Innovations in Distance Education (IDE) project that began in 1995, Ragan (2004) introduced an "emerging set of guiding principles and practices that would provide a philosophical foundation for the design and development of educational programming ... for an effective educational experience" (paragraph 3-6). These guiding principles and practices consist of five major elements: Learning Goals and Content Presentation; Interactions; Assessment and Measurement; Instructional Media and Tools; and Learner Support and Services as summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

Emerging Guiding Principles and Practices (Ragan, 2004, web pages)

Learning Goals & Content Presentation	Interactions	Assessment & Measurement	Instructional Media & Tools	Learner Support & Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clearly defined as part of instructional design plan & be explicitly communicated to student. ▪ Direct specific instructional activities to meet course goals. ▪ Content should be sequenced & structured. ▪ Tie performance evaluation to defined learning goals. ▪ Instructional design & support should be wide-range for faculty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Frequent & meaningful interactions among learners, among instructional materials, & between learner & instructor. ▪ Use electronic tools to create & maintain the learning communities for learners. ▪ Provide learner the opportunity to build confidence & competence w/ education practices & supporting technologies . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Should be congruent w/ learning goals and consist w/ skills required of learner. ▪ Enabling learners to assess their progress, to identify areas for review, and to establish immediate learning goals. ▪ Should accommodate the special needs, characteristics & situations of the distance learner. ▪ Provide ample opportunities and accessible methods for provide feedback . 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Selection & use of tools based upon learning goals, “added-value”, and accessible to learners. ▪ Users should be adequately prepared and supported. ▪ Should reflect the diversity of potential learners. ▪ Contingency strategies in place for recovery. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Comprehensive system of technical support services should be in place to provide 24x7 support services. ▪ Regular feedback mechanisms should be designed and implemented to assess the success and failures of the various support systems created for the distance education system.

The change of learning medium from face-to-face to online environment necessitates that an instructional designer should pay attention to “which pedagogical techniques work best in the online environment” (Grandzol & Grandzol, 2006, p. 8). Sims, Dobbs, and Hand (2002) further elaborated that online learning must be “conceptualized as an environment that integrates collaboration, communication, and engaging content with specific groups and independent learning activities and tasks....Significant level of thought must be placed on the very nature of the medium and the underlying implications for teaching and learning” (p. 138). Implicit in how the course content should be presented to learners is the “assumption that content can no longer be seen as being ‘owned’ by the teacher or the discipline, but rather as an information base that can be seen and worked with in different ways” (Sims et al., 2002, p. 139). From this perspective, an effective online learning design is influenced by a choice of pedagogy, learning outcome, and technology resources (Sims et al., 2002).

How online instruction should be designed has the strong potential of eliminating online learning disadvantages cited by Grandzol and Grandzol (2006) such as poor quality; lack of interactivity (Hereford, 2000); difficult medium for subjective course content (Jana, 1999); online workloads and class size (Roach, 2002); technology gaps (Chisholm, Carey & Hernandez, 2002); and high costs of entry (Gagne & Shepherd, 2001). Specifically, the success of an online learning environment is influenced by effectively organizing and managing several factors: course design and delivery, student services, and administration. A summary of desired practices as gleaned from learning

theories and research studies is organized in a table format (see Table 3) by Grandzol and Grandzol (2006) below.

Table 3

Online Education Best Practices (Grandzol and Grandzol, 2006, p. 8-12)

Course Design & Delivery		
	Description of Desired Practice	Author(s)
1	<p>A consistent structure is vital for online success. This allows students to learn new material without learning a new structure each course.</p> <p>The greater the consistency among course modules, the more satisfaction students had with the course, the more they thought they learned, and the more interaction they thought they had with their instructor.</p> <p>Creating consistency is unlikely if faculty is working in isolation, without commonly shared standards. Therefore, standards and best practices should be institutionalized.</p>	<p>Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, Swan, & Shea (2000); Shea, Fredericksen, Pickett, & Pelz (2003).</p> <p>Shea, Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, & Swan (2001).</p> <p>Hartman, Dziuban, & Moskal (2000)</p>
2	<p>Courses should be complete on the day class starts. While this may inhibit spontaneity, it reinforces consistency and allows faculty to concentrate on teaching and participating fully.</p>	<p>Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, Swan, & Shea (2000)</p>
3	<p>The online environment fosters a teaching style that is learner-centered, instead of teaching-centered.</p> <p>Therefore, redirect time from covering content to facilitating student learning (mentor or coach).</p>	<p>Geith (2003)</p>
4	<p>Include navigational documents and instructions that specifically tell students where to go and what to do next.</p>	<p>Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, Swan, & Shea (2000)</p>

Table 3 (cont.)

Course Design & Delivery		
	Description of Desired Practice	Author(s)
5	<p>Match course time commitments to evaluation. For example, if 60% of the course is spent on discussion, why should discussion only count for 25% of the grade?</p> <p>The greater the percentage of the course grade based on discussion, the more satisfied students were, the more they thought they learned from the course, and the more interaction they had with their instructor and peers.</p> <p>The greater the percentage of the course grade based on cooperative or group work, the less students thought they learned from the course.</p>	<p>Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, Swan, & Shea (2000)</p> <p>Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, Swan, & Shea (2001)</p>
6	Instructors should add something new every 2-3 days to keep the class moving.	Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, Swan, & Shea (2000)
7	Keep the course clean of accidental postings and empty documents.	Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, Swan, & Shea (2000)
8	Use a non-graded icebreaker the first day to foster community and help the students practice chatting.	Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, Swan, & Shea (2000)
9	Limit the number of hypertext links per page.	Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, Swan, & Shea (2000)
10	Automate testing and feedback when possible.	Swan (2003)

Table 3 (cont.)

Course Design & Delivery		
	Description of Desired Practice	Author(s)
11	Online courses that encouraged and rewarded collaboration, but did not require discussion from all students were the most successful.	Holland (2000)
12	Utilize self-assessments.	Holland (2000)
13	Give prompt and constructive feedback. Because students expect immediate feedback in the online environment, it is essential to establish guidelines on expected turnaround time for answering e-mails, etc. This may help avert unrealistic student expectations regarding response times.	Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, Swan, & Shea (2001) Perreault, Waldman, & Alexander (2002)
14	Ways to hold a meaningful chat: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resist the temptation to respond to every student's response ▪ Assign individual students the task of summarizing the discussion ▪ Employ student-led discussion where students devise critical thinking questions ▪ Ask specific students to clarify a point ▪ Ask follow-up questions 	Shea, Fredericksen, Pickett, & Pelz (2003)
15	Use tracking mechanisms to reward reading as well as responding to messages.	Swan (2003)
16	Encourage divergent thinking skills by using open-ended questions, and modeling encouragement for diverse points of view. Encourage convergent thinking by using activities such as written assignments, one-on-one tutorials, small group collaboration, and self-testing.	Swan (2003)
17	Develop grading rubrics for participation.	Swan (2003)

Table 3 (cont.)

Course Design & Delivery		
Description of Desired Practice		Author(s)
18	Faculty should seek to establish “swift trust” during the first week by establishing a lively and responsive environment.	Hiltz, Arbaugh, Benbunan-Fich, & Shea (2004) Coppola, Hiltz, & Rotter (2002)
19	Present explanations of animations (such as PowerPoint slides) in spoken form instead of text form. Simultaneously present narration and animation. Narrate in a conversational tone. Allow the learner to have control over the pace of the presentation.	Mayer (2001); Mayer & Moreno (1998); Swan (2004)
Student Services		
Description of Desired Practice		Author(s)
20	Include an orientation to the class, including welcome, contact information, evaluation procedures, etc. The more students can get to know each other and the professor at this point, the greater likelihood that active learning will take place.	Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, Swan, & Shea (2000) Benke, Bishop, Thompson, Scarafiotti, & Schweber (2004)

Table 3 (cont.)

Student Services		
	Description of Desired Practice	Author(s)
21	<p>Include a student services area that provides administrative reference materials (policies & procedures), degree program reference materials, a student lounge (forum for ad hoc discussions – both academic and social). Have faculty participate in these adhoc discussions, too.</p> <p>Student service center should be comprehensive. Provide a single point of contact for all issues. Have one point of contact for every 200-250 students.</p> <p>Student support is an essential component of online education. Many institutions neglect student support in deference to developing courses and opening them for enrollment. Have a student services section on the WebSite the links to various support resources available at the institution.</p>	<p>Hislop (2000)</p> <p>Alexander (2005)</p> <p>McGrath, Middleton, & Crissman (2002)</p>
22	Make human tutors available.	Swan (2003)
Administration		
	Description of Desired Practice	Author(s)
23	Establish quality control guidelines that address issues of consistency.	Swan (2003)
24	Faculty should participate in relevant training before developing online courses.	Donnelli & Klein (2005)
25	Faculty should consult selected “best-courses” that serve as a model for development.	Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, Swan, & Shea (2000)
26	Utilize an outside or peer reviewer.	Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, Swan, & Shea (2000); Thompson (2003)

Table 3 (cont.)

Administration		
	Description of Desired Practice	Author(s)
27	Faculty should design online courses more as communication and collaboration environments than as repositories for content.	Dziuban, Hartman, Moskal, Sorg, & Truman (2004)
28	Build in variety: some students did better with PowerPoint slides while others preferred text outlines. Consider using a cyclic design, whereby each lesson has elements of interest for all learning styles (i.e. text readings, case studies, journals, research projects)	Holland (2000) Danchak (2004)
29	Be careful using too much multimedia, especially video, because of transfer issues.	Holland (2000)
30	The maximum number of students faculty believed they could effectively teach online is 25.	Hartman & Truman-Davis (2001)
31	There are several different ways to organize online courses. Several researchers promote the modular system of curricular design because it builds on concepts of social learning, mental processing and systems thinking.	Wentling & Park (2001); Frederickson, Pickett, Pelz, Swan, & Shea (2000)
32	Utilize “web vets” in trainings.	Hartman, Dziuban, & Moskal (2000)
33	Faculty saw a 25% time savings in the online environment compared to the traditional environment. However, this excludes the time for course development, which was substantially more in the online environment. To save time and utilize technology’s power, one can reduce instructor grading time by placing previously hand-graded activities online, reducing the amount of time spent on lecture, and increasing the percentage of time spent on interaction.	Waddoups, Hatch, & Butterworth (2003) Bishop (2003)

As discussed previously in the introduction section, the tremendous growth and the marked shift from teaching-centered to learning-centered in online business education

have prompted AACSB International (2007) to provide the accredited higher education institutions with insights in order to ensure quality in online business education. In AACSB International's guideline entitled "Quality Issues in Distance Learning", particular emphasis is placed on enabling the self-learning aspects for students; promoting student-instructor interaction and student-student interaction; and articulating clearly to students about performance expectations for students, how/where student-instructor interactions should occur, and required technical competencies and equipments. To provide students in an online learning environment the much needed sense of learning community and group interactions, appropriate use of technology tools can bridge the gap:

"The instructional designer can put in real-time chats with instructors, threaded discussions among the learners and the instructors, and even public or private e-mails to the other learners in the class and to the professors. One can tape a segment of a guest speaker to be streamed online or, better yet, have a real-time guest speaker sign on to the class to chat with the students. The advantage of this strategy in a distance environment is that this guest may be in a totally different state or country. As long as the time is coordinated, all students, instructors, and guests can log on and learning can begin" (Chernish et al., 2005, p. 93).

A review of various empirical researches indicates that these insights and recommended practices were put into uses for the online classrooms and these research results revealed varying degrees of success.

EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON IMPLEMENTATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGNS

Effective use of technology tools

Comparative research conducted in the area of instruction designs tends to be of three different learning environments: face-to-face, online, and hybrid (a combination of face-to-face and online features). One example is the case study done by Chernish, DeFranco, Lindner, and Dooley (2005) which compares the results of one human resource management course that was offered in several sections and was taught with three different methods of delivery: traditional classroom, instructional television, and Internet. Issues involving students, instructors, instructional designers and use of technology were discussed. The results showed that students' academic achievements were not affected by different delivery methods of instruction. In particular, results from this study indicated that online learning is not a one-size-fits-all. Rather, success tends to happen to students who are self-disciplined and/or self-directed. Specifically, "self-directed learning does not mean isolation but, in fact, involves several resources, professionals, lectures, seminars, and face-to-face interactions" and that "an environment that advocates peer interactions, social support, and interpersonal communications, cooperative learning models can help attain the sense of a learning community which is frequently lacking in distance education experiences" (Chernish et al., 2005, p. 88).

Oakes and Rengarajan (2002) pointed out that the enabling difference between synchronous and asynchronous learning is in how technology being utilized effectively. The benefits afforded an online learner such as self-pacing of learning materials and "time and place independent" fall within the realms of asynchronous learning (p. 57). Whereas, synchronous learning is more aptly described as a "virtual classroom" of which

“an online learning environment that tries to closely copy a classroom, with Web-based bells and whistles added” (p. 58). According to Oaks and Rengarajan (2002), for a virtual classroom to have the equivalent of every type of major interactions that happen in a real classroom, the nature of the interaction between learners and instructors is dependent upon well coordinated and effective use of synchronous technology such as: audio and video; visuals (PowerPoint, HTML pages, and graphic files); shared electronic whiteboard; application sharing (live online demos of software applications and hands-on participation); choreography (well-defined processes to facilitate interaction. The instructor may have overriding capabilities to take back control at any time); group feedback (online mechanism through which the instructor polls the participants in real time and takes further actions based on the results); breakout sessions (group members interact with each other in a sub session, equipping them with almost all of the online tools available in a regular session).

Reinforcing the need for appropriate use of technology tools to enhance online learning, Gagne and Shepherd (2001) conducted a study to find any performance differences between face-to-face and online learning for an introductory accounting class. Both types of class lasted 17 weeks and had the same text, syllabus, assignments, and examinations. The only operational difference is that the face-to-face class met once a week whereas “in the distance class, the students had no face-to-face contact with each other or the instructor. The distance students could communicate via telephone, e-mail, threaded bulletin board discussions and synchronous chat technologies. Except for the

textbook, the distance class received all material for the course over the Internet. The distance section received supplemental administrative and course information, e.g., solutions to assigned problems, via the Web” (Gagne and Shepherd, 2001, p. 60). Gagne and Shepherd (2001) posited that “a graduate level introductory accounting course should be a good candidate for distance education delivery [with effective use of technology]. Typically, students are required to master ways of organizing and presenting factual material. The required effort is methodical and logical” (p 59). The study results showed no significant difference in terms of student performance; however, online students felt that “interaction with the online instructor using e-mail, telephone, or chat demands greater efficiency than open oral discussion, and therefore is more limited. This is perhaps the greatest limitation of the online delivery method” (p. 64). Based on the study’s results and the online students’ perceptions, Gagne and Shepherd (2001) suggested that “future research in this area should center on the issue of improving student perception of instructor availability. Is a richer medium required (i.e. video), or can certain procedures be incorporated to help students feel as if the instructor is more available” (p. 65).

Interaction and Success in Learning

Another recurring research theme in online learning is the degrees and effects of student-instructor interaction and student-student interaction toward academic achievements. Factors contributing to a student’s success in learning were examined in a research study conducted by Deka and McMurry in 2006. Students from two sections of a

course in basic economics were chosen, one as face-to-face and the other as distant learning where students watch the class on television. The researchers wanted to investigate whether students' success is influenced by any or all of the following factors: contact with the instructor, student demographic background, preparedness (i.e., study skills, reading comprehension), and self-esteem/self-efficacy/motivation. Students' success is defined as exam grades (A, B, C, D, F, and drop) and retention rates. It was determined that face-to-face students have better grades than online learners even though distant learners were significantly older and had higher reading comprehension rates. For online learners to have a higher chance of being successful, aside from the required abilities such as higher reading comprehension and scholastic competence, they must also have assertiveness in the willingness to maintain contact with the instructor for support/guidance. The study results further indicated that there is a strong influence between the online learner's persistence and active participation in the student-instructor interaction and the learner's chance of success in an online learning environment. It is also crucial that online learners should be screened and advised prior to attempting to register for an online course to determine whether they are well-suited for online learning environment.

Vamosi, Pierce, and Slotkin (2004) investigated student satisfaction and their perceptions of efficacy of distant learning in two sections of an introduction to financial accounting course which had a mixed method of instruction delivery: students in both sections were in face-to-face classrooms for the first half of the course; for the second

half of the course, section 1 students had 3 chapters lectured in class and 3 chapters via online; section 2 students also had the same arrangement as section 1 but in reverse order of the chapters (i.e., chapters 7, 10 and 11 were live-lectures for section 1 while section 2 had these same chapters via taped lectures; chapters 8, 9, and 12 were taped-lectures for section 1 while section 2 had these via live lectures). When students were in asynchronous mode of online learning, they were not allowed to have in-person contacts with the instructor or use live class time to ask questions about online course materials. Instead, they can participate in a synchronous chat on Blackboard or post message to an asynchronous discussion board. A beginning and ending of semester survey were given to all students to gage their impressions of the distant learning portion. The study results “show that the students reported a lower relative level of satisfaction with the distance-learning component, as well as diminished effectiveness in mastering the distance-learning course material” (Vamosi et al., 2004, p. 360). In explaining the students’ lower level of satisfaction with the distance learning component, Vamosi et al. (2004) suggested that issues such as efficient time management, interaction (less student-student interaction), and degrees of technology effectiveness may make a significant difference.

Yet another study to compare face-to-face with online courses in graduate-level accounting was conducted by Revere, Heagy, and Rusth (2006) in order to measure students learning achievements. While learning achievement is the concrete measurement for comparative research, Revere et al. pinpointed another issue: “Hundreds of studies indicate there are no statistically significant differences between learning achievement in

face-to-face and online instruction....The question remains as to whether online instruction is as effective as face-to-face instruction in all courses or only a certain types of courses” (Revere et al., 2006, p. 20). As a basis for this research question, Revere et al. reviewed several comparative business studies about whether students’ academic achievements (i.e., homework and research paper grades, quizzes and final exam scores) were affected by different delivery methods of instruction, face-to-face, hybrid or online. These business research studies provided both conclusions: “no statistically significant difference” and “statistically significant difference” in students’ learning performance (Revere et al., 2006, p.21). Further details revealed why there were conflicting conclusions: it depends on which area of study discipline was being studied. Apparently, on the “no statistically significant difference” side are courses such as undergraduate business statistics (McLaren, 2004, as cited in Revere et al., 2006), freshman English composition (Nichols et al., 2003, as cited in Revere et al., 2006), business communications (Tucker, 2001, as cited in Revere et al., 2006), and graduate-level course in regulation and policy in telecommunication industry (Fallah & Ubell, 2000, as cited in Revere et al., 2006). On the “statistically significant difference” side is the research results from Shachar and Neumann (2003) who conducted meta-analysis on 86 experimental and quasi-experimental studies as well as other studies of specific courses such as principles of microeconomics (Brown & Liedholm, 2002, as cited in Revere et al., 2006). Thus, Revere et al. (2006) contended that there has been a lack of accounting-specific studies conducted and that of the few studies being done, the research model

used the comparative method which “has been criticized for its simplicity and the fact that it ignores what may be confounding variables” (p. 22). By incorporating confounding variables into the course score (i.e., course semester, age, sex, work status, and interactions among the model variables), the study’s result showed a “statistically significant difference in the mean course scores for the online and face-to-face subjects ($p \leq .0001$) with the face-to-face students outperforming the online students” (p. 23). Revere et al. (2006) concluded that for an accounting course, “the lack of immediate and individualized instructor-student verbal interaction may have contributed to the lower degree of learning achievement by the online students” (p.24).

Learning and Problem-Based Activities

In the quest for continuous improvement in the quality of online learning, the focus has been aimed toward understanding the learner’s needs in order to build the instructional content and the supporting learning environment that would fit the target audience. Thus, it has been noted that instruction designs for online learning has changed or moved from enabling the instructor to deliver instruction on a different platform - computer-based rather than classroom - to placing the learning process and responsibility on the students. There is also an increased advocacy for designing a learning environment that could support and encourage the interaction between instructors and students, peers, and cooperative learning community (Chernish et al., 2005). Chernish et al. study’s results indicated that for the learner’s achievement level, there was a slight preference toward traditional classroom environment due to the fact that students in traditional

classrooms have a much higher sense of learning community compared to the other two groups, instructional television and Internet.

As dictated by AACSB International, online business learning tends to be problems-solution and team-work based (AACSB International, 2006). Learning outcomes in many business situations involve problem solutions, and creating and sharing new knowledge within workplace situations require collaboration among members of a team. Work-based activities (WBA) and computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) are appropriate components for courses in such learning situations. Via this approach, collaborative work situations become the core of a course. There are four main issues and challenges that must be addressed for problem-based solutions: identify the key motives and goals for each of the main groups of stakeholders (participants, facilitator or instructor, and workplace supervisors or mentors); define the expected outcomes in details; identify an appropriate instructional theory to support the instructional-design approach for the WBA-CSCL tasks; and analyze the activity system dynamics.

As such, Collis and Margaryan (2004) proposed that instruction designs for learning to enhance problem-based activities can be best served by the utilization of the activity theory as originated by Leont'ev and Vygotsky in 1978 combined with the social factor in a technology-support learning environment (Jonassen, 2002). Engestrom (1987) depicted Leont'ev and Vygotsky's activity theory as a three-level model of activity: the collective activity carried out by a community toward an objective goal; the individual or

group action driven by a conscious goal; and the operation structure is influenced by the conditions and tools of the action. Activity theory can contribute to the understanding of computer-supported collaborative learning (CSCL) in the corporate setting by “[understanding] learning not as the internalization of discrete information or skills by individuals, but rather as expanding involvement over time— social as well as intellectual— with other people and the tools available in their culture” (Russell, 2002, p. 65).

The key propositions of activity theory relevant to WBA-CSCL are that activities are always situated in a social context. Collis and Margaryan’s (2004) activity system for computer-supported collaborative learning also incorporated the five key principles of Merrill’s instructional design theory (2002): problem setting (presenting real-world situations), activation (where to start), demonstration (applying prior knowledge to understand new problem), application, and integration (providing practice exercises to solve case studies). In the following section, the learning theories and instructional design models that provide the foundation for constructing the learning content of an effective online learning environment will be discussed in details.

Learning Theories and Online Learning Environment

Greeno, Resnick, and Collins (1996) define knowledge, learning, and motivation based on three general perspectives: behavioral, cognitive, and situative. In the behavioral perspective, knowledge is the observed change in behavior(s) after a new practice has been introduced and enforced; learning is the noted process that brought on the change in

behavior; and motivation for learner is extrinsic – reward obtained for expected exhibition of behavior. Learning outcome in the behavioral perspective must be measurable and quantified. From the cognitive perspective, knowledge and learning are more fluid and less distinguishable where knowledge is thought to be the learner's ability to process new information and to organize such information so that he/she can use of the information effectively when needed to analyze a new situation and to make decision; learning is understood as a constructive process of conceptual growth involving reorganization of concepts in the learner's understanding and growth in the general cognitive abilities such as problem-solving strategies and metacognitive processes; motivation for learner is more intrinsic such that in gaining the knowledge and being able to make sense of an event provide the learner with confidence and satisfaction. While the goal of instruction still emphasizes the process of knowledge transfer from teacher to learner, instruction designs influenced by cognitivism are enhanced with task analysis and learner analysis. In the situative perspective, knowledge as the cooperative activities in which learners are able to participate such as apprenticeship; learning occurs when the participant's increase in abilities also cause an increase in participation of the activity; and the motivation for participants come from demonstrating the value of gaining knowledge to solve problems and cultivating their sense of confidence in their ability to master the objectives.

To demonstrate the progression of learning from traditional learning models to constructivist models; Jonassen, McAleese, and Duffy (1993) introduced the Continuum

of Knowledge Acquisition Model (figure 1) which consists of three types of learning that leads from ignorance to expertise:

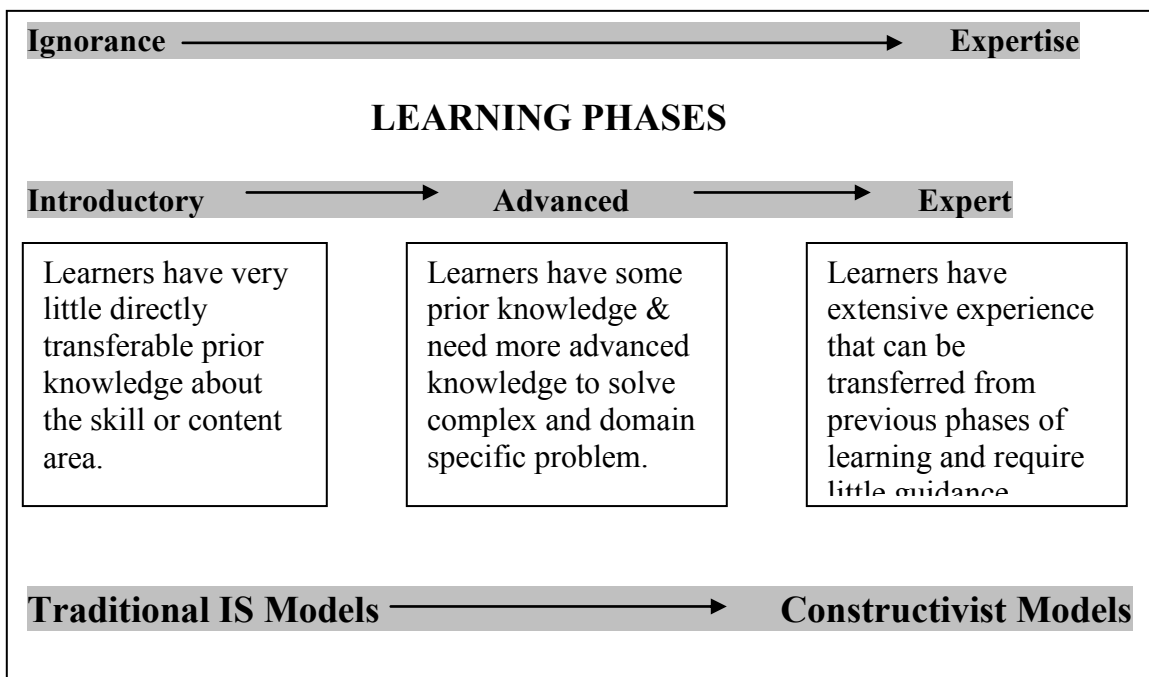


Figure 1: The Continuum of Knowledge Acquisition Model (Jonassen, McAleese, & Duffy, 1993)

In looking at Jonassen’s Continuum of Knowledge Acquisition model, the constructivist instruction is intended to “activate cognitive process that leads to understanding” and that

“constructivist assessment focuses on the quality of learners’ understanding rather than the quantity of knowledge they have acquired” (Mayer, 1999, p. 128). Thus, in an online learning environment, issues in learning, teaching, assessment, and technology must be examined as they are the contributing factors to the quality of the learning environment. Mayer (1999) identified the four issues in education and three views of how students learn in table 4 and table 5, respectively:

Table 4

Four Issues in Education (Mayer, 1999, p. 132)

Educational Area	Educational Issue
Learning	Learning by memorizing vs. learning by understanding
Teaching	Curriculum-centered vs. child-centered education
Assessment	Retention vs. Transfer
Technology	Technology-centered vs. learner-centered applications

Table 5

Three Views of How Students Learn (Mayer, 1999, p.133)

Learning Is	Teacher’s Role	Learner’s Role	Role of Technology
Response strengthening	Dispenser of rewards and punishments	Recipient of rewards and punishments	To provide drill and practice on basic skills
Knowledge acquisition	Dispenser of information	Recipient of information	To provide access to information such as databases or hypermedia
Knowledge construction	Cognitive guide	Sense maker	To allow guided participation in academic tasks

Learning as knowledge construction “occurs when a learner actively builds meaningful cognitive representations...In constructivist learning, learners engage in active processing such as paying attention to relevant incoming information, mentally organizing it into coherent structure, and integrating it with existing knowledge” (Mayer, 1999, p. 141). Mayer (2004) further defined the meaning of active learning in the context of cognitive activity and behavioral activity such that

Activity may help promote meaningful learning, but instead of behavioral activity per se (e.g., hands-on activity, discussion, and free exploration), the kind of activity that really promotes meaningful learning is cognitive activity (e.g., selecting, organizing, and integrating knowledge). Instead of depending solely on learning by doing or learning by discussion, the most genuine approach to constructivist learning is learning by thinking. Methods that rely on doing or discussing should be judged not on how much doing or discussing is involved but rather on the degree to which they promote appropriate cognitive processing. Guidance, structure, and focused goals should not be ignored.

Under the premise of constructive learning, the goal for the learner is to explore, to reflect, and to construct knowledge. Bruning, Schraw, and Ronning (1995) explains the constructivist viewpoint in education this way: “the aim of teaching, from a constructivist perspective, is not so much to transmit information, but rather to encourage *knowledge formation* and development of metacognitive processes for judging, organizing, and acquiring new information” (p. 216). As such, related cases/scenarios and information help learners to construct meanings of their own learning (Jonassen, n.d.; Schank, 1993/1994; Schank, Fano, Bell & Jona, 1993/1994; Schank, Berman & Macpherson, 1999; Shaffer & Resnick, 1999) and authentic learning experiences for learners such as

case studies and business scenarios are real-world or simulated experiences of a particular discipline (Shaffer & Resnick, 1999).

The link between the theoretical principles of constructivism and the practices of instructional design is best characterized by Savery and Duffy (2001) in three primary propositions:

1. *Understanding is in our interactions with the environment.* This is the core concept of constructivism. We cannot talk about what is learned separately from how it is learned, what we understand is a function of the content, the context, the activity of the learner, and, perhaps most importantly, the goals of the learner.
2. *Cognitive conflict or puzzlement is the stimulus for learning and determines the organization and nature of what is learned.* When we are in a learning environment, there is some stimulus or goal for learning -- In Dewey's terms it is the "problematic" that leads to and is the organizer for learning (Dewey, 1938; Rochelle, 1992). For Piaget it is the need for accommodation when current experience cannot be assimilated in existing schema (Piaget, 1977; vonGlaserfeld, 1989)...It is the goal of the learner that is central in considering what is learned.
3. *Knowledge evolves through social negotiation and through the evaluation of the viability of individual understandings.* The social environment is critical to the development of our individual understanding as well as to the development of the body of propositions we call knowledge. At the individual level, other individuals are a primary mechanism for testing our understanding. Collaborative groups are important because we can test our own understanding and examine the understanding of others as a mechanism for enriching, interweaving, and expanding our understanding of particular issues or phenomena. Thus, facts are facts because there is widespread agreement, not because there is some ultimate truth to the fact (p. 3-4).

The emphasis of learner-centered approach to instructional design puts focus on the student and his/her being responsible for the learning activity; for example, the design of problem-based learning in online business curriculum illustrates the influence of constructivist principles where learning must have a purpose and the knowledge

gained by learner must become meaningful to the learner. Savery and Duffy (2001)

outlines the instructional design principles as followed:

1. Anchor all learning activities to a larger task or problem.
2. Support the learner in developing ownership for the overall problem or task.
3. Design an authentic task where learner should engage in activities which present the same types of cognitive challenges.
4. Design the task and the learning environment to reflect the complexity of the environment they should be able to function at the end of learning.
5. Give the learner ownership of the process used to develop a solution.
Frequently, teachers will give students ownership of the problem, but dictate the process for working on that problem.
6. Design the learning environment to support and challenge the learner's thinking. The concept of a learning scaffold and the zone of proximal development as described by Vygotsky (1978) is a more accurate representation of the learning exchange/interaction between the teacher and the student.
7. Encourage testing ideas against alternative views and alternative contexts – knowledge is socially negotiated as in the concept of learning community.
8. Provide opportunity for and support reflection on both the content learned and the learning process. (Savery & Duffy, 2001, p. 5-8).

Reflective of the constructivist principles and learner-centered approach to instruction design, in an online learning environment where the organization of instructional content has strong influence on learning achievement, the utilization of various instructional design models is dependent upon the target audience. In alignment with Rungtusanatham et al.'s typology of distance education models (2004) discussed previously under the topic 'online instruction design – elements and guidelines', Reigeluth (1996) believes that instructional design should be changed from standardization to customization, from focusing on presenting information to making sure that learner's needs are met, from putting information into the learner's head to helping the learner to focus on learning the information in his own way. Reigeluth identifies two components of instructional design:

methods and situations which “offer explicit guidance on how to better help people learn and develop....include cognitive, emotional, social, physical, and spiritual...Instruction should provide clear information, thoughtful practice, informative feedback, and strong intrinsic or extrinsic motivation” (Reigeluth, 1996, p. 5). Prescriptive in nature, instructional design models are design or goal oriented such that they “offer guidelines as to what method(s) to use to best attain a given goal” (Reigeluth, 1996, p. 7).

Instructional Design Models

In adhering to a constructivist learning environment, the design of online learning environment should provide learners with the complete control of when, where, and how much learning should be done. By giving learners’ control over their own learning, they are able to decide what to study and to follow what learning sequences that fit their needs. In addition, they will also find the learning experience more motivating (Collins, 1993). The forefront challenge in providing an effective and successful learning experience is to enable the students the opportunity to gain needed knowledge without their having to forgo the affordances readily available in the face-to-face learning environment. Factors such as interactions with instructor and peers in an organized setting provide learners with instantaneous feedback of learners’ cognitive process; real time learning assessment; suitable instructional content for the target audience; and student supports and services such as tutoring, academic advisors, and hands-on technical assistance (Galusha, 1997). For online learning to be successful, it is crucial that the organization of instruction must be effectively designed with an understanding of the

learner's needs and learning objectives. An educational needs assessment "has been increasingly recognized as a necessary part of curriculum design" (Pratt, 1980, p.79).

Thus, if designing online instruction is considered as a process which involves making the deliberate choices among learning theories, instruction design principles, and technological possibilities then instructional design models are regarded as providing the prescriptive guidance for the instructional designers to consider when constructing an online learning environment. Designing problem-based learning for a business course is well represented by a number of instructional models including: *Cognitive Apprenticeship* (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989), *Goal Based Scenarios* (Schank, Berman, & Macpherson, 1999), *Constructivist Learning Environments* (Jonassen, 1999), and *Problem-Based Learning* (Savery & Duffy, 2001). Some of the instructional design models considered responsive to issues previously identified through the review of empirical studies in online business courses are discussed in the section below.

CONSTRUCTIVIST LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS MODEL

From the constructivist viewpoint for the design and delivery of instruction, learning is considered as

...the activity in context. The situation as a whole must be examined and understood in order to understand the learning. Rather than the content domain sitting as central, with activity and the 'rest' of the context serving a supporting role, the entire gestalt is integral to what is learned (Duffy & Cunningham, n.d., p. 1).

Thus, Jonassen (1999) proposes that the Constructivist Learning Environments model is a good fit for instruction design where a problem/project is surrounded by

various intellectual support systems. The objective is for learner to solve the problem or to make meaning of the situation. Jonassen (1999) advocates that the problem, project, or case study should be ill defined or poorly structured so that the learner can take ownership of the problem and determine how the problem can be defined. Characteristics of an ill-defined problem include “unstated goals and constraints”, “multiple solution paths or no solutions at all”, “multiple evaluating criteria”, “requiring learners to make their own judgments and to defend their decisions”. The Constructivist Learning Environments model (CLE) consists of the followings:

1. Start with the Problem: should be ill-defined in CLE
 - a. Problem context – Modeling
 - b. Problem representation/simulation – scaffolding
 - c. Problem manipulation space – Coaching
2. Related Cases: CLE should provide access to a set of related experiences for reference.
3. Information Resources: CLE should provide learner-selectable information just-in-time.
4. Cognitive (Knowledge-Construction) Tools: generalizable computer tools that are intended to engage and facilitate specific kinds of cognitive processing (Kommers, Jonassen, & Mayes, 1992, as cited by Jonassen, 1999).
5. Conversation and Collaboration Tools: the use of a variety of computer-mediated communications to support collaboration among communities of learners (Scardamalia, Bereiter, & Lamon, 1994, as cited by Jonassen, 1999).
6. Social/Contextual Support: to accommodate environmental and contextual factors affecting implementations. (Jonassen, 1999, p 218-230).

FIRST PRINCIPLES OF INSTRUCTION MODEL

Within the context of designing for learning content, Merrill (2002a) defines ‘problem’ as to “include a wide range of activities, with the most critical characteristics being that the activity is some whole task rather than only components of a task and that the task is representative of those the learner will encounter in the world following

instruction” (p. 45). Based on the above definition of ‘problem’, Merrill (2002a) further suggested that “the most effective learning products or environments are those that are problem-centered and involve the student in four distinct phases of learning: (a) activation of prior experience, (b) demonstration of skills, (c) application of skills, and (d) integration of these skills into real-world activities” (p. 44) as illustrated in figure 2 below.

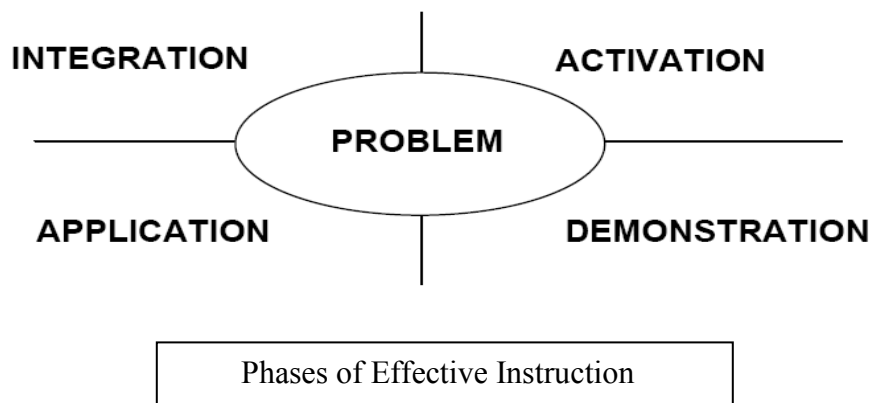


Figure 2: Phases of Effective Instruction (Merrill, 2002a, p. 45)

The emphasis of structuring online business courses in the context of problem-based learning is clearly illustrated in Merrill’s First Principles of Instruction model which is a “prescriptive design principle on which various instructional design theories and models are in essential agreement” and that it relates to “creating learning environments and products rather than describing how learners acquire knowledge and skill from these environments or products” (Merrill, 2002b, p. 40). Merrill’s First Principles of Instruction model consists of:

1. Problem setting - presenting real-world situations

2. Activation - where to start
3. Demonstration - applying prior knowledge to understand new problem
4. Application – providing learners with opportunity to practice applying their newly acquired skills; evaluation of learner is consistent with stated or implied learning objectives.
5. Integration - providing practice exercises to solve case studies.

Based on the First Principles of Instruction model, Merrill (2002b) proposes a design development approach called Pebble-in-the-Pond which “prescribes worked problems early in the sequence of instruction and a gradual fading of this guidance or coaching as the instruction proceeds. The concentric circle representing Merrill’s Pebble-in-the-Pond is described as

...consist[ing] of a series of expanding activities initiated by first casting in a pebble, that is, a whole task or problem of the type that learners will be taught to accomplish by the instruction. Having identified an initial problem, the second ripple in the design pond is to identify a progression of such problems of increasing difficulty or complexity such that if learners are able to do all of the whole tasks thus identified, they would have mastered the knowledge and skill to be taught. The third ripple in the design pond is to identify the component knowledge and skill required to complete each task or solve each problem in the progression. The fourth ripple is to determine the instructional strategy that will be used to engage learners in the problems and help them acquire the component knowledge and skill required to complete the tasks or solve the problems. The fifth ripple is interface design. It is at this point in the design process that the content to be learned and the strategy used to engage learners is adapted to the delivery system and instructional architecture of the learning situation or product. (Merrill, 2002b, p. 40-41).

E-LEARNING DESIGN MODEL

It has been said that there is an inherent lack of interactions among learners and between learners and the instructor in online learning (Carr, 2000; Gagne & Shepherd, 2001; Chisholm, Carey & Hernandez, 2005) whereas these types of interactions are a given in the face-to-face environment. Thus, Berge (2002) suggested that creating activities to foster interactions for the online learners should be done within the context of the learner's environment and that the secret to designing a successful learning environment is to align three elements: learning goals, learning activities, and feedback and evaluation. Berge's e-learning design model (2002) describes the important factors to consider when establishing an e-learning environment and designing instruction from a constructivist viewpoint: to take full advantage of active, interactive and reflective learning, the learning environment should be designed for learning to be situated within context, involving learners in authentic problem-solving project where there is a challenge to solve or to complete, providing the opportunity for learner to reflect on learning experience, and employing f2f-proven instructional interventions such as positive reinforcements, feedback and cooperative learning.

Cultural Influence on Learning Styles

According to Hawk and Shah (2007), there are six prominent learning style models: (1) Kolb's experiential learning model consist of learner's concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation; (2) Gregorc's learning style model based on learner's mediation abilities: concrete, random,

abstract, sequential; (3) the VARK model based on sensory such as visual, aural, read/write, and kinesthetic; (4) Felder-Silverman learning/teaching style model based on “the individual having preferences along five bipolar continua: active-reflective, sensing-intuitive, verbal-visual, sequential-global, and intuitive-deductive”; (5) Dunn and Dunn learning style model based on five learning style stimuli (environmental, emotional, sociological, physiological, and psychological processing) and several elements associated within each stimulus; and (6) RASI (Revised Approaches to Studying Inventory) as cited by Hawk and Shah (2007), defined as a “composite of characteristic cognitive, affective, and psychological factors that serves as an indicator of how an individual interacts with and responds to the learning environment” (Duff, 2004, p. 56).

In a study conducted by Battalio (2009), four learning dimensions were identified as being compatible to online learning:

- *Reflective learners*—those preferring to think quietly about information rather than being interactively engaged with persons or learning activities. Unlike active learners who prefer social interaction, reflective learners should theoretically prefer working online because the environment itself favors self-directedness.
- *Intuitive learners*—those preferring discovery, innovation, and abstractions rather than the factual, example-based, concrete learning of sensing learners (see Dille and Mezack 1991). Because of the orientation toward self-directed learning, online students must be the masters of their own learning, even in very organized, instructor-centered courses, by making sense of the variety of materials made available online and integrating these materials into a unified whole. Thus, these learners would be more comfortable managing their own learning.
- *Verbal learners*—those who get more out of words than from visual representations. By its very nature, an online course is reading intensive, and, because students manage their online course through a Web interface or e-mail in-box, reading is an integral part of the online course. Of course, a Web interface does add a significant visual component

that may inhibit verbal learners, as shown by Becker and Dwyer (1998). However, twenty-first-century technology has permeated our lives such that today's students, whether visual or verbal learners, should be reasonably comfortable in Internet environments (Battalio 2007).

- *Global learners*—those who learn in large jumps by seeking out the “big picture” rather than learning in the traditional, sequentially organized college course. Theoretically, sequential learners would prefer a live class in which the instructor leads the class through course materials and discussions, whereas global students should be more comfortable filtering through a series of online course materials in order to make the interconnections they need to put their work in perspective (p. 74).

Of the four learning styles, Battalio's research concluded that Reflective Learner is most successful in online learning environment and further suggested that in order to accommodate different learning styles, an instruction design that combines both collaborative and self-directed elements should be utilized (Battalio, 2009).

Although the six prominent learning style models reviewed by Hawk and Shah did not show a clear relationship between learning styles and culture, Hawk and Shah (2007) contended that culture should be considered within the contexts of how learning occurs: "...should include the interaction among individuals in the course as well as the interaction of the course and instructor with policies and resources for the program, the department, and the institution, the physical environment, and the historical, cultural, and political background of the country" (Hawk & Shah, 2007, p.17). In the following section, review of various studies related to learning and culture is presented in order to establish how culture influences the success of online learning.

CULTURES, LEARNING, AND EXPECTATIONS

Geert Hofstede (2007), a renowned authority in comparative intercultural research, defines culture in general as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another” (p. 413).

Hofstede (2007) uses five dimensions to classify national cultures (p. 416-419)

1. Individualism vs. Collectivism: The most evident difference between Asian countries on the one side and Western European and Anglo countries on the other Individualism stands for a society in which the ties between individuals are loose: everyone is expected to look after him/herself and his/her immediate family only. Collectivism stands for a society in which people from birth onwards are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, which throughout their lifetime continue to protect them, in exchange for unquestioning loyalty.
2. Power Distance (large vs. small): the extent of inequality in a society to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally. Asian cultures score relatively high on Power Distance.
3. Uncertainty Avoidance
4. Masculinity vs. Femininity
5. Long Term vs. Short Term Orientation - Long Term Orientation means valuing, for example, persistence and thrift. Short Term Orientation pole means valuing “face” and respect for tradition. This dimension opposed many Asian countries to the rest of the world, in the sense that the Asian countries scored long-term and the others medium or short-term. (Hofstede, 2007, p. 416 – 419).

Based on various comparative intercultural research studies, Hofstede (2007) indicated that the differences in national cultures significantly influence each nation’s outlooks which in turns affect their actions and practices. Citing an experimental survey of 15 possible perceived goals being ranked by students in an MBA class about their own business leaders from different nationalities, Hofstede proved that there were “dramatic country differences” in what one business leader sees as most important or least

important when compared to another country's business leader's perceived goals (see table 6).

Table 6

Five Relatively Most and Five Relatively Least Important Perceived Goals (out of 15) Ascribed to Successful Business Leaders in Four Countries. (Hofstede, 2007, p.416)

China (1999)	India (1999)	Denmark (2004)	USA (1999)
<u>Most important</u> 1. Respecting ethical norms. 2. Patriotism, national pride. 3. Power. 4. Honor, face, reputation. 5. Responsibility towards society.	<u>Most important</u> 1. Family interests. 2. Continuity of the business. 3. Personal wealth. 4. Patriotism, national pride. 5. Power.	<u>Most important</u> 1. Creating something new. 2. Profits 10 year from now. 3. Honor, face, reputation. 4. Staying within the law. 5. Responsibility towards employees.	<u>Most important</u> 1. Growth of business. 2. Personal wealth. 3. This year's profits. 4. Power. 5. Staying within the law.
<u>Least important</u> 1. Creating something new. 2. Game and gambling spirit. 3. This year's profits. 4. Personal wealth. 5. Stay within the law.	<u>Least important</u> 1. Staying within the law. 2. Creating something new. Responsibility towards employees. 3. Respecting ethical norms. 4. Game and gambling spirit.	<u>Least important</u> 1. Family interest. 2. Power. 3. Responsibility towards employees. 4. Personal wealth. 5. Continuity of the business.	<u>Least important</u> 1. Profits 10 years from now. 2. Responsibility towards employees. 3. Family interests. 4. Continuity of the business. 5. Creating something new.

In the area of designing online learning, there have been several studies to investigate whether or how cultural differences affect various aspects of the learning experience for learners. According to Bentley and Tinney (2003), “students with a non-U.S. educational background have statistically significant different preferences for how they want to interact with content than have those with a U.S. educational background” (p. 1). In yet another research related to instruction design and culture; Bentley, Tinney, and Chia (2005), contended that

How each of us determines good or quality instruction is to a large degree founded on what educational values we hold (Evans & Nelson, 2003; Leung, 1996). These values are primarily shaped by (a) cultural norms, (b) the philosophy of learning to which we adhere, and (c) our personal preferences for learning. When our educational values match those embedded in the course design, the match up contributes to our perception of its being a *quality* educational experience; conversely, when our educational values do not match those of a course, then dissatisfaction is likely to occur. (p. 117)

Of the eight educational value factors (language, educational culture, technical infrastructure, primary audience, learning styles, reasoning patterns, cultural context, and social context) that influence how the learner evaluates quality in instruction, Bentley et al (2005) cited researches done by Edward Hall (1966, 1976) who “compares the cultures of the world on a scale ranging high-context to low-context” and Neuliep (2003) and Gundling (1999) who defined high-context as “circular thinking model of group oriented cultures such as the Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Latin American, Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, French, and Vietnamese... low-context cultures, where the focus is more on individuals than on the group, are represented by the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia, and most of Western Europe, including Scandinavia” (p.

122). Edward Hall (1966, 1976)'s characteristics of high-context and low-context cultures are listed below:

High-Context Cultures	Low-Context Cultures
Implicit messages	Explicit messages
Internalized messages	Plainly coded messages
Nonverbal coding	Verbalized details
Reserved reactions	Reactions on the surface
Distinct in-groups and out-group	Flexible in-groups and out-groups
Strong people bonds	Fragile people bonds
High commitments	Low commitments
Open and flexible time	Highly organized time

In designing online instruction, Bentley et al (2005) advised that “one should take into account that users may come from various cultures; therefore, the content should be designed as culturally neutral as possible” (p. 125).

To examine the influences of local cultures on the success of online learning environment, Mills and Harvey (2005) conducted a study to explore how local context and cultural considerations should be incorporated into the planning and delivery of online teaching and learning. In 2004, Charles Sturt University (CSU) had 320 students, residing in Hong Kong, enrolled Library and Information Studies (LIS) e-learning courses. E-learning at CSU is defined either as ranging from “fully digital... to Internet-

enabled learning [which] combines learning and technology to facilitate learning” (p. 45). Based on CSU’s long-term experience in delivering e-learning course, Mills and Harvey (2005) suggested that to remain competitive, CSU must continue to work hard for the students overseas in areas such as having “different instructional approaches for different overseas market; recognizing different learning styles in students; understanding that distance education students require social and cultural support and be proactive [about this factor rather than leaving it to the in-country partner(s)]” (p. 52). Additionally, Mills and Harvey (2005) took the position that:

E-learning in its most fully electronic or online definition is not the best option in all situations...Flexibility is the key to effective distance learning, but if delivered fully electronically it is in some respect inflexible. Elearning needs to be developed and delivered taking full account of the culture and context in which it is offered, what students want, the subject matter, and how the programme is administered. One size does not fit all. Our experience also indicates that a mix of e-learning and paper-based delivery is more effective than either one in isolation (Mills & Harvey, 2005, p. 45-46).

In another study about the impacts of instructional technology interventions on Asian pedagogy; Ku, Pan, Tsai, Tao, and Cornell (2004) provided the pedagogical differences between Western and traditional Asian. Ku et al. (2004) contended that the objective of American-style instruction in higher education is for the students to “be able to deliver presentations using a wide array of technologies, write papers that reflect both eloquence and conviction, work well as a member of multicultural working team, and develop positive assertiveness” (Ku et al, 2004, p. 88). In contrast, Chinese students interviewed in Ku et al’s research indicated that they are more familiar with the instruction method of what is commonly known as a “one-way communication” where

the instructor delivers knowledge through lecturing and the students are the passive learning participants who are not expected to ask questions (Ku et al, 2004).

There are marked differences in values between the West and East as identified by Ku et al. (2004) in table 7 below:

Table 7

Values Differences between the West and East (Ku et al, 2004, p. 88)

West	East
Supernatural religion	Secular humanism and enlightenment
Belief and faith	Paradigmatic assumptions
Cartesian dualism	The way of complimentarily
Values as things	Values as wave-forms
Cultures and values – Yin	Cultures and values – Yang
Pioneer capitalism	Catch-up capitalism
Finite games	Infinite games

To identify the cultural gaps and to offer some insight that may bridge such cultural differences in designing online instruction while still retaining the recognized learning values of the American-style instruction as mentioned in the study conducted by Ku et al (2004); Rogers, Graham, and Mayes (2007) conducted a study about the impact of instructional designers' levels of cultural competency on how instruction being designed. Through in-depth interviews with 12 instructional designers who were selected based on their willingness to participate in the research and their extensive experience

and knowledge in designing online instructions for students from cultures other than the United States, the collected research data pointed to the need for the instructional designers “to be aware of general cultural and social expectations in order to make the materials very relevant to the learners, to make it possible for them to use their life experience and their work experience and their everyday life environment” (Rogers et al, 2007, p. 203).

Summary - Combining Theories and Models into Design Practices

AACSB International’s publication “Quality Issues in Distance Education” (2007) stated:

“The design of learning experiences will greatly influence the success of a distance learning program. Business schools must articulate clearly what is to be taught (e.g., content) and how content will be delivered to students (e.g., pedagogies and technologies). Educators should design learning experiences to take advantage of the various modalities that best fit with the learning objectives and with students learning styles...Rather than concentrating on teaching inputs, effective distance learning encourages a focus on student learning outcomes” (p. 10, 15).

Clearly, for the online students to have a positive learning experience, designing instruction in an online learning environment calls for an understanding of the relationships among: (1) the target audience/learners and learning goals as achieved through needs assessment (Pratt, 1980; Ragan, 2004; Rungtusanatham et al., 2004); (2) instructor’ pedagogy and the application of learning and design theories toward course content (Sims, Dobbs, & Hand, 2002; Grandzol & Grandzol, 2006); and (3) appropriate utilization of education technology tools to enable learning to occur (Jana, 1999; Chisholm, Carey & Hernandez, 2002). As instructional designers continually searching

for elements that could positively influence the learning experience and outcomes for the online learners; additional factors such as constraints of learning context, use of technology tools, costs, benefits, and time limitation should also be taken into consideration. Further supporting the notion of customized combo approach represented as a typology by Rungtusanatham et al. (2004), Collins (1993) maintains that design trade-offs are inevitable when designing for learning environments. The shift from teaching-centered to learning-centered education leads us from traditional objectivist techniques toward constructivist teaching and learning practices.

For an online business course, there are several characteristics of curriculum development that must meet AACSB International (2006)'s accreditation guidelines as well as be attributed to best practices:

- A total educational experience that emphasizes conceptual reasoning, problem solving, and preparation for lifelong learning.
- Faculty should adopt active learning methodologies and should challenge students by using such pedagogical approaches as problem-based learning, projects, simulations, etc.
- Online environment fosters a teaching style that is learner-centered: more coaching or mentoring rather than covering content.
- Maintain consistency in how courses should be structured: standards and best practices should be institutionalized.

- Encourage and reward collaboration: match course time commitment to appropriate percentage of evaluation.
- Give prompt and constructive feedback: establish clear grading rubric.
- Encourage convergent thinking by using activities such as written assignments, discussions, small group collaborations, and self-testings.

With the identified expectations placed on online business courses as outlined above plus the awareness of the target audience as being novice at online learning, the Continuum of Knowledge Acquisition Model (Jonassen, McAleese, & Duffy, 1993) provided a visual guidance in determining the appropriate instructional strategies for an effective and successful online learning environment. The Marketing Management hybrid course was designed with the goal to engage students in knowledge formation (Bruning, Schraw, & Ronning, 1995). Thus, it was considered appropriate for the hybrid course to follow the Constructivist Learning Environments model (Jonassen, 1999) where students were presented with problem-based case studies of which there was no one right answer and students were expected to make their own judgments as well as to defend their decisions.

Since this Marketing hybrid course was a foundation course for all new MBA students, it was organized to follow both teaching-centered prescription and learner-centered approach. Based on the Continuum of Knowledge Acquisition Model (Jonassen, McAleese, & Duffy, 1993), when the objective was to provide learners with new skills and new knowledge, a teaching-centered approach should be used. Thus, the course

content was divided into major topics with associated lessons to help learners proceed step-by-step to master the new information. In applying the learner-centered approach to the development of Marketing concepts, the learning activities such as topic discussions and problem-based case studies were selected and structured with an awareness of the students' cultural diversity to which students can easily relate and lecture notes were filled with examples of marketing strategies with which students can easily identify or relate from their own personal experiences. By participating in discussions and group projects, it was expected that students would discover and construct knowledge through collaborative learning and social interactions (Shaffer & Resnick, 1999).

The following methodology section is intended to discuss in details how the research study was organized and conducted in order to determine whether the various instructional design theories and practices that are widely accepted in the United States are also as well-received by students from a different learning culture.

CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHOD

The purpose of this study was to conduct an exploratory qualitative research in order to investigate how students from an Asian learning culture adapt to an American online learning environment and to determine whether the various instructional design theories and practices that are widely accepted as best practices in the United States are also as well-received by students from a different learning culture. Accordingly, in recognition of the influences of local cultures on the success of online learning environment (Mills & Harvey, 2005), the hybrid online course that was used for this research study was designed following Battalio's suggestion of combining both collaborative and self-directed learning activities (Battalio, 2009).

The details of how this research was conducted as a case study are outlined in the following six sections: (1) Methodology Overview; (2) Research Questions; (3) Pilot Study Results; (4) Research Participants; (5) Instrument and Data Collection Procedures; and (6) Data Analysis Procedure.

Methodology Overview

Case study research involves the close examination of people, topics, issues, or programs for the purpose of understanding and/or discovering the uniqueness of each case by answering focused questions in order to produce in-depth descriptions and interpretations. According to Merriam (2001), case study research is "a particularly suitable design" if process is the focus of the research. Process as a research focus can be

either as “monitoring: describing the context and population of the study, discovering the extent to which the treatment or program has been implemented, providing immediate feedback of a formative type” or “causal explanation: discovering or confirming the process by which the treatment had the effect that it did.”

Case study research can also be initiated and conducted based on the types of interest: intrinsic, instrumental and collective. Stake (2003) differentiates the three types of interest this way: an intrinsic case study is conducted when the researcher “wants better understanding of this particular case...The purpose is not to come to understand some abstract construct or generic phenomenon, not theory building...Study is undertaken because of an intrinsic interest in, for example, this particular child, clinic, conference, or curriculum.”; an instrumental case study is conducted “mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization”; and collective case study is “instrumental study extended to several cases...in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition.” (Stake, 2003, p. 136-138).

Yin (2003) describes the method variations in case studies as a research strategy. Case studies have a distinctive place in evaluation research with at least four different applications: (1) *to explain* the causal links in real-life intervention that are too complex for the survey or experimental strategies; (2) *to describe* the real-life context in which an intervention occurred; (3) *to explore* those situations in which the intervention being evaluated has no clear, single set outcomes; and (4) *to give benefit* to evaluation in descriptive mode (Yin, 2003). The case study methodology is similar to other types of

research in that the researcher followed the research process of (1) developing the research questions, (2) conducting a literature review, (3) determining data sample gathering and analysis techniques, (4) collecting data with considerations toward ethical issues, (5) evaluating and analyzing the data, and (6) drawing conclusions and offers recommendations.

As pointed out by Stake (2003), categorizing the type of interest for a case study helps the researcher to orientate the study's research methodology. Since the focus of this study was to better understand how a US-based university can be successful in applying the well-researched learning theories and best practices toward designing an online learning course for non-US students as the target audience, this research was considered as an intrinsic case study (Stake, 2003). Thus, as an intrinsic case study with an emphasis toward giving benefit to evaluation in descriptive mode (Yin, 2003), this research sought to understand which instructional design features and strategies contribute the most to student satisfaction and student interaction; thereby, these design features and strategies should be considered as recommended standard practices when designing online courses for this particular target audience. A case study approach allows the researcher with an opportunity to study one specific online learning environment without intervention manipulations. Based on the above definitions of what constitutes a case study and how a case study should be conducted, this research study is described as an intrinsic and descriptive single case study (Stake, 2003).

Research Questions

The study was conducted to address the following research questions:

1. How do the students in Vietnam adapt to the American instruction in a graduate-level online learning environment?

Question one was aimed at taking notes of the potential differences in education cultures in order to understand how these differences may influence the students' reactions and responsiveness to the online learning environment. The data source to answer question #1 came from the analysis of data extracted from observations and online mechanisms such as emails, discussion board, and chat log.

2. What are the needs and expectations of the students in Vietnam when they enroll in an online learning environment? Does the American online instruction meet these students' needs and expectations?

Question two was intended to identify the students' needs and expectations by investigating whether the instructional designs based on American learning theories and practices were a good fit. The data source to answer question two came from the analysis of students' self-introductions and survey questionnaire.

3. Which instructional design features and strategies contribute the most to student satisfaction and student interaction?

Question three was intended to confirm if the design elements, identified in research publications as best or desired practices for an American online learning environment, would also work for the online students in Vietnam. The data source to answer question

three came from the analysis of survey questionnaire, and data extracted from online mechanisms such as emails, discussion board, and chat log.

Pilot Study Results

The Marketing Management hybrid course was piloted in Spring 2008 to 16 graduate-level students in Vietnam. At the beginning of the course, preliminary self-introduction questions were sent to all 16 students to gather their demographic data (see Appendix B). The answers to the self-introduction questions indicated that only 2 out of 16 students have had some experience in online learning through their workplace training. At the end of the 6-weeks period, students were asked to fill out a survey questionnaire to gauge their learning experience for the online portion of the hybrid course (see Appendix E). The survey questions covered six areas of the online learning experience: course content, technology/system interface, evaluation/assessment, control ability for learner, interaction, and learner's opinion about success of online learning. Of the survey results, 8 out of 16 students agreed that online learning course provided useful but only somewhat sufficient content; the majority of students, at least 11 out of 16, felt that the online learning technology was easy to use, easy to understand, user-friendly, and easy for them to find the content they need. In the area of evaluation, more than half of the students felt that the testing and assessments were fair. The online learning environment received less positive responses when it came to learner's ability to control their own learning and the amount/degree of interaction that students felt they should have – only 6 out of 16 students thought that they had the control ability and

approximately 38 percent or 6 out of 16 students, thought that online learning system made it easy for them to interact with either instructor or other students. Consistent with the behaviorist paradigm, when interactions occurred between students and instructor in chat room sessions, students indicated that they had expected the instructor to introduce the topics, to lead the discussion, and to elaborate or explain the chapters' content rather than for the students to come with questions and to participate in discussion. There were also considerable degrees of anxiety from students to be learning in an online environment instead of seeing the instructor in class.

The pilot Marketing Management hybrid course was initially designed with a goal to identify the instruction design elements such as learning activities, course organization, and technology tools that potentially can be generalized and applicable to any other online courses offered to students in Vietnam. Based on the results of the pilot study, revisions were made to the instructional design elements of the Marketing Management hybrid course. Design changes to the course were done with the expectation of effecting improvements in areas of students' interaction and self-directed learning. For example:

1. To address the considerable degrees of anxiety from students to be learning in an online environment, an orientation session was conducted in January 2009, prior to the official beginning of the course in February 2009. Students met in a computer lab and with the assistance of a human tutor, to go over the mechanics of how an online chat session would be conducted while the instructor was also online.

2. Discussion Board: in the pilot study, the discussion topics were designed as one feature to encourage student-student interaction. However, review of postings on the Discussion Board showed that the student-student interactions became perfunctory as the course progressed. Analysis of discussion content from the pilot study pointed to the students' lack of experience in learning through interactions with peer discussions. To improve the quality of student-student interactions, just-in-time guidance and evaluation was provided to students' postings.
3. Chat rooms: were intended for both student-instructor interaction and student-student interaction. However, analysis of data extracted from the pilot study showed that students entered chat room at scheduled office hours with the instructor and treated these chat sessions as a one-way knowledge transfer from instructor to students and students also indicated that they did not feel there was sufficient student-instructor interaction. Two other chat rooms, created in the pilot were intended for student-student interactions, were left unused. In revising the course, these were the changes made to chat room activities:
 - a. Frequency of chat sessions with instructors was increased from once per week to two chat sessions per week.
 - b. The nature of chat sessions was changed such that prior to the chat time, students were expected to post questions related to reading

assignments and they were also expected to actively participate in the discussions.

- c. The two previously unused chat rooms have been renamed as “team meeting room #1” and “team meeting room #2”. Students were expected to use these chat rooms to conduct their team meetings.

4. Team problem-based case studies and project presentations: Seven team problem-based case studies were added for students to have the exposure of team-work to evaluate and solve real-world problems. Students were randomly assigned into teams of 5 members to work on a team case study and to make presentation in class to instructor and peers during the sixth week of the course. This instructional strategy followed the problem-based learning approach (Jonassen, 1999; Schank, Berman, & Macpherson, 1999; Savery & Duffy, 2001; Merrill, 2002a) as well as intended to enable the student-student interaction. The intention here was to encourage students to interact among themselves as they make sense of the new learning materials. Chat rooms were also used more extensively for teams to conduct their team case study’s work sessions.
5. Individual problem-based case studies: As specified by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business International (2007), “a total educational experience emphasizes conceptual reasoning, problem-based solving, projects, simulations, etc.”, each student was required to work on 4

small problem-based case studies and to email their works to instructor as specified by due dates.

Following the usability design guidelines, each of the Web pages consisted of a smaller section on the page's left side that contained a list of navigation links to either the course's contents or activities and a prominent right side section that displayed detailed information of the link that was opened (see Figure 3). The course's online learning environment had several elements to support students' learning and interactions: course syllabus (see Figure 4), course content (see Figure 5), discussion board (see Figure 6), individual problem-based case studies (see Figure 7), quiz link (see Figure 8), email (see Figure 9), and chat rooms (see Figure 10).

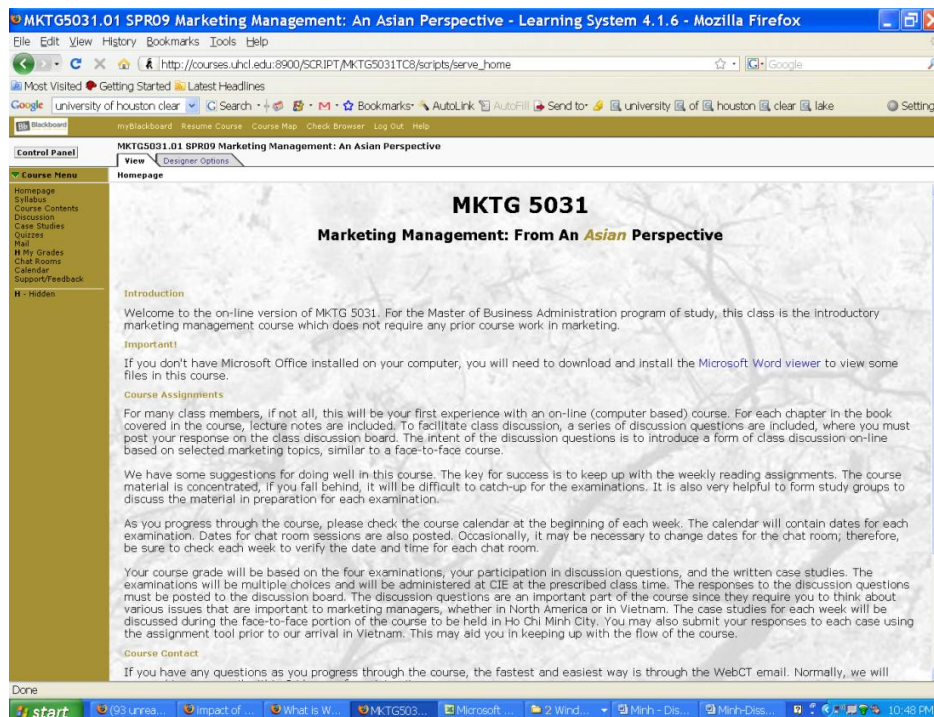


Figure 3: Home page of the Marketing online course on WebCT.

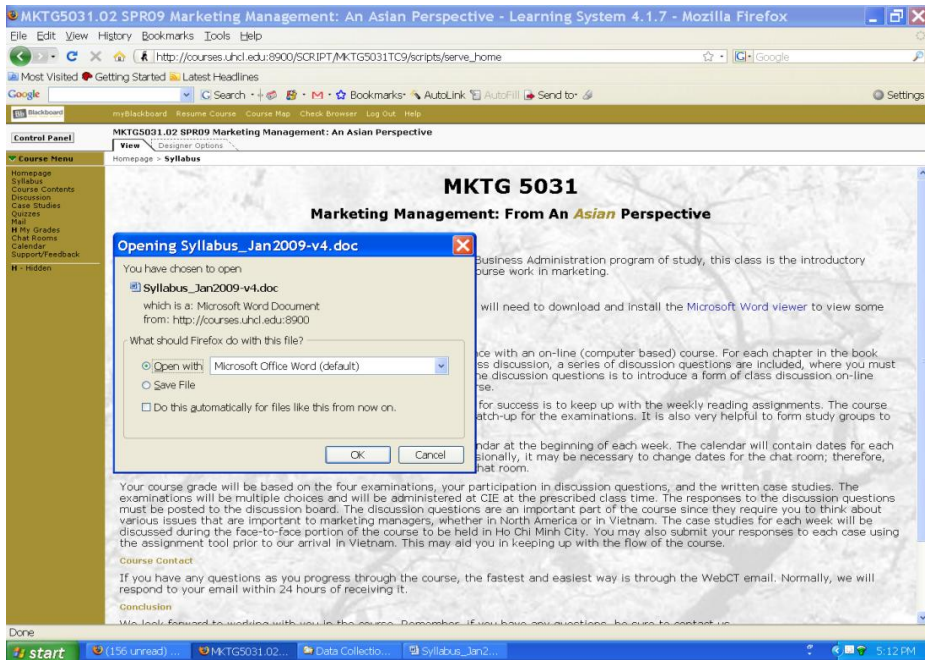


Figure 4: Syllabus link - students can download a copy of course syllabus in Microsoft Office Word

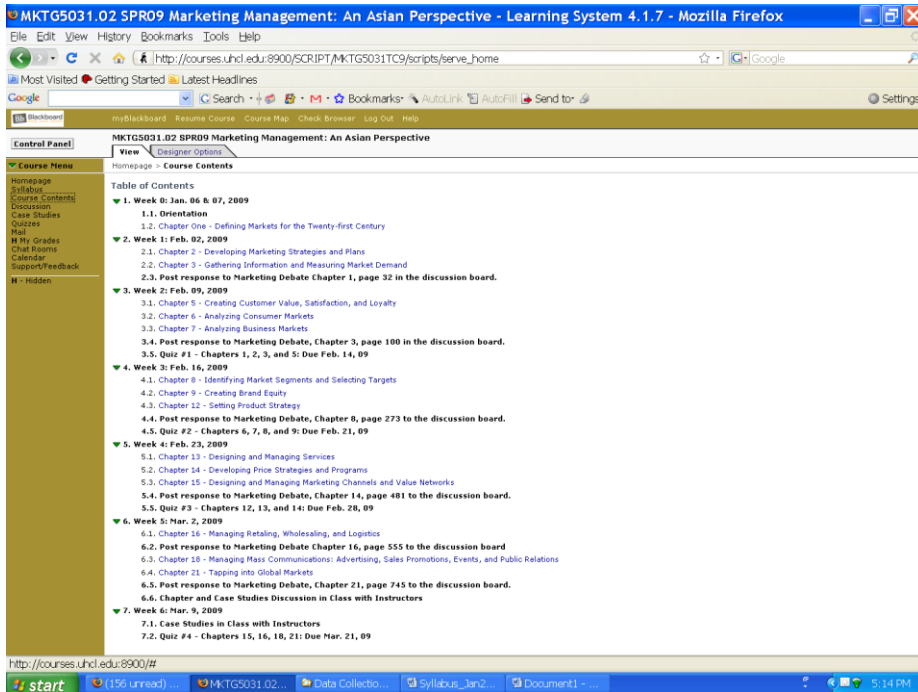


Figure 5: Course Content link

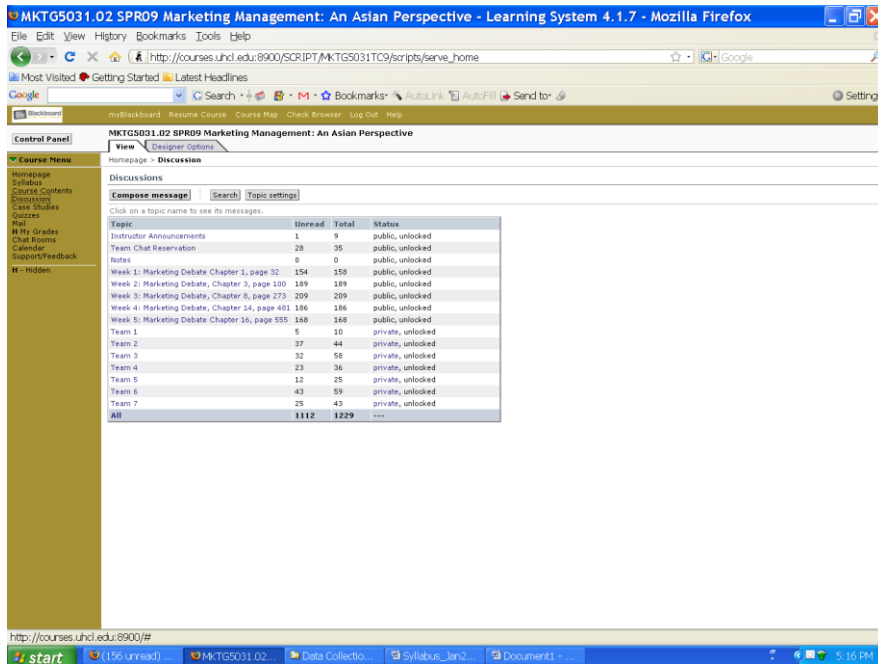


Figure 6: Discussion Board listing topics for each week

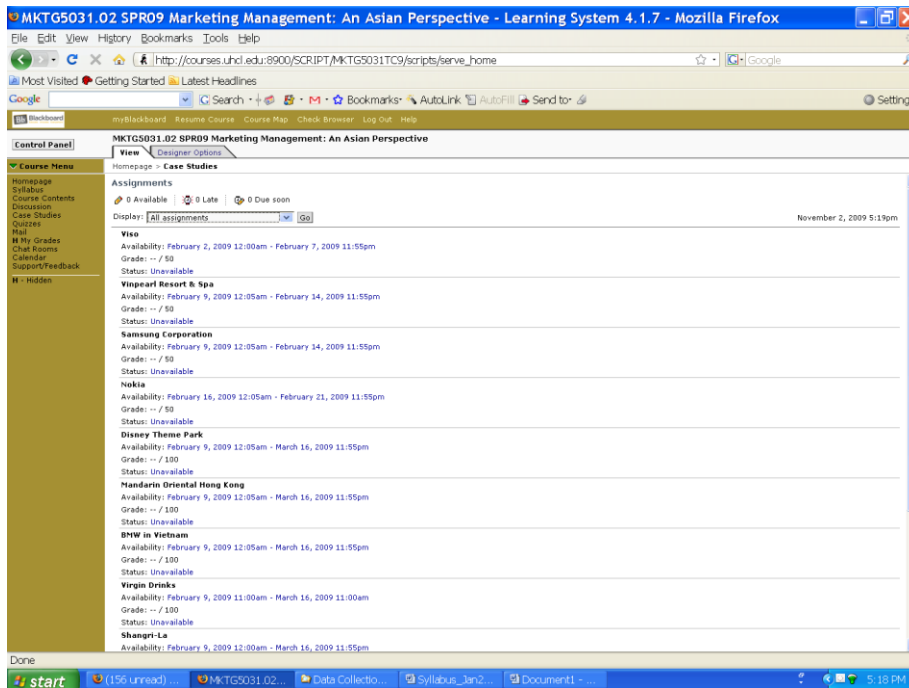


Figure 7: Individual Problem-based Case Studies

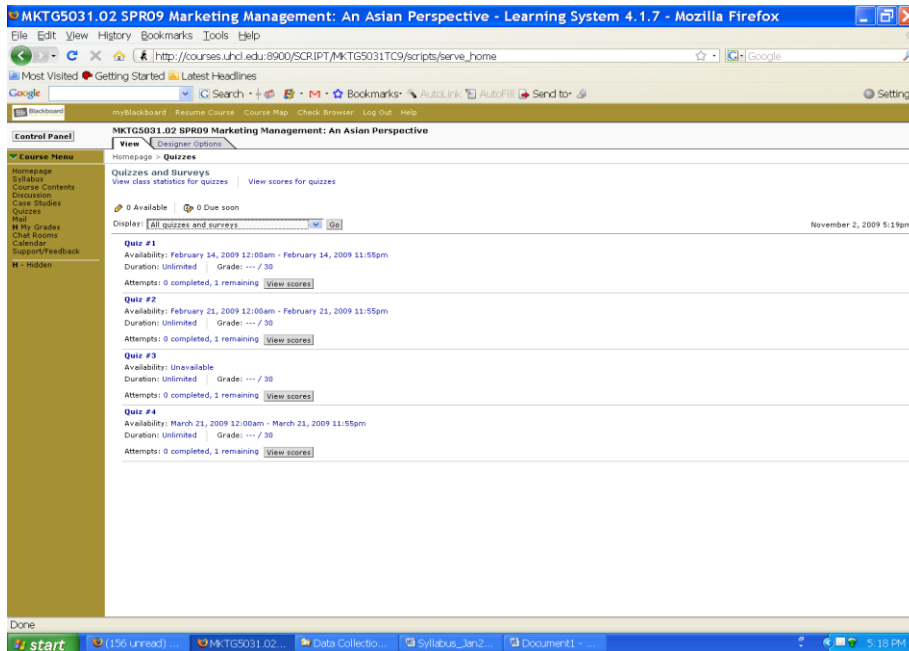


Figure 8: Quizzes link

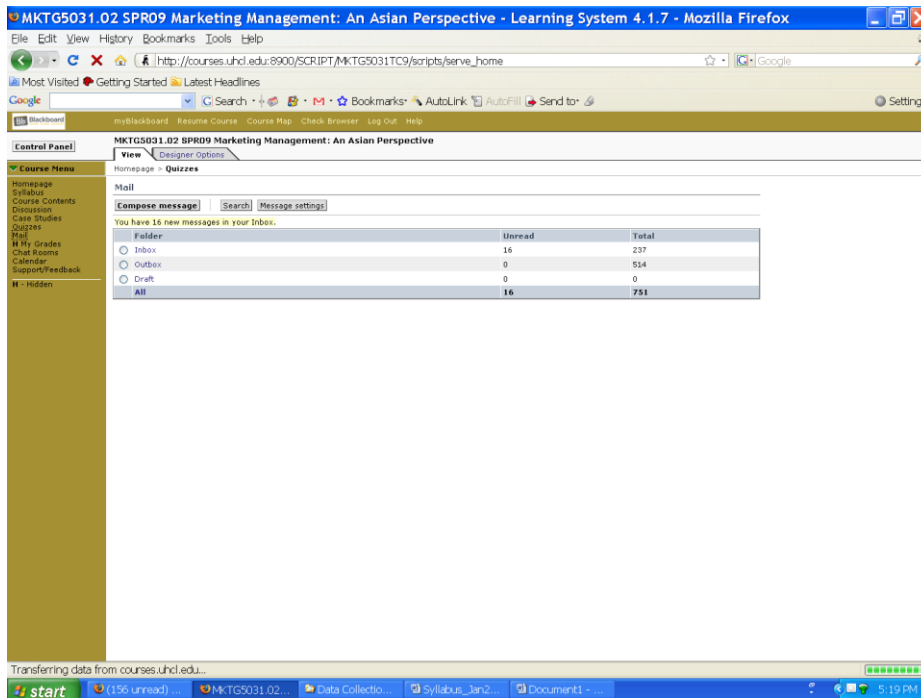


Figure 9: Mail link

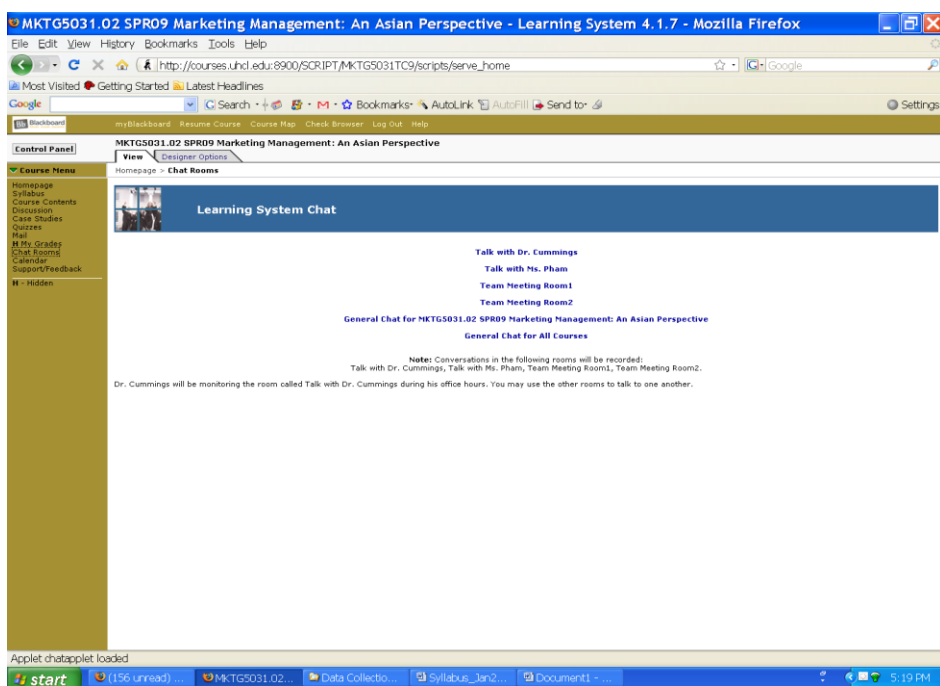


Figure 10: Links to Chat rooms

The re-designed hybrid online learning course was offered to the graduate-level students in Vietnam in Spring 2009 in order for the researcher to examine whether a US-based university can be successful in meeting non-US students' needs and expectations. The hybrid course had a six-week duration, divided into two distinctive components: a four-week long online portion where all learning and interactions will be conducted online via WebCT, a learning management system (LMS) for higher education institutions, and a two-week face-to-face portion. A course syllabus provided the student with information about how the course would be conducted (see Appendix A). The face-to-face portion was held in traditional classroom setting with the instructor and the researcher traveling to Vietnam to meet the students.

Research Participants

The research participants were all graduate-level students from Vietnam who had registered to enroll in this hybrid online course. There were a total of 58 students ranging in ages from 21 to 35. These students, both male and female students enrolled but were not evenly split by genders. To access the course learning environment, WebCT, each student was given a logon user ID and password. Since the main purpose of this study was to conduct an exploratory qualitative research in order to investigate how students in a unique setting, from an Asian learning culture, adapt to an American online learning environment and to determine whether the various instructional design theories and practices that are widely accepted as best practices in the United States are also as well-received by students from a different learning culture, no intervention was introduced. To further maintain the unique nature of this specific case study, the entire class was kept intact. In fact, Creswell (2008) advised that in the matter of selecting participants, “homogeneous sampling” is suitable for the purpose of “describing some subgroup in depth” (p. 215).

Instrument and Data Collection

Prior to data being collected, students were invited to participate in the study voluntarily and the consent form (see Appendix C) was emailed by the instructor to all students to ask for their participation in the research study. At the beginning of the course, to collect the demographic data, students were asked to write a brief self-introduction by answering a few questions that also had been used in the pilot research

conducted in Spring 2008 (see Appendix A) and to email their introduction notes to the instructor. At the end of the course, students who wanted to participate in the study and had signed the consent form, were asked to complete the survey questionnaire (see Appendix D), and to email both documents to this study researcher's email address.

To address the issue of research credibility, Merriam (2001) suggested that data should be collected from multiple sources. In Spring 2009 research study, the research data were collected from the course's various learning activities and both quantitative and qualitative data were entered into either Microsoft Excel or Microsoft Word software:

1. Chat room: students used this feature to conduct team meetings and interactions among themselves as well as with the instructor and teaching assistant.
2. Discussion Board: students were required to post their analyses of assigned topics that are related to the chapters' marketing theories and their responses to classmates' analyses.
3. Emails: students used this feature as another means to communicate with classmates and the instructors.

In addition to the above electronic repositories of data, other methods were used in order to collect salient data for this research study:

- a. Self-introductions: at the beginning of the course, students were asked to answer a series of questions and email the answers to the researcher (see Appendix B).
- b. Survey questionnaire: A 26-item Likert survey instrument entitled "Measurement of Electronic Learner Satisfaction" (Wang, 2003) was used

in the pilot study to gauge students' opinions about their online learning experience (see Appendix E). The survey questions addressed the four components that affect students' satisfaction in online learning: learner interface, learning community, course content, and personalization (see Table 8). The pilot sample yielded high internally consistent reliability (Cronbach's alpha = 0.92).

Table 8

Four Components of Satisfaction (Wang, 2003)

Learner Interface	Learning Community	Content	Personalization
Q5, 6, 7, 8, 9	Q21,22,23, 24	Q1, 2, 3, 4	Q16, 17, 18, 19

The survey data collected from pilot research in Spring 2008 indicated that the Wang survey questions were too generic and therefore deemed as insufficient to provide answers to the research questions. Based on Wang's survey instrument, the researcher created another survey instrument entitled "Online Learning Survey" (see Appendix D) to gain specific information relating to different aspects of online learner's needs and expectations. Modification process of the Wang survey instrument included the following steps: (1) the researcher selected six multiple-choice questions from Wang's survey instrument and added three Likert-type questions as well as five open-ended questions with the expectation that the data from these survey questions would provide answers to the

research questions; (2) two graduate students from the pilot course and the course instructor reviewed the modified survey instrument and provided feedback. The “Online Learning Survey” consists of nine multiple-choice questions and five open-ended questions (see Table 9). These questions covered students’ experience with the online format of the course. An example of the Likert-type survey question is “The online system, WebCT, is easy to use” with seven possible answer choices ranging from “Strongly Agree” with an equivalent point scale of “7” to “Strongly Disagree” with an equivalent point scale of “1”. Examples of open-ended questions were “List the course activities and/or online WebCT features that you think had contributed positively to your learning experience” and “At the end of the online portion of this Marketing course, how would you describe your online learning experience?” The modified survey instrument used for this research study also had a high internally consistent reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.90). The survey data addressed the research questions two and three.

Table 9

Components of Online Learning Survey (Appendix D)

Content	Learning Community /Learner Interface	Learning Experience	Learner Expectation
Q1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7	Q4, 5, 6, 11	Q8, 9, 10	Q12, 13, 14

Following suggestion made by Lincoln and Guba (1985) regarding member checks, collected data and interpretations were taken back to the students, from whom the

data were derived, to ask for their assessment or confirmation whether such data and interpretations were good representation what they have answered or stated. Table 10 below lists the research questions of this study and the primary as well as supplementary data sources that were collected in order to address the research questions:

Table 10

Research Questions and Corresponding Data Sources

Research Questions	Primary Data Sources	Supplementary Data Sources
(1) How do the students in Vietnam adapt to the American instruction in a graduate-level online learning environment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chat room interactions. ▪ Emails to instructor and among students. ▪ Discussion board messages. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Follow-up email exchanges with students based on their self-introduction responses.
(2) What are the needs and expectations of the students in Vietnam when they enroll in an online learning environment? Does the American online instruction meet these students' needs and expectations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chat room interactions. ▪ Emails to instructor and among students. ▪ Discussion board messages. ▪ Survey questionnaire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demographic and background information collected during introduction at the beginning of the course. ▪ Follow-up email exchanges with students based on their self-introduction responses.
(3) Which instructional design features and strategies contribute the most to student satisfaction and student interaction?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chat room interactions. ▪ Emails to instructor and among students. ▪ Discussion board messages. ▪ Team project /presentation. ▪ Survey questionnaire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demographic and background information collected during introduction at the beginning of the course.

Data Analysis

Grounded theory, originated by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, can be combined in a case study research of a specific phenomenon as an informed approach to data analysis in order to build a “story” (Merriam, 2001). Additionally, Creswell (2008) advised that “for the beginning qualitative researcher, grounded theory offers a step-by-step, systematic procedure for analyzing data” and that one should use grounded theory “when you need a broad theory or explanation of a process” (p. 432). Of the three types of grounded theory designs for data analysis: systematic procedure (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), emerging design (Glaser 1992), and constructivist approach (Charmaz, 1990, 2000, 2006), the researcher followed the systematic procedure where the data collected from WebCT, initial self-introductions, follow-up emails, and survey were analyzed using open, axial, and selective codings (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in order to identify commonalities from the data that can be generated into categories.

Quantitative and qualitative data extracted from WebCT and collected from survey questions were loaded into Microsoft Excel and Microsoft Word. The data stored in Microsoft Excel provided the basis for quantitative analysis. For qualitative analysis, data stored in Microsoft Word was used in the systematic design for grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). According to Creswell (2008), Strauss and Corbin’s systematic design for grounded theory consists of analyzing the data in three coding steps: open, axial, and selective; and developing “a logic paradigm or a visual picture of the theory generated” (p. 434). In following the three phases of coding: open, axial, and selective

(Creswell, 2008), the researcher had done the followings: in open coding phase, the researcher reviewed the data stored in Microsoft Word in order to identify the common expressions and data elements that provided details for emerged categories such as students' background, students' perception of benefits in attending this hybrid online course, identified necessary computing and learning skills. The coded data were further sorted into categories and sub-categories or properties (see Table 11); in the axial coding phase, a figure was drawn to identify the hierarchy of data elements within students' online learning experience (see Figure 11); in the selective coding phase, interrelationships among these categories where one of the categories, online learning experience, emerged as the "core category or phenomenon" (Creswell, 2008) and the remaining conditioning categories that influence the core category were identified as "causal conditions" (Creswell, 2008, p. 437). As an outcome of the selective coding phases, the researcher proposed a visual picture of the theory, Process of Vietnamese Learning Culture Adapting to American Online Learning, which validated the relationships among the core category, online learning experience; causal conditions, strategies; contexts; and realized benefits (see Figure 12). Throughout these coding processes, the researcher continually discussed the outcomes with the course instructor who functioned as peers debriefing of the reliability of data sorting and analyzing. In following this practice of debriefing with a third party, it was expected that they may provide impartial inputs and other potential aspects of research inquiry that the researcher might not have considered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Table 11

Coding Categories of Students' Online Learning Experience

Categories	Sub-Categories/Properties	Examples
Background	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Undergraduate Degree. ▪ Progress within Program of Study. ▪ Exposure to English usage. ▪ Type of student. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Business vs. non-Business. ▪ Completed 1/3 or 2/3 of the program. ▪ Use of English through work environment. ▪ Full-time vs. part-time student.
Perceived Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Convenience ▪ Educational Goals ▪ Being flexible ▪ Learn from other students ▪ Growth in Confidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Time saving. ▪ Obtain an American degree. ▪ Adapt to new ways in learning as well as in life. More success. ▪ Self-check on learning thru discussions with others.
Essential Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-discipline ▪ Motivation to learn ▪ Time management ▪ Knowledge about computing skills ▪ Typing skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Need to be organized. ▪ Extra effort expended to search for info beyond text book. ▪ Unfamiliar with Internet. ▪ Falling behind in text chat.
Support Expected / Received	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Similar to face-to-face ▪ Ease of Access to instructor and other students ▪ Shared knowledge ▪ Orientation of WebCT 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Receive lecture thru scheduled chats. ▪ Various modes of contact: email, chat, discussion board ▪ Open posting of discussion topics. ▪ Initial review of WebCT features.
Sense of Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Anonymity ▪ Use of Mentors/nominated leader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Isolated/disconnected/feeling loss. ▪ Embolden to speak up. Increased participation in discussions. ▪ Informally recognized leaders among students.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative research was to investigate how students from an Asian learning culture adapting to an American online learning environment and to determine whether the various instructional design theories and practices that were considered as best practices in the United States may also be as well-received by students from a different learning culture. This chapter begins with descriptions related to the online course as the research site and students as the participants. In addition to the initial self-introduction and follow-up emails, other data source came from the various activities created to support the students' online learning and stored on WebCT. Students were also asked to fill out a survey at the end of the course.

Based on all data gathered and analyzed, Elements of Online Learning Experience was drawn to show the hierarchy among the elements within an online learning environment that affect students' online learning experience (see Figure 11). Within the structures of students' background, course organization context and course interaction context, a visual picture of the proposed framework entitled Process of Vietnamese Learning Culture Adapting to American Online Learning (see Figure 12) was developed where causal conditions, as defined by Creswell (2008), that already existed from the demographic, and educational and cultural backgrounds as well as the learning strategies that students adopted all contributed to their experience in learning online. The proposed framework, Process of Vietnamese Learning Culture Adapting to American Online Learning, will be discussed in Chapter V.

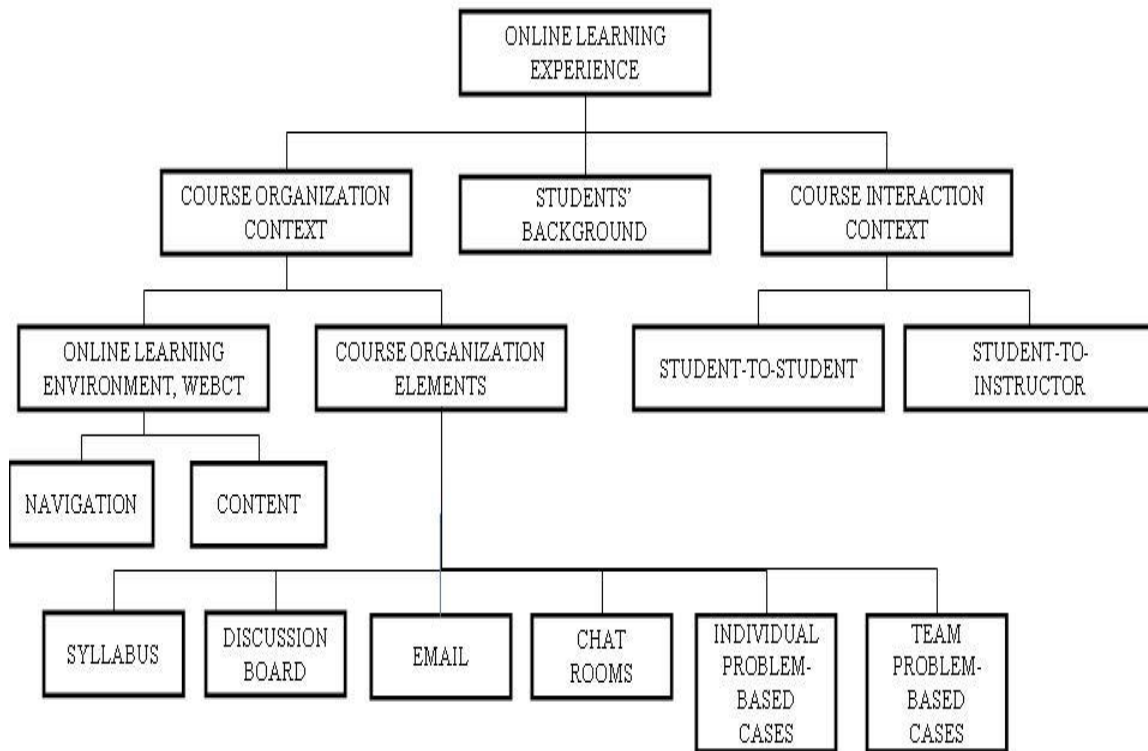


Figure 11: Elements of Online Learning Experience

Data gathered from the students' initial self-introduction emails (see Appendix B) provided the background information about the research participants such as full-time or part-time students, undergraduate degree/specialty, English proficiency, prior experience in online learning, prior knowledge about the subject being taught (Marketing Management, graduate level), and students' expectation from attending this online learning course. Based on the students' responses, the researcher sent additional follow-up questions in order to clarify what the students meant in their answers or to gain further details related to their experience after attending one week in the online course. Due to the extensive amount of students' comments being used to support the descriptive nature of this case study research, various sections of student comments were bolded by the researcher to highlight the key points.

Research Participants' Background

There were a total of 58 students, ranging in ages from 21 to 35, enrolled in this Marketing hybrid online course which comprised of 4 weeks online learning via WebCT and 2 weeks face-to-face learning with the instructor and students meeting in Vietnam. These students, both male and female students enrolled but were not evenly split by genders. The common education practice in Vietnam is to have students sorted into groups or cohorts where they will be enrolling in the same courses and progressing together throughout their program of study. For this particular program of study, students were expected to complete six graduate-level and business-related courses within an academic year. Data gathered from the students' self-introduction responses indicated that there were two cohorts combined to attend this course: one cohort of 22 students who

have completed 4 out of 6 courses in their program of study; the other cohort of 36 students who have completed 1 out of 6 courses before attending this class. Although 6 students indicated that they had taken some work-related online training, none of the 58 students had completed a fully designed online course prior to enrolling in this Marketing online course.

Beside the difference in the number of courses that students had completed within this program of study, 24% of students (n=14) were enrolled full-time in this MBA program. From their work experience, 48% of students (n=28) have had frequent exposure in reading/writing/speaking English. Data extracted from the students' initial self-introductions had enabled the researcher to generate a participants profile with the following significant characteristics: novice online learners, predominantly part-time students, and majority of students had frequent exposure to English usage at their work places. Table 12 summarizes the data gathered from students' self-introduction.

Table 12

Responses from Students' Self-introduction

Number of Students	Full-time Students	Had Experience in Read/Write/Speak English	Had Prior Online Learning Experience	Undergrad Degree in Business
58	14 (24%)	28 (48%)	6 (10%)	21 (36%)

In the preceding paragraphs, the researcher has presented data collected from students' initial self-introductions which included the students' work and education

backgrounds. In the following paragraphs, the researcher will present the research data to answer these research questions:

(1) How do the students in Vietnam adapt to the American instruction in a graduate-level online learning environment?

(2) What are the needs and expectations of the students in Vietnam who enroll in this Graduate Marketing Management online learning environment? Do the American online instructional designs which incorporate various elements deemed to be desirable practices in American published literature, meet these students' needs and expectations?

(3) Which instructional design features and strategies contribute the most to student satisfaction and student interaction?

How do the students in Vietnam adapt to the American instruction in a graduate-level online learning environment?

Following the constant comparative method of data analysis where units of data deemed meaningful by the researcher were compared with each other in order to generate tentative categories and properties (Merriam, 2001), the researcher reviewed students' initial self-introductions and students' after-one-week-of-class responses. Students' responses in the three categories: their experience in reading/writing/speaking English, their having or not having prior e-learning experience, and their expectations of this online learning course indicated that elements within these three categories directly influenced how students formulated adapting strategies to learn online. In summary, students adapted to online learning through recognizing the need to have better time

management, being organized and prepared for reading and analysis assignments, staying focused during chat sessions to avoid getting lost or confused, and seeking or nominating leaders among themselves to serve as sources of learning support.

The follow-up responses from students were included in the next sections to further provide a detailed description of the students' reactions and how they adapted to their online learning experience. As English was the students' second language, all of the students' responses were faithfully reported in the exact manners that the students wrote, in order to illustrate the students' command of the English language. The researcher had made no attempt to correct grammatical or language usage errors, words included within brackets were added by the researcher in an effort to provide more clarity to students' statements.

PARTICIPANTS' EXPOSURE TO ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Seventy six percent of students ($n=44$) were working full-time and attending their graduate program of study part-time (see Table 12). Predominantly, students tended to work for non-Vietnamese companies whose primary language for all methods of interaction was English. Consequentially, their responses indicated that they gained the reading/writing/speaking experience in English from their work place. A sample of responses from students included:

- "...working full time for a Thai company requiring writing and communicating in English";

- “full-time work in Student Services at RMIT VN (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology Viet Nam) University”;
- “work for US law firm”; “full time for Siemens Limited Viet Nam as Procurement and Purchasing Officer and I use English everyday”;
- “PR assistant from Navigos Group. Speak and write both English and Vietnamese everyday at my work: emails, press releases, PR reports...”;
- “full time English teacher”;
- “work in a Representative Office of a Malaysian Corporation, therefore I need to use English quite often at the workplace”;
- “work as an English translator”;
- “bank officer at HSBC Bank. Use English to write emails to other departments”;
- “work for a Japanese Ad Agency with English in use daily”.

A few students worked for Vietnamese companies where they might not have had the opportunity to speak or write in English; however, they had constant exposure to the written English from the Internet. For these students, their work experiences were more often to be in the computing technology as one student responded that he “work in Sales, selling cell phone on Internet”. One student has been working in his family business and shared with the researcher that his exposure to the English language had been through attending technical certification courses,

I help to manage my family’s business, just a Internet service/shop. In fact, I am technician because I also have computer science or IT certificate from Microsoft.

Yet another student elaborated that his experience with the English language has been gained through his researching software computing problems via the Internet,

I am a software developer. Because my company is a Vietnamese firm, I've never used English at work. However, while doing research or troubleshooting problems; I have to search in the internet for information or solutions. It is the only chance for me to use English at my working place.

PARTICIPANTS' PRIOR EXPOSURE TO ONLINE LEARNING

All 58 students responded that they have never attended an online learning course that was fully designed like this Marketing course. When the researcher probed the students for possible online learning experience from their work places, further details emerged. Even though the majority of the students were working full-time while completing their graduate-level program of study, few of these students had any exposure to online learning as part of their work-related trainings. Only 10% of students ($n=6$) had some work-related training via the Internet. While Web-based training is considered quite common and thus better developed as a knowledge transfer strategy for workers in the United States of America, the Vietnamese workers have not been as well-exposed to this corporate training practice nor were the training materials as well-developed. Two of the six students who have had some online training at work indicated that these Web-based trainings were more likely to be "chat & forum from work". More specifically, one student indicated that his online training at work was "so boring because I had to read PowerPoint slides or Word documents online".

PARTICIPANTS' REACTIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

In responding to the question “What are your expectations from attending this course”, the majority of students left a blank answer. As learners, Vietnamese students were not accustomed this type of questions and their expectations were seldom sought out. Nine percent of the total 58 students ($n=5$) provided an answer where they cryptically listed the technological features that they expected to see incorporated into the course such as the use of webcam, simultaneously-cast/live lecture sessions, video, and telephone conferencing,

We basically need to have: audio & video means. We can use headphone & webcam to see & listen to the prof. And we should have a "conference room" where everyone can see the same "screen" of what's happening in class. (Student 1)

video classroom; professor spends more time with students; detailed requirements and expectation from prof on each case study. (Student 2)

While expressing an interest in trying out the online class, one student characterized the loss of face-to-face interaction with the instructor as being an “inconvenience”:

I am so glad to attend this class and be instructed by you. And I am also interesting in this study online although there are some inconveniences that I can not see and talk with you directly.

One week after students have been attending and doing course works online, the researcher emailed all 58 students asking for more comments on their online learning experience. Response from one student indicated that he had found a coping/adapting strategy to online learning: paying close attention during scheduled chat room sessions

with instructor and managing reading assignments efficiently to keep up with the twice-weekly chat room discussions. This same student also recognized the benefits afforded online learning: saving time from not having to commute to class, feeling uninhibited and free to interact with classmate while in chat room [since there was no figure of authority present to impose classroom rules], easy to search for information on the Internet while simultaneously participating in chat room,

I found it's interesting to learn online. At the first time, I think **study online requires me to concentrate on chat room and do quickly to catch up with the lesson.** When I study online, not only I chat with you but also I feel free to talk with my friend about the lesson or something 😊. I think when we study face to face in Vietnam; I'm not allowed to talk with others when professor is teaching.

It's a difference between face to face and study online. Moreover, when you have a question to us, I can answer your question basing on textbook or searching something on the Internet quickly. **I feel more flexible and active.** Another thing is that **I don't have to come to class because at home, I can study 😊.** However, **study online, in my opinion, requires me to work so much. It takes a long time to prepare the lesson carefully before the class.** Sometimes, during the class, I feel we don't have time enough to share many things in textbook. Furthermore, **study face to face make me understand more easily than study online because professor directly teaches us from beginning to ending of per chapter.**

That is my view point about studying online at the first time I want to talk with you. But I think **as a Business Man in future, I have to be flexible in every situation, don't follow the old way, always find new things. Be confident** that we can do whatever we want to get the target.

Since learning online was a new experience for these students, they expressed their expectation that by going through this experience, it would prepare them for being more flexible and able to cope with the unknowns. In addition to echoing the first student about the time-saving value by not having to attend classes in person, a second

student also evaluated the merits of specific activities/elements offered within the online course: her English writing skills improved with text-based communication, centrally-located course contents and easy access to course contents within WebCT, gaining assurance in new knowledge by having access to other students' discussion points,

This is my first experience w/ online and I find it very interesting and some kind of time-saving.

Interesting:

- It **teaches me how to adapt to the new learning environment** in specific, which I think is a good experience for me to be prepared to cope with any new environment in general further.

- The **type of communication is from informal writing (chatting, writing responses) to formal writing (case studies, tests), which teaches me to be careful in thinking to write everything smoothly and correctly.**

- I can open the chat room to re-read the information, some of which I may miss or not pay attention to at the time. This is **surely one of advantages of studying online.**

- This is really a new experience that, I can say, people should try one time.

Time-saving:

- **I don't have to spend time to travel.** I can chat and read the text book at the same time.

- The class hour is shorter compared to that of previous courses. A class of previous courses lasted from 3 - 4 hours, if not to mention about 30 - 45' traveling.

So, I would like to propose some suggestions, if they help:

- Flexible, but most of the time, due to the time limit, **we should stay focus on main points of the chapters**, which are directed by your questions so that we will stick to them. This is what you are doing very well.

- We should **try to finish the chapter of its class, make it within the time limit.**

- Encourage people to give real examples, which we encountered or saw somewhere. **Real cases are interesting and force people to think to response.**

Another student pointed out the overall increase in students actively posting their opinions on the discussion board as an unexpected benefit of learning online. She suggested that learning online gave students the feeling of being anonymous and thereby

becoming uninhibited - words appearing within brackets are added by the researcher to provide clarity,

At first, when we heard that MKT [Marketing] will be conducted online, we were disappointed a bit because we wish to see Pro. [the course instructor] and you [the researcher functioning as teaching assistant] FTF [face-to-face], hope that you don't mind. However, discussion board and case study stimulate us a lot. I found myself very comfortable when I can work w/ Pro. [the course instructor], you, and classmates wherever I am via internet. I think so far, I did have some good experience in studying online. I check the discussion frequently and I found that all of the students now turn out to be very active in giving opinions. Normally in our class, only some of the students raise their voice, the others just keep silent.

I'm the class monitor; so, I pay attention to class studying mood quite a lot. And, though **keeping silent is a kind of normal habit of Vietnamese students**, I suppose that students should discuss more at this master level. I mean **discussion board did benefit students and class in a way that they all have to say something ☺, I like it!**

Along with the positive responses such as time-saving, feeling freer to interact, improved English writing skills; there were other students who felt that being in a graduate-level course was already challenging; their lack of experience in learning online added another roadblock to their educational progress. As one student wrote,

Learning this MBA course is a challenge and online learning marketing is even a bigger challenge. I am not good at computer skill and feel rather uncomfortable with this. Reading the textbook confuses me a lot. I wish you were here to teach and explain to us because many questions cannot be posted in chat room.

Another student expressed that she found it had been difficult to learn online due to several factors such as her inexperience with chatting on the Internet, having inadequate typing skill, having slow reaction/response to discussion questions which prevented her from participating in discussions of the reading assignments. Yet she also

expressed optimism that the new way of learning will save her time and better knowledge in Marketing by analyzing real-life case studies,

I'm not familiar with chatting via web pages. Moreover, my typing is so bad I cannot catch up with the speed of class. When I want to raise my ideas, I have to think a lot and **it takes time for typing**, then when I read and contribute my idea, you move to another question.... **But I think it is just a piece of cake, I will try to catch up with your speed soon ;-).** Moreover, I'm working and I have not much time for researching Marketing, that is my weakness. In the mean time, **I myself will arrange my schedule and improve my typing speed.** Anyways, **this course will bring me many advantages** for studying via internet **such as save time**, have a wide **knowledge about Marketing via many real case studies and of course increase my typing speed.**

After one week of learning online, one particular student who had indicated in his initial self-introduction email that he had some exposure to online training from his work place and also commented that his previous online experience was “so boring”, continued to express his strong resistance to online learning and his skepticism that learning this Marketing course online should be a viable option,

I absolutely do not want to take a Internet based class, especially for marketing which should be organized as a face to face class, because I have some internet based classes before and the class time was so boring.

What are the students' needs and expectations?

Data gathered from students' self-introduction indicated that based on their prior learning experience, they were used to be in class to listen to instructor's lecture, to take notes, and to memorize facts as presented by the instructor from which they then used as answers to test questions. As such, in attending this hybrid online course, students indicated that they continued to have a need to see and to interact with the instructor.

Data collected from chat room, emails, discussion board messages, and survey showed that students initially expected the instructor to provide lectures over the reading assignments. As the class progressed into the second week, students gradually shifted their expectation from receiving lectures to recognition of their need to be familiar with the learning management system as well as having keyboard skills and to be attentive in chat room sessions.

At the beginning of this hybrid online learning course, students were asked to email the instructor their self-introductions within which students were asked to provide answer to the question “What are your expectations from attending this course?” Only 9% of 58 students ($n=5$) provided an answer to this question and their responses primarily targeted the technological aspects such as the need to have audio and video capabilities, utilizing webcam and recorder, so that students could see the instructor and listen to his lectures. It was suggested by the students that a “conference room where everyone can see the same screen of what’s happening in class”. Once the 6-weeks hybrid learning course was completed, students were asked to fill out an end-of-the-course survey. To identify the students’ expectation gap between the beginning and at the end of the course, two open-ended questions were included in the survey: “At the beginning of the online portion of this Marketing course, what did you expect online learning should be like?” and “At the end of the online portion of this Marketing course, what did you expect online learning should be like?” From the survey’s result, 70% of students answered these two questions where they indicated that they expected to learn

from instructor's lectures, not from reading text books by themselves, and instructor would provide students with key knowledge points,

Student1 >>hoc kieu nay can gi len truong [study this way (where we have to read text books ourselves), no need to come to school]

Reading the textbook confuses me a lot. I wish you were here to teach and explain to us because **many questions cannot be posted in chat room.**
(student2)

I think **after each question that professor provided and after our responds, professor should give out the right concept to help us understand clearly.** I also **expect the lecture which includes lively picture and real sound** of the professor to have the overview of each chapter. (student3)

Expected that the professor will give lesson through the WebTC. (student4)

I expect it will have a lecture of the professor, and after that we will have the chat room to discuss more. (student5)

At first, I imagine that an online course would be provided with videos of professor's talks and lectures, because I heard about some thing like that from my friend in Singapore. So I was a little bit **disappointed when we use chat function to take lectures, and it's difficult to keep track of the discussion in the chat box, because too many people talk at them same time and the chat box keep scroll down very fast** every time somebody type something. (student6)

Get the lectures through WebCT. Discuss lesson-related questions raised by students. **Support or correct the answers by professor.** (student7)

Thus, instead of the expected verbal, face-to-face interaction, students were confronted with text-based interaction where a novice level in computing and typing skills presented an immediate barrier to a successful online learning experience. Referring to the scheduled chat sessions with the instructor, more than one student plaintively said they felt behind or being confused in chat room due to lack of typing skill,

My typing is so bad I cannot catch up with the speed of class. When I want to raise my ideas, I have to think a lot and it takes time for typing, then when I read and contribute my idea, you move to another question.

I felt a little boring during the chat time because **sometimes I was behind the chatting or I couldn't catch up by typing.**

While text-based interactions with instructors gave students anxiety and frustration, students also indicated in the end of the course survey that they recognized an improvement in their English writing skill for both grammar and appropriate language usage; learned how to debate and study with other students; and gained confidence in expressing their dissenting opinions :

I read more, write more and think more quickly. My writing improves but my speaking decreases. In some way, **I've learned the way to discuss, study with other people online.** Maybe, discussing like this take a little bit more time but still effective.

I read much more for quizzes and individual case study. Especially case study and discussion debate are most useful.

Through this course, **I learned how to coordinate w/ classmates.** I have **experience to accept different ideas from mine. Know how to show opinions and arguments which was difficult for me previously.**

Did the American online instructional designs meet these students' needs and expectations?

By the end of the course, students' satisfactory grades, earned through various quizzes and exams, indicated that they have gained the fundamental knowledge of marketing theories. In addition to this quantitative data, based on the responses below, students' implicit expectations had also been realized through this course. Students

acquired benefits such as gaining confidence in online learning; getting exposure in collaborative learning with classmates; getting practical knowledge in how the learning management system, WebCT, works; and learning how to manage time to better prepared the students for additional online or hybrid courses once they arrive in the United States for further studies,

I found myself **learn a lot from an online course through chat room and discussion board**. Now I have some experience about an online course, and it would be easier for me in deciding whether to take another online course without that much nervous like at the beginning.

This is the first time I studied online, so I felt very interested. We have nice teacher as Dr. C. and nice assistant as Ms. P. They not only delivered their knowledge but also their experience. **I had a good unique opportunity to learn from my folks when we chatted or when we did our team case study.**

I got experience using WebCT. I learn how to manage time to meet the deadlines. I am more confident in learning online. I got most of the knowledge I wanted in the course. I learn more about marketing in terms of Asian perspective. I need more practice such as doing marketing research & marketing planning.

It is more **convenient because I can study online anywhere**. I can save all the discussions at the chat room for reference. **I need to understand most [marketing] concepts before joining the chat room.**

I got many experiences: sending email, posting case study, debating w/ classmates, managing time (submit on time).

Honestly, I think **I've gained so much experience on this course such as skills of online studying, how to use WebCT which help me get close and familiar with my future university UHCL** (hope so). Secondly, the way of studying is useful for example by doing chat I can recall what lesson I had already read at home, it makes me have a deep memory about the lesson. **Discussion topic is good, so the debate of it is. Good experience in group working.**

Since the students enrolled in this Marketing course had never attended an online learning course, their expectations were based on their prior learning experiences in Vietnam where students meet in a classroom to receive lectures from the instructor and learning is equated to memorizing. Although it was initially difficult for students to adjust to the new concept of their being required to take on a more active role in learning as evidenced in the responses below, students had come to realize that to be able to interact with other learners required that they needed to be prepared for class:

I should read the chapters carefully before class. Learn how to express my own opinion and debate with others to persuade them through discussion board and chat rooms. **Learn how to interact freely w/ classmates and the professor** through email and discussion board w/in webct.

We have to prepare lesson carefully before class. Moreover, we have to **be active in questions related to lessons**, share something w/ prof and classmates. **Don't be shy** when we raise ideas.

I felt disconnect with the class sometimes, maybe that's because this is my first experience studying online.

Which instructional design features and strategies contribute the most to student satisfaction and student interaction?

Data extracted from WebCT's Discussion Board and students' evaluation gathered from end-of-course survey indicated that overall, students considered two instructional design features: use of Discussion Board to facilitate student-student interactions and chat rooms to facilitate both student-student and student-instructor interactions as being either "most helpful" or "helpful" (see Table 14). As the result of constant comparative analysis of the data collected from students' initial self-

introductions, learning activities hosted on WebCT, chat logs, emails, and survey; components affecting how the students evaluate their online learning experience were categorized into two contexts: Course Organization Context and Course Interactions Context. The Course Organization Context included elements that provided the structure of how the course was delivered to students, i.e., schedule, frequency and instructor-support of the learning activities, discussion topics, chat sessions, use of discussion boards and emails, individual and team case studies that support or enhance students' gain in knowledge of the subject matter – Marketing. The Course Interaction Context encompassed the interactions that occurred between student-to-student and student-to-instructor.

COURSE ORGANIZATION CONTEXT

As discussed previously, the Course Organization Context in this research consisted of how the course was structured in the online learning environment (OLE) and the seven elements that provided the basis for students to navigate through their learning journey. The online learning environment was hosted by WebCT and the seven elements within the Course Organization Context included 1) syllabus; 2) discussion topics; 3) use of discussion boards; 4) use of Email within WebCT; 5) chat rooms; 6) individual case studies; and 7) team case studies. In the following paragraphs, the researcher will describe how the students managed within the online learning environment and their evaluation of the seven elements of the course organization context.

Online Learning Environment (OLE)

At the conclusion of the course, students were asked to fill out a survey questionnaire (see Appendix D). Out of 58 students 41 students sent responses to the survey, a 71% response rate. The answers gathered from questions 1 through 7 established a statistical picture of students' learning experience in the online learning environment.

Of the 58 students, 50% ($n=29$) agreed that WebCT is "easy to use" and 43% ($n=25$) also strongly agreed or agreed that "WebCT makes it easy for me to find the content I need". Thirty one percent ($n=8$) agreed that WebCT "makes it easy for me to discuss questions and/or answer with my teacher" and 34% of students ($n=20$) agreed "the course content stored on WebCT is easy for me to understand." With respect to student interaction, 34% of students ($n =20$) thought that WebCT "makes it easy for me to share what I learned with other students". In response to the question regarding taking another on-line course, no student strongly agreed with the statement "I will take another online course if offered"; 7% of students ($n=4$) "agree", 19% of students ($n=4$) "agree somewhat", and 21% of students ($n=12$) are "neutral". In particular, one student commented that "course content should be offered students outline contents w/ important definitions in form of power point file for easily understanding & efficiently following the whole chapter." Table 13 provides more details of the responses from the students.

Table 13

Students' Responses to OLE

Survey Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree Some-what	Neutral	Disagree Some-what	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. The online system, WebCT, is easy to use	4	25	8	2	2	0	0
2. WebCT makes it easy for me to find the content I need	4	21	6	5	2	3	0
3. WebCT provides useful content	1	10	17	8	3	2	0
4. Makes it easy for me to discuss questions and/or answers with my teacher.	4	14	13	2	4	4	0
5. Makes it easy for me to share what I learned with other students.	5	15	11	5	3	1	1

Table 13 (cont.)

Survey Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Agree Some-what	Neutral	Disagree Some-what	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6. The course content stored on WebCT is easy for me to understand.	2	18	10	8	1	2	0
7. I will take another online business course if offered.	0	4	11	12	4	8	3

Next, using the research data collected from the course repository, WebCT, students' interactions via the Discussion Boards and Chat Rooms, and survey results, the researcher will describe how students experienced the 7 course elements structured within the course organization context.

Elements within Course Organization Context

Prior to the start of this online learning course, students were asked to attend an orientation session, conducted simultaneously in person by the instructor in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, while the researcher logged in WebCT from Houston, Texas. Students were asked to login to WebCT to participate in a chat session with the researcher in order for them to be familiar with the online learning environment. When students entered the

online learning environment via WebCT, they saw the home page which was divided unequally into two sections vertically. The dominant section contained a brief summary of what the course entailed, the smaller section on the left side contained several text links for students to navigate throughout the course (see Figure 3).

At the end of the course, to determine the degree of helpfulness of the seven elements: syllabus, discussion topics, discussion board, email, chat room, individual problem-based cases, and team problem-based case; students were asked to rank their choices on a Likert-scale of 1 to 8. Over all, more students chose Discussion Topics as the activity that was “most helpful” (n=13) in terms of enabling students to meet their learning goals and expectations. Table 14 summarizes the ranking results for the seven online learning elements.

Table 14

Ranking of Helpful Online Elements

Ranking Items	Most helpful (1)	Helpful (2)	Helpful (3)	Helpful (4)	Helpful (5)	Helpful (6)	Helpful (7)	Least helpful (8)
Organization of course content	2	3	3	7	6	6	6	7
Syllabus	6	2	7	4	9	1	5	6
Discussion Topics	13	11	6	5	1	3	1	1
Use of Discussion Board	10	11	4	3	2	6	4	1
Use of Email within WebCT	0	2	3	7	7	10	5	7
Chat rooms	2	7	6	4	4	4	6	9
Individual Case Studies	5	10	8	5	5	2	4	2
Team Case Study	3	9	8	6	3	5	4	3

Followings are the descriptions and data gathered that reflect students' interactions with the seven elements of the Course Organization Context.

Syllabus

Four weeks before the online learning course began, two orientation sessions were scheduled. For the orientation session, students were asked to login to WebCT to participate in a chat with the researcher functioning as the course teaching assistant. While reviewing the syllabus to clarify how the online learning environment would be conducted, students showed their lack of understanding how learning online meant to a learner; expressed their confusion of various functions and logistics within the online environment; were very concerned about not receiving chapter lectures from the instructor:

“But I really confuse [about what the researcher had explained about the syllabus] what do we use Chat Room for? [Chat room is] just for asking? how can he [the course instructor] give a lecture to us?”;

“This kind of teaching method is quite new...brand new [for us]. so he [the course instructor] wont give lectures, all we have to do is reading... kill me dead with reading.”;

“As I understand in this course you have to read the material, and then every week on thursday and tuesday to chat to ask professor about what we are confusing, any topic relating to the course?”

At the end of 6-weeks course, a survey questionnaire was given to all students to fill out. One survey question contained all seven elements that formed the structure for the course. Students were asked to select any, some, or all of seven elements that they considered had been helpful to their online learning experience. Consistently, less than

half of the students responded that the course syllabus had been helpful: 45% of students ($n=18$).

Discussion Topics and Use of Discussion Boards

To encourage interactions among students, five discussion topics were presented for students to analyze. Each week, a specific discussion topic was posted on the discussion board (see Table 15). Throughout the first five weeks of the course, students were required to analyze the weekly topic, to post their analyses to the discussion board, and to respond to at least three other students' analysis postings.

Table 15

Topics for Discussion Board

Week	Discussion Board Topic
1	Does Marketing Create or Satisfy Needs?
2	Is Consumer Behavior More a Function of a Person's Age or Generation?
3	Is Mass Marketing Dead?
4	Is the Right Price A Fair Price?
5	Is the World Coming Closer Together?

Within each week, students were required to post their answers related to that week's discussion topic. Students were also required to post their opinions in response to at least three other students' answers. Thus, as data shown on table 16, (1+3) denoted that at a minimum, each student was expected to post one time for their position of the discussion topic and three times as reactions toward their classmates' discussion postings. Data collected from WebCT indicated that although a few students fell below the

expected discussion postings, on average, each student participated five times per Discussion Topic for the Discussion Board activity.

Table 16

Discussion Board Participation

Student No.	TOPIC 1	TOPIC 2	TOPIC 3	TOPIC 4	TOPIC 5
1	1 + 2	1 + 2	1 + 10	1 + 9	1 + 6
2	1 + 6	1 + 3	1 + 4	1 + 4	1 + 3
3	0 + 1	0 + 2	0 + 3	1 + 4	1 + 6
4	1 + 3	1 + 6	1 + 5	1 + 3	1 + 4
5	1 + 4	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 2	1 + 3
6	0 + 0	0 + 0	0 + 0	0 + 0	0 + 0
7	1 + 3	1 + 8	1 + 6	1 + 4	1 + 3
8	1 + 3	1 + 5	1 + 6	1 + 4	1 + 3
9	1 + 6	1 + 8	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 3
10	1 + 5	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 4
11	1 + 5	1 + 3	1 + 5	1 + 3	1 + 3
12	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 4	1 + 6	1 + 3
13	1 + 7	1 + 7	1 + 8	1 + 6	1 + 4
14	1 + 4	0 + 2	1 + 6	1 + 3	1 + 4
15	1 + 4	1 + 3	1 + 10	1 + 6	1 + 8
16	0 + 1	1 + 4	1 + 0	1 + 3	0 + 0
17	0 + 0	0 + 0	1 + 4	1 + 4	1 + 4
18	1 + 6	1 + 2	1 + 6	1 + 5	1 + 5
19	1 + 4	1 + 2	1 + 4	1 + 4	1 + 4
20	1 + 4	1 + 3	1 + 4	1 + 4	1 + 3
21	0 + 0	0 + 0	0 + 0	0 + 0	0 + 0
22	1 + 7	1 + 5	1 + 8	1 + 4	1 + 3
23	1 + 3	1 + 4	1 + 1	1 + 3	1 + 4
24	0 + 0	1 + 4	1 + 4	1 + 3	1 + 4
25	1 + 4	1 + 8	1 + 4	1 + 3	1 + 3
26	1 + 7	1 + 20	1 + 13	1 + 8	1 + 4
27	0 + 0	0 + 0	0 + 0	0 + 0	0 + 0
28	1 + 5	1 + 5	1 + 14	1 + 8	1 + 4
29	0 + 3	1 + 4	1 + 1	1 + 6	1 + 6
30	1 + 4	1 + 5	1 + 5	1 + 8	1 + 7
31	1 + 3	1 + 6	1 + 5	1 + 7	1 + 6

Table 16 (cont.)

Student	TOPIC 1	TOPIC 2	TOPIC 3	TOPIC 4	TOPIC 5
32	1 + 6	1 + 4	1 + 8	1 + 5	1 + 5
33	1 + 4	1 + 6	1 + 4	1 + 4	1 + 3
34	0 + 0	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 4	1 + 4
35	1 + 3	1 + 2	1 + 3	1 + 5	1 + 4
36	1 + 1	1 + 4	1 + 4	1 + 3	1 + 4
37	1 + 3	1 + 2	1 + 1	1 + 3	1 + 3
38	1 + 3	1 + 4	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 2
39	1 + 3	1 + 4	1 + 3	1 + 3	2 + 3
40	1 + 3	1 + 5	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 3
41	1 + 8	2 + 7	2 + 7	1 + 5	1 + 5
42	1 + 9	1 + 15	1 + 13	2 + 7	1 + 3
43	1 + 3	1 + 6	1 + 4	1 + 6	2 + 4
44	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 4	1 + 3
45	1 + 2	1 + 7	1 + 6	1 + 5	1 + 4
46	1 + 3	1 + 5	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 3
47	1 + 4	1 + 5	1 + 4	1 + 3	1 + 4
48	1 + 3	1 + 4	1 + 0	1 + 1	1 + 0
49	1 + 3	1 + 5	1 + 8	1 + 8	2 + 5
50	1 + 3	1 + 6	1 + 6	1 + 5	1 + 8
51	0 + 0	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 5
52	1 + 3	1 + 5	1 + 4	1 + 3	1 + 4
53	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 3	2 + 2
54	1 + 4	1 + 4	1 + 4	1 + 4	1 + 4
55	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 2	1 + 3	1 + 3
56	1 + 4	1 + 4	1 + 4	1 + 4	1 + 3
57	1 + 4	1 + 5	1 + 7	1 + 7	1 + 8
58	1 + 3	1 + 5	1 + 3	1 + 3	1 + 3

When asked to select which online elements were helpful to their online learning experience, 65% of students ($n=27$) picked Discussion Topics and 72% of students ($n=30$) picked Use of Discussion Boards. On the Likert scale of the survey question where the seven online learning elements were ranked from (1) as most helpful to (8) as

least helpful to students' meeting their learning goals and expectations, the result also confirmed that students considered Discussion Topics and Use of Discussion Boards ranked high in either being most helpful (1), 13 students, or close to being most helpful (2), 11 students. These results confirm the researcher's expectation that the use of Discussion Board to post students' analysis of the Discussion Topics emulated classroom discussion and fostered student interaction.

Use of Email within WebCT

Review of the Emails' content and when/how often emails were used by students showed that this method of interaction contributed the least to students' learning. Further supporting this observation, students' responses collected from the end-of-course survey showed that on a Likert scale of (1) as being most helpful to (8) as being least helpful to their online learning experience, students rated the use of email within WebCT as being within mid-range of (5) or (6) as toward being least helpful.

With regard to learner-to-learner interaction, students did not depend on Email within WebCT to share their learning. Rather, in informal discussions with students about the lack of email use among themselves, students indicated that since they were organized in a study cohort for the entire duration of the graduate-level program of study, they were more used to either keeping in touch via telephone, personal emails, or face-to-face gatherings. Accordingly, Emails were more often used as a way for students to interact with the course instructor and the researcher. Typically, the nature of these Email interactions fell within the administrative part of the course, i.e., students' inquiry

of when quiz grades would be posted; missing grade points on certain activities; requesting more clarification of how quiz/exam would be conducted.

Chat Rooms

As a hybrid online learning course with a 6-weeks duration, students had 4 weeks learning online via WebCT and 2 weeks face-to-face with the instructor. Of the online environment, chat room was one of the seven elements where learner-to-learner and learner-to-instructor interactions occurred. For each of the 4 weeks online learning, chat room schedules were setup so that students could attend two chat sessions with either the instructor or the researcher. These twice-weekly chat sessions were non-compulsory and were intended for students to ask questions related to chapter readings.

For the first two chat sessions, unused to the online environment and there were no instructor on site to assert authority, students tended to fire off questions from various topics without waiting for a response from either the instructor or the researcher. The nature of these questions/discussions was either not related to the assigned reading topic of the week or students reverted to socializing among themselves by typing their responses in Vietnamese rather than English,

Student6 >>did u have a starbuck coffee yet :)

Student1 >>may i ask you if you don't mind that how old are you?

Student13 >>chataholic

Student11 >>chi H. nhieu chien wa' [sister H. causes too many problems]

As a result, the first week's chat room sessions were chaotic. There were several reactions from the students:

(1) getting lost in the trail of discussion, feeling frustrated and confused,

Student10 >>I am getting **lost with the lecture...**

Student5 >>many ideas cum up here Miss therefore would you please sum up for the last?

Student15 >>i think **this way like a mass difficult to follow**

Student1 >>you guys see, there are many question at the same time, how can MS.pham answer

Student1 >>if we still like this way, to be quite frank, **i'm so confuse, and mix up**

Student14 >> **How we can control the chatroom, a lot of people, a lot of ideas.**

It'll be confusing!

(2) resigned to the chaotic situation; showed preference to learning face-to-face;

commiserated and expressed optimism for eventual improvement,

Student2 >>okie, okie, thanks... **I think we get back to discussion!**

Student3 >>student1, **we have no choices**

Student3 >>**do not complain anymore, focus on the lesson,pls**

Student3 >>"**face to face" is much better.** hehe!!!

Student6 >>I think more concentration can help... and this is just the first time to have lessons online so... maybe a bit unfamiliar>>but should be fine soon, dont worry

In recognition that chat room etiquettes must be established in order to gain control and effectiveness, some guidelines were suggested and agreed to by the students: one topic at a time, taking turns, and students were not allowed to have side discussions posted in chat room along while the chat room was on-going,

Student4 >>**is there any better rules to conduct the conversation more effective?**

Instructor >>Let's **keep to one topic/question please.** Allow me to respond before you go on to next question.

Instructor >> just like in actual class, **no one should interrupt** the person talking. So we take turns.

Instructor >>I will **not jump from topic to topic** and request everyone to follow this standard please

Instructor >>also, **no side discussion away from topic** that we're discussing. I'll post a chat room etiquette to email everyone

Instructor >>the best way is to **stay on topic to avoid cluttering chat space which cause more confusion and distraction**

By the second chat session, to further control the discussion flow and to capture the instructor's responses which were mixed in with other students' postings, students offered suggestions such as,

(1) more guidelines for chat room etiquette, instructor would summarize key points for each topic before moving on to the next discussion topic:

Student1 >>sorry for interruption, i think **we should have a mechanic such like hand raising in class** for individual raise his/her ideas and this ideas will be confirmed by TA or Prof

Student7 >>I think we **should summarize at the end of the class**

Instructor >>yes, I do sum up our disc before moving on to next topic and yes, **experience w/ IM helps**

(2) instructor's response should be in capital letters; maximum five students' postings per topic then all should wait for instructor's response before students continue with their postings, everyone should end each posting with either 'over' or 'ovr':

Student8 >>i think we should do like this: if anyone post his/ her idea, the remains **should wait for Ms. Pham response then the next will raise his/hers.**

Student4 >>and, **pls type the whole sentence your idea**

Student9 >>1st person jumps and when finishing, pls type: OVER, then Ms.

PHam comments after that others must wait to turn

Student4 >>**pls capital your writing, Ms. Pham/**

Responses extracted from the end-of-course survey indicated that contrary to the instructor's plan of using chat sessions as a form of office hours for students to drop in with any questions that needed clarification, students treated these chat sessions as the

equivalent of classroom lecture sessions. Students attended the chat session with an expectation that the instructor or the researcher, functioning as teaching assistant, was to provide the students a complete lecture about the assigned reading,

we should add the lecture of the professor. Professor should provide the explanation of concepts and case study. (Student 1)

students need more time for chatting w/ instructors and chat room should also have log files for students after every chat session. (Student 2)

to make class more effective, I think **chat room should have function to save the chatting dialog for student to review the discussion again.** (Student 3)

we need to ask and answer actively. After class, we summarize what we study. Before class, students have to send questions related to lessons and then in class we discuss together. (Student 4)

more time in chat in order to discuss the lesson more deeply, 90 minutes is not enough. **More team case study in order to have more chances for student present their work.** And all of class know how the case solved, more info exchanged. (Student 5)

the online course is good for developing self-study and we could learn from each others' experiences and knowledge. However, I found I could study better and understand more clearly and deeply if I could have more time to study w/ prof. [professor]. (Student 6)

Below is an excerpt of the chat log which also demonstrated students' expectation of using chat session with instructor as a way to obtain a full lecture on the assigned reading,

Instructor >>Has everyone read the chptr [chapter]?
Student15 >>not yet
Student7 >>not yet
Student3 >>me 2

Instructor >>ok. Here's how our weekly chat will be conducted: you guys must read chapters before the chat; on chat date & time, we'll pick out some of the chapter content to discuss and explain

Student10 >>how many chaps we will read per chat time?

Individual Problem-based Cases

Students were required to work on four individual problem-based case studies that would be graded. Although students were not used to learning a subject matter via case study analysis and they exhibited a high degree of anxiety that the instructor would not provide an absolute “right answer” for each case study, the end-of-course survey indicated that students recognized the value of learning by analyzing case studies. The research data showed that 75% of students ($n=28$) selected Individual Problem-based Cases as being a helpful component to their learning. Clearly, students were able to relate to the Marketing concepts when they answered the questions posed within these problem-based cases.

Team Problem-based Cases

Although Team Case Studies were structured as an activity within the 2-weeks face-to-face with the instructor, this learning activity introduced the students to a new method of learning: teamwork. Students were randomly assigned by the researcher to combat the natural formation of team from cohort. Also, teams were required to interact via team chat rooms. At the end of the team case study activity, students were asked to write an assessment of their experience working in a team by answering the question

‘After having been participating in the team case study activity with your team, (a) what did you like? (b) What would you want to have done differently?’

Students’ responses to ‘What did you like’ showed that they enjoyed the teamwork experience, recognized the value of diverse knowledge from each team member, learned to persuade others through debating their points, and learned to negotiate from each other,

In fact, this group is one of the best groups I have participated in. All the group members are very dynamic, creative and have wide knowledge in Marketing. I really liked to work with the other members of the group, especially through the face to face group meetings, because I have learned a lot of useful things from them. (Student 1)

Open mind and cheering atmosphere in the team. Working with “strong” teammates who are good in knowledge and also creative. (Student 2)

Though each of us is in-charge for a specific question, unlike other groups, **we threw out the answer from each of us and the whole team gave comments. By doing that, all of us had chance to learn from each other and learn all the answer for the case study.** (Student 3)

I like the learning spirit of my team. Despite being very busy and tired from daylong working, everybody in my team still tried the best to meet one another and discussed enthusiastically about the topic and proposed many interesting ideas. **I like the opportunity of debate** in which we can sit down next to one another to pinpoint the “good” and “not good” of each person’s presentation. (Student 4)

Had a chance to approach a real case and analyze it. The **team case study helped me understand and apply concepts in the chapter, and learn from other team members**, as only I myself cannot cover all the theories, but the unity of five of us made strength. (Student 5)

I find each member interestingly. Each is professional in different major, so we use this advantage to strength project in anyway. Moreover, everyone has different personality. **When I work in team, I understand them more and learn how to treat with those personalities in terms of friendship and partnership.**

And last but not least, we are closer from now. We notice the good and the bad as well in others but we like to be friend now and future. After all, **we find that we can work well each other**. All in all, **working in team help me to explore new things in terms of personality and work style. I like to study and work in team even we sometime argue and fight to protect our own ideas**. It's not bad but it builds up advanced knowledge and relationship. (Student 6)

Students' responses to 'What would you want to have done differently' indicated that time management, collaboration and coordination of efforts within a team is both a challenge and a much needed skill to acquire in order for teamwork to be successful,

I am very proud of the group members' performance in studying and finishing the case. **Only one thing I want to change is that we should consider the limited time [allowed us] when presenting.**

All the team should have spent more time for the project. **Some teammates are too busy in work so that sometime we were behind the schedule.**

I like the topic and the way we did the case together. **We gathered online at first, discussed the topic, searched for information, decided the working timeline, worked individually as well as in a team.** After one week, we met face to face to discussed more. Some of the questions are quite tough to us and we had to find out ways to work it out. Finally, we worked online, sending information to the team via webCT. On the presentation day, we stayed together and presented our case.

There did come many difficulties during the project; however, **after some disagreements and impasses, we did overcome all challenges to perform** at our best. I appreciate the teamwork spirit and the mutual information exchange to solve the problem. **The project, also, offered us the opportunity to dig into marketing concepts and principles to better understand marketing.** If we have more instructions to approach the project and some recommendations in each stage, for example, in draft report, we could be able to analyze it more effectively.

I love to work with people from different background and culture, from with I have gradually strengthened my team working skills.

All the **team members learned how to listen to each others and respect others.** So though **there were some moments of “burning” conflicts in opinions, we could work it out by being more open to each others’ point of views.** Each team members contributes his/her own strength to the team case study.

In summary, to the extent of how the seven elements within the online learning environment had helped and/or affected the students enrolled in this Marketing Management course, data related to each of the online learning elements had been analyzed and discussed in the preceding paragraphs. As shown in tabular summaries of survey data addressing the helpful value of the seven elements of online learning environment (see Table 17), the majority of students chose activities such as Discussion Topics ($n=27$), use of Discuss Board ($n=30$), and Problem-based Cases (both Individual ($n=29$) and Team Case Studies($n=27$)) as enabling them to understand the new Marketing concepts through collaboration, communication, and problems solving (Sims, Dobbs, & Hand, 2002).

Table 17

Helpful Online Elements for Students

Helpful Items	Number of Students Selected
Organization of course content	9
Syllabus	18
Discussion Topics	27
Use of Discussion Board	30
Use of Email within WebCT	14
Chat rooms	16
Individual Case Studies	29
Team Case Study	27

COURSE INTERACTION CONTEXT

The course interaction context encompassed the interactions that occurred between student-to-student and student-to-instructor. Data extracted from WebCT's Discussion Board and students' evaluation gathered from end-of-course survey provided the basis for analyzing the course interaction context.

Student-to-Student Interaction

As previously reported in the course organization context section, of the seven course elements that made up the course organization; Chat Rooms, Discussion Topics and Use of Discussion Board, and Team Problem-based Cases were chosen more often by students as having contributed positively to students' learning experience and to students' interaction with other students. Sixty five percent students considered the Use of Discussion Board as contributing positively to their learning experience and to their interaction with other students. Students said that they

- “like the way it is constructed & managed. We have as many chances as possible to raise our ideas & debates”,
- “believe discussion board is effective since it helps us to sharpen our writing skills as well as debating skill”,
- “topics were very interesting, although everyone have their own way to solve problem, we had opportunities to debate, to learn from each other,” and
- “mostly help me facilitate the interaction with the other students since it's very easy for me to post my own opinions, to give and receive comments,

and to reply to the others' opinions in a well-organized structure so it's also easy to view and keep track of the posts and comments.”

Responding to the survey question ‘List the course activities and/or online WebCT features that you think had contributed positively to your learning experience’, students’ comments about their experience with interactions in Chat Room indicated that they recognized (1) the value of learning by understanding the connection between Marketing theories and realistic problem-based cases that they can relate to or familiar within their living environment; (2) that they could learn from other students as well as from the teacher; and (3) that they gained confidence to express their opinions not only in this online class but also in other traditional face-to-face classes,

...make a relation between key concepts in the book w/ real examples in HCM [Ho Chi Minh city]. (Student 1)

give me a chance to learn from friends as well as teacher. I'm free to type my thought of problem and can **follow different ideas from friends.** (Student 2)

helped improve my learning experience alot, I found myself be **more confident to speak out loud my thoughts**, it's a great advantage of an online course because in face to face, students used to be shy to express their opinions. And even now, in face to face class, it's easier for me to tell my ideas and my thoughts since **I'm now more confident, and the interaction with the other students is now also become better** since we've already had many discussion along the course, all thank to the online Marketing course. (Student 3)

Regarding their experience with working on the Discussion Topics and in sharing their analyses of problem-based cases with each other via Discussion Board, students recognized several benefits: (1) being able to understand the various Marketing concepts through doing analysis on problem-based cases that they can relate; (2) cases were

reflective of their lives/situations/society; (3) becoming more motivated to search for information beyond the text book in order to provide innovative solutions; (4) being able to view the responses of other students allowed for more opportunity to see different viewpoints. In the words of the Vietnamese students:

...help us learn **how to analyze a real company, real situation** by concepts that we learn from the book. (Student1)

force me to **work hard to have good answer to questions. Case related to companies in VN**, that is an advantage to us. (Student2)

like the way it [online content] is constructed & managed. We have as many chances as possible to raise our ideas & debates. (Student 3)

believe **discussion board is effective** since it helps us to sharpen our writing skills as well as debating skill. **Reading various responses from other people helps me to self-check my knowledge**, double check it with the text, which I can say, helps me gain a lot more knowledge. (Student 4)

Students reacted positively when participating in the Team Case Study activity:

I and my team have our own [chat] room to discuss, to solve the problem of team case study. (Student1)

like doing team case study. We **had good time working together & the presentation is very exciting to me.** (Student2)

There were a few students who had answered the open-ended question ‘List activities that you think had contributed positively to your interaction with other students’ by commenting on the value of using the Discussion Board to express their opinions and to defend their view points:

topics were very interesting, although everyone have their own way to solve problem, we **had opportunities to debate, to learn from each other.** (Student1)

mostly **help me facilitate the interaction with the other students** since it's very easy for me to post my own opinions, to give and receive comments, and to **reply to the others' opinions in a well-organized structure so it's also easy to view and keep track of the posts and comments.** (Student2)

In quantitative terms, when choosing among the eight instructional design elements provided within this Marketing hybrid online course, data gathered from the survey showed that students considered activities such as Discussion Board ($n=28$), Problem-based Cases (Individual Case Studies ($n=20$) and Team Case Study ($n=19$)) contributed to their learning. Students also recognized that Use of Discussion Board ($n=27$) and Team Case Study ($n=21$) clearly supported student-student interactions (see Table 18).

Table 18

Elements Contribute to Learning and Interaction

Course Activities	Contribute to Learning	Contribute to interaction w/ other students
Organization of course content	0	0
Syllabus	1	0
Discussion Topics	6	4
Use of Discussion Board	28	27
Use of Email within WebCT	4	6
Chat rooms	18	15
Individual Case Studies	20	3
Team Case Study	19	21

Most of the student-to-student interactions occurred in WebCT's Discussion Board and Team Chat Rooms. In reviewing data extracted from the Team Chat Rooms, for the first chat session, students preferred to use Vietnamese while discussing what

potential problem / loss of instructional benefit (as implied in their comments) they have in attending an online course without having an instructor in class with them, the researcher's English translations are within brackets:

Student1 >>hoc kieu nay can gi len truong [study this way, no need to come to school]

Student2 >>ko break chiu o noi [can't bear without break time]

Student1 >>ngoi o nha doc sach cung du xai roi, hehe [sit at home reading textbook just as good, haha]

Student 3 >>minh se discuss cach hoc nay sau khi tan lop [let's discuss how to study for this online class after class hours]

By the second week, students' chat log showed that they have adapted to conversing more in English rather than in Vietnamese and they have begun to replace some face-to-face team meetings with using team chat rooms as a venue for them to discuss and resolve the logistics of how to share works on their assigned team case:

Student1>>**we discuss about how to solve the team case**

Student1>>i think, to take it easy, firstly we should identify which chapter each question belong to?

Student2>>no

Student3>>agree with Student1

Student2>>i do think so

Student1 >>and then we focus on each questions for solving

Student3 >>do or dont , Student2 ?

Student2 >>sorry, I do not agree with u

Student2 >>**I think the first step is to fix which approachs we will do our project**

Student2>>it means we will divide all questions into 4 parts for each member

Student4>>**each member will be in charge for his/her onwn part**

Student2>>2. we group questions which have the same content/title or ask about the same thing

Student4>>okie, let discuss about how to assign the team case first

Student2>>after 3 days, we must finish the detailed outline

At the end of the third week, students' chat log showed that they were comfortable in using the team chat room for discussion and to use WebCT email to post their progress so that team members can review and provide support:

Student2>>**remember to post your drafts/ideas on webct frequently**
Student1>>we dont know how hard each question is
Student2>>**we post our accomplishment on the web**
Student2>>**so that the other members can check them and give comments**
Student1>>so during the time we do, if we can't afford all assign, raise your trouble and other members will help
Student1>>maybe help to solve question or take this question

Student-to-Instructor Interaction

In the online learning environment, WebCT, student-to-instructor interactions occurred via emails and chat rooms. As previously discussed in the course organization context section, it was most often that students sent emails to instructor to seek information about and/or resolution for administrative issues involving test scores, late submission of assignments, deferred/excuse absent due to work-related demands...etc. Thus, emails were rated by students to be least contributing to their online learning experience. The other means for student-instructor interactions was via chat rooms which were scheduled twice per week. Postings extracted from chat sessions pointed to students' efforts to adapt with the online learning environment by various measures such as turning the chat sessions into lecture sessions, an attempt at mimicking the traditional classroom environment where students expected the instructor to pose questions and to provide the 'right' answer after all students have provided their opinions:

Student1 >>**what else can u teach us ms.P?**
Student2 >>We back the main topic
Student3 >>**next question, plz**

Student4 >>Ms. Pham, How to make a marketing plan with low budget ? for ex :
in small private biz in real estate

Student5 >>very good question Student4

Student6>> Student3, we're on the 1st chapter, and you already want us to jump
into the case study? lol

Student5 >>**pls follow up the question of Student3**, ms pham

Instructor >>so we identify our target cust. then craft a strategy to go after that

Student7 >>Ms Pham How can we find out who is target cus? By market
research?

Student6 >>To Ms Pham, I'm totally agree that we should learn our TA well, first
thing first

Student7 >>Is that what you mean Ms Pham ? Everything about the consumers,
the more you learn about them, the better it is

Student9 >>are they rich? poor? or...

Student3 >>**can we focus on a more concrete topic**

Student8 >>Hey, Student9, You can't change the topic

Student2 >>**i feel we are a little far from Ms.Pham's question**

Summary

In this chapter, the researcher has reported, discussed and identified the themes emerged from data that had been collected via students' self-introduction emails; follow-up emails between students and the researcher; emails, chat logs, and discussion board within WebCT; and the end-of-the-course survey. The collected data provided the basis to support the answers to the research questions that were stated in the introduction chapter. In the chapter V, the researcher will discuss how the data results informed the researcher's proposed framework, Process of Vietnamese Learning Culture Adapting to American Online Learning.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

As stated in the introduction chapter, the purpose of this research was to conduct an exploratory qualitative research in order to understand how students from a behavioral learning culture adapted to a constructive learning design and to determine whether the various instructional design elements, which were based on constructivist learning, would meet these students' needs and expectations. This chapter begins with a summary of the key findings presented in the context of a framework entitled Process of Vietnamese Learning Culture Adapting to American Online Learning, followed by the discussion of the research findings that answered the research questions, guided this study, and how the collected research data provided further support to the literature cited in Chapter II.

Prior to attending this hybrid online learning course which consisted of 4 weeks online and 2 weeks face-to-face instruction, students unanimously expressed the view that they were not enthusiastic about learning in the online environment. Further informal inquiry conducted by the researcher at the beginning of the course indicated that the students' reluctance to embrace online learning was rooted in (a) their lack of experience with online learning in general, and (b) their perception that their lack of knowledge about Marketing as a subject matter required hands-on instruction which can only be achieved through face-to-face learning. The traditional education practice in Vietnam consists of grouping students into cohorts where the same students attend the same classes together throughout their program of study. Additionally, Vietnam's method of instruction has the instructor as the dispenser or conveyor of knowledge with students as

the passive recipients of that knowledge. Generally, as a common practice, students are expected to attend class, listen to instructor's lectures, memorize the text book's information, and take tests to produce the test scores which were considered the basis to measure learning. Thus, students' initial rejection of taking an online course was based on the concern that by not having a physical place, the classroom, to facilitate learning, they would lose the hands-on guidance from the instructor.

As presented in chapter IV, analysis of data collected from initial interviews, survey, and interactions recorded on WebCT indicated that multiple influences affecting how students approached their experience of learning online. The research findings, presented as answer to research question one in chapter IV, further supported previous studies which contended that instruction quality is evaluated based on what "educational values we hold" and that our educational values are shaped by "cultural norms", "philosophy of learning" and "personal preference for learning" (Bentley, Tinney & Chia, 2005). To better understand and to organize the data, the researcher proposed a framework entitled, *Process of Vietnamese Learning Culture Adapting to American Online Learning* (see Figure 12). The researcher built the framework based on Creswell's Grounded Theory Coding from Open Coding to the Axial Coding Paradigm where "how certain factors influence the phenomenon leading to the use of specific strategies with certain outcomes" (Creswell, 2008, p. 437). Specifically, the proposed framework visually explains the process where Vietnamese students' evaluation and expectation of their online learning experience were influenced by their education and work

backgrounds which then also led to how successful they were in being able to formulate learning strategies to navigate through the course activities.

Confirming Rungtusanatham, Ellram, Siferd, and Salik's four online learning models which outlined issues related to approaches to learning pace, course content and course delivery (Rungtusanatham et al, 2004), this study's data had shown that students experienced learning online within the two contexts, Course Organization Context and Course Interaction Context, and their various demographic as well as educational backgrounds influenced how they evaluated the online learning experience. Through open coding process, five theoretical categories emerged. The five theoretical categories included (1) students' background, (2) perceived benefits, (3) essential skills, (4) supports expected and/or received, and (5) sense of community. The five categories and their sub-categories were summarized in Table 11 and were discussed in chapter IV.

Process of Vietnamese Learning Culture Adapting to American Online Learning

From the five emerged categories and their associated causal conditions, the researcher's proposed framework, Process of Vietnamese Learning Culture Adapting to American Online Learning, represents the relationships amongst the contexts, conditions, and strategies involved in the students' experience of learning online. Within the process of learning online, as "causal conditions" (Creswell, 2008, p. 437), students brought to their online learning experience the various educational backgrounds; their work

experience which gave the majority of the students the English language skills as well as some exposure to the Marketing practices; essential computing skills or lack of these skills; and their expectations of perceived benefits for attending this hybrid online course. These background conditions acted as influences to students' online learning experience. Furthermore, based on their initial interactions with learning online within the two contexts, Course Organization and Course Interaction, students recognized the need to have adapting strategies. Thus, for a successful online learning experience, students identified the need for (1) better time management, (2) being better prepared for chat room participation through completing reading assignments, (3) being more active in team works and Discussion Board debates, and (4) learning through reaching out to other students for knowledge sharing. These adapting strategies were found to influence Vietnamese students' experience of online learning that occurred within the Course Organization Context and Course Interaction Context. Consequent to the opportunity to learn Marketing concepts in the online environment, students initially resisted, resigned, and then reluctantly accepted that this hybrid online course was the only way that this particular Marketing professor can offer to students in Vietnam. However, once students had completed the hybrid online course, they came to realize both the perceived and the unexpected benefits such as (1) time savings and flexibility that online learning affords; (2) attaining an American education without having to travel away from their home country; (3) realizing that they can successfully adapt to a different way of learning and that they can learn from peers as well as from the instructor; (4) growing in confidence

that they can be active learners through collaboration and participation. The visual picture of the proposed framework is shown in Figure 12.

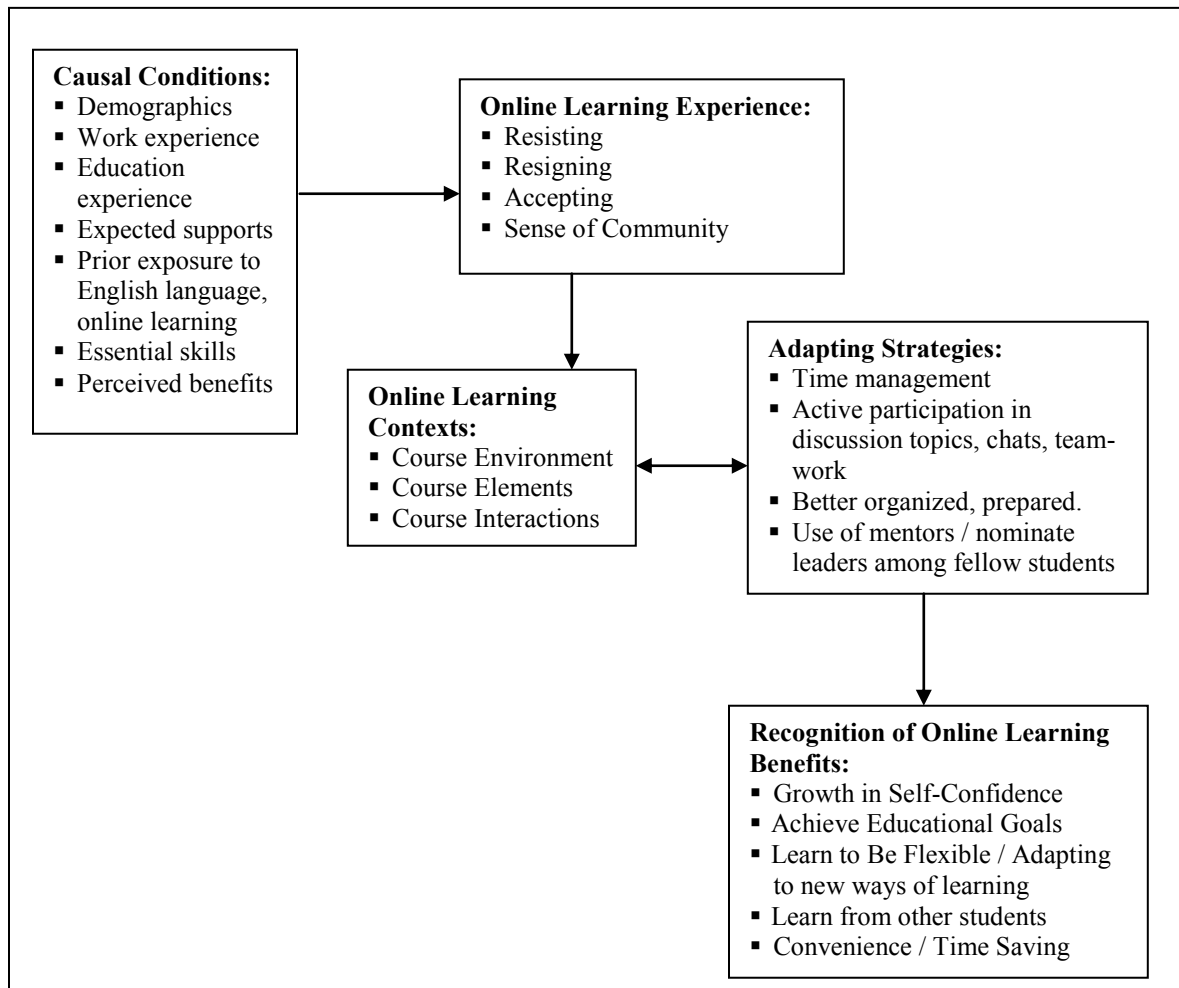


Figure 12: Process of Vietnamese Learning Culture Adapting to American Online Learning

In the following sections, using the components within the proposed framework, Process of Vietnamese Learning Culture Adapting to American Online Learning, and the research data as the basis for analysis, the researcher will further elaborate on the students' online learning experience, their adapting strategies, and the eventual realized benefits of online learning.

Online Learning Experience

In reviewing the students' education backgrounds, all of the student participants indicated that they had never attended a formally designed online learning course where the Internet rather than brick-and-mortar classroom was the learning environment, where learning goals were identified and clearly structured, learning expectations were outlined, and students were graded on their class participation as well as test performances. As stated previously, students in Vietnam are accustomed to a group learning environment where students are assigned into a specific group/cohort and they stay together throughout their program of study (Wikipedia, Education in Vietnam, n.d.). Vietnamese students are accustomed to going to class to sit through lectures. In contrast, the nature of online learning designs, under the premise of constructivist learning, dictates that students are expected to be independent and active learners (Bruning, Schraw, & Ronning, 1995). As advocated by Grandzol and Grandzol (2006), the hybrid online course in this research went even further by attempting to emulate an active learning environment utilizing Western instructional design best practices such as "facilitating student learning through guided discussion, encouraging and rewarding collaboration,

asking follow-up questions in chat sessions, encouraging divergent thinking skills by using open-ended questions and diverse points of view” (p. 8-12).

At the beginning of this hybrid online learning course, students were asked to email the instructor their self-introductions within which students were asked to provide answer to the question “What are your expectations from attending this course?” Only a few of the students provided an answer to this question and their responses primarily targeted the technological aspects such as the need to have audio and video capabilities, utilizing webcam and recorder, so that students could see the instructor and listen to his lectures. It was suggested by the students that an online class needs a “conference room where everyone can see the same screen of what’s happening in class”. One of the differences between distance learning versus online learning is that in the distance learning environment, students gather in a specific classroom which is located in a different location from the instructor and student-instructor interactions are facilitated via audio/video recordings; whereas, in the online learning environment, students are not expected to be physically at a specific location at a specific time and student-instructor interactions are facilitated via the Internet. Based on the students’ initial responses, it was apparent that they were thinking of being in the distance learning environment rather than an online learning environment. As discussed in the literature reviews section, considering the traditional education practice in Vietnam where students are accustomed to be passive learners and to being grouped into cohorts for the duration of their program of study, the instructor is regarded as an authority figure who decides what students

should learn and is the holder and dispenser of the knowledge, the students' initial expectations reflected their preference to maintain the traditional way of learning (teacher-centered), face-to-face interaction, and the need to see and talk with teacher physically.

Once the 6-weeks hybrid learning course was completed, students were asked to fill out an end-of-the-course survey. To identify the students' expectation gap between the beginning and at the end of the course, two open-ended questions were included in the survey: "At the beginning of the online portion of this Marketing course, what did you expect online learning should be like?" and "At the end of the online portion of this Marketing course, what did you expect online learning should be like?" Analysis of their answers indicated these recurring themes:

Traditional Learning vs. Constructive Learning

In Vietnam, the traditional learning model has a teacher's role is that of an authoritative figure who determines what students should learn and the teacher is responsible for providing students with the exact answers to all questions. In contrast, online learning has constructive learning as its foundation where there is an underlining expectation that an online learner should be an independent learner and in the learning process, be able to critically analyze information presented (Bruning, Schraw, & Ronning, 1995; Mayer, 1999; Volery & Lord, 2000; Mills & Harvey, 2005). As illustrated by students' expectations at the beginning of the course, the different beliefs in how learning occurs emerged from statements made by the students who enrolled in this

hybrid online learning course. Students' comments reflected their learning expectations which are implicitly based on their prior learning experiences. Consistently, students were expecting that online learning would emulate the traditional Vietnamese teaching model. Thus, Mills and Harvey (2005) advised that in designing instruction, attention should be paid toward "different approaches for different overseas market" and "different learning styles in students."

Distinction between Synchronous vs. Asynchronous Learning

As the data collected from students indicated, students had no clear understanding of the difference between synchronous learning vs. asynchronous learning. While students were aware that the course would be conducted via the Internet, their expectation was that the learning activities would be as if it was a face-to-face classroom with the exception that technology in the form of video and audio will compensate for the instructor being physically located elsewhere. Thus, rather than the expected verbal interaction, students were confronted with text-based interaction where a novice level in computing and typing skills presented an immediate barrier to a successful online learning experience.

While this hybrid Marketing course was predominantly structured as an asynchronous online learning environment, advanced awareness of students' common educational practices and their initial resistance to learning online dictated that chat room as a synchronous activity should be included to facilitate the student-instructor interaction. This instruction design feature which combined asynchronous and

synchronous features to support students' learning confirmed Sims et al's assertion that online learning must be "conceptualized as an environment that integrates collaboration, communication, and engaging content with specific groups and independent learning activities and tasks" (Sims, Dobbs, & Hand, 2002).

Adapting Strategies

Within the researcher's proposed framework, Process of Vietnamese Learning Culture Adapting to American Online Learning, identified causal conditions influenced how students experienced online learning and consequently, causing students to come up with strategies to adapt to learning in the online environment within the context of both course organization and courser interaction. As causal conditions, students' lack of experience with online learning and with the chat sessions being text-based where students and instructor interacted via typing information on a WebCT screen rather than speaking or having visual contact, students experienced chaos and frustration in the initial chat sessions as indicated through data collected from chat log and students' answers to the survey questionnaire. Also from the survey, it was noted that students perceived learning via the Internet as being impersonal and therefore, they would not get sufficient attention from the instructor. This finding confirmed Bentley et al's contention that Vietnamese students, identified as high-context learners, "*require* more social context in order to read the meaning of the communication and how to respond appropriately" (Bentley, Tinney, & Chia, 2005). Yet conversely, it is this same perception of online learning being an impersonal environment that gave students a sense of obscurity and

thus, helped students to overcome the in-classroom shyness that is typical of Vietnamese students. The impersonal nature of online learning provided students a degree of self-confidence where they felt comfortable to express themselves. As the result, students' level of interaction was much higher than expected in a traditional face-to-face class of Vietnamese students.

Student interactions with the instructor in this hybrid online Marketing course required students to login to WebCT at scheduled chat hours, twice per week. In designing the course, the scheduled chat hours were intended as instructor's office hours where students had the opportunity to ask questions and interact with the instructor. In practice, however, students enrolled in this hybrid online Marketing course had the expectation that every scheduled chat session with the instructor should be a full lecture over the assigned reading given by the instructor. Thus, the intended nature of chat hours was enhanced to include both limited lecture and guided discussion, based on questions posed by the instructor, with reviews of reading chapters in order to help students to adapt to online learning without losing the guidance from the instructor that students have been conditioned to expect in a face-to-face classroom. The change in practice of how chat hours should be conducted followed the Continuum of Knowledge Acquisition Model (Jonassen et al, 1993) where the progression of learning moves from introductory to expert. Since this online learning course introduced the principles of Marketing, students were expected to be in the introductory learning phase. By following Jonassen et al's Continuum of Knowledge Acquisition Model (1993), chat hours was structured to

enable students to understand the Marketing theories through reading assignments and participating in guided discussions with the instructor. This instructional approach of guided discussions also followed the method of “graduated prompting” (Campioné & Brown, 1987; Newman et al., 1989) as cited by Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (1999). Further confirmation of active approach to learning and transfer where “learners actively choose and evaluate strategies, consider resources, and receive feedback” (Bransford et al, 1999), data evidence found in specific questions that students posed in chat log which closely followed the reading assignments, showed students’ attempts at making sense of their newly acquired knowledge.

Additionally, data collected from chat room log demonstrated that chat room chaos issue rooted in students’ lack of prior experience in online learning as well as a newfound confidence and lack of awareness of how chat room protocols should be observed. In realizing that some rules should be established in order for all to benefit from the online chat sessions, students used their face-to-face in class’ practices such as raising hands and taking turns to speak in order to propose online behaviors such as limiting five postings per topic, ending their posting with the word ‘over’ to signal that they have completed their thoughts, and requesting instructor to type in all capital letters for students to identify instructor’s discussion more easily.

Another adapting strategy for students participating in this case study showed that they continued to depend on their group study structure for collaboration and informal nomination of leaders among students for expert guidance to help them progressing

through the online learning course. This finding supports the instruction design proposition where “knowledge evolves through social negotiation and through the evaluation of the viability of individual understanding” (Savery & Duffy, 2001).

As part of the adapting strategy to keep up with reading assignments and case study analyses, students commented in the survey that they realized the need to be better organized and to have time management skill. Various studies had indicated that to be successful in online learning, students must have the dedication and must know how to use their available time efficiently (Morgan & Tam, 1999; Saba, 2000; Vamosi, Pierce, & Slotkin, 2004). In design this hybrid online course, the syllabus and course calendar served as a planning and organization tool for students to manage their various assignments and due dates.

Students’ comments from end-of-course survey and chat log showed that as they progressed through the course and became self-sufficient with the various features of WebCT, they expressed less anxiety and frustration and became more enthusiastic in Discussion Board postings as well as Chat Room discussions. This observation further confirmed Song’s (2005) research finding as cited by Hill, Song, and West (2009) that learners become active participants in online activities once they are familiar with the online technology.

Recognition of Online Learning Benefits

As previously presented in the Chapter IV, since the students enrolled in this Marketing course had never attended an online learning course, their expectations were

based on their prior learning experiences in Vietnam where students meet in a classroom to receive lectures from the instructor and learning is equated to memorizing. Thus, students initially expressed doubt that learning online would be suitable for this Marketing course. This expression of doubt against online learning supported the finding conducted by May, Acquaviva, Dorfman, and Posey (2009) in a study of medical students attending an asynchronous online course. May et al (2009) found that 91% of the students considered learning online “decreased opportunity for social interaction with classmates and faculty.”

However, in attending this online learning course that was modeled after the constructivist learning theories as advocated by Jonassen’s Constructivist Learning Environments Model (1999), Merrill’s First Principles of Instruction Model (2002a), and Berge’s e-learning design model (2002) where learning was achieved through solving problem-based case studies that required application of knowledge acquired from the course; students were expected to be the active participants. It was difficult for students to grasp the new concept of their being required to take on a more active role in learning. While text-based interactions with instructors gave students anxiety and frustration, students also indicated in the end of the course survey that they recognized an improvement in their English writing skill for both grammar and appropriate language usage; learned how to debate and study with other students; and gained confidence in expressing their dissenting opinions.

Since the majority of students enrolled in this 6-weeks hybrid online course were working full-time, by not having to physically attend class, students realized the previously unaware benefits such as time saving from not having to commute after work to school; ease of extracting course content/discussion notes/chat info from WebCT; and the afforded flexibility to share learning and knowledge among students. Students' answers indicated their placing high value on the difference of Western education practices such as the opportunities for exchanges of opinions with peers through relevant case study analyses and Discussion Board interactions. This finding reinforced previous study conducted by Vamosi et al (2004) where it was suggested that students' level of satisfaction is decreased when there was less student-student interaction.

Furthermore, unanticipated gain from online learning was the degree of self-confidence that students acquired from the bi-weekly chat sessions with the instructor and the Discussion Board exercises revolving around the Discussion Topics. By the end of the course, students' satisfactory grades, earned through various quizzes and exams, indicated that they have gained the fundamental knowledge of marketing theories. In addition to this quantitative data and based on students' responses, their implicit expectations had also been realized through this course. Students acquired benefits such as gaining confidence in online learning; getting exposure in collaborative learning with classmates; getting practical knowledge in the learning management systems that are considered commonly utilized in American higher education institutions; and learning

how to manage time to better prepared the students for additional online or hybrid courses in once they arrive in the United States for further studies.

Swan (2001) found that “three general factors - clarity of design, interaction with instructors, and active discussion among course participants - significantly influenced students' satisfaction and perceived learning” (p. 306). Based on the students’ survey responses, students consistently valued the use of Discussion Board as a major instructional design feature that contributed to their learning and enabling the interaction with other students. Considering the passive learning environment in Vietnam, this hybrid online learning course was structured in such a way that students were required to participate in Discussion Topics and to post their opinions on the Discussion Board in order to foster more active learning. Students indicated that as they became accustomed to stating their own opinion with respect to each of the five Discussion Topics that they were required to post on Discussion Board, they gained more confidence. Additionally, in the process of responding to other students’ postings, students became more self-assured in stating their viewpoints and debating opposing opinions. Students’ enthusiastic use of Discussion Board to exchange opinions related to the Discussion Topics indicated that they had recognized the value of active learning and thus this research’s findings corroborated Ragan’s conclusion that instructional design features that further support or enable students to be active and independent learners should always be considered in the construction of an online course (Ragan, 2004). As indicated in Ragan’s *Emerging Guiding Principles and Practices* (2004), effective use of electronic tools such as

Discussion Board to promote varying types of interactions between student-to-student, student-to-content and student-to-instructor provide learners “the opportunity to build confidence and competence.” Since English is a secondary language for these students, students’ selection of Discussion Board as a preferred asynchronous form of online learning further supported other studies’ results that Hill, Song, and West (2009) cited as allowing students “more time to reflect” before having to post their responses. To some extent, the chosen instructional design features that encourage students’ interaction among themselves such as Discussion Topics and use of Discussion Board, Team Chat Room, and Team Case Studies were also helped by the instructor’s strategy of requiring students to use these features to earn their grades. This mandatory practice provided students with additional impetus to participate and to contribute actively.

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to explore how a particular group of students from Vietnam, who have been more accustomed to being taught in the face-to-face and traditional learning model where the instructor has the responsibility to provide the knowledge to students, attempted to learn in an online learning environment that was designed with a constructive learning model where students were expected to be active learners. Toward this purpose, the researcher has provided descriptive data gathered from emails, discussion boards, chat rooms, and end-of-the-course survey that illustrated the students’ education background, learning expectations, and reactions to online learning. Through constant comparative data analysis, students’ online learning experience was

identified as being influenced by their backgrounds, expectations, and within the contexts of course organization and course interaction. Thus, in identifying the influences and outcomes of student's online learning experience, the findings of this case study further supported suggestions for online education best practices where course design should include elements such as setting clear goals and expectations for learners; multiple representations of course content; frequent opportunities for active learning through student-student interactions; frequent and constructive feedback; flexibility and choice in satisfying course objectives; and instructor guidance and support (Grandzol & Grandzol, 2006).

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative research involved studying a specific group of students enrolled in one online course at a particular university in Vietnam. Creswell (2008) advised that in the matter of selecting participants, "homogeneous sampling" is suitable for the purpose of "describing some subgroup in depth" (p. 215). While the findings from this research may raise an additional awareness of the need to pay attention to each specific group of students' needs and expectations when designing online courses, the limited sample size and specific selection of participants for this research prevented the findings to be directly generalized to the larger population. Thus from this aspect, an attempt to standardize instruction designs for online learning should take in consideration of the specific target audience.

Recommendations for Future Research

As an extension of this research, it appears that there are additional treatments related to instructional designs that should be considered in future research:

1. With the technological advancement in video and audio teleconferencing systems, how would the use of these new technologies as a replacement for text-based chat room enhance the students' online learning experience?
2. What changes in design models and learning methods are needed to be more responsive to specific student population? How to strike a balance in instruction designs and target students' learning styles in order to be successful in meeting students' learning needs?
3. An experimental design could be introduced in Vietnam where competing learning models introduced by Rungtusanatham et al (2004) such as Overview Model with Feedback vs. Managerial Learning Model could be constructed and tested empirically. Given the current political environment where higher education policies and practices are centrally controlled by the government, consideration should be made toward how the instruction's designs can be structured to account for various treatments that would be allowed by the authority.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Course Syllabus

Instructors:	Dr. T. C....., Dean –School of Business, U... Ms. Minh Pham, Doctoral Candidate – University of Texas, Austin	E-mail:	Use the WebCT Address
Office:	Suite	Fax:
Phone:	Virtual Chat Room:	(HCM City Time) 7:30 pm – 9:00 pm

Required Book and Web Browser

- Kotler, Philip; Keller, Kevin Lane; Ang, Swee Hoon; Leong, Siew Meng; and Tan, Chin Tiong. **Marketing Management: An Asian Perspective.** Fourth Edition, Prentice-Hall, 2006.
- Web Browser: Internet Explorer 5.0 or Firefox.

Course Goals

MKTG 5031 is the introductory course in marketing. It covers the spectrum of basic concepts in marketing using an analytical framework.

Specific learning goals for the course include:

- To develop an understanding of marketing as a continuous process that exists in organizations of all types.
- To stress the importance of customer and market focus.
- To examine the external forces that affect organizations in a rapidly changing global market.
- To become sensitive to the ethical and public policy dimensions of marketing decision-making.

Course Format

- The textbook is very comprehensive and requires a time commitment for you to complete a thorough reading of the chapters as they are assigned. It will be difficult to

catch up if you fall several chapters behind. My suggestion is that you should read the material according to the course schedule.

- The course schedule is laid out in weekly assignments.
- There are assignments associated with each week’s reading. After reading the material, you should use the “Check Your Understanding” item to assess your understanding.

Chat Room Schedule

Chat Date	Group	Instructor
Jan. 06, 2009	B	Dr. C./Ms. Pham
Jan. 07, 2009	A	Dr. C./Ms. Pham
Feb. 02, 2009	A	Dr. C.
Feb. 04, 2009	B	Ms. Pham
Feb. 03 & Feb. 05, 2009	B	Ms. Pham
Feb. 09 & Feb. 11, 2009	A	Ms. Pham
Feb. 10 & Feb. 12, 2009	B	Dr. C.
Feb. 16 & Feb. 18, 2009	A	Dr. C.
Feb. 17 & Feb. 19, 2009	B	Ms. Pham
Feb. 23 & Feb. 25, 2009	A	Ms. Pham
Feb. 24 & Feb. 26, 2009	B	Dr. C.

Discussion Board

There will be an opportunity for you to participate and contribute to class discussions through out the course. There will be three discussion questions to which you should respond. You will post your comments to the Discussion Board. **Keep in mind that the Discussion Board will be worth 50 points of your final grade.** My evaluation of your contributions will be based on how well you meet these criteria:

1. Support the main ideas of your posting with details relevant to the course material.
2. Check back to read responses from other classmates.
3. Take time to think about and reply to those classmates’ responses, either agreeing or disagreeing with the points made.

Each Discussion Topic will be available for one week. Please refer to the Calendar for specific dates.

Week	Discussion Board Topic	Due Date
1	Marketing Debate, p. 32: Does Marketing Create or Satisfy Needs?	Feb. 08, 2009
2	Marketing Debate, p. 100: Is Consumer Behavior More a Function of a Person's Age or Generation?	Feb. 15, 2009
3	Marketing Debate, p. 273: Is Mass Marketing Dead?	Feb. 22, 2009
4	Marketing Debate, p. 481: Is the Right Price A Fair Price?	Mar. 1, 2009
5	Marketing Debate, p. 745: Is the World Coming Closer Together?	Mar. 7, 2009
6	Case Studies in Class with Instructors	Mar. 9, 2009

Case Studies

- There are 4 case studies for students to work on individually throughout the course.
- There is one team project:
 - Students will be assigned to a team.
 - One unique case study will be assigned to each team during the 1st week.
 - Teams will work on their case studies during the 5th week.
 - Team presentations will be done during the 6th week (GCP #15 – Friday 3/13; GCP #16 – Saturday 3/14).
- Completed case studies are to be submitted with the appropriate weekly assignment.
- Students will have the opportunity to modify their case studies during the presentation week (Week #6). The final due date for all case studies is March 29, 2009.
- Each individual case study is worth 50 points toward your final grade.
- Team case study is worth 100 points toward your final grade.

Exams

- There are four quizzes to be taken throughout the course.
- The format is multiple-choice questions based on the text and notes, and case-based application questions related to the reading materials.
- The quizzes will be timed and will be taken in class.
- The quizzes are closed book, closed notes.

Exams Schedule for Spring 2009

Assessment	Readings	Due Date
Quiz 1	Kotler, et al. 1, 2, 3 , 5	Feb. 14, 2009
Quiz 2	Kotler, et al. 6, 7, 8, 9	Feb. 21, 2009
Quiz 3	Kotler, et al. 12, 13, 14	Feb. 28, 2009
Quiz 4	Kotler, et al. 15, 16, 18, 21	Mar. 21, 2009

Student Evaluation

Grades will be based on the number of points you earned on quiz scores, the article review and your contribution to the discussions over the period of the course. The point value for each activity will be:

Team Case Study	100 Points
Case Studies - 4 cases @ 50 points	200 Points
Discussion Board	50 Points
Quiz 1	75 Points
Quiz 2	75 Points
Quiz 3	75 Points
Quiz 4	75 Points
Total	650 Points

The grading scale will be:

A	95% and above	C+	79% - 77%
A-	90% - 94%	C	76% - 73%
B+	89% - 87%	C-	72% - 70%

B	86% - 83%	D	69% - 60%
B-	82% - 80%	F	59% and below

WebCT Student Orientation

If you missed the on-line orientation or you need more information about WebCT, check out UHCL's online [WebCT student tutorial](#).

Appendix B: Self-Introduction Questions

Welcome to MKTG 5031.

We would like to begin this class by having each student to introduce yourself. Please answer the following questions and feel free to share with us any other additional pertinent information:

1. Are you a full-time or part-time student?
2. Are you working full-time or part-time? If yes, do you speak or write English at your place of employment?
3. What is the area of discipline for your bachelor degree (natural sciences - biology, chemistry; business – accounting, finance, marketing; education; math; literature; liberal art; computer science..etc..)?
4. Do you have any prior experience with taking class or training through the Internet? If yes, how many Internet-based class or training?
5. Do you have any prior knowledge about marketing concepts and/or practices either through formal education or place of employment?
6. What are your expectations from attending this course?

Please post your response as an email message to Dr. T. C... in WebCT.

Thank you,

Dr. C... and Ms. Pham

Appendix C: Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in Research **The University of Texas at Austin**

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The Principal Investigator (the person in charge of this research) or his/her representative will provide you with a copy of this form to keep for your reference, and will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything you don't understand before deciding whether or not to participate. Your participation is entirely voluntary and your refusal to participate will not influence current or future relationships with University of Houston, Clear Lake or affect your grade in any way.

Title of Research Study:

Student Satisfaction and Academic Achievement in a Culturally Diverse E-Learning Environment: A Case Study.

Principal Investigator(s) (include faculty sponsor), UT affiliation, and Telephone Number(s):

Dr. Min Liu, UT Professor, mliu@mail.utexas.edu
Minh Pham, Doctoral Candidate, minhpham@mail.utexas.edu

Funding source: N/A

What is the purpose of this study?

This study will attempt to identify the effective elements constructed within the marketing online course that would enhance students' learning achievement by looking at three factors: course content organization; instructor's teaching methodology/practice; and students' perception of the online learning experience.

What will be done if you take part in this research study?

- Throughout the course duration in Spring 2009 semester, your online behaviors such as posting, replying, reading, uploading or downloading via your class' online forum will be recorded. The recorded data will only be collected for the purpose of research analysis when the course has ended.

- When the course has ended, you are invited to participate in answering a survey questionnaire. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete and focus on your experiences in taking this course in the online learning environment.
- Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to stop participating in the research at any time or to decline to answer any specific question without any concern that your will be negatively affected.
- Your participation in this research is confidential. Only the researcher will have access to your identity and to information that can be associated with your identity. In the event of publication of this research, no personally identifying information will be disclosed.

The Project Duration is: four months.

What are the possible discomforts and risks?

This study involves minimal risk, that is, there are no risks to participants' physical or mental health beyond those encountered in the normal course of everyday life. No personal or identifying data will be collected from participants. The survey questionnaire will be read only for research purposes by the researcher, and will be kept in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office.

If you wish to discuss the information above or any other risks you may experience, you may ask questions now or call the Principal Investigator listed on the front page of this form.

What are the possible benefits to you or to others?

This study will contribute to a better understanding of effective methods, practices, tools being utilized in a culturally diverse online learning environment. The findings of the study may be helpful for future designs of instructional courseware for the international students.

If you choose to take part in this study, will it cost you anything?

There is no cost for you to participate in this study.

Will you receive compensation for your participation in this study?

If you wish, the researcher will give you the results of the study. Any other compensation for your participation will not be provided.

What if you are injured because of the study?

No physical risk is expected in this study.

If you do not want to take part in this study, what other options are available to you?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse to be in the study, and your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with University of Houston, Clear Lake or affect your grade in any way.

How can you withdraw from this research study and who should you call if you have questions?

If you wish to stop your participation in this research study for any reason, you should contact the co-principal investigator: Minh Pham at minhpham@mail.utexas.edu. You should also call the co-principal investigator for any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research.

You are free to withdraw your consent and stop participation in this research study at any time and your refusal will not influence current or future relationships with University of Houston, Clear Lake or affect your grade in any way. Throughout the study, the researchers will notify you of new information that may become available and that might affect your decision to remain in the study.

In addition, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or if you have complaints, concerns, or questions about the research, please contact Jody Jensen, Ph.D., Chair, The University of Texas at Austin Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects at (512) 232-2685 or the Office of Research Support and Compliance at (512) 471-8871 or email: orsc@uts.cc.utexas.edu.

How will your privacy and the confidentiality of your research records be protected?

If, in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, then the University of Texas at Austin will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. Your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order. The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study.

If the results of this research are published or presented at scientific meetings, your identity will not be disclosed.

Will the researcher benefit from your participation in this study?

This study is for the researcher’s dissertation. Therefore, the researcher will not have any benefit from your participation beyond publishing or presenting the results.

Signatures:

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

Minh Pham

01/01/2009

Signature and printed name of person obtaining consent Date

You have been informed about this study’s purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been advised that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

Printed Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant

Date

You have consented to give permission to the study’s researcher to use your responses to the survey for “other educational purposes”.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Co-Principal Investigator

Date

Appendix D: Online Learning Experience Survey

Purpose of survey questionnaire:

To document the students' perceptions about their online learning experience.

MKTG 5031 - Online Learning Survey

Q1. The online system, WebCT, is easy to use.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q2. The online system, WebCT, makes it easy for me to find the content I need.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q3. The online system, WebCT, provides useful content

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q4. The online system, WebCT, makes it easy for me to discuss questions and/or answers with my teachers.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat

- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q5. The online system, WebCT, makes it easy for me to share what I learn with other students.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q6. The course content stored on WebCT is easy for me to understand.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q7. I will take another online business course if offered by VNU/CIE.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q8. Circle as many of the following items that you think had been helpful to your online learning experience.

- a. Organization of course's contents
- b. Syllabus
- c. Discussion topics
- d. Use of Discussion Board
- e. Use of Email within WebCT
- f. Chat rooms
- g. Individual Case Studies

h. Team Case Study

Q9. Rank the following items in order of most helpful to least helpful (1 as being most helpful; 8 as being least helpful) as related to meeting your learning's goals and expectations:

- Organization of course's contents
- Syllabus
- Discussion topics
- Use of Discussion Board
- Use of Email within WebCT
- Chat rooms
- Individual Case Studies
- Team Case Study

Q10. List the course activities and/or online WebCT features that you think had contributed positively to your learning experience.

Q11. List the course activities and/or online WebCT features that you think had contributed positively to your interaction with other students in the Marketing course.

Q12. At the beginning of the online portion of this Marketing course, what did you expect online learning should be like?

Q13. At the end of the online portion of this Marketing course, how would you describe your online learning experience?

Q14. Given an opportunity to make changes to this online portion of this Marketing course, what would you like to have included or excluded in order to enhance your online learning experience?

Appendix E: Measurement of Electronic Learner Satisfaction

Q1. The e-learning system provides content that exactly fits your needs.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q2. The e-learning system provides useful content.

- h. Strongly Agree
- i. Agree
- j. Agree Somewhat
- k. Neutral
- l. Disagree Somewhat
- m. Disagree
- n. Strongly Disagree

Q3. The e-learning system provides sufficient content.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q4. The e-learning system provides up-to-date content.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q5. The e-learning system is easy to use.

- h. Strongly Agree
- i. Agree
- j. Agree Somewhat
- k. Neutral
- l. Disagree Somewhat
- m. Disagree
- n. Strongly Disagree

Q6. The e-learning system makes it easy for you to find the content you need.

- h. Strongly Agree
- i. Agree
- j. Agree Somewhat
- k. Neutral
- l. Disagree Somewhat
- m. Disagree
- n. Strongly Disagree

Q7. The content provided by the e-learning system is easy to understand.

- h. Strongly Agree
- i. Agree
- j. Agree Somewhat
- k. Neutral
- l. Disagree Somewhat
- m. Disagree
- n. Strongly Disagree

Q8. The e-learning system is user-friendly.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q9. The operation of the e-learning system is stable.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q10. The e-learning system responds to your requests fast enough.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q11. The e-learning system makes it easy for you to evaluate your learning performance.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree

- g. Strongly Disagree
- Q12. The testing methods provided by the e-learning system are easy to understand.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Agree Somewhat
 - d. Neutral
 - e. Disagree Somewhat
 - f. Disagree
 - g. Strongly Disagree
- Q13. The testing methods provided by the e-learning system are fair.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Agree Somewhat
 - d. Neutral
 - e. Disagree Somewhat
 - f. Disagree
 - g. Strongly Disagree
- Q14. The e-learning system provides secure testing environments.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Agree Somewhat
 - d. Neutral
 - e. Disagree Somewhat
 - f. Disagree
 - g. Strongly Disagree
- Q15. The e-learning system provides testing results promptly.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Agree Somewhat
 - d. Neutral
 - e. Disagree Somewhat
 - f. Disagree
 - g. Strongly Disagree
- Q16. The e-learning system enables you to control your learning progress.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Agree Somewhat
 - d. Neutral
 - e. Disagree Somewhat
 - f. Disagree
 - g. Strongly Disagree
- Q17. The e-learning system enables you to learn the content you need.
- a. Strongly Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Agree Somewhat

- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q18. The e-learning system enables you to choose what you want to learn.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q19. The e-learning system records your learning progress and performance.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q20. The e-learning system provides the personalized learning support.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q21. The e-learning system makes it easy for you to discuss questions with your teachers.

- h. Strongly Agree
- i. Agree
- j. Agree Somewhat
- k. Neutral
- l. Disagree Somewhat
- m. Disagree
- n. Strongly Disagree

Q22. The e-learning system makes it easy for you to discuss questions with other students.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q23. The e-learning system makes it easy for you to share what you learn with the learning community.

- h. Strongly Agree
- i. Agree
- j. Agree Somewhat
- k. Neutral
- l. Disagree Somewhat
- m. Disagree
- n. Strongly Disagree

Q24. The e-learning system makes it easy for you to access the shared content from the learning community.

- i. Strongly Agree
- j. Agree
- k. Agree Somewhat
- l. Neutral
- m. Disagree Somewhat
- n. Disagree
- o. Strongly Disagree

Q25. As a whole, you are satisfied with the e-learning system.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

Q26. As a whole, the e-learning system is successful.

- a. Strongly Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Agree Somewhat
- d. Neutral
- e. Disagree Somewhat
- f. Disagree
- g. Strongly Disagree

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Vita

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