

**Graduate Student Perceptions of Social Presence in Online Accelerated
Master of Business Administration Programs**

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Graduate Student Perceptions of Social Presence in Online Accelerated

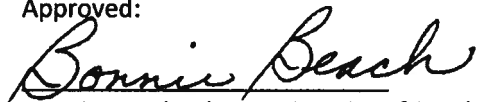
Master of Business Administration Programs

By: Larissa Cremeens

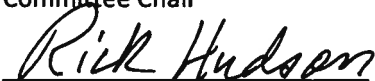
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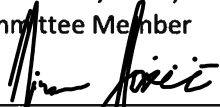
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Abstract

In recent years, there has been a growing trend towards offering courses in a more accelerated online learning format. This study investigates students' preferences to better inform faculty on whether learner-to-learner interactions that build social presence should be retained when condensing online courses. While there is research on social presence in online classes, little is known about student perceptions of social presence in online accelerated programs, such as MBA programs. This research utilizes the social presence questions from the Community of Inquiry Framework questionnaire, which was distributed to MBA program directors and leaders at mid-sized universities in the Midwest. The survey results indicated that students perceived high levels of social presence in online accelerated MBA programs surveyed. Furthermore, a moderate, positive correlation was found between high total social presence perception mean total scores and high satisfaction with these programs. The study also revealed little difference in social presence across various demographic characteristics, including gender, age, number of courses taken, hours worked in employment, and hours spent on coursework. This study provides evidence to support that social presence is still an important construct in the design, development, and delivery of online accelerated MBA programs. This study provides valuable evidence for best practices in creating online accelerated courses and programs that foster high levels of social presence and student satisfaction.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to many people in my life who supported me, and never gave up on me throughout this journey, especially my husband Derek and my wonderful children, Rhett and Emilia. Finally, to my first teacher and my mother, Nancy J. Staley, whose boundless love and inspiring strength continue to guide me every day. Though you are no longer with us, Mom, your spirit and legacy live on in my heart and in the work I do; this is for you.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Acknowledgments	iv
Dedication	v
Table of Contents	vi
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction	12
Problem of Practice	12
Background	13
Purpose of Study	13
Research Questions	14
Research Methods	14
Definition of Terms	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review	17
Theoretical Framework	17
Community of Inquiry Framework	17
Adult Learning Theory	21
Postpositive Worldview	21
History of Distance Education	22
Advancement of Technologies	23
Research in Online Learning	23
Online Learning Community	24
Instructor Best Practices for Online Courses	26
Interaction using Instructional Technologies	27
Student Perceptions of Using Instructional Technologies	28
Post-Pandemic and Online Learning Today	30
History of Accelerated Learning	30
Positive Outcomes of Accelerated Learning	31
Barriers to Accelerated Learning	32
Variety of Students' Reasons for Choosing Accelerated Programs	33
Graduate Student Perceptions of Social Presence in Online Accelerated Programs	34
Summary	35

Chapter 3: Methodology	36
Statement of Purpose	36
Framework	37
Community of Inquiry	37
Adult Learning Theory	38
Research Design	39
Population and Sample	39
Survey Design and Development	40
Validity and Reliability	43
Research Procedures	44
Administrating the Survey	44
Timeline	44
Ethical Considerations	45
Informed Consent	45
Analysis	46
Demographic Data	46
Research Question 1: What Are Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence in Their Online Accelerated Courses in Their MBA Program?	46
Research Question 2: Why Do Students Choose an Online Accelerated MBA Program?	47
Research Question 3: What Are Students' Satisfactions With Their Current Online Accelerated MBA Program?	48
Research Question 4: Is There a Relationship Between Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Reasons for Choosing an Online Accelerated MBA Program?	48
Research Question 5: Is There a Relationship Between Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Their Perceived Satisfaction With Their Online Accelerated MBA Program?	49
Research Question 6: Is There a Relationship Between Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Demographic Characteristics (Gender or Age), Number of Online MBA Courses Taken, Hours Worked Weekly, or Hours Worked on Coursework Weekly?	50
Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations	50
Assumptions	50
Limitations	51
Delimitations	52
Summary	52
Chapter 4: Findings	53
Description of the Sample	54

	viii
Demographics	55
Analysis of Research Questions	57
Research Question 1: What Are Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence in Their Online Accelerated Courses in Their MBA Program?	57
Research Question 2: Why Do Students Choose an Online Accelerated MBA Program?	61
Research Question 3: What Are Students' Satisfactions with Their Current Online Accelerated MBA Program?	65
Research Question 4: Is There a Relationship Between Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Their Reasons for Choosing an Online Accelerated MBA Program?	71
Research Question 5: Is There a Relationship Between Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Their Perceived Satisfaction with Their Online Accelerated MBA Program?	77
Research Question 6: Is There a Relationship Between Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Demographic Characteristics Such as Gender, Age, Number of Online MBA Courses Taken, Hours Worked Weekly, or the Hours Worked on Coursework Weekly?	85
Summary	92
Chapter 5: Discussion	94
Research Question 1: What Are Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence in Their Online Accelerated Courses in Their MBA Program?	95
Research Question 2: Why Do Students Choose an Online Accelerated MBA Program?	97
Research Question 3: What Are Students' Satisfactions with Their Current Online Accelerated MBA Program?	98
Research Question 4: Is There a Relationship Between Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Their Reasons for Choosing an Online Accelerated MBA Program?	99
Social Presence and Length of Courses	100
Social Presence and Convenience of the Online Format	101
Social Presence and Costs	101
Social Presence and Career Advancement	102
Research Question 5: Is There a Relationship Between Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Their Perceived Satisfaction of Their Online Accelerated MBA Program?	103
Social Presence and Pacing	103
Social Presence and Workload	103
Social Presence and Curriculum	104
Social Presence and Online Class Environment	105
Social Presence and Overall Satisfaction & Recommendation of the Program to Others	105

Research Question 6: Is There a Relationship Between Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Demographic Characteristics Such as Gender, Age, Number of Online Courses Taken, Number of Hours Worked Weekly, or the Hours Worked on Coursework Weekly?	106
Social Presence and Gender	106
Social Presence and Age	107
Social Presence and Number of Online Courses Taken	108
Social Presence and Number of Hours Worked in Job Weekly	109
Social Presence and Number of Hours Worked on Coursework Weekly	110
Implications for Practice	111
Limitations	112
Suggestions for Future Research	113
Summary	114
References	115
Appendices	134
Appendix A: Permission to Use Survey by Dr. Randy Garrison	134
Appendix B: Informed Consent	135
Appendix C: Survey	137
Appendix D: Pilot Testing of Survey	144
Procedures	144
Results	144

List of Tables

Table 1 Demographic Information: Gender	55
Table 2 <i>Demographic Information: Age</i>	56
Table 3 <i>Demographic Information: Number of Online Courses Taken at Current College/University</i>	56
Table 4 <i>Demographic Information: Information on Employment Status (Either Part- or Full-Time)</i>	56
Table 5 <i>Demographic Information: Number of Hours Worked at Employment per Week</i>	57
Table 6 <i>Demographic Information: Number of Hours Worked on Courses per Week</i>	57
Table 7 <i>Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence Descriptive Statistics</i>	60
Table 8 <i>Reasons for Choosing an Accelerated Online MBA Program: Descriptive Statistics</i>	61
Table 9 <i>Reasons for Choosing an Accelerated Online MBA Program: Themed Responses</i>	65
Table 10 <i>What Students Are Most Satisfied With in Their Accelerated Online MBA Program</i>	70
Table 11 <i>Overall Satisfaction With Accelerated Online MBA Program</i>	71
Table 12 <i>Kruskal–Wallis Test of Social Presence Scores Across Age Ranges</i>	86
Table 13 <i>Pairwise Comparisons of Age Ranges with Social Presence Total Score</i>	86
Table 14 <i>Kruskal–Wallis Test of Social Presence Scores Across Number of Courses Taken</i>	88
Table 15 <i>Pairwise Comparisons of Number of Courses with Social Presence Total Score</i>	89
Table 16 <i>Kruskal–Wallis Test of Social Presence Scores Across Number of Hours Worked</i>	90
Table 17 <i>Kruskal–Wallis Test of Social Presence Scores and Number of Hours Worked on Coursework</i>	91
Table 18 <i>Pairwise Comparisons of Number of Hours Worked on Coursework With Social Presence Total Score</i>	92

List of Figures

Figure 1 Social Presence Total Mean Score Frequencies	59
Figure 2 Reasons for Choosing: Length of Classes Histogram	62
Figure 3 Reasons for Choosing: Convenience of the Online Format Histogram	62
Figure 4 Reasons for Choosing: Cost Histogram	63
Figure 5 Reasons for Choosing: Career Advancement Histogram	63
Figure 6 Satisfaction with Pacing Histogram	67
Figure 7 Satisfaction with Workload Histogram	67
Figure 8 Satisfaction with Online Classroom Environment Histogram	68
Figure 9 Satisfaction with Curriculum Frequencies Histogram	68
Figure 10 Overall Satisfaction Histogram	69
Figure 11 Overall Recommendation Histogram	69
Figure 12 Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Length of Courses	72
Figure 13 Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Convenience of Online Format	73
Figure 14 Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Costs	75
Figure 15 Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Career Advancement	76
Figure 16 Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Scores and Perceptions of Pacing	78
Figure 17 Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Scores and Perceptions of Workload	79
Figure 18 Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Perceptions of Curriculum	80
Figure 19 Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Perceptions of Online Classroom Climate	82
Figure 20 Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Overall Perceived Satisfaction of MBA Program	83
Figure 21 Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Recommendation of Program to Others	84

Chapter 1: Introduction

Problem of Practice

Online learning is becoming increasingly prevalent, particularly among adult learners unable to participate in face-to-face courses due to geographical constraints and career commitments (Akaneghu, 2012; Sutton, 2022). This growing demand has led higher education institution leaders worldwide to explore novel approaches to virtual teaching and learning.

High course satisfaction in students is positively correlated with high levels of social presence (Alman et al., 2012; Baharudin et al., 2018; Bulu, 2012; Copley Cobb, 2011; Croxton, 2014; Nasir, 2020; Spears, 2012). Students feel satisfied based on their interaction and engagement in the online environment (Biner et al., 1994; Blakely & Major, 2019; Bornschlegl & Cashman, 2019; Nortvig et al., 2018; Sun et al., 2007; Zhu, 2012). Research informs faculty about the positive attributes of effective community-building activities such as learner-to-learner interaction (i.e., discussions, peer review, group projects, etc.) in online courses (Beaudoin, 2002; Dixson, 2010; Kolloff, 2001; Lock, 2007; Swan, 2002).

Accelerated learning has been present in higher education for decades. A newer trend is to offer online programs in an accelerated format by presenting courses in a sequence, in a cohort model, and in a shorter amount of time than a traditional 16-week format. Research has shown no difference between the length of the course and the successful completion of accelerated courses (Daniel, 2000; Donaldson & Graham, 2002; Johnson, 2009; Scott & Conrad, 1992; Seamon, 2004; Trekles & Sims, 2013).

Today, more graduate students find online learning a flexible, accessible, and convenient option for education (Cole et al., 2014). To meet the rise in online learning, higher education leaders must build community activities that students find and perceive beneficial to their overall learning in an online accelerated educational format.

In recent years, there has been a push to move courses from a traditional sixteen-week course to a more accelerated format. Faculty may have a hard time deciding what activities need to be combined

or eliminated due to the time restrictions. In response to the lack of time, faculty may choose to eliminate opportunities for learner-to-learner interaction which could decrease opportunities for building an online learning community. The reason for investigating this phenomenon is to know more about students' preferences to better inform faculty when they are tasked with condensing an online course. Do students truly find value in the learner-to-learner interaction pieces that help build social presence in online accelerated courses? This information could then be translated into a more authentic and valued student learning experience if faculty and online course designers take into consideration what students prefer in their online accelerated programs, specifically in terms of building social presence in an online accelerated format.

Background

This study focused on graduate students' perceptions of social presence in online accelerated courses and programs. Department leaders may ask faculty to restructure courses to fit into a shorter period, such as condensing a 16-week course into seven weeks. This redesign requires determining what to keep and what to eliminate due to the time constraints.

There exists research to inform the best practices of designing online MBA programs (Arbaugh, 2005; Arbaugh & Hwang, 2005; Arbaugh & Rau, 2006). There is also literature to support the effectiveness of social presence in online courses (Borup et al., 2012; Bush et al., 2010; Garrison et al., 1999; James et al., 2016; Smith Jaggars, 2014; Soles & Maduli-Williams, 2019; Whiteside, 2015).

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate graduate-level students' perceptions of social presence in their online accelerated MBA programs at mid-sized public, private, and for-profit institutions in the Midwestern United States. There is literature about the positive effects of social presence in online courses. However, the research is limited in evaluating students' perceptions of social

presence in online accelerated courses. The goal of this examination of student perceptions was to add to the literature and inform best practices of faculty and online course development administrators, such as instructional designers, in higher education institutions. This study's findings inform faculty and instructional designers to design and develop online accelerated courses based on what activities students perceive as the most beneficial.

Research Questions

The questions that guided this study were as follows:

1. What are graduate students' perceptions of social presence in their online accelerated courses in their MBA program?
2. Why do students choose an online accelerated MBA program?
3. What are students' satisfactions with their current online accelerated MBA program?
4. Is there a relationship between graduate students' perceptions of social presence and their reasons for choosing an online accelerated MBA program?
5. Is there a relationship between graduate students' perceptions of social presence and their perceived satisfaction with their online accelerated MBA program?
6. Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of social presence and demographic questions such as gender, age, number of online MBA courses taken, number of hours worked weekly, or the hours worked on coursework weekly?

Research Methods

This study was quantitative with a correlational research design. Data came from a single survey based on items from previously validated surveys and the results of the literature review. The survey was a means to examine graduate-level students' perceptions on social presence in their online accelerated

MBA programs at mid-sized public, private, and for-profit institutions in the Midwestern United States. The survey's reliability and validity were established before its use.

The population consisted of graduate students who had taken at least one online accelerated course in their MBA program at selected institutions. Participating students completed a social presence questionnaire developed and validated by Garrison et al. (1999) and additional questions based on findings from the literature to gauge their perceptions of their MBA program. Qualtrics was the tool used to format and deliver the survey and collect responses online. Identified MBA program chairs and other college representatives received a survey link, study description, detailed instructions, consent form, benefits, risks, and deadline for completion with a request to forward the email to students in their program. The survey link remained open for 14 days before deactivation. Program chairs received a reminder email 7 days after the start of the survey. Although data collection was anonymous, students could provide their email addresses for a chance to win one of four \$25 Amazon gift cards, selected from the completed surveys after the 14 days had elapsed. The data underwent analysis aligned with the research question using SPSS Version 28.0 (IBM Corp., 2021). Evaluating the collected data for normal distribution and assumptions occurred before the use of appropriate parametric or nonparametric tests.

Definition of Terms

The definitions of terms used in this study are as follows:

Accelerated learning: Programs and courses condensed into a shorter time frame, typically condensed from 16 weeks down to a variation of 12, 10, seven, or five weeks (Caskey, 1994; Martin & Culver, 2007; Scott, 1993; Seamon, 2004; Wlodkowski, 2003).

Community building: An explicit focus on building instructor-student relationships and rapport for students to feel like they belong and have a safe space to learn and communicate in an online environment (Conrad, 2005; Dixson, 2010; Liu et al., 2007; Lock, 2007; Shackelford & Maxwell, 2012).

Distance education: A type of learning in which the learner is not in the physical proximity of the instructor. Distance education requires alternate forms of communication such as email, phone, digital platforms, messaging, or other technologies to share materials and information between the student and the instructor (Dick, 2009; Harting & Erthal, 2005; Moore, 1972; Roffe, 2004).

Online education: A type of distance education with technology and computers used to design, develop, and deliver course material via a learning management system (LMS). Instructors and students use the LMS to post and submit assignments, and students use other technologies such as embedded videos, discussion technologies, etc. to interact with the content, their peers, and their instructors (Allen & Seaman, 2013; Shelton & Saltsman, 2005).

Social presence: How connected a learner feels in the online space, creating a sense of belonging. Having appropriate levels of interaction in an online course makes the learner feel supported and connected (Garrison et al., 1999; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Picciano, 2002; Rettie, 2005; Short et al., 1976; Tu & Mclsaac, 2002; Whiteman, 2002; Whiteside, 2015)

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In the fall of 2021, 1.8 million students enrolled in at least one online distance education course, with 1.3 million taking courses at a distance exclusively (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023). In the eighth edition of *The Changing Landscape of Online Education (CHLOE) Report* (Quality Matters [QM], 2023), over half of the reporting higher education institutions did not require formal faculty training in the design and development of online courses, even when faculty are already teaching online. Gathering insights from graduate students regarding their experiences, whether positive or negative, holds significance for instructors and academic institutions as they shape and refine their online programming (Kaifi et al., 2009). With a rise in online course offerings and the newer trend in offering accelerated courses online, more research is needed to evaluate students' perceptions of social presence and community building in their online courses.

Significant research has occurred on online students' perceptions of social presence. The literature on the intersectionality of student perceptions of social presence in online accelerated courses is limited. In general, the existing literature is not discipline-specific for evaluating the perceived effectiveness of social presence in online accelerated MBA programs.

The lenses of the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Swan et al., 2008) and Knowles' (1980) adult learning theory principles guided the literature review. Incorporated into this review are the historical contexts of distance education and accelerated courses; the importance of interaction and creating a culture of community in online education. As well as a discussion of the current, albeit limited, literature on social presence perceptions of online accelerated programs.

Theoretical Framework

Community of Inquiry Framework

The CoI framework stems from Dewey's (1897/1959) philosophy of collaborative–constructivist learning. The CoI framework is an application of Dewey's philosophy on constructivist learning to online

learning environments. To better understand online teaching and learning, Garrison et al. (1999) established the CoI framework to examine the interconnection of social, cognitive, and teaching presence in online education. The framework suggests the importance of the three interrelated presences that contribute to a meaningful educational experience in online settings: social, cognitive, and teaching. Akyol and Garrison (2008) used the CoI framework to evaluate graduate students' online learning experiences and found that all three presences showed a significant relationship with students' perceived satisfaction with online courses. Other researchers using this framework have focused on the role of social presence (Annand, 2011), the intersectionality of all three presences (Garrison et al., 1999), students' perceptions and satisfaction (Maddrell et al., 2020), and the student's perception of learning in online learning environments (Richardson & Swan, 2003; Swan, 2002).

Social Presence. Social presence refers to learners' ability to project themselves socially and emotionally in the online learning environment. The element involves developing a sense of community, establishing interpersonal relationships, and creating a supportive learning atmosphere (Garrison, 2017). Copley Cobb (2009) described social presence as what students perceive as "real" online. In the online environment, social presence includes activities where students can see themselves belonging in the online course. Garrison et al. (2001) identified three subcategories of social presence that can manifest in an online environment: expression of emotion, open communication, and group cohesion. Ultimately, the three work together to provide a sense of belonging in the online environment (Archard, 2014; Pang, 2020).

In their study of the CoI framework, Akyol and Garrison (2008) found social presence to be the only element with a significant correlation coefficient of the three CoI frameworks (social, cognitive, and teaching) meaning the perception of connection within the online learning context had the highest influence of the learning outcomes within their analysis. Instructional designers and teachers could incorporate activities in their online courses to boost social presence, such as having students introduce

themselves to other students, creating common areas for students to ask questions, having discussions, and using synchronous tools (Lehman & Conceição, 2010). High levels of social presence are apparent in online courses with activities and assignments based on reflective real-life scenarios (Kilis & Yildirim, 2019). Furthermore, when students can hear and see the instructor and their peers in the online environment, there is an increase in student satisfaction in terms of social presence (Smith Jaggars, 2016).

Cognitive Presence. Cognitive presence refers to how learners construct meaning through course dialogue and reflection. This element involves critical thinking, problem-solving, and exploring new ideas in the learning community. Cognitive presence has four components: a triggering event, exploration, integration, and resolution. Triggering an event means designing discussions and assignments intentionally (Boston et al., 2009). The next area of exploration involves students exploring the issues presented in online coursework individually and as a community through discourse and reflection (Akyol & Garrison, 2011). Specifically, instructors could provide scaffolding opportunities for students to practice or master a particular area before moving on to the next, creating rough drafts, using project-based learning, and engaging in group-related projects such as peer review or group presentations. The third stage of cognitive presence is integration, where learners construct meaning from the ideas generated during exploration (Hanstedt, 2018). Integration could translate to student-led discussions, role-play activities, higher-order activities such as creating a portfolio, or student projects and presentations in online courses. The last area of cognitive presence involves the process culminating in a resolution, where the learners apply the new knowledge (Palloff & Pratt, 2010). Other ideas for this level of presence include reflection activities such as journaling or rough drafts of more significant concepts.

Teaching Presence. Teaching presence encompasses the planning, facilitation, and guidance of cognitive and social processes with the aim of students mastering the course-level learning objectives.

This element includes planning and organizing the online learning experience, facilitating discussions, and providing feedback. In the design and organization processes, educators undertake various tasks to structure and shape a course or learning environment, making decisions related to curriculum development, selecting instructional methods, establishing time parameters, and utilizing instructional mediums effectively (Garrison et al., 2001).

Facilitating discourse pertains to teachers' role in guiding learner activities, fostering agreement or disagreement, and enabling consensus-building. Teachers play a pivotal role in discourse facilitation by encouraging, acknowledging, or reinforcing student contributions; cultivating a positive learning atmosphere; engaging participants; prompting discussions; and evaluating the effectiveness of the discourse process. Direct instruction involves instructors presenting content or posing questions, confirming student comprehension through assessment and exploratory feedback, and diagnosing and addressing any misconceptions during the learning process (Garrison et al., 2001; Kilis & Yildirim, 2019). Some literature suggests that instructors need to make themselves available to students in the form of office hours to improve their teaching presence rather than record lectures in the online environment (Preisman, 2014). Furthermore, when faculty interact and build rapport with students online, students are more satisfied with their online courses, which can translate to higher academic achievement (Glazier, 2016; Trespalacios & Uribe-Florez, 2020).

The CoI framework suggests that a successful online learning experience results from effectively integrating the three elements: cognitive, social, and teaching presence. The framework has received wide adoption and adaptation in online education, providing a theoretical basis for designing, implementing, and evaluating online courses to enhance the quality of online learning experiences. Higher education faculty directly impact the social, cognitive, and teaching presence in the CoI framework, especially when there is intentionality in creating ways to humanize their online courses and

build a close teacher–student relationship online (Cox-Davenport, 2014; Delmas, 2017; Glazier, 2016; Pacansky-Brock, 2013; Smith Jaggars & Xu, 2013).

Adult Learning Theory

Knowles (1980) introduced the concept of the learning environment and the effect the online learning climate has on adult learners. A prominent figure in adult education, Knowles (1980) proposed andragogy principles, emphasizing adult learners' distinct characteristics (Wiesenberg & Hutton, 1995). According to Knowles (1980), adults are self-directed, preferring to take responsibility for their learning. Adult learning theory suggests the importance of recognizing adult learners as autonomous individuals who bring a wealth of experiences to the learning environment (Knowles, 1980). Additionally, Knowles (1980) highlighted the significance of learners' self-concept in adult education, asserting that adults have a mature self-perception that shapes their readiness to engage in learning activities.

The principle of experiential learning suggests that adults learn best when content is connected to their existing knowledge and experiences (Knowles, 1980). Knowles's (1980) principles, such as readiness to learn and orientation to learning, provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how adults approach educational experiences, and the principles have been influential in shaping instructional strategies for adult learners across diverse contexts (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Thus, in online environments, adult learners must be able to share their personal and work experiences and connect their unique experiences with the coursework to create more profound meaning and build relationships with each other.

Postpositive Worldview

This study has a correlational research design with a quantitative methodology and a foundation in the postpositive philosophical worldview described by Creswell and Creswell (2018). This study fits in the postpositive viewpoint because it has observable variables obtained through a survey that can be compared with other variables. The postpositive worldview also suggests there is no absolute truth and

a research design is not always perfect (Phillips & Burbules, 2000). Correlational research incorporates the postpositive philosophical worldview, with variables used to test hypotheses based on participants' objective survey responses.

The following sections include the history of distance education; the historical context of accelerated courses; the importance of interaction and creating a culture of community in online education; and a review of the current, albeit limited, literature on social presence perceptions of online accelerated programs.

History of Distance Education

Distance learning in higher education began in the late-1800s as correspondence courses established by the United States Postal Service (Kentnor, 2015). These correspondence courses included instructional materials and assignments sent through the mail, with students completing the activities at a distance (Moore, 2019). The purpose of this format was to meet the needs of underrepresented individuals across the United States who could not otherwise access traditional forms of higher education (Jonassen, 2001; Kentnor, 2015).

The first evidence of correspondence courses appeared in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1728, when Caleb Phillips posted an advertisement in the *Boston Gazette* offering shorthand courses (Jonassen, 2001; Kentnor, 2015). Early correspondence course adoption occurred with the 1870s Chautauqua Movement in New York State (Harting & Erthal, 2005). John Heyl Vincent and Lewis Miller started a correspondence course as a summer training program for Sunday school teachers, which they expanded to include arts and general education (Kentnor, 2015). With this course, Vincent initiated the country's first adult education program and correspondence school designed for working adults (Scott, 1999). Other schools quickly followed as Chicago businesses partnered with the University of Chicago to offer correspondence courses by William Harper Rainey.

Advancement of Technologies

Correspondence courses continued to grow in popularity in higher education, albeit with little to no change in sending and receiving activities, assignments, and correspondence via postal carriers (Kentnor, 2015; Moore, 2019; Peters, 2003). From the late 1890s through the 1920s, some correspondence courses occurred via radio, and a television component entered in the 1920s through the 1980s (Kentnor, 2015). Beginning with the invention of computers in 1980, correspondence courses evolved from sending and receiving materials through the mail to delivering assignments via computer. The business sector was at the forefront of these efforts, with companies using computer-based programs to educate and train employees (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2002).

The University of Phoenix was the first higher education institution to implement CompuServe, the first consumer online service to offer online education to students in Phoenix, Arizona (Rudestam & Schoenholtz-Read, 2002). With the 1991 development of the World Wide Web, the University of Phoenix adopted internet-based online educational programs for students outside the institution. The transition to the use of technology led to wide use of the term *online learning* as a form of distance learning. Allen and Seaman (2008) introduced the term, defining distance education as using computers and the internet to deliver 80% or more of coursework online.

Research in Online Learning

Correspondence courses are built on a premise that interaction between the instructor and student did not need to be face-to-face. In the 1700s, 1800s, and most of the 1900s, it was hard to conceive how the various facets of student–teacher interaction could be possible outside of written correspondence. With the variety of technologies available today, it is important to discuss the impact of interaction on the learner and to focus on the quality of education provided in the online environment (Allen & Seaman, 2008; Kentnor, 2015; Moore, 2019).

Online Learning Community

Three types of interaction are required to build an online learning community: learner-to-instructor, learner-to-learner, and learner-to-content (Conrad, 2005; Dixson, 2010; Lock, 2007). Lock (2007) defined an online learning community as a social learning experience, such as peer-to-peer, peer-to-content, or instructor-to-peer, or as a learning community, such as learning from others in online education. The members of an online learning community can communicate with each other through online networking and instructional technologies. When a sense of community online exists, students are more engaged with the content and feel more connected to their peers and instructors (Liu et al., 2007; Lock, 2007).

Learner-to-Instructor Interaction. Learner-to-instructor interaction is essential in an online course (Conrad, 2005; Lock, 2007; Shackelford & Maxwell, 2012). This interaction occurs when the student and instructor engage in a meaningful exchange of conversation through individual responses on discussion boards, grading feedback, and responding to questions (Conrad, 2005). In a longitudinal study, Conrad (2005) explored student perceptions regarding establishing an online classroom community. Using surveys and interviews to collect data, the researcher determined students felt connected through the online learning environment when participating in online discussions and feeling connected with their instructor. The course design, instructor-created materials, and learner-to-learner interaction aided learning community perception (Conrad, 2005). Instructors could also impact and enhance positive interaction in their online courses by showing students how to initiate conversations, accept varied viewpoints, praise others' efforts, and invite continued commentary (Shackelford & Maxwell, 2012).

Learner-to-Learner Interaction. Learner-to-learner interaction is vital to building community in an online environment, supporting productive and satisfying learning, and helping students develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills and feel they are part of something larger than themselves (Beaudoin, 2002; Dixson, 2010; Kolloff, 2001; Lock, 2007; Swan, 2002). In Swan's (2002) study, students

who interacted with one another in their online courses reported high levels of satisfaction and learning. Dixson (2010) explored how students perceived the effectiveness of engagement activities such as self introductions, and discussions, and how these learning engagement activities contributed to the sense of online community. The study showed that the modality in which students engaged was not a necessary component, such as using specific instructional technologies or assignments, but that students felt engaged if some engagement activity occurred. The defined engagement activity could connect what they were doing in the course to real-world assessments while they performed the work and posted discussions in the online environment. The study findings suggest that online faculty need to encourage different means of interaction that students perceive as meaningful, such as designing and developing online discussions or authentic assessments (Dixson, 2010). Finally, Beaudoin (2002) concluded that students in an online course with high levels of interaction achieved higher performance than students in the same online course with only moderate interaction.

Learner-to-Content Interaction. Learner-to-content interaction is also vital to creating a thriving online learning community (Dixson, 2010; Lock, 2007; Zimmerman, 2012). Zimmerman (2012) found that interaction with the course content is significant because engagement may contribute to successful learning outcomes and course completion. Beyond including readings in an online course, other types of learner-to-content interaction include tutorials created by faculty and other students, embedded quizzes in which students have multiple attempts, chances for students to reflect, or games or simulations in the online environment.

Literature informs best practices about the importance of creating and establishing learning communities in the online learning environment. One of the most prominent seminal researchers of creating and establishing online learning communities, Lock (2007), analyzed how online course design may promote the development of an online learning community. Lock outlined five critical guidelines for creating an online learning community: (a) student awareness of the community, (b) the design of online

courses, (c) technologies to sustain the community, (d) the creation of a community beyond the course, and (e) sustaining online community. Lock also identified four essential components of continuing an online learning community: communication, collaboration, interaction, and participation. These guidelines must be present through the behaviors and actions of all online participants, including instructors, to create a positive learning experience. Although the guidelines provide a foundation, there needs to be a specific mention of how to implement the guidelines in the online classroom (Yuan & Kim, 2014). Instructional technology is a critical aspect of helping to establish and maintain an online learning community (Lock, 2007).

Instructor Best Practices for Online Courses

Creating an online community starts with the instructor implementing the three levels of interaction (learner-to-content, learner-to-instructor, and learner-to-learner) in the online course design. QM compiles research on the effectiveness of learner interaction and course and module objectives' alignment to the course tools and instructional technology and provides benchmarks for ensuring quality assurance in online education. Since its inception in 2011, QM has developed and maintained a rubric for evaluating effective online courses (QM, n.d.). The essential and specific rubric standards are backed by research and serve to guide instructors in developing, evaluating, and improving their online courses. QM also includes best practices for applying these standards in the online course. The QM rubric has been highly beneficial for instructors to create and design effective, engaging, and interactive online courses (Monroe, 2011).

In a case study, Baran et al. (2013) identified the most effective online teaching practices, providing novice and experienced online faculty with practical advice from experienced online educators on transferring their courses online. Experienced online educators found that online faculty needed to increase teaching presence and interaction among and with learners. Instructional technologies are an effective means of creating teacher presence and interaction among learners and instructors.

Interaction using Instructional Technologies

Despite plentiful research on online learning communities and student perceptions, there is limited scholarship regarding how faculty perceive the effective approaches and best practices in designing online courses by using various instructional technologies. Such instructional technologies could be lecture recording (learner-to-content) or announcements (learner-to-instructor). The following research findings will guide best practices for interactions using instructional technologies.

Researchers at the University of Wisconsin–Stout sent surveys to students to determine the impact of online learning micro-video lectures on their learning (Berg et al., 2014). Based on the results, Berg et al. (2014) identified an ideal video length of 15 minutes or less (Berg et al., 2014).

Guo et al. (2014) conducted a large-scale study of the effectiveness of video production on student engagement. The researchers collected data from nearly seven million viewers of online video content from four courses on edX massive open online content to determine the appropriate length of online lectures. Based on how long individuals watched the videos and how they answered questions after each, Guo et al. concluded that videos of 6 minutes or less were the most appropriate for student engagement. The literature presents a recommendation for instructors, video producers, instructional designers, and technologies on best practices for creating content lectures: Keep lectures short (Berg et al., 2014). Guo et al. also found that students preferred a “talking-head” to a “podium-style” lecture. Students also liked when instructors used a close-up webcam camera instead of standing in the distance or using recording videos in a face-to-face environment.

Online instructors are responsible for creating learner-to-content interaction by developing authentic assessments. In a mixed methods study involving nearly 300 participants, Poth (2018) found that students who completed formative assessments using instructional technology felt more prepared for the summative assessment. Through audience response systems in a face-to-face classroom, students were able to receive immediate, anonymous feedback on formative assessments. Many

accessible instructional technologies are appropriate for use online to mimic the audience response systems in the face-to-face classroom.

In addition to online courses, there are other ways instructional technologies can bring people together, including environments such as open online chatrooms. Building on Woods and Ebersole's (2003) research on using non–subject-specific discussion boards to build community in online classes, Voithofer (2006) conducted a qualitative study to explore intertextuality, discourse, and narratives to conceptualize and contextualize online learning environments among cancer patients and how they interacted with each other in the open online learning environment. Using online chat rooms and discussion boards—the same instructional technology found in the online classroom—Voithofer analyzed the importance of storytelling and the ability to express oneself online. The participants felt they were being heard and understood by having a free space to express their experiences and feelings. Voithofer concluded that the students felt part of a community despite being separated by distance. Online course instructors could facilitate this sense of community and feelings of connectedness by allowing students to express their feelings and opinions. For example, a discussion board labeled “Class Café” or “Student Lounge” might be an opportunity for classroom support and community building. Facilitating a separate, non-course-related discussion within online courses may help students avoid seeking information or posting information on social media. Beyond creating learner-to-content and learner-to-instructor interaction opportunities, online instructors are also responsible for designing interaction between the learners. This learner-to-learner interaction is possible in the online environment (i.e., discussion boards, group projects, etc.).

Student Perceptions of Using Instructional Technologies

Instructors and instructional designers perceive students as tech-savvy because of the advent and proliferation of technological advancements in modern society. However, there remains a need to evaluate how students view instructional technology in the online classroom.

Millennials (defined as individuals born in the 1980s to late 1990s) and centennials (individuals born after the 1990s) interact with technology in varying ways. Even though students are skilled in using technology, such as internet surfing, they may not be comfortable using technology in online courses (Crearie, 2018). Liaw (2008) investigated how students perceive the effectiveness of e-learning-, finding that self-efficacy significantly influences students' satisfaction in their learning management system. Multimedia interaction and interactive learning activities could be means to control the perceived effectiveness of the online learner. Liaw's findings indicated that scaffolding instructional technologies, as for individual learning activities, could be beneficial to students' self-efficacy and comfort using instructional technology. After practicing with the instructional technology, students had higher levels of self-efficacy and perceived satisfaction with using e-learning technologies in the online environment (Liaw, 2008).

VoiceThread is an instructional technology used in online classrooms to enhance learner-to-learner interaction, allowing students to create, share, and comment using text, audio, and webcam (VoiceThread, n.d.). VoiceThread allows users to hear vocal inflections, see mannerisms, and capture body language and tone of voice. Studies using VoiceThread have shown that online students felt more connected and engaged. VoiceThread contributes to a sense of community in the online environment (Delmas, 2017). Delmas (2017) found that by using VoiceThread, online students felt they developed relationships with their online classmates. However, despite building relationships with their peers, students remained reluctant to use tools such as VoiceThread (Ching & Hsu, 2015). There is a difference between male and female users and their preferences in using audio and webcam comments for online asynchronous discussion (Anderson & Haddad, 2005; Ching & Hsu, 2015). Females preferred the audio and webcam discussions more than males and reported feeling more connected to their peers by using the microphone and webcam to interact.

Post-Pandemic and Online Learning Today

The impacts of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic are lingering. Emergency remote instruction was implemented out of necessity, often lacking through, careful design and development of online coursework. Both faculty and student perceptions of online learning have changed dramatically since the COVID-19 lockdown (Bonk, 2020). Since some students were forced to learn remotely, they may have had unreliable internet connection, and reliable internet connection is one of the main factors that can affect Col (Lau et al., 2021). Further, the online curriculum should include social, cognitive, and teaching presence (Lau et al., 2021).

In a study conducted during March 2020, Ensmann et al. (2021) found a heightened need for social presence during the pandemic. At a time when anxiety and stress were extreme, opportunities to interact socially in the online environment were important for students' retention and mental well-being (Ensmann et al., 2021). These findings highlight the importance for educators and institutions to prioritize social presence in online environments throughout the pandemic and into today. Prioritizing social presence can directly impact student success and the long-term viability of online learning programs.

History of Accelerated Learning

During the early 1970s, college and university administrators faced a challenge posed by the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education urging them to enhance the accessibility of postsecondary education (Caskey, 1994). In response to this call, higher education institution leaders embarked on experimental ventures involving alternative delivery models. Among these models, accelerated courses gained prominence, often condensed from a traditional 16-week course to a shorter period like 5, 7, or 10 weeks (Scott, 1993). Accelerated courses may be "intensive courses" (Scott & Conrad, 1992), often offered in higher education in the summertime. In 1967, Professor Clay Schoenfeld was one of the first leaders in developing summer offerings at the University of Wisconsin (Martin & Culver, 2007). Since

then, even more higher education institutions have offered accelerated programs so students can complete their degrees faster. Scott (2003) identified four key attributes of high-quality learning experiences in accelerated courses: instructor characteristics, teaching methods, classroom environment, and evaluation methods. These attributes have substantial influence over the perceptions and experiences of students engaged in accelerated courses. One of the fastest growing and transformative changes in higher education is the number of accelerated learning programs, growing from roughly 200 in 2002 (Wlodkowski, 2003) to over 800 in 2006 (Serdyukov, 2008). As reported in *CHLOE 8* (QM, 2023), 39% of chief online learning officers at higher education institutions identified offering new, accelerated degrees as one of their top five focuses for online growth.

Positive Outcomes of Accelerated Learning

Many studies have shown significant and improved learning outcomes from students who participated in accelerated courses instead of traditional-length courses (Logan & Geltner, 2000; Mandernach et al., 2006; Scott, 2003; Seamon, 2004; Tatum, 2010; Trekles & Sims, 2013). Logan and Geltner (2000) examined more than 446,000 students over a 5-year span from 1994–1999. The findings showed that students enrolled in 6-week compressed courses had higher passing rates and GPAs than those enrolled in traditional or 16-week courses. Research also indicates that students reported higher satisfaction with accelerated courses intentionally designed with learner-to-learner activities (Driessnack et al., 2011; Trekles & Sims, 2013). Specifically, Trekles and Sims (2013) found that students enjoyed the discussions and worked with their peers in their accelerated coursework because they felt more engaged in the faster-paced environment. Furthermore, Driessnack et al. (2011), Kasworm (2008), and Penprase and Koczara (2009) indicated that students noted how vital the real-world activities and assessments in the accelerated online learning environment were to their accelerated program retention. Researchers have found no difference in mastering learning outcomes between traditional and accelerated courses (Rafferty & Lindell, 2011; Van Scyoc & Gleason, 1993).

Barriers to Accelerated Learning

There are some barriers to student success in accelerated online learning platforms. Deggs (2011) identified three challenges in online accelerated programs: intrapersonal, career-related, and academic-related. The intrapersonal barriers refer to issues such as time management; money management; the balance of family, community, and coursework; the fear of failure; and the handling of physical and emotional matters (Deggs, 2011; Miertschin et al., 2015; Rinkema & Williams, 2021). Wlodkowski et al. (2001) found that 59% of students left an accelerated program due to having too many home responsibilities. The second barrier, as outlined by Deggs, is career-related obstacles such as meeting deadlines and employment expectations while balancing the workload of an accelerated course. Wlodkowski et al. also found that 60% of students left an accelerated program due to conflict between their studies and their jobs. The third barrier Deggs identified is academic-related. There are student academic barriers, such as a lack of understanding and using the technology, balancing a heavy course load, and meeting the instructor's expectations (Mandernach et al., 2006). Some academic-related barriers fall on the instructor of an accelerated course, such as lack of instructor feedback (Deggs, 2011; Miertschin et al., 2015; Rinkema & Williams, 2021) or coping with a learning disability (Mandernach et al., 2006).

Adult learners must work at overcoming challenges in the accelerated format by managing their time. While completing accelerated coursework, adult learners can expect their academic workload to reflect their career commitment. Students' success requires communicating their challenges to faculty (Mandernach et al., 2006).

Some faculty and higher education upper administrators have asserted that accelerated courses lack rigor (Wolfe, 1998). Alternatively, there are perceptions that courses are too crammed and not designed effectively in an accelerated format (Shafer, 1995). Some research indicates that accelerated learning is inferior to the traditional format due to lessening the course's substance and making the

content “too easy” or a means for students to get a degree quicker (Scott, 1993). Other administrators reported that accelerated formats do not meet their students’ needs and place stress on the students and faculty (Colclasure et al., 2018). Some faculty felt unprepared for teaching in a condensed format and recommended returning to the 16-week traditional format.

Variety of Students’ Reasons for Choosing Accelerated Programs

The perception of accelerated learning in the literature differs, with more recent research pointing toward students’ preference for accelerated learning due to time, cost, convenience, and satisfaction.

Time and Convenience. A more significant percentage of students graduated sooner from accelerated programs than traditional programs (Wlodkowski, 2003). In a comparative study, Wlodkowski et al. (2001) found that 26% of adult students completed their studies in three years in an accelerated program at a private college, surpassing the 18% three-year graduation rate for students enrolled in a conventional academic program at a public college. Serdyukov et al. (2003) suggested that, for adult learners, the shorter time of a course holds a higher value than financial considerations. With condensed course time, students are more apt to stay focused and develop better time management skills (Colclasure et al., 2018).

Cost. The rising cost of tuition at postsecondary institutions makes it harder for individuals to afford college. The high price of college means individuals are less likely to access the education and training they need (Archibald & Feldman, 2008; Mitchell et al., 2019; Mulhern et al., 2015; Wilkins et al., 2013; Wolla, 2014). Accelerated learning allows students to obtain their degrees faster and with fewer expenses. Although cost-effectiveness is crucial for educational institutions and individuals, research (Serdyukov, 2008; Serdyukov et al., 2003) shows the growing significance of time efficiency as a primary factor in students selecting a school or program and persisting until completion. The desire to save time has increased the demand for various short-term, accelerated, and intensive programs and courses.

When coupled with the integration of educational technology applications, accelerated offerings could enhance students' overall productivity in the learning process.

Student Satisfaction of Curriculum and Program. Students are more likely to enjoy or be satisfied with an accelerated format that incorporates attributes such as active learning, a collaborative classroom environment, and a more relaxed environment (Daniel, 2000). Students are also more satisfied with accelerated courses when they build relationships with their faculty and peers (Kasworm, 2008). Trust, timely feedback, and interaction with peers and instructors in online accelerated courses play crucial roles in student perceptions and higher academic achievement (Bolliger & Martin, 2018; Xu & Smith Jaggars, 2014). How well the course is designed also contributes to the success of online accelerated programs and their instructors (Carr, 2014; Oh & Jonassen, 2007).

Known Demographic Information. Wlodkowski et al. (2001) and Wlodkowski et al. (2002) found that women were twice as likely as men to graduate within six years from an accelerated program at the same school. However, little to no research indicated student age, the number of hours worked compared to completing schoolwork, and the relationship to social presence.

Graduate Student Perceptions of Social Presence in Online Accelerated Programs

Few researchers have addressed graduate students' perceptions of social presence in online accelerated programs. Lowenthal (2016) examined social presence in online accelerated courses through the lens of the instructor and the instructor's efficacy of their social presence in online courses. Soles and Maduli-Williams (2019) analyzed 48 students' perception of the social presence of an online accelerated Master's in Educational Administration program. Soles and Maduli-Williams found that emotional expression, group togetherness, and open and honest communication with peers and the instructor yielded higher satisfaction with the course and greater academic achievement.

Summary

The Col and Knowles's (1980) adult learning theory principles provide a foundation to understand how students perceive social presence in online accelerated coursework. Courses must be intentionally designed with community-building activities that support learner-to-learner, learner-to-content, and learner-to-instructor interaction. Including these activities in the online accelerated format is crucial to students' retention, success, and perceived satisfaction in online accelerated courses. Students have expressed interest in activities that build community in the online environment. The literature supports community-building activities in online courses; however, little research informs the best practices of social presence in online accelerated programs, specifically MBA programs. This study provides a body of knowledge focusing on graduate students' perceptions of social presence combined with their satisfaction with their course load and overall program. Faculty and online support specialists, such as instructional designers, could use the findings to partner with faculty to design and develop online accelerated programs, specifically MBA programs. The study could provide a foundation for instructors to evaluate the continued use of social presence and community-building activities in online accelerated coursework.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate graduate-level students' perceptions of social presence in their online accelerated MBA programs at mid-sized public, private, and for-profit institutions in the Midwestern United States. The findings could inform best practices for incorporating social presence activities in the design and development of online accelerated MBA courses. This research could be beneficial to faculty interested in students' perceptions regarding the effectiveness and engagement of the identified community-building activities that enhance social presence in online accelerated MBA courses. Researchers have examined the effectiveness of social presence in online courses and students' preferences in choosing online accelerated programs. However, there are limited investigations of students' preferences of social presence activities in online accelerated courses. The literature review showed no studies specific to students' preferences of social presence in online accelerated MBA programs.

Research indicates that community-building activities in online classes are essential for students' engagement with the content and connecting with their peers and instructor (Conrad, 2005; Dixon, 2010; Lock, 2007). However, limited research exists on the perceptions of community-building activities in online accelerated courses (Soles & Maduli-Williams, 2019). There is a need to determine if students believe community-building activities in an online accelerated course improve social presence, helping to build a sense of community in the online environment. This study fills the literature gap on students' perceived effectiveness of social presence in online accelerated MBA courses in a fully online MBA program.

Many students recognize online learning as a flexible, accessible, and convenient option for learning (Cole et al., 2014). Higher education administrators need to ensure excellence in building

community activities that students find and perceive beneficial to their overall learning in an online accelerated educational format.

This quantitative study was an examination of master's-level students' perceptions of social presence in online accelerated courses in fully online MBA programs. Six research questions guided the study:

1. What are graduate students' perceptions of social presence in their online accelerated courses in their MBA program?
2. Why do students choose an online accelerated MBA program?
3. What are students' satisfactions with their current online accelerated MBA program?
4. Is there a relationship between graduate students' perceptions of social presence and their reasons for choosing an online accelerated MBA program?
5. Is there a relationship between graduate students' perceptions of social presence and their perceived satisfaction of their online accelerated MBA program?
6. Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of social presence and demographic questions such as gender, age, number of online MBA courses taken, number of hours worked weekly, or the hours worked on coursework weekly?

Framework

Community of Inquiry

Data collection occurred via a survey incorporating the Social Presence Survey developed by Arbaugh et al. in 2008. Arbaugh et al. (2008) designed a survey to administer to students in master's- and doctoral-level courses at four institutions in 2007. Arbaugh et al. rooted their survey in the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework in social presence developed by Garrison, et al. in 2000. The CoI framework addresses three elements in the learning experience of online learners—social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence—and how they interrelate. This framework informs research

on best practices for online learning design and instruction. According to the framework, the most effective learning experiences have high levels of all three elements. The first element, social presence, refers to the way students feel connected, both socially and emotionally, to each other in the online classroom. Teaching presence is the design, development, and implementation of coursework to enhance cognitive and social processes to realize meaningful instruction aligned with course outcomes. The last element, cognitive presence, addresses how students have mastered the content by making meaningful connections and mastery of the course outcomes. Social, teaching, and cognitive presence intersect to create the learning experience for online learners. This study focused on students' perception of social presence in their online accelerated courses in their fully online MBA program. To align with the research questions, this study included only the social presence portion of the survey. Dr. Randy Garrison, one of the co-developers of the Arbaugh et al. survey, granted permission to use the social presence survey used in this study (see Appendix A).

Adult Learning Theory

Knowles (1980) introduced the concept of the learning environment and the belief that the online learning climate affects adult learners. Knowles, a prominent figure in adult education, proposed andragogy principles, emphasizing adult learners' distinct characteristics (Wiesenberg & Hutton, 1995). According to Knowles (1980), adults are self-directed, preferring to take responsibility for their learning. These principles underscore the importance of recognizing adult learners as autonomous individuals who bring a wealth of experiences to the learning environment (Knowles, 1980). Additionally, Knowles (1980) highlighted the significance of learners' self-concept in adult education, asserting that adults have a mature self-perception that shapes their readiness to engage in learning activities.

The principle of experiential learning suggests that adults learn best when content is connected to their existing knowledge and experiences (Knowles, 1980). Knowles's principles, such as readiness to learn and orientation to learning, provide a theoretical foundation for understanding how adults

approach educational experiences and have been influential in shaping instructional strategies for adult learners across diverse contexts (Merriam & Baumgartner, 2020). Thus, in online environments, adult learners must be able to share their personal and work experiences and connect these unique experiences with the coursework to create more profound meaning and build relationships with each other.

Research Design

This study was quantitative with a correlational design. The research is grounded in the postpositive philosophical worldview, as described by Creswell and Creswell (2018). Because there were observable variables obtained through a survey comparable to other variables, the study aligned with the postpositive viewpoint. The postpositive worldview also suggests there is no absolute truth, and a research design is not always perfect (Phillips & Burbules, 2000). Correlational researchers adopt a postpositive philosophical worldview, using variables to test hypotheses based on participants' objective survey responses. This survey was a means to explore and investigate the understanding of a phenomenon—in this case, students' perceptions of social presence in their online accelerated MBA courses.

Population and Sample

The sample population was master's-level students taking at least one online course in an entirely online, accelerated MBA program at an accredited university. The participants were at least 18 years of age and had taken at least one online course in a fully online accelerated MBA program. In accordance with federal privacy regulations, direct access to students' email addresses was not possible. An email to MBA program directors at predetermined accredited institutions that offer fully online accelerated MBA programs included a request to forward the survey to the students enrolled in each program.

The identification of 15 mid-sized midwestern institutions occurred using an online search engine and comparing institutions based on peer groups from the online Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System data results. Midsize institutions within this context refer to institutions in the Midwestern United States with total enrollments (graduate and undergraduate) starting approximately at 5,000 to about 15,000 students. Of the 15 online accelerated MBA programs, there are seven at public universities, seven at private universities, and one at a for-profit institution. The 14 public and private universities have campuses in the Midwestern United States, whereas the for-profit institution is solely online. Based on Kass and Tinsley's (1979) recommendations for five to ten participants per survey item, the targeted number of survey participants is 190 to 380 students. This range is relatively close to Comrey and Lee's (1992) recommendation to have at least 200 participants, classified as "fair," or, ideally, 300 participants, classified as "good" for sample size measure. Directors of the 15 online accelerated MBA programs in the Midwestern United States received an email informing them of the study and asking them to distribute the survey to their students. To encourage participation, four students who completed the survey in full in the specified time frame and provided their email addresses were randomly selected to receive a \$25 Amazon gift card.

At the beginning of the survey was the participant consent form (see Appendix B), which students had to accept before accessing the questions. The consent document informed the participants they could opt out at any time and could choose not to answer questions if they felt uncomfortable.

Survey Design and Development

This quantitative study incorporated a social presence survey prepared by Arbaugh et al. (2008). Survey modification focused on online accelerated MBA courses and social presence. Excluded from this study's survey were sections from the original survey addressing the effectiveness or presence of the online instructor and the cognitive presence of the student. This study's survey had six sections: reasons for choosing an online accelerated MBA program, level of agreement about the pacing and workload for

the MBA program, level of satisfaction of curriculum and online classroom environment, perceived satisfaction with their MBA program, overall social presence perceptions, and demographic questions. Survey creation and storage occurred via Qualtrics, a simple web-based survey creation tool. The survey took about five to ten minutes to complete. Refer to Appendix C for screenshots of the full survey.

The first section of the survey required students to answer why they chose the online accelerated MBA program. Question development occurred based on the literature on why students chose an accelerated program. The literature indicates various reasons for the selection, such as the length of courses (Zemke & Zemke, 1981), curriculum options (Carr, 2014; Fedynich et al., 2015; Harris et al., 2013; Oh & Jonassen, 2007; Picciano, 2002; Richardson & Swan, 2003; Smith Jaggars & Xu, 2013; Xu & Smith Jaggars, 2014), cost (Iloh & Tierney, 2014; Jenkins & Cho, 2013; King, 1994; Kirkwood & Price, 2005; Scrivener et al., 2015; Smith Jaggars et al., 2015; Smith Jaggars & Bailey, 2010; Strumbos et al., 2018), and career advancement (Zemke & Zemke, 1981). Research suggests students choose accelerated courses to focus on the content more, achieve their goals faster, increased their productivity, have flexible accommodations, and have more accessibility (Serdyukov et al., 2003). Likert-scale data are useful for attitudinal questions (Rea & Parker, 2014). A ten-point scale enabled construct validity because longer scales better indicate respondents' agreement (Awang et al., 2016). Additionally, the distance between the scaled responses is more accurate, making the responses useful as interval data. Awang et al. (2016) found the ten-point scale was a better measurement to conduct parametric testing.

In completing the second section of the survey, students rated their level of agreement with the course pacing and workload. The questions included Likert-scale responses from one = *strongly disagree* to ten = *strongly agree*. The third section required students to rate their satisfaction with the curriculum and the online classroom climate in their online accelerated MBA program. These questions were added based on Kasworm's (2003) findings on student satisfaction with their online accelerated programs. This researcher wanted to include these questions to compare and contrast from the results from the

Kasworm (2003) study. Responses fell on a Likert scale from one = *strongly disagree* to ten = *strongly agree*.

In the fourth section, students rated their overall satisfaction with the program and the likelihood of recommending it to others. Correlating these data with the demographic and social presence survey items indicated if there was a relationship between each of the variables. Like the other sections, response items ranged from one = *strongly disagree* to ten = *strongly agree*.

The fifth section was an adaptation of Arbaugh et al.'s (2008) survey. Only the 21 questions pertaining to social presence remained from the original 34-question survey. Questions relating to teaching and cognitive presence were removed as they did not pertain to social presence. To ensure construct validity and accuracy, the five-point Likert scale from Arbaugh et al.'s survey became a ten-point scale for this study. A scale of ten was chosen as the longer the scale, the better in determining the agreement of respondents and in establishing construct validity (Awang et. al, 2016). Thus, for each question, the Likert-scale responses ranged from one = *strongly disagree* ten = *strongly agree*. The total social presence perception score is the mean of an individual's responses to the 21 questions which will be referred to as the social presence total mean score.

The sixth and final section of the survey enabled the collection of respondents' demographic information. Per Creswell and Creswell's (2018) and Nardi's (2018) recommendations, the demographic questions appeared at the end of the survey to avoid survey fatigue. The section enabled the collection of information regarding the participants' gender (*male, female, prefer not to answer*) and age. Respondents reported the number of courses taken in the program at their current institutions; how many hours weekly they spent on coursework; and whether they worked at a full-time job and, if so, how many hours weekly they worked.

Since the survey had been edited from the original survey designed by Arbaugh et al. in 2008, a pilot test was conducted to test for reliability and validity of the survey instrument. Located in Appendix D is the information related to the Pilot Study.

Validity and Reliability

Arbaugh et al. (2008) established the validity and reliability of the initial survey instrument. With the Col framework, Cronbach's alpha score yielded a high constant result of 0.91 for the social presence survey portion. Researchers use Cronbach's alpha to measure internal consistency, or how closely related a set of variables are as a group (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The constructs used in the original survey to measure instructors' presence and cognitive presence are unnecessary for this study.

Testing the validity and reliability of this study's survey was necessary due to modifications from the original version. Validity means the survey questions measure what they are supposed to measure and validate the accuracy of the survey assessment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rea & Parker, 2014). An expert panel reviewed the edited survey for face validity, providing feedback and recommendations on the questions to help further define the constructs. SPSS Version 28.0 was the tool used to analyze the survey.

Reliability reflects the extent to which a study's results can be replicated upon repeating the study under the same conditions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Terrell, 2016). Testing the survey's reliability occurred using a Cronbach's alpha value by calculating the internal consistency of a pilot study test for the social presence survey items (Nardi, 2018). A Cronbach's alpha computation was used to determine the degree of reliability, with ideal values between 0.70 and 0.90 (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Cronbach's alphas for the 21 social presence items was .927. The social presence items had very high reliability with a score greater than 0.90. All Likert-scale sections of the survey showed at least good reliability. See Appendix D for more information regarding the pilot study and the reliability and validity of the survey instrument.

Research Procedures

Administrating the Survey

Qualtrics was the tool used to create the survey, administer the survey to students, and collect and store survey responses online. An online survey was appropriate to reach students across the 15 universities in different U.S. Midwestern states. Online surveys are convenient for distribution, respondent follow-up, and transferring data to the tools (in this case, SPSS) used for analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Rea & Parker, 2014). The survey was distributed via email in a Qualtrics form to the 15 MBA program directors at previously identified institutions to forward to their students enrolled in online, accredited, and accelerated MBA programs. The email included information about the purpose of the study, the consent form, and incentive for survey completion. Online program directors elected to receive the study results, which allowed them to compare and contrast the best practices for their programs. Any student wanting to opt out of the Qualtrics survey could close the survey window at any time without penalty and incomplete surveys were excluded from data analysis. The survey opened as soon as the email was sent to the program chairs, directors, and leaders.

Timeline

Emails to the 15 identified program director went out following dissertation committee and University of Southern Indiana Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the proposal. The survey was deactivated six weeks after initial contact with the program directors, chairs, and administrative leaders. The program directors received email reminders two weeks after initial contact. Data will remain in the cloud version of Qualtrics for up to five years. Only the researcher is able to access the Qualtrics survey results through university login credentials and thus the emails collected for the free prize drawing are not shared. The data was then deidentified for analyses.

Ethical Considerations

The proposal for this quantitative study underwent IRB review to ensure the safeguarding of human subjects (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). A researcher must meet three ethical obligations: data access, production transparency, and analytical transparency (Lupia & Elman, 2014). First, to control accessibility, all data were stored in SPSS Version 28.0 on a secured network and accessible only by the lead researcher using a unique username and password on a password-secured computer. To ensure the participants' information remained confidential, the only identifying information collected was the voluntary option of entering their university affiliated email to enter the free prize drawing. The free prize drawing consisted of winning one of four \$25 Amazon gift cards. Prior to statistical analysis, there was a random draw of four numbers from the list of all participants who entered their emails. The four participants were notified of their winnings via email to their university affiliated email address and were thanked for completing the survey. Then the participant email addresses were deleted from the raw data set within SPSS and were deidentified for analyses. The consent form indicated that participation was voluntary and may be terminated at any time by closing out the survey or not answering questions (Nardi, 2018; Terrell, 2016). The consent form presented the potential risks, benefits, and survey completion time. The participants may have felt uncomfortable answering some of the survey questions. Benefits include adding their perceptions of social presence in online accelerated courses in fully online accelerated MBA programs to the literature. The participants could only take the survey once, and that setting was placed in Qualtrics. A captcha was included on the survey to ensure human participants, not bots, complete the survey.

Informed Consent

Participants needed to provide their consent before beginning the survey. The consent form that was included on the first page of the survey (see Appendix B), indicated that participants could opt out at any time and their identities would not be recorded. The form also indicated the time commitment

and the voluntary nature of participation. Researchers must obtain informed consent to ensure their participants are aware of their confidentiality and how the data will be used (Singer, 1993). The survey was not a means to collect any identifiable information. The participants will benefit from informing online course designers and developers about students' perceptions of social presence in their online MBA courses.

Analysis

Demographic Data

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the demographic data collected in the last section of the survey. Data analysis occurred using SPSS Version 28.0. Demographic data enabled the correlation of research results in Research Question 6.

Research Question 1: What Are Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence in Their Online Accelerated Courses in Their MBA Program?

The fifth section of the survey contained 21 statements to establish perceptions of social presence. These statements underwent adaptation from Arbaugh et al.'s (2008) survey. Only the 21 questions related to social presence remained from the original 34-question survey. In this section, graduate students rated their level of agreement using a Likert-type scale of 1 (*strongly disagree*) to ten (*strongly agree*). With a ten-point scale, the distance between the scale can be inferred to be more accurate and thus can be used as interval data (Awang et al., 2016). Additionally, the spacing on the scale can be considered more accurate, making it suitable for use as interval data (Awang et al., 2016). For instance, a 50% agreement aligns more closely with a rating of five on a ten-point scale than with two or three on a five-point scale. Awang et al. (2016) found that the ten-point scale serves as a promising scale to conduct parametric testing. The sample size, range (minimum and maximum), median, mean, and standard deviation were calculated for responses to each of the 21 statements to

identify student perceptions of social presence. A Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for normality was conducted.

The social presence total mean score is the mean of an individual's responses to the 21 questions. A total social presence perception mean score was calculated for use in analyzing research question one and in analyzing research questions four, five, and six. This data will be shown using a histogram to display the distribution of the social presence total mean score. Survey items in the student perceptions of social presence section that were missing responses voided the response and were not included in reporting the total mean score. SPSS Version 28.0 facilitated this analysis.

Research Question 2: Why Do Students Choose an Online Accelerated MBA Program?

The first section of the survey contained four questions and one type-in response for participants to discuss why they chose an online accelerated MBA program. This section was developed based on the literature review for reasons students were choosing online accelerated MBA courses. Students were asked to rate their level of agreement using the same Likert-type scale from the social presence questions, where one = *strongly disagree* and ten = *strongly agree*. With a ten-point scale, the distance between the scale can be inferred to be more accurate and thus can be used as interval data (Awang et al., 2016). Awang et al. (2016) found that the ten-point scale serves as a promising scale to conduct parametric testing. The summary descriptive statistics and a visual representation of the data in the form of histograms for each variable were reported for the four questions about why students chose an online accelerated MBA program. A Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for normality was used to determine if the data is normally distributed.

There is one open-ended question within this section that asks students if there were other reasons for choosing an online accelerated MBA program. Participant responses to this question were exported from SPSS to a Microsoft Word document. A manual thematic analysis of the responses began with coding the text into short summaries. Repeated phrases or words appearing across responses

underwent thematic grouping and counting. Responses percentages were calculated from the total number of comments.

Research Question 3: What Are Students' Satisfaction With Their Current Online Accelerated MBA Program?

This research question corresponds to the second, third, and fourth section of the survey. Descriptive statistics are used to report the students' current satisfaction of the pacing, workload, curriculum, online classroom environment, overall satisfaction, and recommendation of their online accelerated MBA program question to others. The summary statistics were reported for the six questions about how satisfied students are with their current accelerated online MBA program. With a ten-point scale, the distance between the scale can be inferred to be more accurate and thus can be used as interval data (Awang et al., 2016). Awang et al. (2016) found that the ten-point scale serves as a promising scale to conduct parametric testing. The latest version of SPSS, version 28.0, was used for this analysis. A Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for normality was conducted to determine if the data was normally distributed. Survey items in the students' satisfaction with the pacing, workload, curriculum, online classroom environment, overall satisfaction, and the recommendation of the program to others that were missing responses would have voided all responses and were not used.

Research Question 4: Is There a Relationship Between Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Reasons for Choosing an Online Accelerated MBA Program?

Data analysis began with evaluation for a normal distribution of the responses for reasons for choosing an online accelerated MBA program, by conducting a Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for normality. Next, a Spearman's Rho correlation determined the relationship between the dependent variable: the total mean score of the perceptions of social presence and the independent variables for each reason for choosing an online accelerated MBA program; length of courses, convenience of the online format, costs, and career advancement as well as to test the significance of the relationship between the two

variables. To showcase the relationship between the variables, scatterplots are used to display the data. Reporting the data using a scatterplot shows the direction and strength of the relationship. According to Holcomb (2017), there appear to be no universal rules for describing in words the strength of relationships by correlation coefficients. However, within Holcomb's (2017) text, there are rough estimates for describing relationships with the numerical value; a value of 0.00 indicates no relationship, values between .01 and .24 may be called "weak" or "negligible", values between .25 and .49 may be called "moderate", values between .50 and .74 may be called "moderately strong", values between .75 and .99 may be called "very strong", and finally a value of 1.00 is called "perfect." This same reporting is also considered in the reporting of Research Question 5. Data analysis occurred using SPSS Version 28.0.

Research Question 5: Is There a Relationship Between Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Their Perceived Satisfaction With Their Online Accelerated MBA Program?

The first step to answering this question was calculating a social presence total mean score column. Next, correlations were calculated for social presence total mean scores with the responses to their current satisfactions with the pacing, workload, curriculum, online classroom climate, overall perceived satisfaction of the online accelerated MBA program, and the recommendation of the program to others. Data analysis began with evaluation for a normal distribution of the data by conducting a Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. Next, a Spearman's Rho correlation determined the relationship between the dependent variable: the total mean score of the perceptions of social presence and the independent variables for satisfaction of students' current online accelerated MBA program; pacing, workload, curriculum, online classroom climate, overall perceived satisfaction of the online accelerated MBA program, and the recommendation of the program to others. A test for significance using a Spearman's Rho was also conducted. To showcase the relationship between the variables, scatterplots are used to display the data. Reporting the data using a scatterplot shows the direction and strength of the relationship. Data analysis occurred using SPSS Version 28.0.

Research Question 6: Is There a Relationship Between Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Demographic Characteristics (Gender or Age), Number of Online MBA Courses Taken, Hours Worked Weekly, or Hours Worked on Coursework Weekly?

This research question corresponds to the sixth and final section of the survey, which includes the demographic information of the respondents. After evaluation for normal distribution, a Mann-Whitney U test was used to determine any difference in social presence total mean scores by gender. A Mann-Whitney U test was conducted since it was comparing the social presence total mean score with two independent variables (Male and Female) and since the data was not normally distributed. Additionally, the distributions between male and female were not similar indicating the mean ranks were to be compared rather than means or medians. For the remaining demographic variables such as age range, the number of online MBA courses taken, hours worked weekly, and hours worked on coursework weekly a Kruskal-Wallis statistical test was run. According to MacFarland & Yates (2016) a Kruskal Wallis test is an appropriate statistical test to run to determine the significance between the medians of three or more independent groups. When a Kruskal-Wallis showed significance, a post-hoc analysis, Dunn's Procedure with a Bonferroni Correction was performed and reported. The dependent variable was the social presence total mean score (scale/ratio data). The independent variables were age range, the number of online MBA courses taken, hours worked, and hours worked on coursework (nominal data). SPSS Version 28.0 was run for this analysis.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

One assumption was that the chairs of each of the identified 15 online accelerated MBA programs who agreed to participate in this study would send the survey to all students in their programs. Because the survey was anonymous, it was assumed that students would answer honestly. A third assumption was that the research questions were answered based on the chosen methodology.

Limitations

As with all research, this study had limitations. This research only represents student perceptions at these small number of institutions and results cannot be generalizable to a bigger population. Furthermore, not all students within these institutions that could have participated in the survey did complete the survey in full. Another limitation was that not all 15 directors chose to share the survey with their faculty to share with their students. Also, the researcher had no way to know how the courses in each program evaluate the effectiveness of course design, assessments, or planned learner-to-learner interaction. A recommendation is that online courses have opportunities for students to collaborate, aligning with research showing the effectiveness of learner-to-learner interaction (Conrad, 2005; Dixson, 2010; Garrison & Arbaugh, 2007). The study was correlational, which meant variables that would better explain relationships could have been missed. Also, participants might have felt uneasy answering questions about their perceptions and could opt out of the survey, skewing the results.

Bias could have been a limitation of this study. Despite assurances of confidentiality, participants could provide socially acceptable answers rather than honest ones (Nardi, 2018). Additionally, some students may have disliked the extremes of a Likert scale. Central tendency bias means that fewer students may choose a one or ten response and thus something closer to the middle such as a 5. Researcher bias is another possibility (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Another limitation of conducting quantitative research with a survey is nonresponse bias (Rea & Parker, 2014). Individuals might not have opened their email messages or responded to their program directors. Furthermore, the program directors could have chosen not to distribute the survey to all students. Failure to complete all questions is a part of nonresponse bias (Rea & Parker, 2014) and those students' perceptions were removed from the study as the informed consent indicated that failure to complete the survey in full would result in withdrawal of their consent. Students not receiving surveys

lowers the response rate, which could affect the reliability of the results representing the sample population.

Delimitations

Because this was a quantitative proposed study, delimitations exist. There is one open-ended question in the survey that qualitative research design could provide information from participants that are not addressed in other sections of the survey due to the Likert-style questions. Also, this research is only looking at a small subset of colleges and universities. There may be colleges or universities or other for-profit institutions that use strategies not addressed that could add to the continued study of social presence of online accelerated MBA programs. Also, this research study is only looking at online accelerated MBA programs and cannot be a representation of all accelerated fully online programs.

Summary

Guided by a postpositivist worldview and Garrison et al.'s (2008) Col framework, this study provided quantitative statistical analysis of the survey questions related to students' perceptions of social presence in online courses in a fully online MBA program. Sharing the data and results and creating new literature on students' perceptions may inform best practices in designing and developing accelerated MBA courses for fully online MBA programs. After reviewing these results, instructional designers' reflections on pedagogical practices may benefit academic programs by strengthening practices already in use, modifying practices that may be concerning, or identifying other pedagogical methods to replace or supplement current practices. By knowing and understanding students' perceptions of online accelerated MBA programs and their perceptions of community building and social presence activities, faculty will be better informed on how to design and develop online accelerated courses. The results of this study could contribute to a more authentic and valued student learning experience.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this quantitative study was to investigate graduate-level student perceptions of social presence in their online accelerated MBA programs at mid-sized public, private, and for-profit institutions in the Midwestern United States. During the 2024 Spring semester, pre-identified MBA program directors, chairs, and other individuals who had online accelerated MBA programs received an email asking them to distribute a survey to their graduate students to obtain the students' perceptions of social presence in their program. The survey comprised six main sections: factors for choosing an online accelerated MBA program, the level of agreement about the pacing and workload for the MBA program, the level of agreement about the online classroom environment and curriculum, perceived satisfaction with their MBA program, overall social presence perceptions, and demographic questions. This chapter presents an analysis of the answers to the following research questions.

1. What are graduate students' perceptions of social presence in their online accelerated courses in their MBA program?
2. Why do students choose an online accelerated MBA program?
3. What are students' satisfactions with their current online accelerated MBA program?
4. Is there a relationship between graduate students' perceptions of social presence and their reasons for choosing an online accelerated MBA program?
5. Is there a relationship between graduate students' perceptions of social presence and their perceived satisfaction with their online accelerated MBA program?
6. Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of social presence and demographic questions such as gender, age, number of online MBA courses taken, number of hours worked weekly, or the hours worked on coursework weekly?

Description of the Sample

The sample population was master's-level students taking at least one online course in an entirely online, accelerated MBA program at an accredited university. The participants were at least 18 years old and had taken at least one online course in a fully online accelerated MBA program. In accordance with federal privacy regulations, direct access to students' email addresses was not possible. An email to MBA program directors at predetermined accredited institutions that offer fully online accelerated MBA programs included a request to forward the survey to the students enrolled in each program.

The identification of 15 institutions occurred using an online search engine and comparing institutions based on peer groups from the online Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System data results. Of the 15 online accelerated MBA programs, seven are at public universities, seven at private universities, and one at a for-profit institution. The 14 public and private universities have campuses in the Midwestern United States; the for-profit institution is solely online.

There were 15 initial emails sent to program directors and university leaders, and a reminder email went out approximately 2 weeks before the close of the survey. At the request of three program directors, the survey remained open for an additional 4 weeks for a total of 6 weeks from April 15 through May 31, 2024. The administrators at five of the 15 identified institutions responded, thus, the results represent at least one private and four public institutions.

Because the institutions' program directors and leaders distributed the student survey, it is not possible to calculate a response rate. However, 174 individuals started the survey and 135 completed it in full with the exception of a couple of individuals who did not complete a few demographic questions. It is possible the remaining 39 participants started to take the survey and either did not feel comfortable or did not consent to the survey.

Demographics

The sixth and final portion of the survey enabled the collection of participants' demographic information to make connections with the research questions and understand those connections. The demographic questions included age range, gender, number of online classes taken as part of the program at the current college or university, employment status, approximate number of hours worked in employment per week, and approximate number of hours worked on coursework per week. Frequency counts and percentages were obtained to analyze the responses. As shown in Table 1, a slight majority of the respondents were female (54%). The participants' ages ranged from 18 to older than 51, with 25% of the respondents aged 26–30 years (see Table 2). There were similar percentages of respondents in the 18–25 (19%), 36–40 (18%), and 31–35 (16%) categories. Other characteristics included the number of online classes taken in their current program and university (36% reported eight or more courses) and employment status, with nearly all (97%) responding “yes” to full-time employment (see Tables 3 and 4). Table 5 indicates the approximate number of hours students worked, with the highest number of hours reporting as 41–50 hours per week (45%); Table 6 shows the approximate number of hours students worked on their coursework per week, with the highest reporting (35%) worked on coursework six–ten hours per week.

Table 1

Demographic Information: Gender

Gender	<i>n</i>	%
Male	61	45.2
Female	72	53.3
Prefer not to answer	1	0.7
Total	134	100

Table 2*Demographic Information: Age*

Age range	<i>n</i>	%
18–25	26	19.3
26–30	34	25.2
31–35	22	16.3
36–40	24	17.8
41–45	11	8.1
46–50	11	8.1
≥ 51	7	5.2
Total	135	100

Table 3*Demographic Information: Number of Online Courses Taken at Current College/University*

Number of online courses	<i>n</i>	%
This is my first course	10	7.4
2–4	35	25.9
5–7	42	31.1
8 or more	48	35.6
Total	135	100

Table 4*Demographic Information: Information on Employment Status (Either Part- or Full-Time)*

Are you employed?	<i>n</i>	%
Yes	131	97.0
No	4	3.0
Total	135	100

Table 5*Demographic Information: Number of Hours Worked at Employment per Week*

# of hours worked: Job	<i>n</i>	%
Less than 20 hours per week	6	4.4
21–30 hours per week	7	5.2
31–40 hours per week	42	31.1
41–50 hours per week	61	45.2
51+ hours per week	18	13.3
Total	134	100

Table 6*Demographic Information: Number of Hours Worked on Courses per Week*

# of hours worked: Coursework	<i>n</i>	%
Less than 5 hours per week	5	3.7
6–10 hours per week	47	34.8
11–15 hours per week	42	31.1
16–20 hours per week	35	25.9
21+ hours per week	6	4.4
Total	135	100

The responses to these demographic survey questions will help inform and provide a perspective of the analysis and outcomes of the research questions.

Analysis of Research Questions

Research Question 1: What Are Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence in Their Online Accelerated Courses in Their MBA Program?

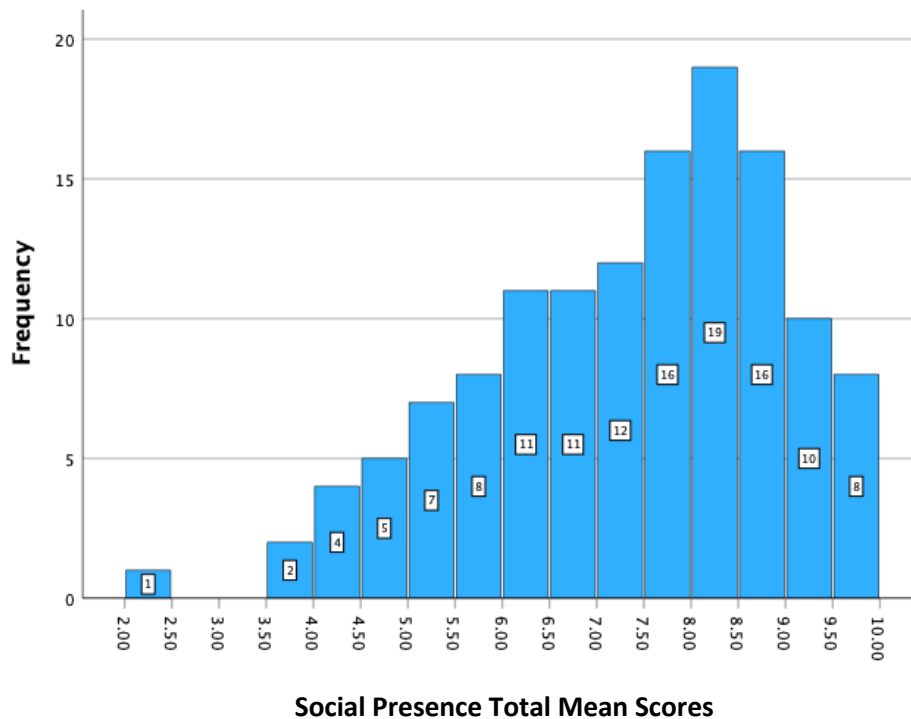
The fifth section of the survey contained 21 statements to establish perceptions of social presence. These statements underwent adaptation from Arbaugh et al.'s (2008) survey. Only the 21 questions related to social presence remained from the original 34-question survey. In this section, graduate students rated their level of agreement using a Likert-type scale of one (*strongly disagree*) to ten (*strongly agree*). A social presence total mean score was calculated for use in analyzing research question one and in analyzing research questions four, five, and six. The social presence total mean

score is the mean of an individual's responses to the 21 questions. The sample size, range, median, mean, and standard deviation were calculated for responses to each of the 21 statements to identify student perceptions of social presence. The items used to determine students' social presence perceptions had a very high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95. Correlational testing using Spearman's rho occurred by correlating each item with the total mean to determine the validity of each Likert-type question. Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for normality indicated that all responses of students' perceptions of social presence across all statements were not normally distributed ($D[135] = .121-.208$, $p < 0.001$).

Survey items in the student perceptions of social presence section that were missing responses voided the response and were not included in reporting the total mean score. Of the 135 social presence total mean scores calculated, scores ranged from 2.29–10.00. Figure 1 showcases the data using a histogram that shows the distribution of the social presence total mean scores. Most individuals have a social presence total mean score between 6.00 and 9.00, and the distribution is skewed to the left. There is a peak frequency around the social presence total mean score between 7.50 and 9.00 with 51 respondents between these three (7.50-8.00, 8.00-8.50, and 8.50-9.00) mean score ranges representing 38% of all survey participants. There were 18 respondents representing 13% of survey participants with mean scores between 9.00 and 10.00. There were 22 respondents representing 16% of all survey participants with mean scores between 6.00 and 7.00. The remaining 44 respondents represented 33% of all survey participants reported means of 5.99 and below. All social presence total mean score frequencies appear in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Social Presence Total Mean Score Frequencies



As seen in Table 7, the highest rated total social presence perception score ($M = 8.57, SD = 1.50$) was from graduate students who felt they applied the knowledge gained in this program to their work or other non-class-related activities. The second highest rated was being able to describe ways to apply the knowledge created within this program ($M = 8.46, SD = 1.71$). The third highest reporting was students felt they have developed solutions to course problems that can be applied to practice ($M = 8.39, SD = 1.68$). The fourth highest statement was being able to brainstorm and find relevant sources to explore problems posed in this program ($M = 8.37, SD = 1.80$). Finally, the fifth top statement was learning activities helped them to construct explanations/solutions ($M = 8.21, SD = 1.91$). Being able to form distant impressions of some course participants ($M = 4.96, SD = 2.67$) was the lowest scoring item and getting to know other course participants gave me a sense of belonging in the program ($M = 5.30,$

$SD = 2.79$) was the second lowest. There were seven items out of 21 items that had means reported above 8.00 and four items had means lower than 6.00. See Table 7 for the sample size, range, median, mean, and standard deviation for all 21 social presence questions.

Table 7

Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence Descriptive Statistics

Social presence statement n=135	Range		Median	Mean	SD
	Minimum	Maximum			
I can apply the knowledge created in this program to my work or other non-class related activities	4	10	9.00	8.57	1.50
I can describe ways to apply the knowledge created in this program	2	10	9.00	8.46	1.71
I have developed solutions to course problems that can be applied to practice	3	10	9.00	8.39	1.68
I can brainstorm and find relevant sources to explore problems posed in this program	1	10	9.00	8.37	1.80
Learning activities helped me construct explanations/solutions	1	10	9.00	8.21	1.91
I felt comfortable participating in the course discussions	1	10	9.00	8.20	2.03
I utilized a variety of information sources to explore problems posed in this program	1	10	9.00	8.10	1.95
Reflection on course content and discussions helped me understand fundamental concepts in this program	1	10	8.00	7.99	2.06
Combining new information helped me answer questions raised in course activities	1	10	8.00	7.90	1.97
I felt comfortable interacting with other course participants	1	10	8.00	7.90	2.33
I felt comfortable conversing through the online medium	1	10	8.00	7.88	2.24
Course activities piqued my interest	1	10	8.00	7.81	2.19
I felt comfortable disagreeing with other course participants while still maintaining a sense of trust	1	10	8.00	7.74	2.23
I felt motivated to explore content related questions	1	10	8.00	7.57	2.23
I felt that my point of view was acknowledged by other course participants	1	10	8.00	7.45	2.46
Questions/Scenarios posed increased my interest in course issues	1	10	8.00	7.35	2.572
Online discussions were valuable in helping me appreciate different perspectives	1	10	7.00	6.43	2.87

Social presence statement n=135	Range		Median	Mean	SD
	Minimum	Maximum			
Online discussions help me to develop a sense of collaboration	1	10	6.00	5.93	3.07
Online or web-based communication is an excellent medium for social interaction	1	10	5.00	5.71	2.66
Getting to know other course participants gave me a sense of belonging in the program	1	10	5.00	5.30	2.79
I was able to form distinct impressions of some course participants	1	10	5.00	4.96	2.67

Research Question 2: Why Do Students Choose an Online Accelerated MBA Program?

The first section of the survey contained four questions and one open-ended response for participants to discuss why they chose an online accelerated MBA program. This section was developed based on the literature review to explore the reasons students chose their online accelerated MBA program. Students were asked to rate their level of agreement using the same Likert-type scale from the social presence questions, where one = *strongly disagree* and ten = *strongly agree*. Mean, range, median, and standard deviation descriptive statistics were calculated for the four questions about why students chose an online accelerated MBA program. Histograms showcasing the distribution of the data for these four survey items are found in Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5. Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5 show that the data is skewed with the distribution skewed to the left in all four histograms.

Figure 2

Reasons for Choosing: Length of Classes Histogram

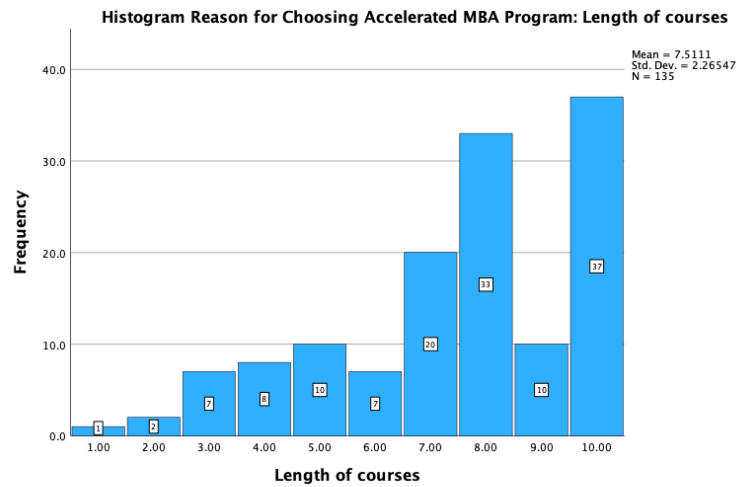


Figure 3

Reasons for Choosing: Convenience of the Online Format Histogram

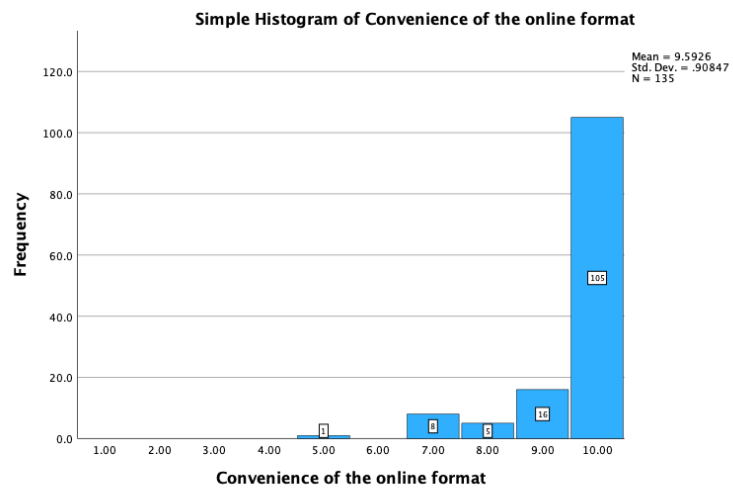
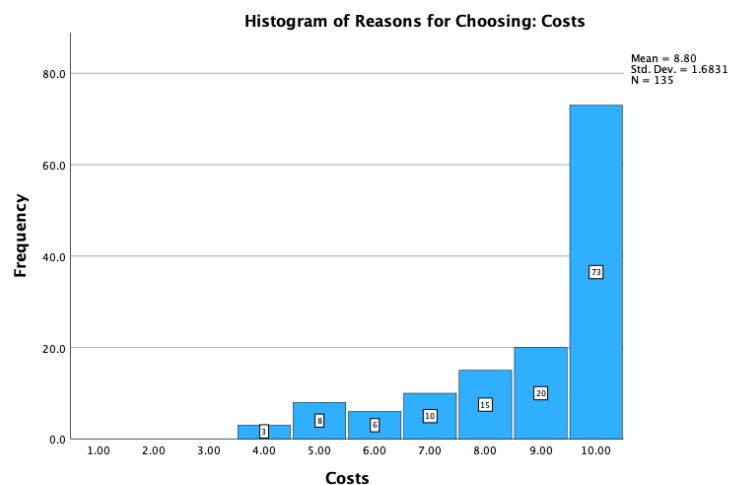
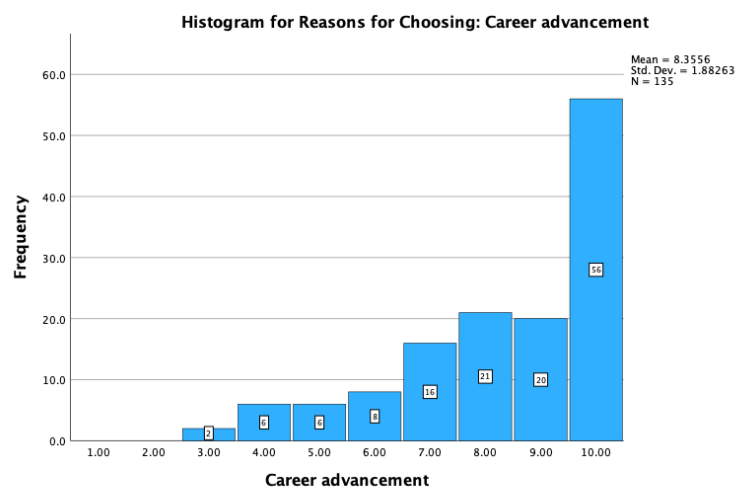


Figure 4*Reasons for Choosing: Cost Histogram***Figure 5***Reasons for Choosing: Career Advancement Histogram*

Items in the reasons for choosing an online accelerated MBA program were all significantly correlated with the social presence total mean score ($r_s(135) = .168-.250, p < 0.001$). A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality indicated that the students' responses about reasons for choosing such a program did not follow a normal distribution across all statements ($D[135] = 0.18-0.45, p < .0001$).

The most commonly stated reason for choosing an online accelerated MBA program was the convenience of the online format ($M = 9.59$, $SD = 0.91$); the least often was course length ($M = 7.51$, $SD = 2.27$). See Table 8.

Table 8

Reasons for Choosing an Online Accelerated MBA Program: Descriptive Statistics

Reasonings for choosing accelerated online MBA program $n=135$	Range		Median	Mean	SD
	Minimum	Maximum			
Convenience of the online format	5	10	10.00	9.59	0.91
Costs	4	10	10.00	8.80	1.683
Career advancement	3	10	9.00	8.36	1.88
Length of courses	1	10	8.00	7.51	2.27

Open-Ended Responses for Reasons for Choosing an Online Accelerated MBA Program. In this section, one open-ended question asked students if there were other reasons for choosing an online accelerated program. A manual thematic analysis of the responses began with coding the text into short summaries. Repeated phrases or words appearing across responses underwent thematic grouping and counting. For instance, one student wrote down that they chose an online accelerated MBA program due to their military schedule, and that response was coded as “Flexibility”. Another student wrote that they choose an online accelerated MBA program to perform better on their job and that was coded under “Career Growth.” The percentages of each theme were calculated from the total number of comments. Not every student made a comment, and some comments had multiple themes.

Forty-eight students responded to the open-ended question. Some students made multiple comments, resulting in 59 total comments. The following themes emerged: flexibility ($n = 16$); time ($n = 9$); structure of program ($n = 7$); career growth ($n = 6$); cost, including reimbursement options ($n = 6$); personal knowledge gained or personal growth ($n = 5$); networking opportunities ($n = 4$); accreditation of program ($n = 4$); and having no program prerequisites ($n = 2$). See Table 9 for the percentages of all themed responses.

Table 9*Reasons for Choosing an Online Accelerated MBA Program: Themed Responses*

Theme	Frequency (n)	%
Flexibility	16	27.1
Time	9	15.3
Program structure	7	11.9
Career growth	6	10.2
Cost, including reimbursement options	6	10.2
Personal growth	5	8.5
Networking	4	6.8
Accreditation of program	4	6.8
No prerequisites	2	3.4
Total	59	100

Some of the themes were repeats from previous survey questions. Most students chose to elaborate in more detail because the timing, flexibility, and structure of the program were important to them.

Research Question 3: What Are Students' Satisfactions with Their Current Online Accelerated MBA Program?

The two questions in the survey's second section elicited participants' level of agreement with statements about the online accelerated MBA program's pacing and workload. In the third section of the survey, students reported their perceptions of satisfactions with the curriculum and online classroom climate. These sections stemmed from the literature review on what students liked about their online accelerated MBA program. Students rated their level of agreement with statements using the same Likert-type scale from the previous sections, from one = *strongly disagree* and ten = *strongly agree*. Mean, range, median, and standard deviation descriptive statistics were calculated for the four questions about student perceptions of the pacing, workload, curriculum, and online classroom climate in their online accelerated MBA program. Correlational testing with the Spearman's rho statistic was a way to determine the validity of Likert-type questions by correlating each item with the total mean score. Items for the reasons for choosing an online accelerated MBA program were all significantly

correlated with the social presence total mean score ($r_s(135) = .489-.711, p < 0.001$). A Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for normality indicated that the students’ responses across all statements did not follow a normal distribution ($D[135] = 0.20-0.26, p < .001$). Histograms showcasing the distribution of the data for these six survey items within this section are found in Figures 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, and 11. These Figures show that the data is skewed with the distribution skewed to the left in all six histograms. In Figure 6, the majority of the students, 62 students representing 46% of all participants surveyed, were highly satisfied with the pacing of their online accelerated MBA program. Figure 7 shows that the majority of the students, 46 students representing 34% of all participants surveyed, were highly satisfied with the workload of their online accelerated MBA program. Figure 8 showcases that the majority of the students, 61 students representing 45% of all participants surveyed were highly satisfied with the online classroom climate. Figure 9 shows that the majority of the students, 47 students representing 35% of all participants surveyed were highly satisfied with the curriculum of their online accelerated MBA program. Figure 10 highlights that the majority of the students, 67 students representing 50% of all students surveyed were overall highly satisfied with their online accelerated MBA program. Figure 11 showcases that the majority of the students, 82 students representing 61% of all students surveyed would highly recommend the program to others.

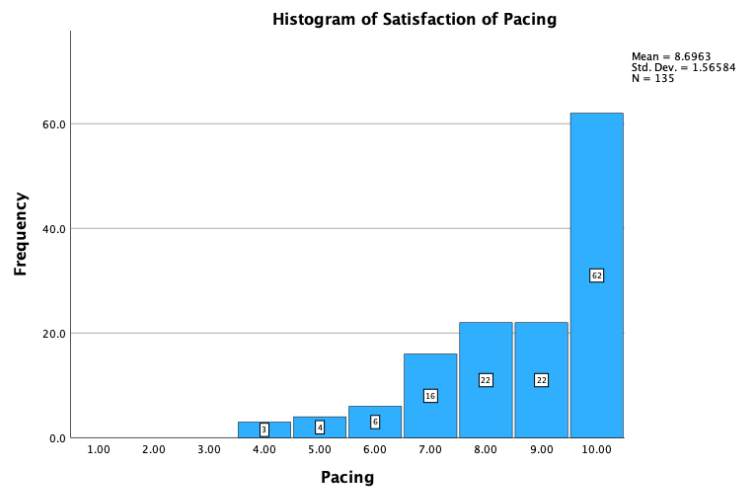
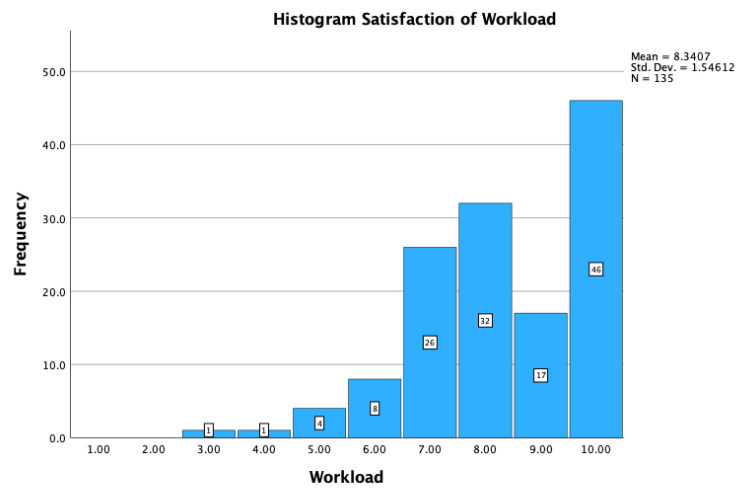
Figure 6*Satisfaction with Pacing Histogram***Figure 7***Satisfaction with Workload Histogram*

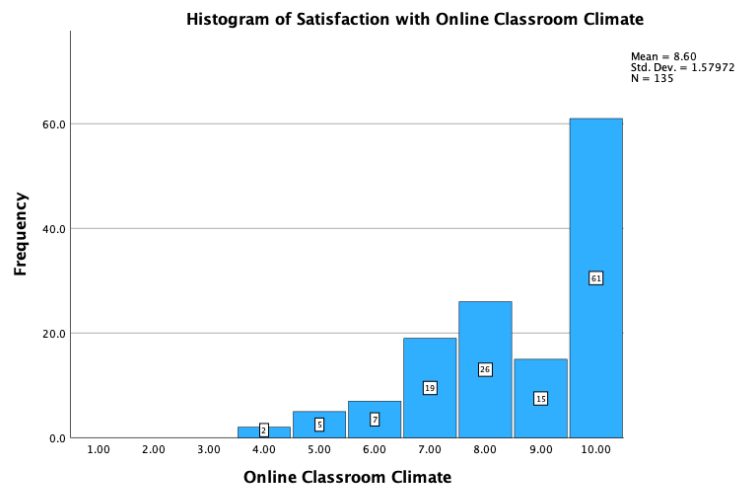
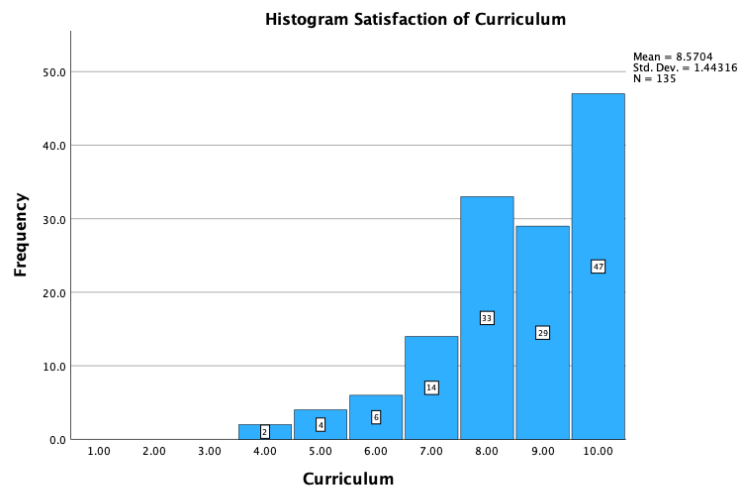
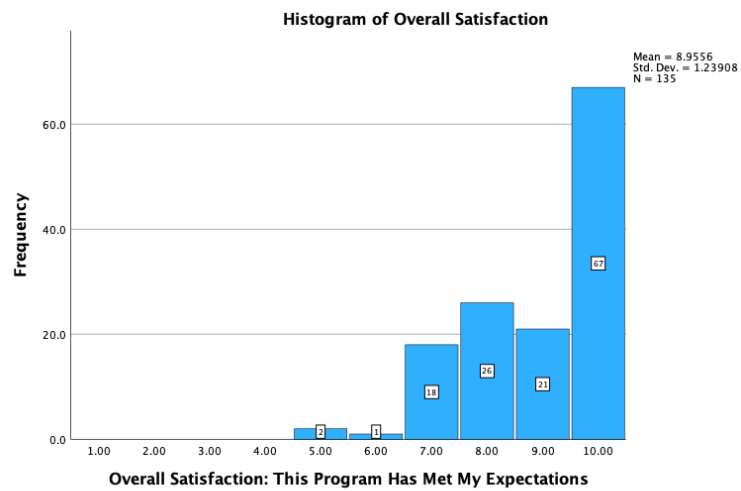
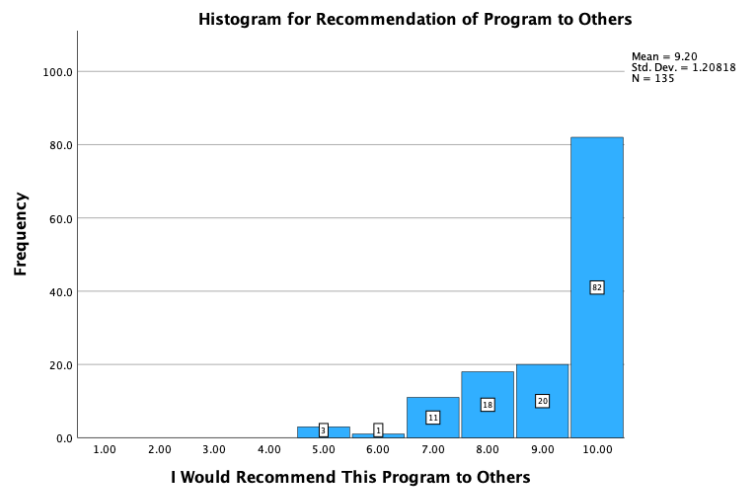
Figure 8*Satisfaction with Online Classroom Environment Histogram***Figure 9***Satisfaction with Curriculum Frequencies Histogram*

Figure 10*Overall Satisfaction Histogram***Figure 11***Overall Recommendation Histogram*

Students reported being most satisfied with the course pacing ($M = 8.70$, $SD = 1.57$). The second highest item that brought the students the most satisfaction was their perception of the online class environment ($M = 8.60$, $SD = 1.58$). See Table 10 for sample size, range, median, mean, and standard deviation.

Table 10

Ranking of What Students Are Satisfied With in Their Online Accelerated MBA Program

Perception of satisfaction n=135	Range		Median	Mean	SD
	Minimum	Maximum			
Pacing	4	10	9.00	8.70	1.57
Online Class Environment	4	10	9.00	8.60	1.58
Curriculum	4	10	9.00	8.57	1.44
Workload	3	10	8.00	8.34	1.55

In the survey's fourth section, the participants answered two questions to rate their overall level of satisfaction with their online accelerated MBA program and their willingness to recommend the program to others. Students rated their level of agreement using the same Likert-type scale from one = *strongly disagree* to ten = *strongly agree*. Descriptive statistics in the form of range, median, mean, and standard deviation were calculated for the two questions about their perceived satisfaction with their online accelerated MBA program. Correlational testing using the Spearman's rho statistic enabled determining the validity of Likert-type questions by correlating each item with the total score. The reasons for choosing an online accelerated MBA program were all significantly correlated ($r_s(135) = .822$, $p < 0.001$). A Kolmogorov–Smirnov test for normality indicated that students' responses did not follow a normal distribution ($D[135] = 0.30\text{--}0.35$, $p < 0.001$). Overall, the students believed their online accelerated MBA program met their expectations ($M = 8.96$, $SD = 1.24$) and would recommend the program to others ($M = 9.20$, $SD = 1.21$; see Table 11).

Table 11*Overall Satisfaction with Online Accelerated MBA Program*

Overall satisfaction n=135	Range		Median	Mean	SD
	Minimum	Maximum			
I would recommend this program to others	5	10	10.00	9.20	1.21
This program met my expectations	5	10	9.00	8.96	1.24

Research Question 4: Is There a Relationship Between Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Their Reasons for Choosing an Online Accelerated MBA Program?

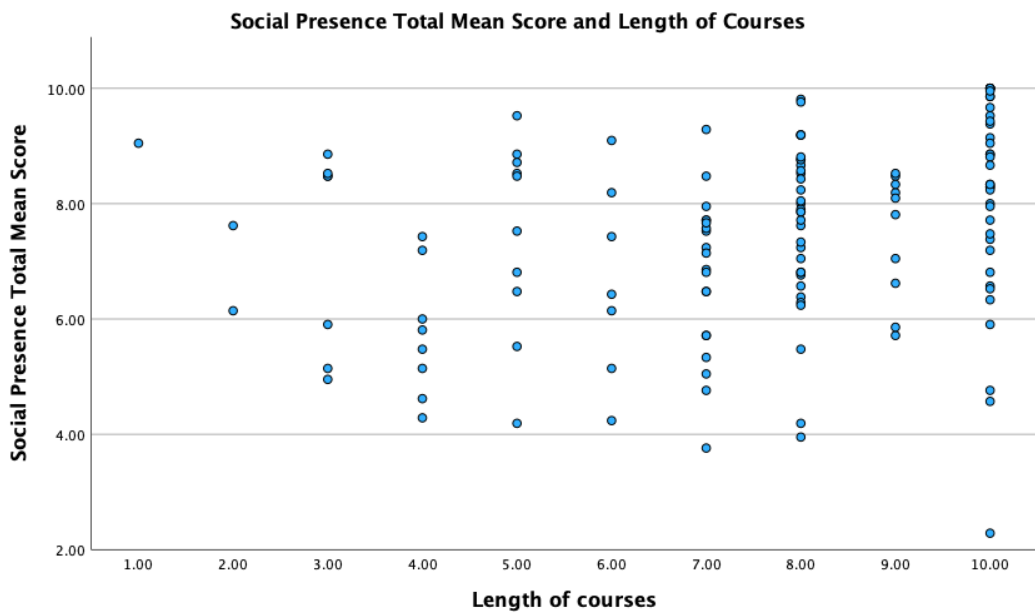
The first step to answering this question was calculating a social presence total mean score column. Next, correlations were calculated for the social presence total mean scores with the responses to why students choose an online accelerated MBA program: length of courses, convenience of the online format, cost, and career advancement.

Social Presence and Length of Courses. First, there was an evaluation of the data regarding students' social presence perceptions and one reason for choosing an online accelerated program, length of courses, for normal distribution and test assumptions. Descriptive statistics were calculated for survey responses to check for normal distribution of responses to determine appropriateness of the various parametric testing planned for data analysis. Since the data was not normally distributed for this survey item, a Spearman's rho was the statistic used to assess the relationship between participants' perceptions of social presence and the importance they placed on the length of courses in their decision to select an online accelerated MBA program. There was a moderate, positive correlation between the two variables that was statistically significant, $r_s(135) = .332, p < .001$. The Spearman's rho value of 0.332 indicates a moderate positive correlation between the two variables. This suggests that as one variable increases, the other tends to increase as well, but the relationship is not particularly strong. The p-value of less than 0.001 indicates that the correlation is highly statistically significant. This means that there is a very low probability that the observed correlation is due to random chance, providing strong

evidence of a real association between the variables. A scatterplot of the dependent variables (see Figure 12) shows the relationship is moderate and positive. With a visual inspection, this scatterplot (Figure 12) does show a slight curve in the relationship which could mean that caution needs to be made with using a linear statistical analysis.

Figure 12

Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Length of Courses

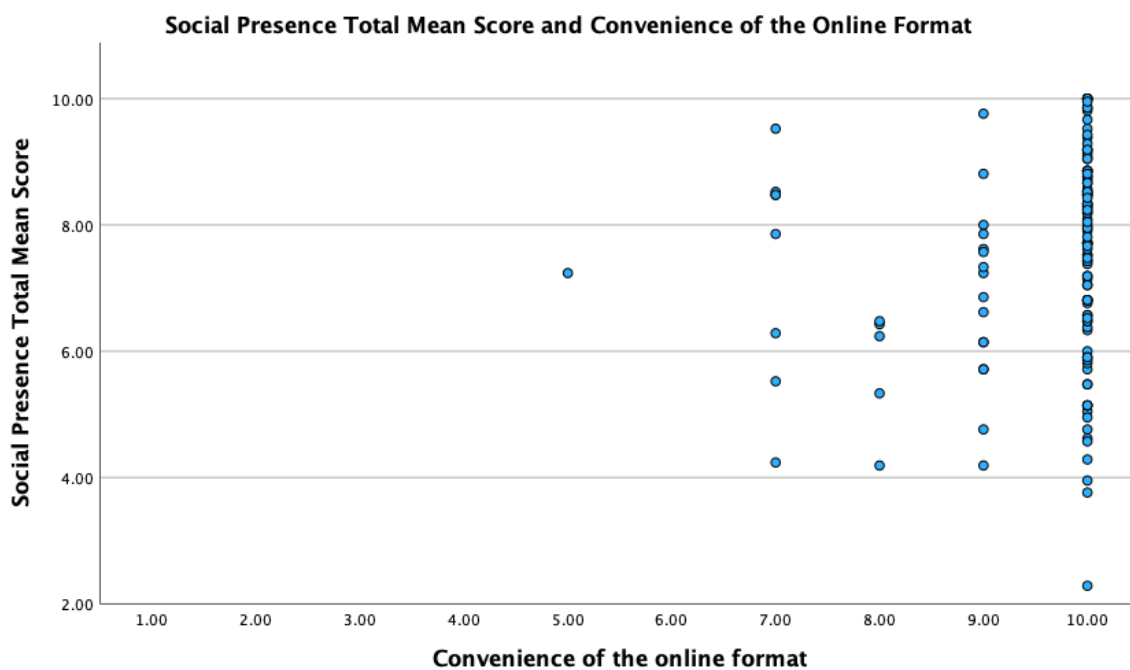


Social Presence and Convenience of Online Format. An evaluation of the data regarding students' social presence perceptions and reason for choosing an online accelerated program, convenience of online format, occurred for normal distribution and test assumptions. Descriptive statistics were calculated for survey responses to check for normal distribution of responses to determine appropriateness of the various parametric testing planned for data analysis. Since the data was not normally distributed for this survey item, a Spearman's rho was the statistical test used to assess the relationship between participants' perceptions and the importance of the convenience of the online format in selecting an online accelerated MBA program. There was a weak, positive correlation between

the two variables that was statistically significant, $r_s = (135) = .213, p < .013$. The Spearman's rho value of 0.213 indicates a weak positive correlation between the two variables. This suggests that as one variable increases, the other variable also tends to increase, but the relationship is relatively weak. The p-value of less than 0.013 indicates that the correlation is statistically significant. This means that there is a small probability that the observed correlation is due to random chance, providing some evidence of a real association between the variables. Displaying this relationship, a scatterplot of the dependent variables (see Figure 13) shows the scattering of the points that do not form a perfect line. The location of the points indicates the relationship is weak and positive.

Figure 13

Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Convenience of Online Format

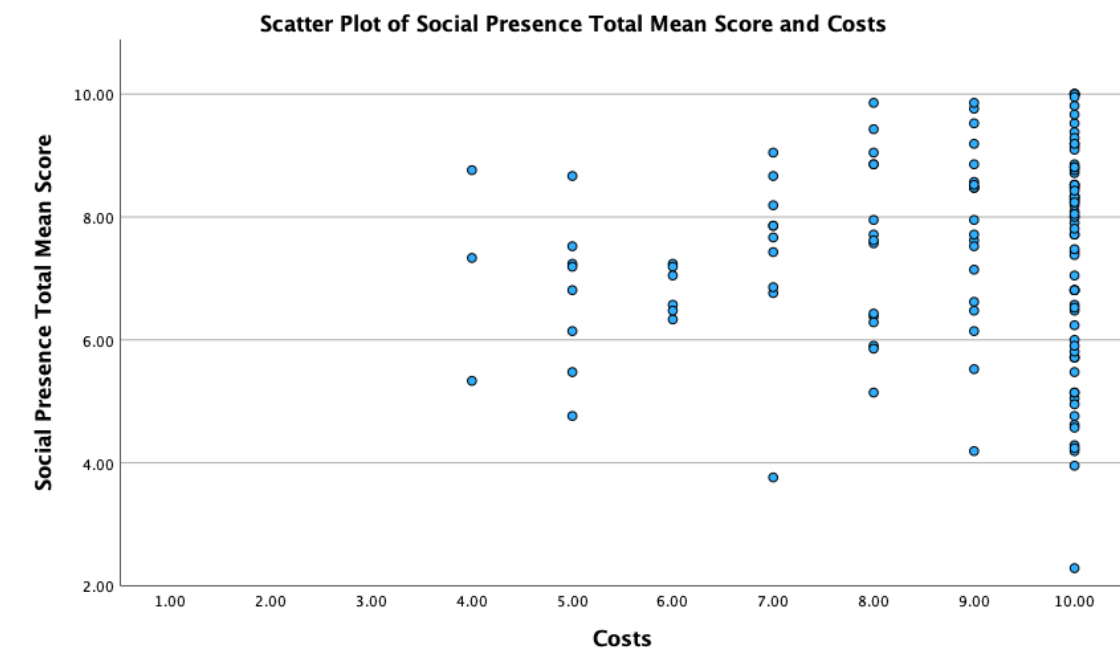


Social Presence and Costs. Data analysis began with an evaluation of the data regarding student social presence perceptions and one reason for choosing an online accelerated program, cost, for normal distribution and test assumptions. Descriptive statistics were calculated for survey responses to

check for a normal distribution of responses to determine appropriateness of the various parametric testing planned for data analysis. Since the data was not normally distributed, a Spearman's rho was the test used to assess the relationship between participants' perceptions of social presence and the importance they placed on cost in their decision to select an online accelerated MBA program. There was a negligible, positive correlation between the two variables that was not statistically significant, $r_s = (135) = .112, p < .195$. The Spearman's rho value of 0.112 indicates a negligible positive correlation between the two variables. This suggests that there is a slight tendency for one variable to increase as the other increases, but the relationship is very weak and likely not practically significant. The p-value of 0.195 is not statistically significant at common alpha levels at 0.05. This means that there is a relatively high probability that the observed correlation could have occurred by random chance, and therefore, there is not enough evidence to conclude that there is a meaningful relationship between the variables. A scatterplot of the dependent variables (see Figure 14) shows the scattering of the points, and the relationship is weak and positive.

Figure 14

Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Costs

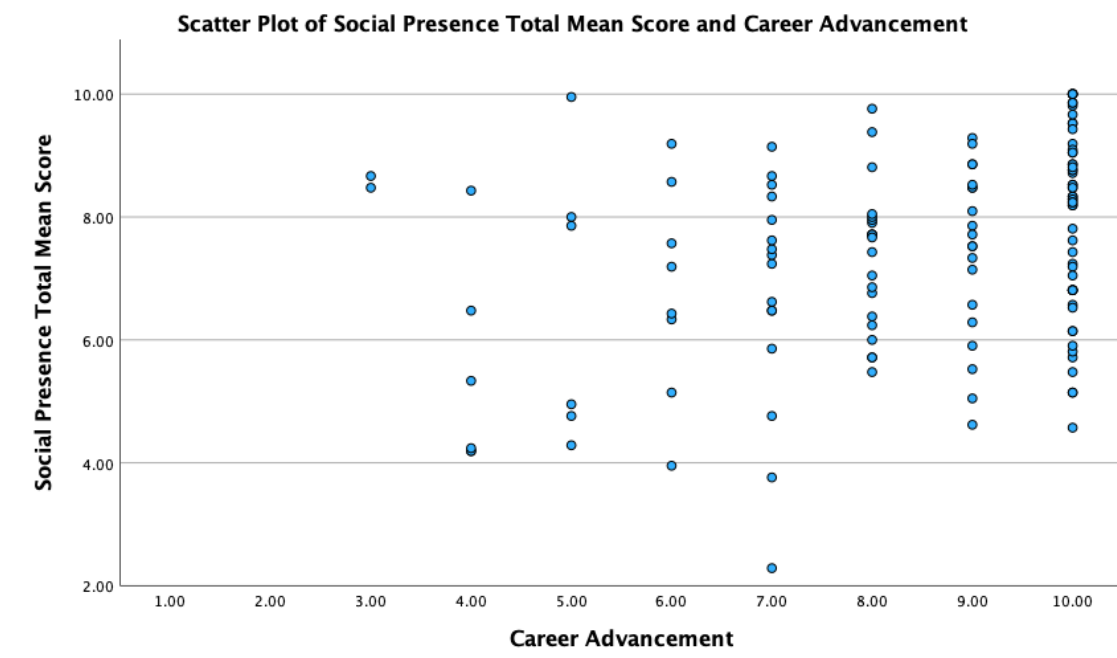


Social Presence and Career Advancement. The first step was evaluating the data regarding students' social presence perceptions and one reason for choosing an online accelerated program, career advancement, for normal distribution and test assumptions. Descriptive statistics were calculated for survey responses to check for a normal distribution of responses to determine appropriateness of the various parametric testing planned for data analysis. Since the data was not normally distributed, a Spearman's rho was the statistical test used to assess the relationship between participants' perceptions of social presence and the importance they placed on cost in their decision to select an online accelerated MBA program. There was a moderate, positive correlation between the two variables that was statistically significant, $r_s = (135) = .323, p < .001$. The Spearman's rho value of .323 indicates a moderate positive correlation between the two variables. This suggests that as one variable increases, the other variable tends to increase as well, with a noticeable but not very strong relationship. The p-value of less than 0.001 indicates that the correlation is statistically significant. This means that there is a

very low probability that the observed correlation occurred by random chance, providing strong evidence of a real association between the variables. A scatterplot of the dependent variables (see Figure 15) shows that the points do not form a perfect line. The location of the points indicates that the relationship is moderate and positive.

Figure 15

Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Career Advancement



To answer this Research Question Number Four, there was the strongest relationship, reporting a significance between social presence and the reason of length of courses and social presence and the reason of career advancement for choosing an online accelerated MBA program, both showing a moderate and positive relationship. The relationship between social presence and the reason of choosing an online accelerated MBA program as the convenience of the online format showed significance, but with a negligible and positive relationship. This study found that there was no significance between social presence and cost as a reason for choosing an online accelerated MBA program.

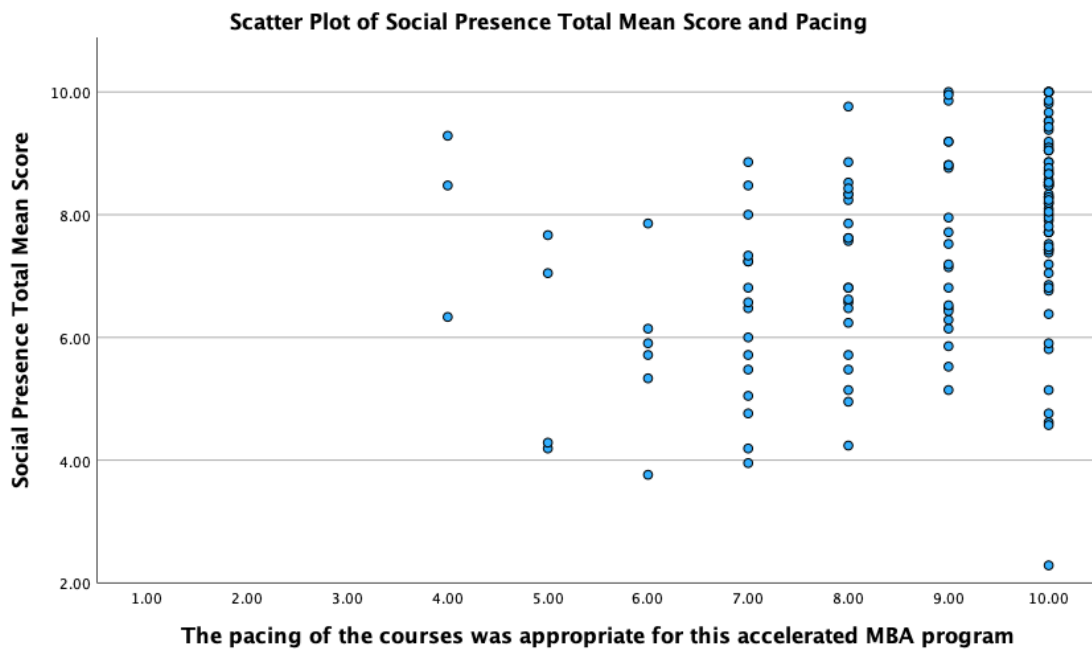
Research Question 5: Is There a Relationship Between Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Their Perceived Satisfaction with Their Online Accelerated MBA Program?

Answering this research question began by calculating a column for the social presence total mean score and correlating the score with students' perceived satisfaction level with pacing, workload, curriculum, the online class environment, overall satisfaction with the program, and the recommending of the program to others.

Social Presence and Pacing. First, there was an evaluation of the data regarding student social presence perceptions and their perceived satisfaction with the pacing of their online accelerated MBA program for normal distribution and test assumptions. Descriptive statistics were calculated for survey responses to check for a normal distribution of responses to determine appropriateness of the various parametric testing planned for data analysis. Since the data was not normally distributed, a Spearman's rho was the statistical test used to assess the relationship between participants' perceptions of social presence and the importance they placed on their perceived satisfaction with the pacing for their online accelerated MBA program. There was a moderate, positive correlation between the two variables that was statistically significant, $r_s = (135) = .407, p < .001$. The Spearman's rho value of 0.407 indicates a moderate positive correlation between the two variables. This suggests that as one variable increases, the other variable also tends to increase, with a noticeable and meaningful relationship. The p-value of less than 0.001 indicates that the correlation is highly statistically significant. This means that there is a very low probability that the observed correlation occurred by random chance, providing strong evidence of a real and substantial association between the variables. A scatterplot of the dependent variables (see Figure 16) shows the scattering of the points that do not form a perfect line. The points indicate that the relationship is moderate and positive. With a visual inspection, this scatterplot (Figure 16) may also show curvature and thus the correlation analysis needs to be taken with caution.

Figure 16

Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Scores and Perceptions of Pacing

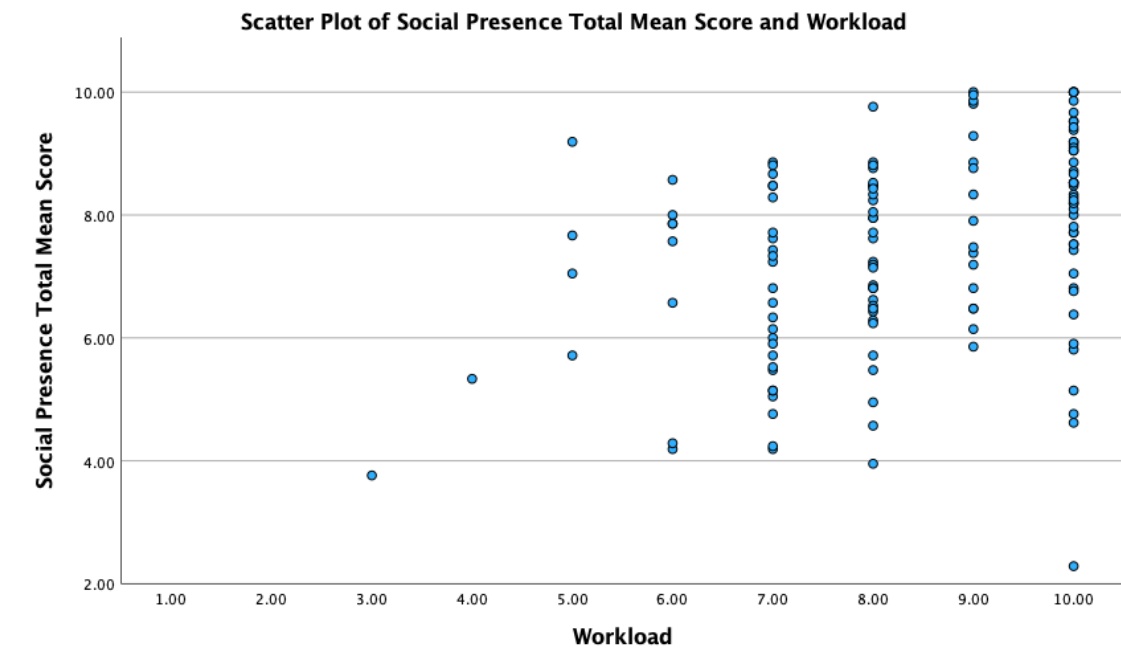


Social Presence and Workload. There was an evaluation of the data regarding students' social presence perceptions and their perceived satisfaction with the workload of their online accelerated MBA program for normal distribution and test assumptions. Descriptive statistics were calculated for survey responses to check for a normal distribution of responses to determine appropriateness of the various parametric testing planned for data analysis. Since the data was not normally distributed, a Spearman's rho was the statistical test used to assess the relationship between participants' perceptions of social presence and the importance they placed on their perceived satisfaction with the workload for their online accelerated MBA program. There was a moderate, positive correlation between the two variables that was statistically significant, $r_s = (135) = .386, p < .001$. The Spearman's rho value of 0.386 indicates a moderate positive correlation between the two variables. This suggests that as one variable increases, the other variable also tends to increase, with a noticeable but not very strong relationship. The p-value of less than 0.001 indicates that the correlation is highly statistically significant. This means that there is

a very low probability that the observed correlation occurred by random chance, providing strong evidence of a real association between the variables. A scatterplot of the dependent variables (see Figure 17) shows that the points do not form a perfect line. The points indicate that the relationship is moderate and positive.

Figure 17

Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Scores and Perceptions of Workload

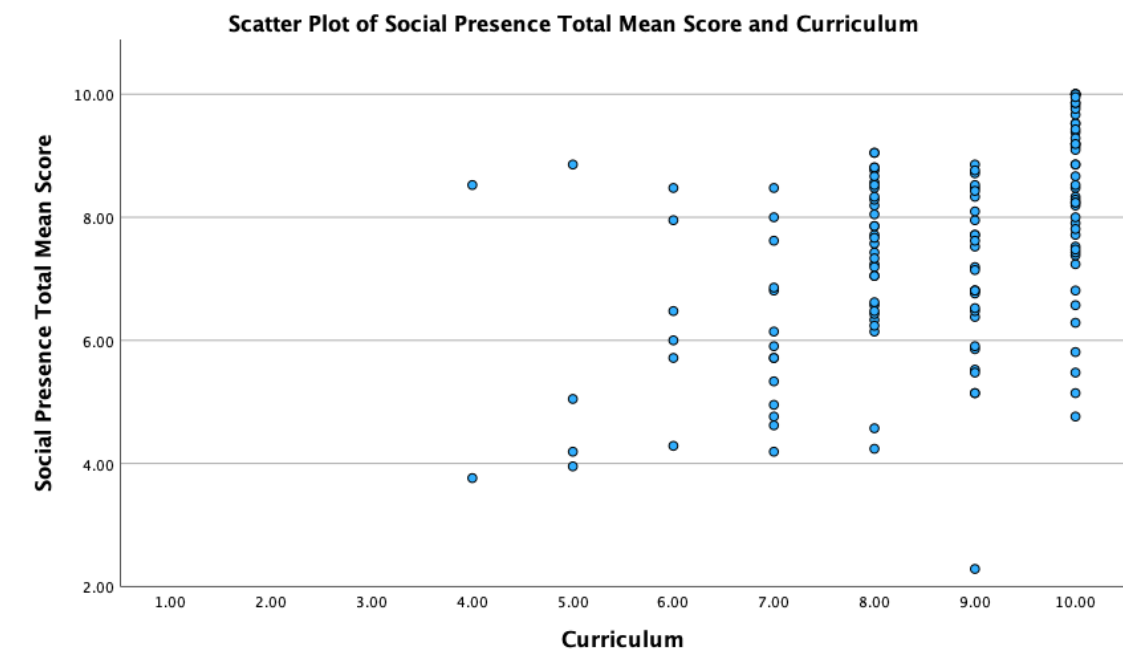


Social Presence and Curriculum. Analysis began with an evaluation of the data regarding students' social presence perceptions and their perceived satisfaction with the curriculum of their online accelerated MBA program for normal distribution and test assumptions. Descriptive statistics were calculated for survey responses to check for a normal distribution of responses to determine appropriateness of the various parametric testing planned for data analysis. Since the data was not normally distributed, a Spearman's rho was the statistical test used to assess the relationship between participants' perceptions of social presence and the importance they placed on their perceived satisfaction with the workload in their online accelerated MBA program. There was a moderate, positive

correlation between the two variables that was statistically significant, $r_s = (135) = .346, p < .001$. The Spearman's rho value of 0.346 indicates a moderate positive correlation between the two variables. This suggests that as one variable increases, the other variable also tends to increase, with a noticeable but not very strong relationship. The p-value of less than 0.001 indicates that the correlation is highly statistically significant. This means that there is a very low probability that the observed correlation occurred by random chance, providing strong evidence of a real association between the variables. A scatterplot of the dependent variables (see Figure 18) shows that the points do not form a perfect line. The points indicate that the relationship is moderate and positive.

Figure 18

Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Perceptions of Curriculum

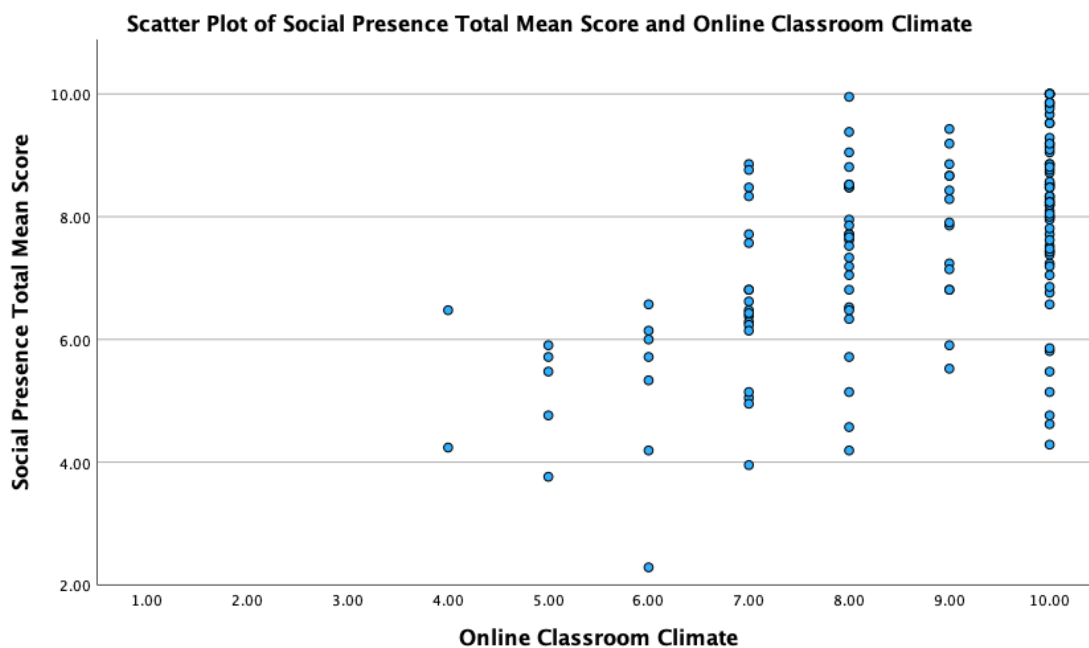


Social Presence and Online Class Environment. Analysis began with an evaluation of the data regarding students' social presence perceptions and their perceived satisfaction with the online class environment of their online accelerated MBA program for normal distributions and test assumptions. Descriptive statistics were calculated for survey responses to check for a normal distribution of

responses to determine appropriateness of the various parametric testing planned for data analysis. Since the data was not normally distributed, a Spearman's rho was the statistical test used to assess the relationship between participants' perceptions of social presence and the importance they placed on their perceived satisfaction with the workload for their online accelerated MBA program. There was a moderately strong, positive correlation between the two variables that was statistically significant, $r_s = (135) = .503, p < .001$. The Spearman's rho value of 0.503 indicates a moderately strong positive correlation between the two variables. This suggests that as one variable increases, the other variable also tends to increase, with a relatively strong relationship. The p-value of less than 0.001 indicates that the correlation is highly statistically significant. This means that there is a very low probability that the observed correlation occurred by random chance, providing strong evidence of a real association between the variables. A scatterplot of the dependent variables (see Figure 19) shows that the points do not form a perfect line. The points indicate that the relationship is moderately strong and positive. Figure 19 does show a slight curvature in this relationship, thus the correlation analysis should be taken with caution.

Figure 19

Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Perceptions of Online Classroom Climate

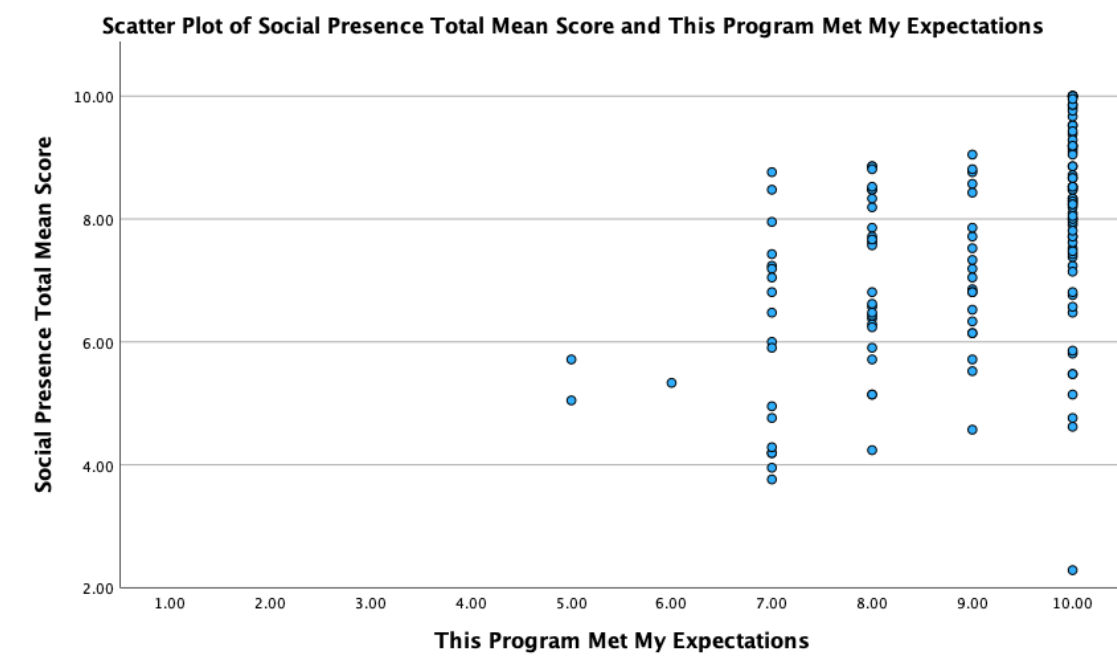


Social Presence and Overall Satisfaction. Analysis began with an evaluation of the data regarding students' social presence perceptions and their perceived overall satisfaction with the online accelerated MBA program for normal distribution and test assumptions. Descriptive statistics were calculated for survey responses to check for a normal distribution of responses to determine appropriateness of the various parametric testing planned for data analysis. Since the data was not normally distributed, a Spearman's rho was the statistical test used to assess the relationship between participants' perceptions of social presence and the importance they placed on their perceived overall satisfaction with their online accelerated MBA program. There was a moderate, positive correlation between the two variables that was statistically significant, $r_s = (135) = .480, p < .001$. The Spearman's rho value of 0.480 indicates a moderate positive correlation between the two variables. This suggests that as one variable increases, the other variable also tends to increase, with a noticeable and meaningful relationship. The p-value of less than 0.001 indicates that the correlation is highly

statistically significant. This means that there is a very low probability that the observed correlation occurred by random chance, providing strong evidence of a real and substantial association between the variables. A scatterplot of the dependent variables (see Figure 20) shows that the points do not form a perfect line. The points indicate that the relationship is moderate and positive.

Figure 20

Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Overall Perceived Satisfaction of MBA Program

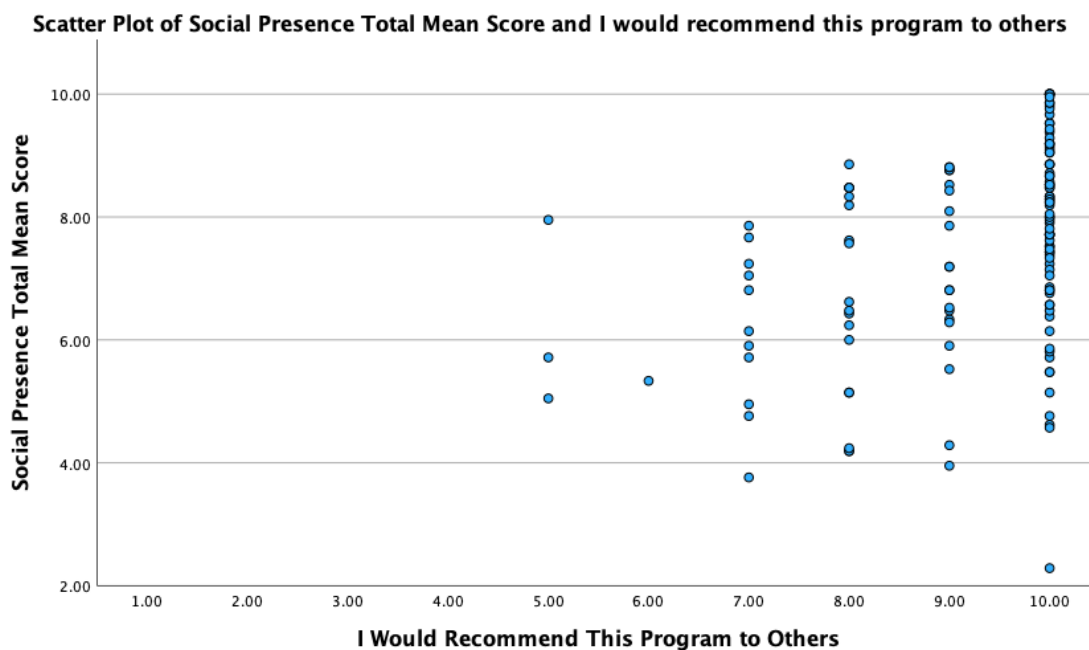


Social Presence and Recommendation. Analysis began with an evaluation of the data regarding students' social presence perceptions and their perceived recommendation of their online accelerated MBA program for normal distribution and test assumptions. Descriptive statistics were calculated for survey responses to check for a normal distribution of responses to determine appropriateness of the various parametric testing planned for data analysis. Since the data was not normally distributed, a Spearman's rho was the statistical test used to assess the relationship between participants' perceptions of social presence and the importance they placed on recommending their online accelerated MBA program to others. There was a moderate, positive correlation between the two variables that was

statistically significant, $r_s = (135) = .416$, $p < .001$ (see Figure 21). The Spearman's rho value of 0.416 indicates a moderate positive correlation between the two variables. This suggests that as one variable increases, the other variable also tends to increase, with a noticeable and meaningful relationship. The p-value of less than 0.001 indicates that the correlation is highly statistically significant. This means that there is a very low probability that the observed correlation occurred by random chance, providing strong evidence of a real and substantial association between the variables. The points indicate that the relationship is moderate and positive.

Figure 21

Scatterplot of Social Presence Total Mean Score and Recommendation of Program to Others



This study found that all perceptions of satisfaction (pacing, workload, curriculum, online classroom environment, overall satisfaction, and recommendation of the program to others) were significant with the total mean score of social presence. The strongest relationship that was found in this study was between social presence total mean scores and students' perceived satisfactions of the online classroom environment reporting a moderately strong relationship, whereas the remaining

perceptions of satisfactions (pacing, working, curriculum, overall satisfaction, and recommendation of the program to others) showed a moderate relationship.

Research Question 6: Is There a Relationship Between Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Demographic Characteristics Such as Gender, Age, Number of Online MBA Courses Taken, Hours Worked Weekly, or the Hours Worked on Coursework Weekly?

Gender and Social Presence. After an evaluation of the data regarding students' social presence perceptions for normal distribution and test assumptions, using descriptive statistics that showed that the data was not normally distributed, a Mann–Whitney U test was run to determine if there was a difference in the dependent variable social presence total mean score and the independent variable gender (male or female). Distributions of the social presence total mean scores for males and females were not similar, as assessed by visual inspection, and not normal as assessed by a KS normality test. Since the distributions are not similar, mean ranks are compared as opposed to medians. Mean rank social presence total mean scores for males (66.04) and females (67.81) was not statistically significant, $U = 2137.50, p = .792$.

Age and Social Presence. After an evaluation of the data regarding student social presence perceptions for normal distribution and test assumptions, a Kruskal–Wallis test was run to determine if there was a difference in the dependent variable, social presence total score, and the independent variable of age range since the data were not normally distributed. In this Kruskal-Wallis test, the mean ranking column represents the ranking of the total mean social presence scores across the different age ranges. Higher mean ranks indicate a higher level of social presence for that age group. Within Table 12, the highest mean rank was the 41-45 age group (86.73) indicating this group perceived the highest social presence. The younger age groups, particularly the 18-25 years old had a mean rank of 56.94 and the 26-30 years old with a mean rank of 53.72 have the lowest mean ranks suggesting that these groups perceive the least social presence. There was a statistically significant difference in the distribution of

social presence total scores across the different age groups. This means that at least one age group differed significantly in terms of social presence compared to the other age groups. Mean social presence total mean scores were statistically significantly different between groups, $\chi^2(6, N=135) = 13.260, p = .039$ (see Table 12).

Table 12

Kruskal–Wallis Test of Social Presence Total Mean Score Across Age Ranges

Variable	Age range	N	Median	Mean Rank	Kruskal–Wallis Chi-square	Sig.
Social presence total mean score	18–25	26	7.21	56.94	13.260	.039*
	26–30	34	6.71	53.72		
	31–35	22	7.71	70.73		
	36–40	24	8.26	79.52		
	41–45	11	8.24	86.73		
	46–50	11	8.05	81.41		
	51+	7	8.43	79.86		

Note. * $p < .05$

To determine the significance between age groups, a Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple pairwise comparisons was run. This post hoc analysis without the Bonferroni correction revealed statistically significant differences in mean social presence scores between age ranges of 26-30 and 36-40 ($p=.013$), 26-30 and 46-50 ($p=.041$), 26-30 and 41-45 ($p=.015$), 18-25 and 36-40 ($p=.041$), and 18-25 and 41-45 ($p=.034$). No other age ranges showed a significant difference, see Table 13.

Table 13*Pairwise Comparisons of Age Ranges with Social Presence Total Score*

Age Range 1 vs. Age Range 2	Median 1 vs Median 2	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig. ⁺
18-25 vs. 31-35	7.21 vs. 7.71	-1.217	.224	1.000
18-25 vs. 36-40	7.21 vs. 8.26	-2.040	.041*	.869
18-25 vs. 41-45	7.21 vs. 8.24	-2.117	.034*	.719
18-25 vs. 46-50	7.21 vs. 8.05	-1.739	.082	1.000
18-25 vs. 51+	7.21 vs. 8.43	-1.376	.169	1.000
26-30 vs. 18-25	6.71 vs. 7.21	.316	.752	1.000
26-30 vs. 31-35	6.71 vs. 7.71	-1.589	.112	1.000
26-30 vs. 36-40	6.71 vs. 8.26	-2.474	.013*	.280
26-30 vs. 41-45	6.71 vs. 8.24	-2.433	.015*	.314
26-30 vs. 46-50	6.71 vs. 8.05	-2.041	.041*	.866
26-30 vs. 51+	6.71 vs. 8.43	-1.610	.107	1.000
31-35 vs. 36-40	7.71 vs. 8.26	-.762	.446	1.000
31-35 vs. 41-45	7.71 vs. 8.24	-1.108	.268	1.000
31-35 vs. 46-50	7.71 vs. 8.05	-.740	.460	1.000
31-35 vs. 51+	7.71 vs. 8.43	-.538	.591	1.000
36-40 vs. 41-45	8.26 vs. 8.24	-.506	.613	1.000
36-40 vs. 46-50	8.26 vs. 8.05	-.133	.895	1.000
36-40 vs. 51+	8.26 vs. 8.26	-.020	.984	1.000
46-50 vs. 41-45	8.05 vs. 8.24	.319	.750	1.000
51+ vs. 41-45	8.43 vs. 8.24	.363	.716	1.000
51+ vs. 46-50	8.43 vs. 8.05	.082	.935	1.000

+Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Age Range 1 and Age Range 2 distributions are the same.

The significance level is .05*. The two-sided significance p-values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.

Number of Online Courses Taken and Social Presence. After an evaluation of the data regarding student social presence perceptions for normal distribution and test assumptions, a Kruskal–Wallis test was run to determine if there was a difference in the dependent variable, social presence total score, and the independent variable of number of online courses taken in the students’ MBA program since the distributions were not normal. Distributions of the social presence total mean scores for the number of courses were not similar, as assessed by visual inspection. In this Kruskal-Wallis test, the mean ranking column represents the ranking of the total mean social presence scores across the different

number of online courses taken. Higher mean ranks indicate a higher level of social presence for the group with that number of online courses taken. Within Table 14, the highest mean rank was the number of courses taken equal to one (85.30) indicating this group perceived the highest social presence. The 8 or more classes taken group, had the lowest mean rank of 57.08 suggesting that the more the number of classes taken, that group perceived the least social presence. There was a statistically significant difference in the distribution of social presence total scores across the different number of courses taken. This means that at least one range of the number of courses differed significantly in terms of social presence compared to the other ranges. Median social presence total mean scores were statistically significantly different between groups, $\chi^2(3, N=135) = 9.775, p = .021$ (see Table 14).

Table 14

Kruskal–Wallis Test of Social Presence Total Mean Scores Across Number of Courses Taken

Variable	Number of courses taken	N	Median	Mean Ranks	Kruskal–Wallis Chi-square	Sig.
Social presence total mean score	1	10	8.26	85.30	9.775	.021*
	2–4	35	7.24	64.06		
	5–7	42	8.14	79.64		
	8 or more	48	7.10	57.08		

Note. * $p < .05$

Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn’s (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. This post hoc analysis with the Bonferroni correction showed adjusted statistically significant differences in mean social presence scores among those students who have taken 8 or more classes and 5-7 classes ($p=.038$). No other number of classes taken produced significant results (see Table 15).

Table 15*Pairwise Comparisons of Number of Courses with Social Presence Total Score*

# of Classes Taken 1 vs. # of Classes Taken 2	Median 1 vs. Median 2	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig. [†]
2-4 vs. This is my first online course in the program	7.24 vs. 8.26	1.515	.130	.779
2-4 vs. 5-7	7.24 vs. 8.14	-1.741	.082	.490
5-7 vs. This is my first online course in the program	8.14 vs. 8.26	.411	.681	1.000
8 or more vs. This is my first online course in the program	7.10 vs. 8.26	2.076	.038*	.228
8 or more vs. 2-4	7.10 vs. 7.24	.802	.422	1.000
8 or more vs. 5-7	7.10 vs. 8.14	2.730	.006*	.038*

†Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Number of Online Courses 1 and Number of Online Courses 2 distributions are the same. The significance level is .05*. The two-sided significance p-values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.

Total Score of Social Presence and Number of Hours Worked on Job. After evaluation of the data regarding student social presence perceptions for normal distribution and test assumptions, a Kruskal–Wallis test was run to determine if there was a difference in the dependent variable, social presence total score, and the independent variable of the number of hours worked at either a part-time or full-time job since the distributions were not normal. Distributions of the social presence total mean scores for the number of courses were not similar, as assessed by visual inspection. In this Kruskal-Wallis test, the mean ranking column represents the ranking of the total mean social presence scores across the number of hours worked in a job. Higher mean ranks indicate a higher level of social presence for that group. Within Table 16, the highest mean rank was the group working on average 21-30 hours per week at their job (83.36) indicating this group perceived the highest social presence. The most hours worked with an on average of 51+ hours per week had the lowest mean ranks (63.25) suggesting that the group that works the most hours on their job perceived the least social presence. There was no

statistically significant difference in social presence and the number of hours worked in a career, $\chi^2(4, N=135) = 2.449, p = .654$ (see Table 16).

Table 16

Kruskal–Wallis Test of Social Presence Total Mean Scores Across Number of Hours Worked

Variable	Number of hours worked	N	Median	Mean Ranks	Kruskal–Wallis Chi-square	Sig.
Social presence total mean score	< 20 hours/week	6	9.81	75.58	2.449	.654
	21–30 hours/week	7	8.05	83.36		
	31–40 hours/week	42	7.90	70.71		
	41–50 hours/week	61	7.52	63.93		
	51+ hours/week	18	7.60	63.25		

Total Score of Social Presence and Number of Hours Worked on Coursework. After evaluation of the data regarding student social presence perceptions for normal distribution and test assumptions, a Kruskal–Wallis test was run to determine if there was a difference in the dependent variable, social presence total score, and the independent variable of the number of hours worked on coursework since the distributions were not normal. Distributions of the social presence total mean scores for the number of hours worked on coursework were not similar, as assessed by visual inspection. In this Kruskal–Wallis test, the mean ranking column represents the ranking of the total mean social presence scores across the number of hours worked on students' coursework. Higher mean ranks indicate a higher level of social presence for that group. Within Table 17, the highest mean rank was the group working on course work on 21+ hours per week (87.83) indicating this group perceived the highest social presence. The least hours worked on coursework of less than five hours per week had the lowest mean ranks (41.30) suggesting that the group that works the least hours on their coursework perceived the least social presence. There was a statistically significant difference in the distribution of social presence total scores across the different number of hours worked on coursework. This means that the number of hours worked on coursework differed significantly in terms of social presence compared to the other variables.

Median social presence total mean scores were statistically significantly different between groups, $\chi^2(4, N=135) = 12.663, p = .013$ (see Table 17).

Table 17

Kruskal–Wallis Test of Social Presence Total Mean Scores and Number of Hours Worked on Coursework

Variable	Number of hours worked on coursework	N	Median	Mean Ranks	Kruskal–Wallis Chi-square	Sig.
Social presence total mean score	< 5 hours/ week	5	6.33	41.30	12.663	.013*
	6–10 hours/week	47	7.38	59.24		
	11–15 hours/week	42	7.45	64.08		
	16–20 hours/week	35	8.29	84.61		
	21+hours/week	6	8.48	87.83		

Note. * $p < .05$

To determine the significance between number of hours worked on course work, a Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple pairwise comparisons was run. This post hoc analysis without the Bonferroni correction revealed statistically significant differences in mean social presence scores between number of hours worked of less than 5 hours per week and 16-20 hours per week ($p=.017$), 6-10 hours per week and 16-20 hours per week ($p=.044$), and 11 to 15 hours per week and 16 to 20 hours per week ($p=.030$). No other age ranges showed a significant difference. These significant findings were removed with the Bonferroni correction as demonstrated with the adjusted p -values (see Table 18).

Table 18

Pairwise Comparisons of Number of Hours Worked on Coursework w/ Social Presence Perception Score

# of Hours Worked 1 vs. # of Hours Worked 2	Median 1 vs Median 2	Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj. Sig. ⁺
Less than 5 hours per week vs. 6-10 hours per week	6.33 vs. 7.38	.221	.638	1.000
Less than 5 hours per week-11 to 15 hours per week	6.33 vs. 7.45	.179	.672	1.000
Less than 5 hours per week-16 to 20 hours per week	6.33 vs. 8.29	5.714	.017*	.168
Less than 5 hours per week-21 + hours per week	6.33 vs. 8.48	2.396	.122	1.000
6-10 hours per week-11 to 15 hours per week	7.38 vs. 7.45	.090	.764	1.000
6-10 hours per week-16 to 20 hours per week	7.38 vs. 8.29	4.038	.044*	.445
6-10 hours per week-21 + hours per week	7.38 vs. 8.48	3.181	.075	.745
11 to 15 hours per week-16 to 20 hours per week	7.45 vs. 8.29	4.683	.030*	.305
11 to 15 hours per week-21 + hours per week	7.45 vs. 8.48	3.048	.081	.809
16 to 20 hours per week-21 + hours per week	8.29 vs. 8.48	.900	.343	1.000

+Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Number of Hours Worked 1 and Number of Hours Worked 2 distributions are the same. The significance level is .05*. The two-sided significance p-values have been adjusted by the Bonferroni correction for multiple tests.

Summary

Overall, these findings conclude that students that were surveyed reported relatively high levels of social presence within their online accelerated MBA programs. Students chose an online accelerated program due to the convenience of the online format, and they were reported being the most satisfied with the pacing and would recommend the program to others. This study found the highest correlation between social presence and the reason for choosing an accelerated online MBA program for career advancement. This study also found the highest correlation between social presence and satisfaction of the online classroom environment. Lastly, the only significance in social presence and demographic characteristics were between taking 8 or more classes in their online accelerated MBA program and taking 5-7 classes.

Chapter 5 will present a discussion of the results and inferences. Expanded knowledge of students' perceptions of social presence could help inform faculty and instructional designers on student

preferences when designing and delivering online accelerated programs. These implications will receive further discussion and there will be suggestions for future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study was a means to create knowledge about graduate students' social presence perceptions and correlate them with perceptions of their satisfaction and reasons for choosing an online accelerated MBA program. Higher education faculty and staff should consider students' perceived satisfaction with their online courses, especially when designing and delivering asynchronous online accelerated courses. Using this and future studies' findings, faculty could design online accelerated classes that meet students' needs and expectations.

This chapter presents the results according to the six research questions.

1. What are graduate students' perceptions of social presence in their online accelerated courses in their MBA program?
2. Why do students choose an online accelerated program?
3. What are students' satisfactions with their current online accelerated MBA program?
4. Is there a relationship between graduate students' perceptions of social presence and their reasons for choosing an online accelerated MBA program?
5. Is there a relationship between graduate students' perceptions of social presence and their perceived satisfaction of their online accelerated MBA program?
6. Is there a relationship between students' perceptions of social presence and demographic questions such as gender, age, number of online MBA courses taken, number of hours worked weekly, or the hours worked on coursework weekly?

There is little research correlating social presence to online accelerated classes, and even less correlating social presence to online accelerated MBA courses and programs. Some of this study's results undergo comparison to the existing body of research to evaluate the effectiveness of social presence. Some of this study's results undergo comparison to the existing body of research to evaluate the effectiveness of social presence. Specifically, the findings are compared with prior studies that have

explored the positive benefits of social presence in accelerated online learning environments, such as Soles & Maduli-Williams (2019). For instance, while many studies, including those by Soles & Maludi-Williams (2019), support the positive impact of social presence on learner engagement and satisfaction, this study uniquely contributes to the literature by identifying social presence with online accelerated MBA courses. The implications of using this information in educational practices or in the design and delivery of online accelerated programs and individual courses may be of interest to online faculty, leadership, and staff. Chapter 5 presents the study's limitations and recommendations for future research.

Research Question 1: What Are Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence in Their Online Accelerated Courses in Their MBA Program?

Students in this study reported high levels of social presence in their online accelerated MBA program. The students gave the highest scores to the ability to apply knowledge created in the program to their work or other non-class-related activities. The majority of students felt they were able to brainstorm and find relevant sources to explore problems posed in their coursework. The high levels of social presence reported by students in this accelerated program may reflect the unique challenges of condensed online learning. In accelerated formats, the speed and intensity of coursework might heighten the importance of strong social presence, as it helps foster a collaborative environment where students can quickly build rapport and engage meaningfully with the material. This suggests that social presence may serve as an essential component for maintaining student engagement and satisfaction, especially in fast-paced educational settings. With a Cronbach's alpha score of 0.91, the social presence mean total score had a similar reliability as 0.95 in Arbaugh et al.'s (2008) study.

There is limited literature on students' perceptions of social presence in online accelerated MBA programs. However, this study's results relate to research on the effectiveness of social presence in nonaccelerated online courses. This reflects Knowles's (1980) adult learning theory that adult learners

prefer practical, real-world experiences so they can connect their learning to their personal or professional careers. Students identified the real-world activities and assessments in the online accelerated learning environment as vital to their retention, a finding that aligns with Driessnack et al. (2011), Kasworm (2008), and Penprase and Koczara (2009). In line with Knowles's (1980) adult learning theory, students in this study valued the ability to apply their learning to real-world situations, highlighting a preference for practical, immediately relevant education. This underscores the importance of designing coursework that is not only academically rigorous but also tailored to adult learners' needs for applicability in their professional lives. In online accelerated MBA programs, where students are often working professionals, this practical orientation is crucial for retention and engagement. Ensuring that assessments and activities consistently reflect real-world scenarios could further enhance social presence and student satisfaction. This study supported adult learners' need to immediately connect their coursework to real-world scenarios. The results suggest the need to find relevant sources to help address the issues discussed in the curriculum and solve workplace problems when designing online accelerated courses.

This study found the lowest total social presence perception score on the ability to form distinct impressions of course participants, which also mirrored Arbaugh's (2008) findings. This outcome could indicate that social presence is not solely based on student interactions, as seen in the expression of emotion part of social presence. The lower scores in forming distinct impressions of course participants could be linked to the time constraints inherent in accelerated courses, where there is less opportunity for sustained interaction and relationship-building. This may suggest that, while accelerated programs foster a sense of group cohesion and collaboration, they may do so at the expense of more personalized connections between individual students. Future research could explore ways to enhance the interpersonal dimension of social presence in these fast-paced learning environments. Social presence in

this context means more to students about open communication and group cohesion. Overall, the students reported high levels of all aspects of social presence in their online accelerated MBA courses.

Research Question 2: Why Do Students Choose an Online Accelerated MBA Program?

The literature indicated four common reasons students choose an online accelerated MBA program: length of courses, convenience, cost, and career advancement. In this study, the top reason given by students was the convenience of the online format. This finding correlates with studies from Wlodkowski (2003), Wlodkowski et al. (2001), and Serdyukov et al. (2003), suggesting that students value their time and the convenience of the online format over the consideration of cost. The prioritization of convenience in selecting an online accelerated MBA program may reflect a growing trend among adult learners who are juggling multiple responsibilities, such as full-time employment and family obligations. This aligns with broader societal shifts toward flexible learning environments that accommodate the increasingly complex lives of working professionals. As more institutions adopt online accelerated formats, the convenience factor will likely continue to play a pivotal role in attracting students, particularly those seeking to integrate education seamlessly into their daily routines.

Costs was the second most frequent reason students gave for choosing an online accelerated MBA program. This reason aligns with Serdyukov's (2008) and Serdyukov et al.'s (2003) findings that accelerated learning allows students to obtain their degrees faster, providing a greater value for their financial investment in their education. Although cost was the second most frequently cited reason for choosing an online accelerated MBA program, it appears that students are viewing their financial investment in a holistic manner, considering not just tuition but also the opportunity costs associated with time away from the workforce or delayed career progression. Accelerated programs offer the advantage of quicker degree completion, enabling students to return to their professional lives more rapidly, which can lead to earlier career advancement and a higher return on investment. Additionally,

factors such as the availability of employer-sponsored tuition assistance and the ability to continue working while studying make these programs particularly appealing from a cost-efficiency perspective.

The open-ended question that followed allowed students to write about the program's flexibility, time, and structure as deciding factors in choosing an online accelerated MBA program. One student found the online program worked for them and their military schedule. Many students indicated that cost, including the opportunity for employer tuition reimbursement, was a significant consideration in choosing an online accelerated MBA program. This information could be helpful for institution administrators and leaders in making connections and partnerships with other businesses to offer the ability for tuition reimbursement. The mention of employer tuition reimbursement as a significant consideration for students choosing online accelerated MBA programs opens opportunities for institutions to forge stronger partnerships with businesses. By aligning program offerings with the needs of employers, educational institutions can increase enrollment and enhance the value proposition for both students and companies. Offering flexible, accelerated programs that cater to working professionals not only benefits individual learners but also supports businesses in developing a more highly skilled workforce. This mutually beneficial relationship highlights the potential for expanded corporate collaboration in the educational sector.

Research Question 3: What Are Students' Satisfaction with Their Current Online Accelerated MBA Program?

The literature indicated four factors for students' satisfaction with online accelerated MBA programs: pacing, workload, curriculum, and online class environment. Two questions added to the end of this section were means to evaluate students' perceptions of their overall satisfaction with the online accelerated MBA program and whether they would recommend the program to others. The students in this study were the most satisfied with the program's pacing and the online course environment. These findings align with other research related to student satisfaction with pacing and online course

environment (Bolliger & Martin, 2018; Carr, 2014; Kasworm, 2008; Oh & Jonassen, 2007; Xu & Smith Jaggars, 2014). Student satisfaction with pacing and the online course environment is not only a key driver of engagement but also has significant implications for retention. In accelerated programs, where the workload and time demands are intensified, it is crucial that students feel supported by the course structure and learning environment. Satisfied students are more likely to stay motivated and persist through the challenges of the program, which can lead to higher retention and graduation rates. As noted in previous research (Bolliger & Martin, 2018; Carr, 2014), ensuring that students remain satisfied with the learning environment and pacing can directly contribute to long-term academic success.

The findings that students were most satisfied with the program's pacing and the online course environment suggest that instructional designers should continue to prioritize these elements in online accelerated MBA programs. Pacing should be carefully calibrated to provide a challenging yet manageable workload that keeps students engaged without overwhelming them. Additionally, fostering a dynamic online course environment through establishing a sense of community, could further enhance satisfaction. Research supports the idea that when students feel connected to both the content and their peers, as seen in Xu and Smith Jaggars (2014), they are more likely to have a positive overall learning experience.

Research Question 4: Is There a Relationship Between Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Their Reasons for Choosing an Online Accelerated MBA Program?

Answering this question required correlating the social presence total scores with each reason for choosing an online accelerated MBA program: length of courses, convenience of the online format, cost, and career advancement. This study was unique in the correlation of graduate students' perceptions of social presence to the length of courses, convenience of the online format, and career advancement as reasons for choosing an online accelerated MBA program; there are limited previous studies to compare this finding.

Social Presence and Length of Courses

This study found significance between social presence and the length of courses as a reason for choosing an online accelerated MBA program. There was a moderate, positive correlation between social presence total scores and the length of courses as a reason for choosing an online accelerated MBA program. Students' social presence increased slightly with their perceptions of length of courses as a reason for choosing an online accelerated MBA program. Given the significance of students' social presence, it is important to understand and value that students' perceptions of shortened, accelerated courses provided slightly higher social presence values.

For students in online accelerated MBA programs, the combination of a shortened course length and heightened social presence may enhance the perceived value of the program. Adult learners, who often balance work and personal responsibilities, might find that the strong social presence developed in accelerated formats provides an additional layer of support and connection, making the program feel more rewarding and engaging. This aligns with the literature on adult learning (Knowles, 1980), which suggests that fostering strong social connections in education can enhance the overall learning experience, especially in condensed learning environments.

These findings suggest that in online accelerated courses, instructional designers and educators should prioritize the development of social presence from the outset. Given the shortened course length, opportunities for interaction, collaboration, and communication need to be structured into the course early and consistently throughout. This could include the use of discussions, group projects, and interactive platforms that encourage ongoing engagement. By fostering social presence in these accelerated settings, instructors can help ensure that students feel connected and supported throughout the course, which may enhance both satisfaction and learning outcomes.

Social Presence and Convenience of the Online Format

This study found significance between social presence and the convenience of an online format as a reason for choosing an online accelerated MBA program. The results showed a weak or negligible, positive correlation between social presence total scores and convenience as a reason for choosing an online accelerated MBA program. Students' social presence increased very slightly with their perceptions of the convenience of the online format as a reason for choosing an online accelerated MBA program.

These findings suggest that while convenience alone may not significantly drive social presence, it remains an important factor that institutions should consider when designing online programs. Offering convenient, flexible learning opportunities while simultaneously enhancing social presence could be a key strategy for improving student satisfaction and engagement. This might involve creating virtual spaces for interaction, using tools that promote real-time collaboration, or encouraging more frequent and meaningful instructor-student communication as seen from research from Voithofer (2006). By blending convenience with intentional course design that fosters social presence, institutions can create a more supportive and connected online learning environment.

Social Presence and Costs

This study did not find a significant difference regarding social presence and cost as reasons for choosing an online accelerated MBA program. The lack of a significant difference between social presence and cost as reasons for choosing an online accelerated MBA program suggests that cost is more likely to be a practical, upfront consideration, rather than one that directly impacts students' perceptions of engagement or connection within the learning environment (Serdyukov, 2008; Serdyukov et al., 2003). While financial affordability may influence students' decision to enroll, it does not appear to play a role in shaping their experience of social presence once they are participating in the program.

This distinction highlights that factor contributing to social presence, such as interaction and community, may be driven more by pedagogical design and technology rather than cost-related considerations.

It is important to consider that while students may choose an online accelerated MBA program based on cost, their expectations for social presence and engagement within the program are likely separate from financial considerations. Students may prioritize affordability when selecting a program, but once enrolled, their focus could shift to the quality of the learning experience, including the sense of connection with peers and instructors. This separation of cost and social presence could indicate that students expect a robust, interactive learning environment, regardless of the program's price point.

These findings suggest that while cost is a critical factor in the initial decision-making process, it may not be a primary concern when it comes to students' perceptions of social presence and engagement. Institutions should be aware of this distinction when marketing their online accelerated MBA programs. While affordability may attract students, it is the quality of the learning experience, particularly the sense of social presence and interaction, that will influence student satisfaction and retention. Therefore, recruitment strategies should highlight both the cost-effectiveness of the program and the opportunities for meaningful engagement.

Social Presence and Career Advancement

This study found significance between social presence and career advancement as a reason for choosing an online accelerated MBA program. The results showed a moderate, positive correlation between social presence total scores and career advancement as a reason for choosing an online accelerated MBA program. That is, students' social presence increased with their perceptions of career advancement as a reason for choosing an online accelerated MBA program.

Career advancement is often a central motivation for students pursuing an MBA, particularly in an accelerated online format where they can quickly apply what they learn to their professional lives (Bolliger & Martin, 2018; Xu & Smith Jaggars, 2014). This results from this study suggest that students

who view career advancement as a key reason for enrolling may be more motivated to engage actively with their peers and instructors, contributing to a stronger sense of social presence. These students may be particularly invested in building relationships and networks within the program, viewing these interactions as instrumental to their professional growth.

Research Question 5: Is There a Relationship Between Graduate Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Their Perceived Satisfaction of Their Online Accelerated MBA Program?

Answering this question required correlating the social presence total scores with each perceived satisfaction factor with the online accelerated MBA program: pacing, workload, curriculum, online class environment, overall satisfaction, and recommendation of program to others.

Social Presence and Pacing

This study found significance between social presence and pacing as a perceived factor of satisfaction with their current online accelerated MBA program. Pacing is a key factor in determining the overall learning experience, particularly in the context of online accelerated MBA programs. When the pace of the course aligns with students' expectations and capacity for workload, they are more likely to feel engaged and connected with both the content and their peers (Colclasure et al., 2018). This study's finding of a moderate positive correlation between social presence and satisfaction with pacing suggests that students who feel the course is paced appropriately are more likely to actively participate in discussions, collaborate on projects, and build relationships within the program. As a result, pacing may contribute to a learning environment that fosters greater social presence and peer interaction.

Social Presence and Workload

This study found significance between social presence and workload as a perceived level of satisfaction with their current online accelerated MBA program. In online accelerated MBA programs, the balance of workload plays a critical role in shaping the student experience. A workload that is perceived as manageable allows students to focus not only on completing assignments but also on

engaging with their peers and instructors. The moderate, positive correlation between social presence and satisfaction with workload suggests that when students are comfortable with the demands of the program, they are more likely to participate in discussions, collaborative projects, and other social aspects of the course. This indicates that satisfaction with workload can directly influence students' sense of connection and interaction within the online learning environment.

These findings suggest that course designers in online accelerated MBA programs should pay close attention to the workload assigned to students. Programs that strike the right balance between challenging but not overwhelming could foster higher levels of social presence, as students may have the capacity to engage in discussions, collaboration, and other forms of interaction. Institutions should ensure that workloads are realistic given the accelerated format, providing students with enough time to both complete assignments and participate in the social aspects of the learning experience.

Social Presence and Curriculum

This study found significance between social presence and curriculum as a perceived level of satisfaction with their current online accelerated MBA program. The positive correlation between social presence and satisfaction with the curriculum suggests that when students perceive the curriculum as relevant, challenging, and aligned with their career goals, they are more likely to engage actively in the course. A well-structured curriculum that addresses practical, real-world challenges can motivate students to collaborate with their peers, participate in discussions, and connect with instructors, all of which contribute to an enhanced sense of social presence. In online accelerated programs, where the pace is fast and the content dense, a curriculum that is both engaging and applicable to professional contexts can significantly impact students' overall satisfaction and their sense of belonging within the program (Driessnack et al., 2011; Trekles & Sims, 2013).

The curriculum in an online accelerated MBA program often serves as the foundation for collaborative learning experiences, such as group projects, case studies, and peer discussions. When

students are satisfied with the curriculum, they are more likely to find value in these interactions, leading to increased social presence. By designing a curriculum that encourages collaborative problem-solving and real-time application of knowledge, institutions can create an environment where students feel more connected to one another and more engaged with the course material. This enhances both the learning experience and the sense of community within the program.

Social Presence and Online Class Environment

This study found significance between social presence and online class environment as a perceived level of satisfaction with their current online accelerated MBA program. The online class environment is crucial in fostering social presence, especially in online accelerated programs where students may have limited time to interact. A well-structured and supportive online environment that encourages communication, collaboration, and engagement can enhance the feeling of being connected with peers and instructors (Seamon, 2004 & Tatum, 2010). The fact that this item had the highest correlation in the study suggests the importance of creating an interactive and engaging online class space. When students are satisfied with the online environment, they are more likely to feel a sense of belonging, which can enhance their participation, collaboration, and overall learning experience.

Social Presence and Overall Satisfaction & Recommendation of the Program to Others

This study found significance between social presence and student perceptions of overall satisfaction with their current online accelerated MBA program. The results showed a moderate, positive correlation between social presence total scores and students' perceptions of overall satisfaction with their current online accelerated MBA program. That is, students' social presence increased with their overall satisfaction with their online accelerated MBA program.

Social presence plays a critical role in shaping the overall learning experience in online accelerated programs. When students feel connected to their peers and instructors, they are more likely to actively participate in discussions, engage with course materials, and maintain their motivation

throughout the program (Driessnack et al., 2011). These factors, in turn, contribute to students' overall satisfaction with the program. In an accelerated format, where the pace can be intense, the presence of a supportive and engaged learning community can help students feel more comfortable and confident, leading to a potential of greater satisfaction with their accelerated online MBA program.

The moderate positive correlation between social presence and students' willingness to recommend the online accelerated MBA program to others suggests that students who feel more socially connected within the program are more likely to endorse it. Social presence fosters a sense of belonging, collaboration, and engagement, which are critical factors in creating a positive learning experience (Garrison, 2017). Students who feel supported and engaged are more inclined to recommend the program, as they perceive it as valuable not only in terms of academic learning but also in building meaningful relationships and professional networks.

Future research could investigate which specific elements of social presence such as emotional support, group cohesion, or open communication are most strongly correlated with students' willingness to recommend the program. Additionally, it would be valuable to examine whether the relationship between social presence and the recommendations of graduate students across various types of online programs, such as those in other professional fields or educational formats. Understanding these dynamics could provide institutions with targeted strategies to enhance social presence and encourage student advocacy.

Research Question 6: Is There a Relationship Between Students' Perceptions of Social Presence and Demographic Characteristics Such as Gender, Age, Number of Online Courses Taken, Number of Hours Worked Weekly, or the Hours Worked on Coursework Weekly?

Social Presence and Gender

Regarding graduate students' social presence perceptions and gender, this study did not find a significant difference between male and female genders. Only the descriptive statistics conducted in this

study aligned with Wlodkowski et al.'s (2001, 2002) findings that women were twice as likely as men to graduate within six years from an accelerated program at the same school. However, these data indicate only the number of females currently enrolled. There are no data to support whether more females than males graduated, only that slightly more females were enrolled in the online accelerated MBA program.

The findings of this study align with some prior research (Wlodkowski et al.'s 2001) indicating that gender may not play a significant role in shaping perceptions of social presence in online learning environments. While some studies have suggested that female students may be more likely to engage in social interactions in traditional classrooms, the online context may reduce these differences, as both genders engage with digital platforms in similar ways. The lack of significant differences found in this study adds to the growing body of literature suggesting that gender does not consistently influence students' experiences of social presence in online accelerated learning environments.

Social Presence and Age

This study found significance between age range and graduate students' perceptions of social presence. However, these significant findings were removed with the Bonferroni correction as demonstrated with the adjusted p -values. The significance may have been removed due to when small sample sizes are utilized in pairwise comparisons as it is considered overly conservative in applying corrections to calculated significance (VanderWeele & Mathur, 2019). Another explanation could be that the initial significance occurred by happenstance, so conducting a Bonferroni correction could better explain the significance value.

The initial significance observed between age range and students' perceptions of social presence may have occurred by chance, particularly when multiple comparisons are conducted. The Bonferroni correction is designed to address this possibility by adjusting the significance threshold to

account for the number of comparisons made (Frost, 2019). In this case, the removal of significance after applying the correction suggests that the initial finding may not have been robust.

The lack of significant age-related differences in this study contributes to the growing body of literature suggesting that social presence is experienced similarly across age groups in accelerated and online graduate-level classrooms.

Social Presence and Number of Online Courses Taken

This study found significance between the number of online classes taken and the graduate students' perceptions of social presence. Pairwise comparisons were performed using Dunn's (1964) procedure with a Bonferroni correction for multiple comparisons. This post hoc analysis with the Bonferroni correction showed adjusted statistically significant differences in mean social presence scores among those students who have taken 8 or more classes and 5-7 classes. No other number of classes taken produced significant results.

The significant difference in social presence scores between students who have taken 8 or more online classes and those who have taken 5-7 classes suggests that greater experience in online learning environments may enhance students' perceptions of social presence. Students who have participated in more online courses could be likely to have become more familiar with the communication tools, social dynamics, and collaborative processes that contribute to a strong sense of connection and interaction in virtual settings. This increased familiarity may lead to more effective participation in discussions, greater comfort in engaging with peers, and a stronger sense of community, which collectively contribute to higher perceptions of social presence. As students gain more experience in online environments, they may become more proficient at navigating virtual interactions, collaborating with peers, and using digital tools to foster social engagement. Over time, this increased proficiency may lead to stronger perceptions of social presence, as students feel more connected and engaged in the online learning

community. This highlights the importance of providing students with multiple opportunities to practice and develop these skills throughout their online educational journey.

These findings have important implications for course design in online programs, particularly for students who are less experienced with online learning. To help students who have taken fewer online courses build stronger perceptions of social presence, institutions might consider offering orientation sessions or training modules that focus on virtual communication, collaboration, and community-building. By providing students with the tools and strategies needed to engage effectively in online environments, programs can help students develop social presence earlier in their online learning experiences, ensuring that even those with less experience feel connected and supported.

Social Presence and Number of Hours Worked in Job Weekly

This study did not find significance between the number of hours worked weekly in a job and the graduate students' perceptions of social presence.

The lack of significant findings between the number of hours worked weekly and students' perceptions of social presence may reflect the flexibility that online accelerated MBA programs offer. Many online programs allow students to participate asynchronously, enabling them to balance their professional responsibilities with their academic commitments. This flexibility may allow students to engage with their peers and instructors at times that are convenient for them, regardless of their work schedules, thus reducing the potential impact of weekly work hours on social presence.

These findings also suggest that social presence in online accelerated MBA programs may be more closely related to students' engagement with course activities, peers, and instructors than to their external job commitments. Despite the demands of working full-time or part-time, students may still be able to foster social connections within the learning environment by actively participating in discussions, collaborating on group projects, and seeking support from their peers and instructors. This indicates that

social presence is not necessarily hindered by the number of hours students work, if they are able to manage their time and stay engaged in the course.

Social Presence and Number of Hours Worked on Coursework Weekly

This study found significance between the number of hours worked on coursework weekly and graduate students' perceptions of social presence. However, these significant findings were removed with the Bonferroni correction as demonstrated with the adjusted p -values. This may have occurred due to when small sample sizes are utilized in pairwise comparisons as it is considered overly conservative in applying corrections to calculated significance (VanderWeele & Mathur, 2019).

The removal of significance after the Bonferroni correction may also reflect variability in how students manage their time and engage with their coursework. Some students who spend more time on coursework may do so in isolation, focusing on individual assignments rather than participating in group activities or discussions that foster social presence. This variation in how students allocate their time might explain why the initial significance was lost after applying the correction, as the relationship between time spent on coursework and social presence may not be consistent across all students.

While the number of hours spent on coursework may initially appear to correlate with social presence, it is possible that the quality of engagement plays a more important role in shaping students' perceptions of social presence. Students who engage in meaningful interactions with their peers, participate in discussions, and collaborate on projects may develop stronger social connections, regardless of how much time they spend on coursework. This distinction between quantity and quality of engagement could explain why the significant findings were removed after applying the Bonferroni correction, as time alone may not be the best predictor of social presence.

Using Dunn's pairwise post hoc analysis after conducting a Kruskal–Wallis test showed significance for age range, number of online courses taken, and number of hours worked on coursework; however, the pairwise analysis showed the significance value could be related to sample size. This study

had a relatively small sample size and may have lacked the statistical power to detect small differences between groups and variables. Another reason could be the homogeneity of data (Dinno, 2015). If the data in different groups or variables are similar or homogenous, statistical tests may not detect a significant difference. This oversight could occur with closely matched groups or those with low variability, as seen in the data reporting. Also, the number of pairwise comparisons affects the significance value in Dunn's procedure with the Bonferroni correction because the correction divides the overall significance threshold by the number of comparisons. The more comparisons you have, the smaller the threshold for significance becomes, making it harder to detect statistically significant differences (Frost, 2019).

Implications for Practice

Social presence should be a consideration when deciding how to design and deliver an online accelerated course. Social presence is necessary to create authentic learning experiences for students where they can have open communication, group cohesion, and expression of emotion in online accelerated courses. Why students choose an online accelerated MBA program matters, and their reasons could be connected to higher total social presence perception score. Students' satisfaction with certain aspects of the program could lead to higher total social presence perception score.

Online accelerated program faculty could leverage high social presence to boost student engagement. Students need opportunities to practice and implement strategies that promote interaction, such as group projects, discussion forums, and peer review activities. Faculty in online accelerated programs may need to adapt to new teaching methods that emphasize social presence, such as creating engaging content, fostering interaction, and using teaching technologies effectively. Online accelerated learning program directors could emphasize the importance of personalized learning experiences in the online environment. Getting to know students on a more personal and professional level could help instructors identify activities and topics students would find the most interesting to

encourage personal and professional growth. High levels of social presence may be connected to networking opportunities in the online environment as well.

Administrators of online accelerated learning programs could regularly assess students and their perceptions of social presence to assist with program recruiting and marketing; social presence could be a unique selling point. Administrators could highlight the program's strong community and support systems, both financial and student services, to attract prospective students looking for an engaging and interactive online learning environment. Higher education administrators of online accelerated programs should continue to evaluate and regularly assess social presence to maintain high program standards and make data-driven decisions to improve or adjust the curriculum and teaching methods as needed.

Limitations

This study contributes a body of knowledge and research regarding graduate students' perceptions of social presence in online accelerated MBA programs; however, there are several limitations. The sample was relatively small compared to program enrollment at all 15 preidentified institutions. The use of purposive sampling limited the results. The survey was not sent directly to students, but to directors and program administrations to send to students.

This study addressed student perceptions without evaluating the online accelerated MBA program design. The design of specific courses could have hindered total social presence perception score depending on what courses students considered when responding to the survey. The questions were broad enough to cover the entire program, but specific courses may have swayed students to answer differently.

Quantitative methodology was another limitation. Although students did not provide their names, they may not have been truthful in their responses and have given more socially acceptable responses instead. Nonresponse bias was also evident, as 39 students started but did not complete the

survey. Because all participants were from one private and four public institutions, the results did not represent students enrolled in for-profit institutions. Furthermore, most of this study was correlational research, which researchers cannot use to establish causation. Although most of the variables were positively correlated, there were only certain variables used. There may have been a variable missed that could have explained the relationship between variables better.

Finally, some of the scatterplots reported within Chapter 4 appeared to have curvature. A scatterplot showing curvature might suggest that the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is non-linear. Frost (2019) explains that a linear regression assumes a straight-line relationship between the variables, meaning the model fits the data best when there's a constant change rate of change between them. Since the scatterplot within this study showed a slight hint of a curve, that might indicate that the rate of change varies across the data, which a linear regression wouldn't capture well. Thus, to replicate this study perhaps another researcher could better explain the relationship between the variables by using a non-linear regression model such as a polynomial regression or other techniques that might be able to capture the complexity of the relationship better.

Suggestions for Future Research

This study created a body of knowledge and research regarding graduate students' perceptions of social presence in online accelerated MBA programs, yet there remain questions and implications for future research. Data in the current study comprised the perceptions of graduate students in one private and four public institutions. Researchers could replicate the study to conduct in-depth comparisons of private, public, and for-profit institutions. Repeating this study in that context could provide additional findings and help add reliability to the current results.

A quantitative survey returns limited data. The survey included one open-ended question for respondents to explain other reasons for choosing an online accelerated MBA program. More open-ended questions could contribute to a deeper understanding of why students selected the options they

did for other categories for satisfaction with their online accelerated MBA program and the reasoning behind their Likert-type responses about social presence. Qualitative research could allow scholars to further investigate what students find enjoyable, not enjoyable, and why, with regard to implementing social presence in online accelerated MBA programs.

This study was not an evaluation of the effectiveness the design and delivery of the online accelerated courses in the MBA program. Investigation of course design and practices used by educators who have higher levels of social presence could contribute to the development of shared teaching practices to other courses that did not score as high on social presence.

Instructors' online teaching pedagogies were not evaluated to determine whether the courses included opportunities for students to obtain hands-on, real-world knowledge in the online environment. Finally, this study was limited to MBA programs. Researchers could compare programs in other fields to MBA programs. Replicating this study with different programs could provide insight on graduate students' perceptions of social presence in other online accelerated programs.

Summary

This study informs best practices in the design and delivery of online accelerated MBA programs to include high levels of social presence. This study provides evidence to support that social presence is an important construct in the design, development, and delivery of online accelerated MBA programs. There is a positive correlation between higher satisfaction with MBA programs and reasons for choosing an accelerated MBA program with higher levels of social presence. Reflecting on current practices to ensure social presence in the online accelerated learning format could benefit academic programs and students' satisfaction with their online accelerated learning environment. Incorporating into practice the items mentioned in this study could significantly enhance the quality and effectiveness of online accelerated learning programs, providing a more engaging and successful learning experience for students.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Permission to Use Survey by Dr. Randy Garrison

5/10/2021

Mail - Cremeens, Larissa A - Outlook

Re: Permission to Use Survey

D. Randy Garrison <garrison@ucalgary.ca>

Tue 5/4/2021 7:31 PM

To: Cremeens, Larissa A <lacremeens@usi.edu>

*** This message was sent from a non-USI address. Please exercise caution when responding, clicking on links or opening attachments. ***

Larissa,

Thank you for your generous comments.

You have my permission to use the Col survey that includes the SP scale.

Best wishes,

DRG

Sent from my iPad

On May 4, 2021, at 6:28 PM, Cremeens, Larissa A <lacremeens@usi.edu> wrote:

[ΔEXTERNAL]

Good Evening Dr. Garrison,

I hope this email finds you well.

I would like to start this email by first saying thank you so much for your research on social presence. As an instructional designer by occupation, I have used your research in practice and found your research to be very beneficial in the development, design, and teaching of online courses.

I am also a doctoral student at The University of Southern Indiana and I am looking into dissertation topics and I am interested a dissertation topic over student perceptions of social presence in online accelerated programs. I am still fine-tuning the specifics of my dissertation proposal such as the population to survey and looking at specific online accelerated programs (i.e. fully online MBA programs) but before I go too far into my dissertation, I would like to ask your permission to use the Social Presence survey you and your colleagues have developed in the following article;

Swan, K., Shea, P., Richardson, J., Ice, P., Garrison, D. R., Cleveland-Innes, M., & Arbaugh, J. B. (2008). Validating a measurement tool of presence in online communities of inquiry.

Do I have your permission to use your survey in my research interests? I would be happy to share more specifics with you (if you are interested) as I progress throughout my doctoral program and specifically the results of the study.

Please let me know if you have further questions.

Thanks,

Appendix B: Informed Consent

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN INDIANA
Student Perceptions of Social Presence in Online Accelerated
Master of Business Administration Programs
(IRB #2164931-1)
Informed Consent Document

You are invited to participate in a research study on student perceptions of social presence in accelerated online Master of Business Administration programs. This study is being conducted by Larissa Cremeens, an Educational Leadership doctoral student from the University of Southern Indiana, with Dr. Bonnie Beach as a faculty sponsor. Larissa Cremeens can be reached at FA029A, 8600 University Blvd., Evansville, IN 47712, lacremeens@eagles.usi.edu.

This survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes of your time. This survey aims to collect information on students' perceptions of social presence in their online accelerated MBA courses. **Social Presence** is the degree to which you feel socially and emotionally connected with others. Additionally, this survey will collect information on why you chose an accelerated online program, the level of your agreement with the pacing and workload of the courses, and your overall satisfaction with your accelerated online MBA program. Your decision to participate or decline participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you have the right to terminate your participation at any time without penalty. Consent is implied when you begin the survey. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. If you do not want to complete this survey, do not proceed to the link, or if started, simply close your browser.

You may also win one of the 4 \$25 Amazon gift cards if you include your university-affiliated email. This email will not be correlated with any survey information. Your participation in this research will be completely confidential. You may benefit from participation by better understanding your perceptions of accelerated courses and the social presence activities to inform faculty in the design and development of their online courses. Participants have the option to skip questions. Data collected from

this survey will be kept within the Qualtrics encrypted cloud storage system and can only be accessed by the researcher, faculty sponsor, and dissertation committee members. The data collected will be stored for up to 5 years within the Qualtrics system.

The following survey includes 32 questions in which you will rate your thoughts on social presence in your accelerated online MBA programs. There is one open-ended question and seven demographic questions. Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and there are no risks to individuals participating beyond those in daily life. If you decide to participate, your responses will be anonymous-recorded without identifying information linked to you. If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact me at lacremeens@eagles.usi.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study or to report research-related problems, you may email the University of Southern Indiana IRB at rkr@usi.edu (IRB Number 2164931-1). Please click the "next" button below if you accept this consent.

Appendix C: Survey



Survey: Student Perceptions of Social Presence in Accelerated Online MBA Courses
IRB Number 2164931-1

You are invited to participate in a research study on student perceptions of social presence in accelerated online Master of Business Administration programs. This study is being conducted by Larissa Cremeens, an Educational Leadership doctoral student from the University of Southern Indiana, with Dr. Bonnie Beach as a faculty sponsor. Larissa Cremeens can be reached at FA029A, 8600 University Blvd., Evansville, IN 47712, lacremeens@eagles.usi.edu.

This survey will take approximately 5-10 minutes of your time. This survey aims to collect information on students' perceptions of social presence in their online accelerated MBA courses. **Social Presence** is the degree to which you feel socially and emotionally connected with others. Additionally, this survey will collect information on why you chose an accelerated online program, the level of your agreement with the pacing and workload of the courses, and your overall satisfaction with your accelerated online MBA program. Your decision to participate or decline participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you have the right to terminate your participation at any time without penalty. Consent is implied when you begin the survey. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. If you do not want to complete this survey, do not proceed to the link, or if started, simply close your browser.

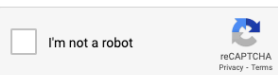
You may also win one of the 4 \$25 Amazon gift cards if you include your university-affiliated email. This email will not be correlated with any survey information. Your participation in this research will be completely confidential. You may benefit from participation by better understanding your perceptions of accelerated courses and the social presence activities to inform faculty in the design and development of their online courses. Participants have the option to skip questions. Data collected from this survey will be kept within the Qualtrics encrypted cloud storage system and can only be accessed by the researcher, faculty sponsor, and dissertation committee members. The data collected will be stored for up to 5 years within the Qualtrics system.

The following survey includes 32 questions in which you will rate your thoughts on social presence in your accelerated online MBA programs. There is one open-ended question and seven demographic questions. Your participation in this survey is voluntary, and there are no risks to individuals participating beyond those in daily life. If you decide to participate, your responses will be anonymous- that is recorded without any identifying information linked to you. If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact me at lacremeens@eagles.usi.edu. If you have questions regarding your rights as a human subject and participant in this study or to report research-related problems, you may email the University of Southern Indiana IRB at rcr@usiedu (IRB Number 2164931-1). Please click the "next" button below if you accept this consent.

Next



Before you proceed to the survey, please complete the captcha below.



Previous

Next



Using a scale of 1-10, with 1 being "NOT important" and 10 being "VERY Important", rate your level of how important the following factors were in your decision to select an accelerated online MBA program.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

1. Length of courses

2. Convenience of the online format

3. Costs

4. Career advancement

5. Is there another reason not listed above as a deciding factor as to why you chose an accelerated online MBA program?

Previous

Next



Using a scale of 1-10, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 10 being "Strongly Agree", rate your level of agreement with the following statements about your experiences with the pacing and workload in your accelerated online MBA program.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. The pacing of the courses was appropriate for this accelerated MBA program

7. The workload of the courses was appropriate for this accelerated MBA program

Previous

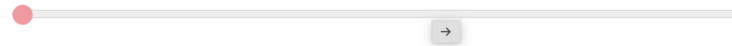
Next



Using a scale of 1-10, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 10 being "Strongly Agree", rate your level of satisfaction with the following aspects of your online accelerated MBA program:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. Curriculum



9. Online Classroom Climate



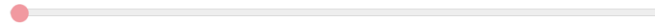
Using a scale of 1-10, with 1 being "Strongly Disagree" and 10 being "Strongly Agree", rate your overall level of satisfaction of this online accelerated MBA program

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. This program met my expectations



11. I would recommend this program to others





Social Presence Perceptions

Using a scale of 1-10, with 1 being **"Strongly Disagree"** and 10 being **"Strongly Agree"**, rate your level of satisfaction with the following aspects of social presence of your online accelerated MBA program.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

12. Getting to know other course participants gave me a sense of belonging in the program
● _____
13. I was able to form distinct impressions of some course participants
● _____
14. Online or web-based communication is an excellent medium for social interaction
● _____
15. I felt comfortable conversing through the online medium
● _____
16. I felt comfortable participating in the course discussions
● _____
17. I feel comfortable disagreeing with other course participants while still maintaining a sense of trust
● _____
18. I felt that my point of view was acknowledged by other course participants
● _____
19. Online discussions help me to develop a sense of collaboration
● _____
20. I felt comfortable interacting with other course participants
● _____
21. Questions/Scenarios posed increased my interest in course issues
● _____
22. Course activities piqued my curiosity
● _____
23. I felt motivated to explore content related questions
● _____
24. I utilized a variety of information sources to explore problems posed in this program
● _____
25. I can brainstorm and find relevant sources to explore problems posed in this program
● _____
26. Online discussions were valuable in helping me appreciate different perspectives
● _____
27. Combining new information helped me answer questions raised in course activities
● _____
28. Learning activities helped me construct explanations/solutions
● _____
29. Reflection on course content and discussions helped me understand fundamental concepts in this program
● _____
30. I can describe ways to apply the knowledge created in this program
● _____
31. I have developed solutions to course problems that can be applied in practice
● _____
32. I can apply the knowledge created in this program to my work or other non-class related activities
● _____

Previous

Next



Share about yourself:

33. Age

18-25

26-30

31-35

36-40

41-45

46-50

51+

34. Please indicate your gender

Male

Female

Prefer not to answer

35. Number of Online Courses you have taken in this program at your current college/university

This is my first online course in the program

2-4

5-7

8 or more

36. Are you employed? (Either Full time or part time)

Yes

No

37. Approximately how many hours do you work in your employment?

Less than 20 hours per week

21-30 hours per week

31-40 hours per week

41- 50 hours per week

51+ hours per week

38. Approximately how many hours do you work on your course work per week?

Less than 5 hours per week

6-10 hours per week

11 to 15 hours per week

16 to 20 hours per week

21 + hours per week

Please choose your institution from the drop down menu below;

Optional: To be entered in to the drawing to win one of the four \$25 Amazon gift cards; please insert your university email below. *Note: This will NOT be used in correlation with your survey responses.



Thank you for participating in this survey. Please click the Submit button below.

Previous

Submit

Appendix D: Pilot Testing of Survey

Procedures

Due to the alteration of the original Community of Inquiry survey and the addition of other questions based on the literature review, the survey required validity and reliability testing, which occurred via a pilot test. The purpose of a pilot test is to ensure that everyone in the sample understands the survey questions in the same way (Rea & Parker, 2014). Pilot testing also ensured the survey flowed logically (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) and received feedback prior to distribution. Additionally, two questions on the pilot survey were added to determine completion time accuracy (approximately five to ten minutes) and elicit suggestions to reword the questions or suggest alternatives. The study survey did not include these additional questions.

Pilot survey distribution occurred in the same manner as the study survey occurred following IRB approval. The pilot survey opened on September 9, 2022; reminders went out one week later on September 16; and the survey closed on September 23. Qualtrics was the instrument used to create the survey. The survey was emailed to 47 individuals who have taken at least one MBA course in a fully online accelerated format. Thirty-seven individuals completed the pilot survey. IRB approval was not needed since this was a preliminary data collection to test the validity and reliability of the survey instrument, and the results are not intended for publication. The results from the pilot study were purely for internal purposes including the feedback on the flow, organization, and time to complete were correct prior to actual survey distribution for this study.

Results

The responses from the pilot survey were imported into SPSS from Qualtrics. After the creation of total columns for the MBA program and total social presence perception scores, descriptive statistics, including skewness and kurtosis, were calculated on each set of questions to determine if data followed a normal distribution of the sample. Skewness helps to determine normal distribution to decide what

type of correlation test to run: Pearson correlation coefficient or Spearman's rho (Terrell, 2016). The MBA program total column had a kurtosis of 1.54, and the column for total social presence perception score had a kurtosis of 2.27; because the expected kurtosis value is 3 (Terrell, 2016), the kurtosis indicated a nonnormal distribution. All scale data underwent testing for normality using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test. Because all items were below the 0.05 level, Kolmogorov–Smirnov testing showed the scale data were not normally distributed.

Reliability testing occurred on social presence questions which was the fifth section of the survey. A Cronbach's alpha computation was used to determine the degree of reliability, with ideal values between 0.70 and 0.90 (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Cronbach's alphas within the pilot study for the 21 social presence items was .927. Due to the varying ideas and constructs of each MBA program perception and satisfaction survey question items, Cronbach's alpha was not conducted to determine an internal consistency for data analysis of Survey Questions 1–11. The social presence items had very high reliability with a score greater than 0.90. All Likert-scale sections of the survey showed at least good reliability.

Spearman's rho correlational testing occurred to determine the validity of the Likert-scale questions (MBA perception and social presence perception) by correlating each scale item with the total score. A survey item is valid when it correlates significantly with the total score (Taherdoost, 2016). The total social presence perception score is the mean of an individual's responses to the 21 questions. Items in the social presence section of the survey ($N = 21$) were all significantly correlated (r_s varies from .625–.913, $p < .01$). Items in the social presence section of the survey ($N = 21$) were all significantly correlated ($r_s = .625$ –.913, $p < .01$).

Data analysis in the study survey occurred differently than in the pilot test. Instead of looking at one total MBA perception score, the researcher analyzed the data in each area of reasons for choosing

an online accelerated MBA program as well as each area for satisfaction and created separate total columns to compare with the one total social presence perception score column.

Feedback from the pilot test participants regarding the survey flow, order, and particular questions underwent review. Pilot survey participants reported the survey taking three to 12 minutes to complete, with an average time of just over six minutes. All respondents found the survey extremely easy to follow and navigate. Three respondents found some of the social presence questions repetitive, two commented on the meaning of “credentialing options,” and one recommended the change from “credentialing options” to “career advancement.” One respondent indicated that the social presence survey portion seemed too long and recommended breaking the section into two parts.