

A CASE STUDY: MORAL AND ETHICAL DECISIONS SOME DOCTORAL
STUDENTS FACE PURSUING DEGREES FROM ACCREDITED,
FOR-PROFIT UNIVERSITIES

by

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the EDUC 980 Course

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this case study is to identify issues some doctoral students face in obtaining their Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) degree from accredited for-profit colleges and universities. The three participants attended for-profit universities in the past five years and failed to obtain their doctoral degrees. Data collection is through an initial demographics survey, qualification survey, vignettes, and the interview itself. Data analysis from the *Coding Manual for Qualitative Research* by Johnny Saldana is used to analyze the data collected from problems doctoral students encounter in pursuit of their doctoral degree (Saldana, 2013). The theoretical foundations for this project come from Kohlberg's Three Stages of Moral Development, in which the last stage focuses on the evaluation of the individual's society (Crane, 1985). This research serves as information for administrators and curriculum designers for doctoral programs for accredited public, private, for-profit and nonprofit, traditional and nontraditional colleges and universities offering doctoral programs. According to the results, non-traditional students find themselves having to make moral and ethical value judgments based on Kohlberg's Moral Stages of Development in pursuit of their PhD doctoral degrees. Based on the evaluation of data, the method of accrediting agencies evaluating higher education must be revamped in order to meet the rising needs of the student today, and these revisions are not limited to the federally funded aid offered to students but to the academic criteria involved in evaluating student success through the degree process as well as in the final stages of the doctoral process.

Keywords: ethics, moral, Moral Law, business ethics, accredited colleges and universities, non-accredited colleges and universities, for-profit colleges and universities, not-for-profit colleges and universities, traditional students, nontraditional students, Human Resources

Dedication

To God

and

My best friend and soul mate

Acknowledgements

*“I shall pass this way but once
So any good I can do
Or kindness I can show
Let me do it know
For I shall not pass this way again”*

These inspirational words to live by are attributed to Stephen Grellet, a Quaker missionary, who is believed to have written them around 1869. I first found these words in a cross-stitch wall hanging I made, and they have been my motto for many years.

Generally, I skip over the dedication, thinking the writer wanted to say something personal to the people named. The problem with picking and choosing an acknowledgment means running the risk of omitting someone. As it is now my turn to write something profound, I find I am truly at a loss for words. Looking back at the path this entire dissertation process took, I wonder who really is important and deserving mention. There is only one.

Writing on ethics, I began looking back realizing how far from center we have come as a society. We are no longer the nation that prides itself on “our word” or its importance. I see that young people today lack the realization and the importance and meaning of the words integrity, honesty, and respect. I see us, as teachers, parents, and leaders, let this generation down, taking instead the easy road. We chose, as this paper calls it, the lazy brain syndrome. We no longer try to stand to be the models our young people should emulate. Instead, we turn our heads as we watch the moral and ethical decay eroding the very fabric of our great nation. What have we lost? We have lost the respect of nations and of our generations of young people. We, instead, stand independent of the truths our forefathers tried to instill; the truths education is all about.

I understand now why it was important that I turn from my ten-plus years' study of adult learning and focus instead on the moral and ethical values we teach in our schools. This work stands as a tribute to those who tried to show me the important things in life: integrity, honesty, giving of oneself—the basis of those inspirational words written above. Most of all, I understand the love of God and honoring Him for my ability to complete this work with the help of those He sent in my path. Those of you He sent, you know who you are, I salute you with all my undying gratitude for answering His call.

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List of Abbreviations

American Council of Education (ACE)

American Psychological Association (APA)

Congressional Committee for Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP)

Council of Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL)

Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (CAPLA)

Department of Education (DOE)

Governmental Accountability Office (GAO)

Grade Point Average (GPA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

National Council for Accrediting of Teacher Education (NCATE)

Secretary's Advisory Committee on Human Research Protections (SACHRP)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Ethics comes from the Greek word, *ethos*, meaning character; a definition handed down through the centuries (McCoy, 2011). Teaching ethics and its moral implications can be traced as far back as Plato and Aristotle (McCoy, 2011). Today, the study of ethics finds its niche under the heading of philosophy describing the moral character, conduct, and values associated with an individual, a group of individuals, an association, region, community, or country (Menzel, 2009). Ethics and morality in most genres is synonymous with and stands for the moral fiber and character of an individual, becoming evident in actions and part of the individual's overall behavior, becoming second nature and not an act put on for the benefit of others (Nash, 2010). In actuality, the ethical behavior learned in childhood through imitation and reward is what determines an individual's identity and perception by others (Krone, 2009).

The study of ethics as it pertains to an individual concerns itself in large part with virtue, morality, and the choices individuals face between good and bad (McCoy, 2011). Traditionally, during the development of an individual's personality, the moral and ethical values begin with the family, followed by teaching that reinforces good behavior in the classroom (McCoy, 2011). Today, however, because of economic concerns, the family structure is not always intact, affecting the imitation of moral and ethical values in the home (Menzel, 2009). Through actions of movie icons, sports figures, and other individuals followed by the media, our culture seemingly adopts the violent actions these figures display (Lau, 2010). Unfortunately, the famous are not the only ones the youthful culture follows. Actions by parents and teachers have the most impact on students today, just as they did in the days of past generations (Liebler, 2010). Times have changed, and

with the increased use of the Internet and social media, pressure to succeed in a fast-paced, ever-changing world is increasing daily, forcing students to make choices they may not have made previously (Liebler, 2010).

For students who pursue higher education goals, the pressure to successfully complete programs is astronomical (Johnson, 2012). Not only do jobs and positions rest on the outcome of successful education, but the economic factor does as well (Bruhn, 2008). With the weakened job market, many companies are no longer offering tuition reimbursement, forcing students to absorb the costs for school themselves, which increases the pressure to succeed (Hennessey, 2011). According to recent postings on job boards, some students work two and three jobs just to pay for their education (Lee, 2012). As a result, many fail to complete their studies (Lee, 2012 Harkin, 2012). For those who do successfully move on, many face increased challenges (Nash, 2010). The ability to write academically, compounded by tests and exams, is often difficult for the adult, nontraditional student (Nash, 2010). In addition, many students assume their current skills will suffice getting them through academic rigors. Students, especially those pursuing doctoral degrees in accredited, for-profit universities, face a paradox complicated by their well-meaning instructors who may not follow a more traditional form of thinking (Plinio, 2010). Professors and instructors may believe that accepting papers that do not quite meet academic criteria for writing is well intended, but this only adds to the confusion these students face. In addition, other faculty who demand strict adherence to academic writing may not lead by example by offering instructional material that fails to meet the same writing standards students are expected to achieve. Thus, the question arises: What do these students do? What options are open to them?

Background

Researching problems doctoral students face required a using a grid of keywords to locate viable content on which to base research. First, to understand the meaning and intent of ethics meant to begin at its origin with Plato and Aristotle, then fast-forward to the meaning of ethics in today's society. The study of ethics presented a wide range of content and required constant narrowing to focus on education, education and law, accrediting and accrediting agencies, then finally higher education and doctoral programs. Understanding ethics requires defining of terminology to complete the understanding both nationally and globally. Finally, the educational arena changed significantly, going from the traditional classroom to the online venue that makes courses and studies available around the world. However, this study does not concern itself with the timeline or centuries of research, but rather looks to define ethics in today's terms, to look at ethics as it pertains to the educational environment, specifically targeting doctoral students attending accredited, for-profit colleges and universities in the United States. This research stems from personal experiences with accredited for-profit schools and findings from an investigation into complaints from dissatisfied students seeking assistance from Governmental Accountability Office (GAO) and the Congressional Committee on Education led by Senator Tom Harkin.

In 2000, the Congressional Committee on Education became aware of the growing number of complaints from students concerning higher education. Initial contact was with Congressman William Pascrell's office of New Jersey; Congressman Pascrell's office said Pascrell no longer headed the education committee but to contact Senator Harkin, who was spearheading an investigation on the complaints coming into

government agencies. In late 2012, initial contact within the Department of Higher Education related several examples of complaints they received concerning ethics on a graduate level. The majority of complaints from graduate students revealed some concerns regarding writing styles, ability to conduct valid research, and a growing number of students using ghostwriters for portfolio compilations for graduation. The contact revealed that students with an inability to write even simple sentences were looking for writers to complete their work.

In an article from *The Chronicle for Higher Education*, one professional writer revealed his reasons for writing especially for graduate students (Dante, 2010). He believes there is a sense of entitlement among students today, and he makes a good living at what he does. Searching the Internet revealed paper sources such as Online Education Consultants, My Paper Geek, Fast Research Papers, and My Paper Writer, to mention a few.

The contact from Congressman Pascrell's office then directed me to the work Senator Harkin's office was doing regarding student complaints. According to the complete Harkin findings, there seemed to be a thread of misunderstanding between the faculty and the nontraditional student in the latter's research and pursuit of a doctoral degree.

Large corporations in search of new venues for investment own the majority of for-profit schools (Crotty, 2012). Coursework from such schools does not always follow sound principles of education or the ethical and moral standards evident in most not-for-profit schools (Crotty, 2012). The majority of for-profit schools do not concern themselves with the student GPA, but rather look at the bottom line more than student

retention and graduation rates. These accredited for-profit schools adopted the amoral characteristics from their business and corporate parent organizations, which are generally accepted by society today (Harkin, 2012).

To a certain degree, to understand the moral and ethical foundations of the educational system here in the United States also requires understanding its progress from the beginning in the 1600s with the founding of the first schools, academies, and universities (Schrum, 2009; Spring, 2005). Some educators believe the change with the most impact on education and ethics is attributed to the removal of any type of religious influences, resulting in changing teaching methods, but also influencing behavior of teachers and educators across the board (Spring, 2014).

According to research, in the early days of this country, the pursuit of an education beyond the necessary basics of reading and simple mathematics was symbolic of a fine ethical and moral character to the community at large (Schrum, 2012). Among other things, an education meant the ability to discriminate between fact, fiction, and perception; and the ability to make the right choice (Spring, 2005, 2014). More recently, the restructuring of education courses and the acceptance of “industry professionals” as instructors in higher education has somewhat infected the ethics and moral character of the classroom (Sternberg, 2013). The adoption of amoral practices in business and industry, running contrary to ethical practices upheld in education for centuries, contribute to a degree to the moral and ethical degeneration of society (Walker, 2012). Changes in the complexion of the educational arena have been slow and did not take place overnight (Spring, 2014). However, in comparison to what education was even fifty years ago, the changes are significant (Spring, 2005).

Not all of the blame falls on the educators and administrators. The student population shares the blame as well. Recent statistics from the Department of Education (DOE), American Council on Education (ACE), and Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) show the majority of students in higher education are nontraditional students (Tate, 2013). This translates to 70% of the student population are over the age of 25 (Tate, 2013). In fact, the average age of the nontraditional student in college today is 45, increasing the average age for doctoral students as well (Tate, 2013). These nontraditional students have family responsibilities, and are gainfully employed (Tate, 2013). Besides all the obvious characteristics and differences between the traditional and nontraditional student, the one characteristic most important is the knowledge and experience from the real world the nontraditional students carry with them into the classroom (Pinchera, 2011).

Research on traditional and nontraditional student populations and characteristics is plentiful, with the major difference focusing on responsibilities not only to family but also to job and profession as well (Pinchera, 2011). Since traditional students have less real world experience, they do not have the influences of the business and industry world to mar their judgment and question the classroom educator (Pinchera, 2011). On the other hand, the nontraditional student will draw upon their previous leaning and experience to enhance the learning offered in most college and university settings (Pinchera, 2011; Wertheim, 2012). Today, the majority of doctoral students have returned to the college or university to complete their education, unlike students of the 1960s through the late 1980s when traditional students completed their education through the doctoral degree process (Hoy, 2013).

The desire for many nontraditional students attempting to achieve the pinnacle level degrees, these students are the most obvious targets of having to make personal moral and ethical decisions regarding their achievement (Bruhn, 2008). In addition, there are often personal reasons for achievement, the obvious being title, prestige, and job advancement (Wertheim, 2012). One only has to wonder how much the mythical influences have affected these professionals, especially as it relates to the classroom. What are their thoughts and their reasoning behind some of the actions they take?

Situation to Self

I was barely 21 when I graduated with my first bachelor's degree. As a second-generation Italian woman, I had a great deal to learn about the "real world" my family shielded from me. Being the first in the family to graduate college, I was fortunate enough to get the wise counsel of my uncles, who felt they needed to warn me about the world I would now learn to face and not always have them around to help. To that end, I look back on the following experience, using it as a series of reflective observations concerning academic integrity:

Days before graduation, I was called into a meeting with the dean and found I was a victim of a student who plagiarized a number of my papers. Being naive, I believed my fellow student when he said he wanted an idea what the teachers wanted in a paper. From that day on, I could never understand why it was easier to copy someone else's work. Later I would find my neighborhood newsletter published as news items in local newspapers short stories I had written without my name, and later a co-authored journal article with my name left off. Most recently, at a college I worked for, one of the staff took credit for several sections of the student manual, especially my sections on

assessment and online learning. Would that be all I was to learn? Not really: I failed my first medical class because I was a woman and my professor did not feel such extensive education should be wasted on a woman. At age 16, I hardly considered myself a woman, but there I was, a 16-year-old failing a class with a grade of 87. So, how does this all contribute to my topic? Integrity. The school that plagiarized my material operates as a for-profit college, even though it is not. However, the current staff is all from for-profit schools, and has a distinctly different slant on integrity. My first doctoral attempt was at a well known, accredited, for-profit school where the APA style required alteration to reflect the university's style of academic writing, reflecting what the faculty wanted to hear rather than valid, factual information. I left there only to fall further into the pit. This second institution had very few staff to talk with before enrolling. In addition, the coursework was so easy none of the books were necessary in order to pass the courses. Shortly before the comprehensive examinations, the school faced a situation, with the president implicated in a scandal with another college selling diplomas to the former state of Soviet Georgia. Needless to say, no one was available to answer student questions by telephone, mail, or e-mail.

Although I studied the characteristics of the adult learner, their methods of learning, best instruction methods, and assessments for the adult, I realized my biggest contribution to the educational body of knowledge would be what doctoral students experience when faced with unscrupulous situations, and unethical decisions and circumstances.

Problem Statement

Ethical concerns in higher education are a relatively new road in educational research, but not a new issue in education (Heyneman, 2008). Contributing to the epidemic of poor ethics and integrity is the wide use of the Internet and the plethora of information available (Cartwright, 2013). Most research concerning ethics in education focuses on course content, healthcare, or plagiarism and the academic integrity issues teachers and administrators face, especially today, with the popularity of social media (Johnson, 2012). Few studies focus on ethical issues within the structure of higher education, let alone the problems some doctoral students face as they advance through their program (Bloodgood, 2010). The ability of nontraditional students to access educational facilities has also increased leading to a problem of selection of the right school and the right program (Lampe, 2012). Often these decisions are based on the credibility of the school press reports, reputation, popularity, and how much work is expected of the student (Lucey, 2009).

This research project looks to build on some of the research conducted by companies specializing in security testing like Cavion in attempting to stem the tide of student cheating, and to further understanding regarding the connection between unethical approaches to granting doctoral degrees. Harkin's findings hinted at the quality of instruction and faculty teaching at accredited, for-profit colleges and universities and a gross misunderstanding of the research presented by doctoral students.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study is to discover moral and ethical decisions some doctoral students face in pursuing Doctor of Philosophy degrees from accredited, for-

profit colleges and universities. At this stage in the research, the moral and ethical challenges doctoral students face will be defined as the pressure forcing these students into accepting values and/or making choices they might not normally make in pursuit of their degree (Bloodgood, 2010).

Significance of the Study

This case study research project is significant in that it examines a growing problem associated with accredited for-profit colleges and universities in the United States today. These institutions, owned and operated by large corporations, look to add to the bottom line and increase profit margin rather than contribute to quality education. Most nontraditional students in pursuit of a degree are not always aware of the background of the school in which they enroll. Further, these students do not really know the qualifications or the credibility of the faculty leading them to their degree goal. Often these students are looking for the fastest path toward a degree and are not initially concerned with the consequences they may face with such a degree.

Having been a student in, as well as taught in, accredited, for-profit schools, I saw firsthand not only the outcome of degrees from these schools and student failure to land that “dream job,” but the effect it has on students to not be able to make the grade, trusting the admissions’ hard sell. In a recent Congressional Committee investigation (Harkin, 2012), some 30 of the 150 accredited, for-profit schools came under intense scrutiny. Students from some of these colleges and universities already shared some insight into their experiences. Although a number of these individuals shared stories from an undergraduate perspective, this study concentrates on those students who were not able to make the grade in doctoral programs.

It is the hope that this case study is the beginning of further research into the educational contributions that accredited for-profit colleges and universities make, as compared to the more traditional programs from accredited not-for-profit colleges and universities.

Definitions

The interpretation of many terms in this study often vary from person to person; therefore, to clearly delineate the meaning and interpretation of these terms, the following definitions apply:

Ethics – based on the Greek word, *ethos*, meaning character, are the principles behind behaviors a society deems good or bad. *Ethics* is sometimes translated and used interchangeably with *morals* (McCoy, 2011; Alexander, 2012; Aristotle’s psychology, 2008–2012).

Morals or morality – what the individual accepts as right and wrong. Morality therefore is the standards to which the individuals hold themselves; what they truly believe is right or wrong personally (Alexander, 2012; Aristotle’s psychology, 2008–2012).

Moral law – is the general rule for a society. A society, or for some, societies in general, is handed down from Divine inspiration. For many, moral law is God’s will, with the instrument of the law being the Ten Commandments (Maxwell, 2007; McCoy, 2011).

Moral beliefs – based on morals or morality; moral beliefs are what the individual holds to be right or wrong. Therefore, moral beliefs are subjective in that they vary slightly or in total from individual to individual. The beliefs are individual, dependent,

and based on how the individual develops (Maxwell, 2007; McCoy, 2011). The best example of moral beliefs comes from Kohlberg's Moral Stages of Development.

Good vs. bad or evil – for the majority of religions and especially the Judeo-Christian world, these are Biblically-based definitions derived from the Scriptures and again in the Ten Commandments (Maxwell, 2007; McCoy, 2011). Good are actions most associated with God while bad actions are in violation of God's laws and mostly associated with Satan and Satanic beliefs (McCoy, 2011). Defining what is good or what is bad in a society in which Biblical references are not politically correct, the terms *good* and *bad* are what society deems acceptable and nonacceptable (Nash, 2010). Keeping with moral correctness, *good* are those actions done out of affection or deemed beneficial for society members while *bad* or *evil* have the opposite effect (Nash, 2010; Plato, 2012).

Golden Rule – is a direct reference to ethics. Found in the majority of religious beliefs, the Golden Rule brings the definition to simplification: the treatment of others (Maxwell, 2007; Spring, 2005).

For-profit colleges and universities – are those institutions owned and operated by corporate structures. The bottom line for the school is the profit.

Not-for-profit colleges and universities – are institutions established for the sole purpose of education, not owned by corporations; the bottom line is academic excellence and achievement (Accreditation, 2013).

Accredited colleges and universities – are those schools having achieved acceptance by the United States Department of Education (USDOE) Accrediting Board.

Traditional students – are those students attending colleges and universities directly from high school (Beaudoin, 2003; CAEL, 2009). These students have very little in the way of work history and experiential learning.

Nontraditional students – are those students attending colleges and universities, have family, and work obligations, and most of all have experiences contributing to their education (Beaudoin, 2003; CAEL, 2009). These students are targets of this research project.

University – the traditional definition is an association. A body capable of granting an acknowledgment that an individual has achieved a certain level of learning recognized by the state.

College – defined as a body capable of granting acknowledgment of achievement; this, however, is not necessarily restricted to learning.

Research Question

This research project has a two part foundation; the first being the historical, philosophical, and documented structures such as schools or accrediting agencies, while the second is the theoretical foundation, seeking the ethical and moral characteristics at an individual level. Colleges' and universities' interests are vastly different in that corporations focus on the bottom line and profit while education is concerned with retention, student success, and academic credibility within the collegiate community. Accrediting agencies maintain adherence to policy. The rules and regulations used by accrediting agencies differ depending on their national location, topic concentration, or school structure.

As is the case with many developmental theories, Kohlberg states an individual can be fixated at any stage of development. Level I focuses predominantly on the self and pleasure/pain (Crane, 1985). Level II focuses on others and the acceptance of the parameters in which most individuals live (Crane, 1985). For a select few who reach Level III sometime in middle age, the focus is on justice and dignity (Crane, 1985). As described by Kohlberg's stages, the majority of doctoral students would fit in at this last stage regardless of chronological age (Crane, 1985). Regardless of the focus or topic for the doctoral student attending accredited for-profit universities, their training includes at least one course on ethics (Bruhn, 2008). Therefore, based on Kohlberg's last developmental stage, stating the adult learner is cognizant of their environment and in full control of their decisions, the questions this research asks are:

1. Are there ethical decisions the nontraditional doctoral student has to make in pursuit of their degree?
2. What is the rationale behind the decisions the student makes?
3. What factors did the nontraditional doctoral student take into account before making these decisions?

Research Plan

This qualitative research project uses the single holistic case study design in order to gain a better understanding of issues faced by students pursuing doctoral degrees from accredited for-profit colleges and universities. The single case study design is an approximate equivalent to a single experiment (Yin, 2009). This research design meets the single case design in that it (Yin, 2009) tests for a set of goals with the expectation the

result be true, intends to capture an account of circumstances, is unique, is the composed of firsthand accounts, and exists in a number of accredited for-profit universities.

The plan for this research project is to interview three to five participants who have failed in their attempt for a doctoral degree. Before the interview, a demographic questionnaire serving as a prelude will qualify participants. The short questionnaire will describe the situation and identify the university; information from the three short vignettes will establish the moral outlook of the participant. The responses to the vignettes will be one of the determining factors for final qualification.

Interviews were held via Skype. The interviews were voice recorded only, then transcribed in order to code the component parts of the detailed conversation with the participant. Prior to the interview, the participant will complete a demographic survey qualifying them to participate in the research, vignettes determining their ethical views, and an online survey questionnaire designed to validate their credibility. The credibility or lack thereof on the part of the institution is validated using the Harkin Report. The survey describing the situation of conflict serves as the third part of triangulation.

Delimitations

The case study aspect is a more recent portion and examines the experience of some nontraditional doctoral students and their treatment of the situation, if at all (Suryani, 2008). There is not the expectation all situations are identical or even similar (Suryani, 2008). The expectation is to find some commonality in issues affecting students and at what level the issues arise, if at all (Suryani, 2008; White, 2009). The case study will not look at any of the issues of legality (White, 2009).

The issue of controlling variables is not an issue in qualitative research; however in order to maintain a clear decisive line (Davidson, 2005), the participants will be (Accreditation, 2013):

1. From accredited, for-profit universities
2. Be nontraditional students having at least fifteen years' work experience
3. Have not or not yet attained their doctoral degree

The study focuses on issues students face (Bloodgood, 2010). Having a knowledge base to begin with, I acknowledge that the student is not alone facing ethical issues (Bloodgood, 2010). The issues under investigation are not blatant disregard for or disrespect toward faculty, staff, or school, but are the subtleties and incidentals that contribute to conflict, lead toward irreconcilable issues, or just lead to the inability to continue (Nash, 2010).

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

A review of current research in the area of understanding what, if any, moral and ethical concerns doctoral students face in pursuit of their doctoral degree from accredited for-profit colleges and universities is important in order to gain an understanding not only from the student perspective but from faculty and staff as well. Although little research exists in this area specifically targeting accredited for-profit colleges and universities, this study is not singular in its search for answers. The United States Congress Education Committee under the direction of Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa also looked into accredited for-profit colleges and universities. Complaints from students in accredited for-profit colleges and universities precipitated the investigations since these students were now responsible for significant amounts of grants and loans (Harkin, 2012; Lewin, 2012). As the number of complaints began to mount, the committee realized the bulk of the complaints centered on improprieties contributing to the failure of these students. These improprieties are the core of this case study research.

In conducting this Literature Review, a number of threads warranting investigation became evident. It seems the student is in the midst of a compilation of issues often unknown to the student. Each of these threads affects the student in different ways depending on the student's viewpoint. These are:

1. The establishment of schools of higher education in this country
2. Established rules and regulations in the form of accrediting agencies governing higher educational facilities
3. The foundations of ethics and morality and its role in society today

Theoretical Framework

Kohlberg is an offshoot of Piaget's Moral Judgment (Piaget, 1997), in which Piaget states children under ten years of age see moral choices as being handed down from a higher power such as parents and when the subject is introduced, God (Piaget, 1997). These seats of power are not subject to change (Piaget, 1997). Children over the age of ten understand there are times when the rules must be broken or changed (Piaget, 1997). As Piaget saw it, the mental image projected is as if walking up a flight of stairs and depicted as follows (Piaget, 1997; Ormond, 2012):

1. Do right and not be punished
2. Sees there are different sides to an issue
3. Concern with being a good person
4. Obeys the law to maintain stability
5. Concerns basic rights and democracy
6. Defines the ideologies by which they live

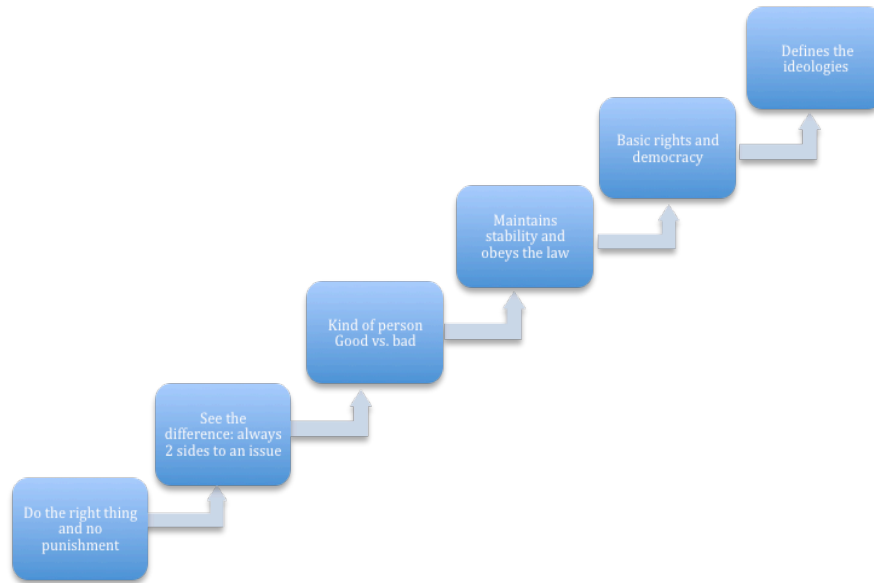


Figure: 1 Piaget's Human Stages of Development

The study questions used by Kohlberg to establish his Moral Stages of Development were not important; the point was the reasoning behind the answers (Crane, 1985). The constant questioning of the subjects followed by the rationale for the answer is the actual point of the study (Crane, 1985). Kohlberg then went on to test the reliability of his study by repeating it. Once satisfied he had a valid sampling, he went on to create his concept of moral development (Crane, 1985; Ormond, 2012).

Initially, the development consists of three simple levels of pre-conventional morality, conventional morality, and post-conventional morality (Crane, 1985).

However, these three simple levels are further broken down into two stages.

Table 1: Kohlberg's Moral Stages

Level	Stage	Description
Pre-Conventional Morality	a) Obedience and Punishment	Fixed rules by parent or God
	b) Individualism and Exchange	Rules may have certain issues

Conventional Morality	a) Good Interpersonal Relationship	More than a simple concept
	b) Maintaining Social Order	Concerns more than the self and included others
Post-Conventional Morality	a) Social Contract and Individual Rights	Consideration given to current society
	b) Universal Principles	Achievement for everything but justice

The two stages Kohlberg splits each of his three levels into are as follows:

Level I is appropriately defined as the Pre-Conventional Morality Level and covers early stages of childhood (Crane, 1985). This level closely resembles Piaget's initial stage in that it covers the early stage of development and the self as the prime concern (Crane, 1985). A child first learns there are clearly defined parameters for right and wrong (Crane, 1985). As the concept becomes clearer, the child slowly learns there are shades of right and wrong. Level I has two stages (Crane, 1985). The first stage is Obedience and Punishment, defining an early stage that virtually mirrors Piaget's stage. He considers the child as the center character in life where right and wrong are laws handed down from the parent or, as understanding develops, by God. As children, they are not yet full members of society (Crane, 1985). This second component is Individualism and Exchange. Here children are capable of understanding there may be another side to an issue and not everything might be all right or all wrong. This stage often introduces some amoral thinking, but depending on the situation, the punishment might be worth the risk (Crane, 1985).

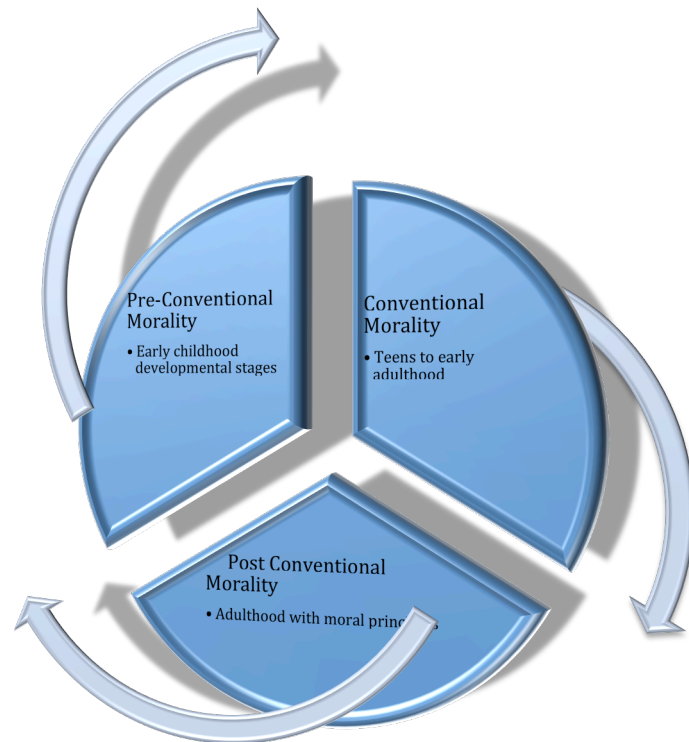


Figure 2: Kohlberg's Moral Stages

Conventional Morality, or Level II, comes at a time where the child makes friends and is looking for acceptance by the group. This level concerns the development of relationships with friends as well as in the family (Crane, 1985). Level II sees the first emergence of the formation of the ethical and moral values of the society. The two stages for this level are developing good interpersonal relationships and maintaining social order (Crane, 1985). Good Interpersonal Relationships, the first stage of Level II, is where the child is still the center character as they enter the teen years. This stage has more of an idealistic perception where everyone within the society group should live by the rules and up to expectations. There is the beginning shift from absolute obedience to the belief in good motivational actions by others (Crane, 1985). The second stage is Maintaining

Social Order. Up to this point, the child has been the central character, but now the individual is starting to branch out and shares space with others. This space includes family and friends, or those who share common interests and ideas. This stage shows the beginnings of approaching membership in the society. The concern here is obedience to laws, authority, and performing in expectations within the social order. According to Kohlberg's research, he began to see similarities between this stage and the first stage under the Pre-Conventional Morality (Crane, 1985). Similar responses in this age group made Kohlberg press on and look for the rationale behind the survey question response. This stage expresses rationales behind the response, which is not the case with the first stage (Ormond, 2012)

Post-Conventional Morality, the third and final level Kohlberg identifies, comes later in life, surfacing around middle age (Crane, 1985). As Kohlberg explains, the adult learns through time and experiences. As a result, the adult reflects on ethical and moral issues pertaining to society. Level III also has two stages and is probably the most interesting (Crane, 1985). Social Contract and Individual Rights is the first stage. This stage questions everything from the function of the society to its basic rights. The individual at this stage looks at the credibility of the society and its moral fiber as well as the function. This stage is where the conversation may address the actual issue of morality and ethics, what is important and what is not. In many circumstances it appears this stage addresses the complete issue facing members of society. In actuality, it is almost complete with the exception of one issue (Crane, 1985). Universal Principles is the second stage of this final level. Throughout each level and stage, there is the slow development of social order, conscience, morality, and ethics behind the individual.

However, this is one thing missing, which this stage addresses: justice. Kohlberg believes each of the five stages can effectively address issues and concerns in society. Kohlberg believed an individual at this stage has at a minimum a crystal-clear understanding of right and wrong, extenuating circumstances, and justice (Crane, 1985).

Unlike most theories identifying stages of development, Kohlberg makes no inference of achievement at specific ages (Ormond, 2012). He does, however, state the stages are in order and an individual can become fixed at any one stage or fluctuate between stages if the circumstances warrant (Ormond, 2012). However, achievement of the third level is somewhere around middle age, at a point when the adult has enough experiential learning to make a valid decision. Kohlberg also states it is very rare individuals ever achieve Stage Six or Universal Principles where action necessitates change in society or decisions concerning justice (Ormond, 2012).

Baby Boomers grew up with limited television shows depicting the moral and ethical values of the time. These values, often linked to religious and Biblical teachings, served as the foundation of growth and development for a generation who, for whatever reason, found a more global method of expression. The television shows that always ended with some kind of lesson on behavior edging on morality and ethics.

The focus of this research uses Kohlberg as its foundation; however, the theoretical foundation would be incomplete without mentioning both the predecessor and successor. Gilligan, both a friend and colleague of Kohlberg, finds fault with Kohlberg's Moral Development concepts. Simply stated, she believes there are male and female perspectives to ethics and moral reasoning (Gilligan, 1982; Walker, 2003). This male and female view is not as black-and-white, but is about views on perception and reality

(Walker, 2003). While the male looks for a mathematical or logical explanation, female evaluates situations based on the ethical side of caring for the self, for others, and the difference between (Gilligan, 1982).

Gilligan correctly states that Kohlberg used 74 boys in his study for moral development (Kakkori & Huttunen, 2010). Gilligan argues that males and females view situations differently and Kohlberg did not take into account the feminist point of view in his development (Gilligan, 1982; Walker, 2003). This difference comes from the way boys and girls are raised (Gilligan, 1982). The difference in development is that males tend to pattern themselves as father figures, as individualists and providers, while the female and maternal patterning tends to be as dependent and as the initial caregiver (Gilligan, 1982). Gilligan and Kohlberg dispute the developmental differences between males and females, but in the end, both had valid arguments pointing to the same conclusion.

Both Piaget and Gilligan contribute significantly to the acceptance of Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory; however, neither are expected to contribute significantly to the focus of this study since Kohlberg's Moral Development identifies the final stage or Universal Development calls into question the moral and ethical values associated with the doctoral student's present stage of development (Ormond, 2012). Kohlberg's theory, as stated, does not differentiate between males and females; however, studies in the final evaluation show the difference between males and females pursuing PhD doctoral degrees is insignificant.

Related Literature

Ethics and Morality

Plato, a philosopher whose influence stretched throughout the known world of 400 BCE, documented his thoughts and teachings in *The Republic*, a publication finding audiences even today (McCoy, 2011; Plato, 2012). He was not only an influential man, but also well-organized and systematic in his thoughts and deeds (Plato, 2012). His book discusses the existence of the perfect world, comparing justice and subliminal self-gratification and individual happiness (Plato, 2012). This utopian philosophy states happiness only exists if justice prevails, even if the individual has indulged in self-gratification to a small extent (Plato, 2012). Plato's ideas find their way back to Socrates, who believed the smartest and wisest individual should lead society. In essence, philosophers should lead the society (Plato, 2012).

Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle influenced society for many years (Aristotle, 2008–2012). Their method of teaching is evident in some classrooms today (Aristotle, 2008–2012). Many schools still believe the teacher or professor is the sole keeper of knowledge and learning and delivered to the student or learner (Friedman, 2006). They are the ones who share both the theory and practical applications of subject matter (Friedman, 2006). To these individuals, students must learn from professors or there is no learning (Friedman, 2006). Learning also can only take place in the classroom, and there is no reasoning, since what teachers have to say is absolute (Friedman, 2006). In actuality, based on experiences of the adult learner or the nontraditional student, we know this is not the case (Fiddler, 2006). Learning can and does take place in a variety of places including the workplace as well as individually as the student pursues areas of

interest (Colvin, 2011). As far as society goes, youth today get mixed signals between movies, games, available information on the Internet, and the amoral code from the business world (Liebler, 2010).

As is evident from the list of definitions earlier, the terms *ethics* and *morality* are interchangeable, especially in society as it exists today. However, it was the point of education to make clear the distinctions between ethics and morality (Spring, 2014). While ethics is the set of principles accepted by a culture, morality involves right and wrong judgments, and the moral standard perceived universal (Sternberg, 2013). The individual interpretations of morality are where most conflict occurs (Sternberg, 2013). Whether the teaching of morality is done in the home or in the classroom, training is a simple case of praise for correct actions and punishment for wrong ones (Piaget, 1997; West, 2012). The key to morality involves the sincerity of the individual and since the conscience is difficult to determine effectively, it is not always obvious (West, 2012). As individuals, morality is first determined as it applies to oneself, and then as we interpret morality and apply it to others (West, 2012). This subjective level is not always objective because it is based on the individual interpretation of morality (Venezia, 2011). However, this determination considers a number of mitigating factors (Venezia, 2011), such as:

1. Cultural values and norms
2. Personal interpretation of logic
3. Emotional state at the time

Our Western Civilization, for centuries, has held ethics and morality based on the Judeo-Christian foundations of civilization (Spring, 2005). These values transitioned

through time and involve a set of values held in esteem by our society (Ficarrotta, 2001; Kitcher, 2012). This ethical and moral belief is the foundation of our American society and is inspired by the Ten Commandments. In the time of Moses, there were 613 Commandments in the original Torah (Bible, 2007; Maxwell, 2007). The 613, in some circles, have been simplified and compacted into the Ten Commandments that we see today (Bible, 2007). The theology behind the relationship between ethics and the Ten Commandments leads some to believe ethics is interpreted as the word of God in the form of a conscience and the freedom of choice between right and wrong (Bible, 2007; Nash, 2010). These values handed down from generation to generation involve a set of values held by human beings worldwide (Nash, 2010). Moreover, societies today, regardless of their religious affiliation, accept these basic tenets and incorporate them into their moral fabric (Nash, 2010; Spring, 2014).

There are a number of courses available in higher education on ethics and morality. These courses explain in detail the role ethics plays in society today (Sternberg, 2013; Van Camp, 2013). For the educator concerned with appropriate interpretations and behavior, video lecture segments find their way into the classroom (Van Camp, 2013). For the most part, they transcend time and fill an important void for an educator trying to function in a non-religious environment (West, 2012). The need to perform or lead by example is clearly the message intended by instructors who design these courses (West, 2012). The importance of understanding the concepts included in these videos played an integral role in the formation of some of the questionnaire and interview questions for this study. Understanding the importance of a role model for any student, traditional or not, is an important component of this research.

Over the years, religious leaders have spoken out regarding ethics and morality especially where business is concerned (Smith, 2014). Leaders such as Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Calvin, the Vatican Popes, and John Westley wrote and stressed the importance of ethics and morality, especially when dealing with the public (Smith, 2014).

Philosophers began discussions on ethics, especially as it pertains to business and commerce in ancient Greece, starting with Plato and filtering through Kant, Marx, and John Mills (Smith, 2014; Plato, 2012). Today we see ethics as a topic of concern in schools, primarily in medicine, but that does not mean ethics is a not a topic discussed by any other discipline (Rumyantseva, 2005).

One would believe ethics and good business practices are one of the pillars in the majority of businesses (Van Camp, 2013). In actuality, most consumers will tell you they are not. The public today does a significant amount of research before any purchases, especially large ones (Van Camp, 2013). One of the prime reasons for researching large purchases is the number of “super deals” offered (DeGeorge, 2010; West, 2012). In reality, these super deals are not so super if conducting true comparisons (Plinio, 2010). Often the super deal ends up being an older model or product manufactured some time ago (Plinio, 2010). The company hinges its bet on nothing going wrong with the product, thus “getting away” with a somewhat shady deal (Minch, 2010).

The idea that business be founded on ethical principles is nothing new. However, it is the consensus that businesses today operate under the principle better termed the “myth of amoral business,” and there are several views on this concept (Spring, 2014). First, business is concerned primarily with the bottom line or a profit resulting in an “anything goes” ideology (Metz, 2009). The foundation of this ideology is that ethics

does not operate in a business atmosphere (Mein, 2009; Menzel, 2009). However, those individuals that are business-oriented do consider themselves ethical (Mein, 2009). One of the problems concerning the amoral business concept is the fact that most businesspersons are not accustomed to handling this phenomenon, lacking the education and training to do so. The reality is since this amoral behavior is expected, the behavior is insignificant even if the unethical practice is obvious or unclear. Defining business concerns the selling of goods and/or services, a definition that encapsulates the production, manufacture, soliciting, and marketing of goods and/or services (DeGeorge, 2010).

Amoral business practices have become a target of publicity, and the public is reacting with increased distaste (DeGeorge, 2010). Reactions toward these companies and organizations with “shady business dealings” are being met with outrage and shunning of these organizations (Gensler, 2011; Why, 2013). However, the verbal tongue-lashings are short-lived, as was the case with other deviations from the acceptable norm (Why, 2013). The plain and simple fact is that according to the majority of texts concerning today’s society, the expectation is that business and ethics are not compatible (Minch, 2010)—however, this is not always the case. Because the individual enters the workplace is no reason that their personal ethical and moral behavior should cease and they should take on the persona of the corporate structure (Minch, 2010). However, it is obvious that today it does (Minch, 2010). One can only wonder if the reason is a result of frustration in securing employment in the current economical market, or if the individual has no real moral conviction to begin with.

In today's business world, many companies come under attack for amoral business ethics for various reasons (DeGeorge, 2010). Companies such as Walmart found themselves defending against accusations of employing illegal aliens and cutting employee costs significantly (DeGeorge, 2010; LaMorte, 2011). In actuality, when the company came under investigation, the majority of workers complied with immigration laws, with only a small number of illegals managing to slip under the screening process (LaMorte, 2011). However, the public will quickly recall the accusation but not the result.

The reverse is also true, especially in cases where blatant abuse took place. Take, for example, the business practices of Bernard Madoff, convicted in 2009 of hedge fund fraud by taking millions of dollars from close associates and friends. The scheme implicated many businesses, some of which were the victim. Public opinion shed unfavorable light on such companies just because of their implication or association. Laws today are in place to prevent such behaviors from taking place (LaMorte, 2011). Unfortunately, the concern is how employees of the company interpret behaviors. Even though there were many condemning Madoff's actions, there were those defending him as well (LaMorte, 2011).

It is difficult to determine the actions of business as being ethical or unethical (DeGeorge, 2010). Laws regulating some behaviors make it obvious to determine; however some not clearly defined and may be difficult to determine based on the point of view taken by the organization. Alternatively, the expectation for the individual within the business organization behaves in a manner that follows a code of ethics acceptable to the society in which it functions (DeGeorge, 2010). The point being is not to change the

ethical convictions of the individual, but rather to build on them and to portray that image to the public (DeGeorge, 2010; Gensler, 2011).

The economic principle under which business functions is, in itself, something for consideration (DeGeorge, 2010). Here, it is believed each of the stakeholders involved in the business transaction is seeking some kind of self-satisfaction; in other words is “in it for themselves” (DeGeorge, 2010). The business looks to sell its product or service for the highest price it will yield while the consumer looks for the cheapest price for that product or service. In other words, the consumer looks for the best “bang for the buck” (DeGeorge, 2010). In some cases, the business will rely on some practices that may not be entirely fair or considered ethical by society in general (DeGeorge, 2010). Over the years, government has passed laws governing how the business should treat their customers as far as product and offers associated with the purchase (DeGeorge, 2010). The problem with no clear definitive answer delves into the actual practice of ethics by members of a business organization. This question looks at the way employees see ethics and how this perception is applied (DeGeorge, 2010). Do employees look at the question as part of a business structure or as it applies to them personally (Gensler, 2011)?

The business world of today has taken an international turn in the days of the Technological Revolution (DeGeorge, 2010). Business is no longer limited to consumers in this country. The focus of many businesses today is on an international market (DeGeorge, 2010). For the successful entrepreneur, they look up to five years out examining business trends and market indicators (DeGeorge, 2010). This means extensive reviews not only on local consumer purchases, but at the global market as well (DeGeorge, 2010).

Establishment of Education in the United States

The understanding of education would not be complete without understanding its early beginnings and close association to the church. The church championed progressive education or education for the masses in the 14th century Europe (Rail, 2012). Martin Luther at that time spoke out about the availability of writings for the common folk. He felt church services and specifically the Holy Bible should be written in a language understood by the common man. Luther's radical ideas transcended time and are partially responsible for the many changes we see in Christian religious services today. The growth of educational institutions boomed in the 13th and 14th centuries, giving new meaning to the terms *Universitas vestra* meaning the whole you, and *stadium universitale*, *stadium commune*, or more commonly known *stadium generale* (Rail, 2012). Further, the only people who could confer degrees of higher learning were kings or the Pope (Rail, 2012). During the 13th century, the *universitas* was the equivalent to the guilds whose members were the skilled and knowledgeable practitioners recognized in their field of expertise (Rail, 2012). Since the institutions were granted titles by kings or the Pope, the association for the *universitatas* took on a religious connotation. In some cases, again those of Italian heritage, incomes were church dependent, resulting in the graduate taking vows of poverty resulting in their close association to the church (Rail, 2012) with rich or well to do relatives sponsoring the needs of the church and heavily influencing the *universitas vestra*.

The student body of these institutions represented the well-to-do students of towns and was an indication of the wealth and prosperity attributed to the institution (Rail, 2012). These students, especially those of Italian descent, were already

professionals recognized by the guilds. The student body followed the rules and regulations associated with the guild (Rail, 2012). These guilds, eventually developed into the university, bound by common interests and protected by sworn oaths of allegiance. The titles bestowed on these individuals such as “doctor”, “professor”, or “master” all had the same meaning and indicated the individual was a “teacher” or “student of learning” (Rail, 2012).

During the 14th century, it was common to find benefactors donating large sums of money toward the growth of a college (Rail, 2012). The benefactor responsible for the hall or building often determined the rules and regulations governing its use and the members permitted admittance. In those days, the term *college* stood for the guild or the modern term *society*, while the actual buildings were halls of learning (Rail, 2012).

As the societies, colleges, and university systems developed, so began the development of structured curriculum (Rail, 2012). The curriculum included grammar and literacy, music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. The language was Latin, Greek, and sometimes Hebrew. Often, the structured learning or curriculum included an outline for the expectations not only including learning, but also for the manner and moral code and eventually a dress code (Rail, 2012). As the rules and regulations became more refined, these standards became the rule they would live by and the development of a moral code members would live by (Rail, 2012).

The beginning of the student’s journey was usually an initiation ceremony. These ceremonies varied between institutions and served as an initiation into academia. The ceremony in part closely resembles fraternity initiations, but the similarity today is strictly a figment of the mind and has no real association to past.

Contemplating the role schools should play in the development of the American fabric has been going on since the early Revolution; however, the debate began in the European established school systems (Spring, 2005). For example, patriotic movements are well defined in some countries and are responsible for the support for revolution and the role schools play in educating the masses (Spring, 2005). Schools in 19th century Russia used testing to determine mental capacities of school students and separated them in accordance with their test scores (Spring, 2014). Those students from wealthy families showing early interests in areas of study like medicine or engineering trained in those areas (Spring, 2005). Although the lower classes completed educational testing as well, only a very select few with exceptionally high scores and with the correct recommendations studied in universities, and only in an area where the government felt there was a need (Spring, 2005).

Schools in 19th century Europe were little different. They accepted the ways education existed since the Dark Ages, wherein the wealthy had a responsibility to the lower classes in directing both their living and work conditions. Education, for the most part, took place in the home where boys learned a trade and girls were educated in the ways of homemaking. Only the early Colonies allowed poor children to be educated in the proverbial one-room schoolhouse, learning numbers and the alphabet. For boys, this was important for money exchanges in the trades and for girls to be able to read the Bible to the family in the early evenings before bed. For these families, morals and ethics were standards derived from the Bible and Biblical Laws, primarily the Ten Commandments.

Schools in the Colonies were fashioned after the schools under British rule (Spring, 2014). The idea was to design an educational structure preserving the Anglo-

Protestant ideology (Spring, 2014). This structure identified religious, moral, and ethical concepts, insuring preservation of the ideology through generations (Spring, 2014).

Thomas Jefferson, the major contributor to the Declaration of Independence and strong proponent for the Constitution's Bill of Rights, argued that the school system needed to provide a complete education to its student population to insure its new leaders had the right tools to govern, thus forming a natural hierarchy for leadership (Spring, 2005, 2014). In actuality, this hierarchy went hand in hand with the aristocratic counterpart in Europe (Spring, 2014). For the majority of the working class, the common school, where students learned the basics of reading, writing, counting, and management of numbers, was all they would need in order to make a living. In Jefferson's mind, this educational system accomplished both educating leaders and the masses, preparing each for their roles in society (Spring, 2014). The common school eventually developed into public education and served as the element to set the stage for a division in classes here in the United States (Spring, 2014).

In the early 1800s, the New York Free School Society saw an advantage in combining rich and poor students into one system (Spring, 2005). The common schools eventually evolved into public education (Spring, 2005). The idea behind public education was that every student who had the capabilities had the right to the same basic education. However, these schools were not located in or near poverty or urban areas. The result was the creation of a middle class educational structure offering the educational opportunities similar to those of the upper class open to everyone (Spring, 2005). The similarity stopped at this point falling short of attending higher educational facilities (Spring, 2005). The majority of these families held middle management

positions and the ability to offer their children more opportunities than the lower class.

The characteristics of the common school (Spring, 2005) are as follows:

1. All students were educated in a single location. The theory behind having all classes of students educated together would decrease hostility between the classes, as was the case in many European countries. Instead of focusing on what families had, the focus was put on nationalism.
2. Establishing and instilling a sense of governmental policy. This meant all students grew up understanding the governmental structure and the foundations of religious beliefs. The beliefs at the time these schools were established were white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant beliefs brought from England. These beliefs included the nurturing of a class state where students from families that could afford to further education were permitted to do so while those from poorer families, although with the same education, went to work or entered the trades.
3. By establishing schools under governmental control, each state controlled school policy and this in turn meant controlling the social, political, and economic policies establishing a foundation for ethical and moral characteristics carried forward from generation to generation.

In addition to the development of higher education and common schools was the establishment of schools known as charity schools (Spring, 2005). These schools addressed the problem of educating children from families with no structure (Spring, 2005). The goal of these schools was the reformation of the character of the student into something more in line with good Christian morals and ethical values of the times and

society (Spring, 2005). Common schools tried to fill the gap by setting strong codes for students to follow while teaching them a marketable trade (Spring, 2005). In theory, every child in the Colonies and eventually the young United States received some form of educational training in order to lead productive lives, thus not becoming a burden on the government and charity (Spring, 2005).

Historical records show the founding of nine colleges before the Revolutionary War (Schrum, 2009). These schools are still in existence today with the exception of one. Each of these colleges focused on deep religious convictions and enrolled the majority of students into the seminary, fostering a dominance of the Protestant religion in the Colonies (Schrum, 2009; Spring, 2014). The extant schools are (Spring, 2014):

1. New College, now Harvard University, of Massachusetts was founded in 1636 as a Puritan or Congregationalist college
2. College of William and Mary of Virginia was founded in 1693 as a school following the Church of England
3. Collegiate School, now Yale University, in Connecticut was founded in 1701 as a Puritan or Congregationalist school
4. King's College, now Columbia University, in New York was founded in 1754 as a predominantly Presbyterian college (however was nonsectarian)
5. College of Philadelphia, now University of Pennsylvania, was founded in 1755 as predominantly Church of England (but was nonsectarian)
6. Rhode Island College, now Brown University, was founded in 1764 as a Baptist college

7. Queen's College, now Rutgers University, The State University of New Jersey, founded in 1766 and was Dutch Reformed

8. Dartmouth College in New Hampshire was founded in 1769

These colleges are Ivy League schools today, with the exception of Rutgers and the College of William and Mary. Rutgers University and the College of William and Mary were private institutions. William and Mary became public in 1906 and Rutgers in 1945, when they began receiving public funds and the designation of a state university (Schrum, 2009). There is reason to believe that both these schools were originally included in the list of pre-Revolutionary War schools but declined to accept the title of Ivy League. This fact is unsubstantiated. The term *Ivy League* refers to the fact these stately colleges can trace their origins to prerevolutionary era. They are all located on beautiful and spacious campuses with buildings marked with Revolutionary history.

Depending on the source, Princeton University, originally founded as the College of New Jersey, is included in the list of colleges founded during the pre-revolution period (Spring, 2014). However, Princeton was an institution focused on a liberal arts education as well as religion, and that may be why there is differing identification with Princeton as one of the original colleges. It should also be noted each of these colleges is accredited by the Middle States Accrediting with the exception of Harvard University, which boasts it requires no accrediting agency to make determinations on the worthiness of its credentials.

Nine other schools not having college or university status until later can also trace their roots to the pre-Revolution era (Spring, 2014):

1. King William School, now St. John's College in Maryland

2. Kent County Free School, now Washington College in Maryland
3. Bethlehem Female Seminary, now Moravian College in Pennsylvania
4. Free School, now University of Delaware
5. Augusta Academy, now Washington and Lee University in Virginia
6. College of Charleston in South Carolina
7. Pittsburgh Academy, now University of Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania
8. Dickinson College in Pennsylvania
9. Hampden-Sydney in Virginia

As with ancient societies, the importance of religious conviction in the leadership class meant a firm foundation in ethical and moral credibility (Spring, 2005). For the Ancients as well as our country's founders, strong ethical and moral presence was crucial in leadership, and especially for training schoolchildren in the classroom, preparing them for leadership roles in society (Spring, 2005). Although the structure of the classroom changed very little over the years, it was not until the mid 1900s that studies concerning learning began influencing the classroom (Spring, 2005). The most drastic changes to the learning environment came with the removal of religion and the No Child Left Behind Act (Schrum, 2009).

One of the key problems today is the amount of quality time families have together (Bucholz, 2007). Initially, teaching children began in the home. Until the onset of the technological revolution, families shared quality time together and one of the prime commitments was faith based (Spring, J. 2013). Regardless of the form of religion, the initial involvement began at an early age and in the home (Spring, 2013). With today's busy schedules and economic conditions, it is difficult to find families sharing time

together. In the past, teachers worked along with the parents to instill a set of values in children; however, today the role models children see are not always the best selection for the child to emulate (Spring, 2014).

We can see girls at an early age imitating their mothers as a role model, using dolls as a surrogate by caring for the child and teaching them right from wrong, shopping, playing house, and later on playing teacher in school (Ormond, 2004). In the meantime, the boys played sports and army games, went to work and assumed leadership roles such as coach or captain of their teams just like dad (Ormond, 2004). Gilligan also mentioned this role casting in her research concerning growing stages. Piaget also recognizes the difference between male and female gender typing and considers it in the stage of socialization.

All too many times parents look for something to brag about in their children (Ormond, 2012). Unfortunately, just as many find fault and stress the child could have done better and do not give enough praise for trying (Schrum, 2009). In past days, parents gave encouragement to children who did not win and schools taught the importance of good sportsmanship as opposed the cheering crowds encouraging fighting on field of play (Schunk, 2012).

Quality time not only means spending time together but leading a strong, moral, and ethical lifestyle at home as well as in the workplace (Spring, 2014). Today, we find children struggling with the paradox of living home life one way and school another (Spring, 2014). According to statistics, children or young people today who are faced with pressure to succeed often turn to methods of cheating as an alternative (Cartwright, 2013). At the same time, students justify their cheating by explaining that finding the

information is just as important as knowing; a paradox somewhat difficult to fight (Cartwright, 2013).

Children need to see parents and teachers making mistakes and accepting correction in order to model appropriate behavior (Crane, 1985). Most children today ask parents questions they cannot answer. Parents often make the mistake of faking an answer instead of saying “I don’t know” (Brookfield, 1995). There is no shame in such an answer as long as action to find the correct answer immediately follows (Brookfield, 1995). Such behavior shows the adult model does not know everything, and young impressionable children learn to seek correct answers for themselves (Brookfield, 1995).

There are times the adult role model, be it parent or teacher, makes the mistake of corrective action to prevent children from “making the same mistakes” (Bueschell, 2008). Although this is in theory a good thing, sometimes mistakes are better teachers (Bueschell, 2008). This concept has not changed over time. The only thing that has changed over time is the amount of pressure young people today feel in trying to please parents and teacher, while at the same time become socially accepted by their friends. The added pressure at a young and tender age gives them mixed messages concerning ethics and morality in today’s day and age.

For-Profit and Not-For-Profit Colleges and Universities in the United States

The argument between the for-profit and the not-for-profit institutions has become a double-edged sword. Many of the for-profit schools began as structured and specific programs without all of the elective courses offered by the traditional college or university. These schools concentrated on trades such as culinary institutes or schools offering specific computer courses targeting an industry need rather than offering degreed

programs. For example, in the mid 1980s one particular school located in Paramus, New Jersey, trained computer programmers on state-of-the-art mainframe computers. These mainframes offered one-tenth the memory as the average tablet today and required large disk drives or tape decks to store data. The momentous computer itself stood in a separate room with a constant temperature of 55°F. At that time, programmers wrote computer code literally in machine language, ones and zeros, in order to increase speed and efficiency. A competent programmer would be able to write computer instructions with as little code as possible to get the job completed. Although traditional colleges offered computer programming, many students opted for the for-profit school for time, expediency, and speed in getting back into the workforce. Many of such schools, though not accredited, often collaborated or partnered with colleges or universities offering students the ability to advance their education to a college level.

The accredited for-profit schools still feel they “fill the need” for fast and convenient educational alternatives (Clark, 2011), and many of these schools operate effectively and honestly. However, many for-profit alternatives do not always concern themselves with the electives of the typical college program but set a straight path for training in a particular field, which has its advantages. The unfortunate part is some rely on profit rather than state or government aid to help fund programs, or stipends to keep students in the seats (Clark, 2011). In actuality, this results in higher costs for the student (Appendix A). Today’s workforce requires the college degree in addition to certificates. This means these same students are looking again at colleges to now turn their certificates into college credit. This is even more costly than the original certificate.

For-profits rely heavily on adjunct faculty who may be field worthy but do not have the experience with academia and the requirements of accrediting agencies (Clark, 2011). The for-profit model achieved some success up until the mid 1990s, when the tide turned from the certificate being the critical factor for job success.

Today, the number of degree granting colleges and universities in the United States is 4,495 with a student population of 20.3 million (Harkin, 2012). The statistical breakdown from the National Center for Educational Statistics for students and institutions is astronomical (statistics research, 2012; Post Secondary and Beyond, 2013). Statistics from this site also shows the majority of traditional students fail to graduate and yet owe on government loans (statistics research, 2012). What the full statistical analysis does not show are the number of students attending the 156 accredited for-profit schools located within this country that are nontraditional in educational structure and theoretical foundation and not having completed the degree requirements (Harkin, 2012). According to publications such as the Harkin Report, the majority of students attending these schools are paying much more for an equivalent education in a private facility (Harkin, 2012). In addition, the completion rate for the for-profit college is much less than the not-for-profit college or university, especially at a baccalaureate level (Crotty, 2012). Completion rates for masters or doctoral programs are also comparatively much less in relation to the not-for-profit colleges and universities (Crotty, 2012). Some schools including nonprofit or private universities list their failure rate as high as 60% (statistics research, 2012). The attraction to many for-profit schools for the nontraditional student is in the promises they make in their advertising (Crotty, 2012).

The foundation of this study hinges on the ethical behavior of many accredited for-profit educational institutions in existence today (Plinio, 2010). These institutions of higher learning are, in actuality, based on modern business practices and are not bound by the same moral and ethical codes of the established or private, nonprofit institutions (Rumyantseva, 2005). Since the number of accredited for-profit schools has increased over the past ten years, the acceptance of these schools in both business and education still meets with resistance (Norris, 2012). For example, many nonprofit schools are reluctant to hire as instructors graduates from for-profit schools (Menzel, 2009). However, understanding the higher education structure and accrediting agencies is also of importance (Menzel, 2009), which may attribute to the reasoning behind this reluctance.

The Department of Education from its inception has dedicated its work to student achievement and competitiveness, and most recently achievement and competitiveness in a global market. In 1989, the Department of Education experienced restructuring (Accreditation, 2013). Today the Department of Education as part of its responsibility monitors (Accreditation, 2013):

1. Federal financial aid
2. Data collection
3. Key educational issues
4. Discriminatory practices and issues

Although the Department of Education approves accrediting agencies, the Department of Education does not mandate rules and regulations (Accreditation, 2013). The individual states dictate laws governing the K-12 schools, colleges, and universities, not the federal Department of Education (Accreditation, 2013). As a result, the rules and

regulations vary from state to state; however, schools must comply with the accrediting agency for which they apply (Accreditation, 2013; Alexander, 2012). Data collection, as listed above, includes accrediting agencies and their standards of monitoring schools insuring they meet equivalent educational standards (Accrediting, 2013).

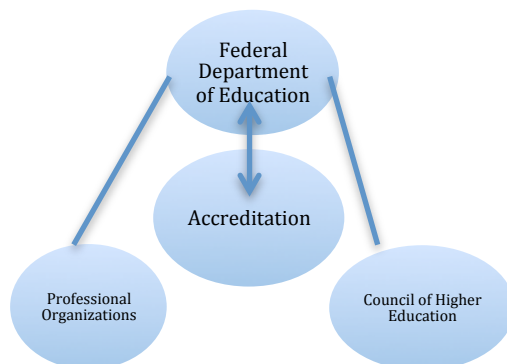


Figure 3: Accrediting Structure

There are two kinds of accrediting boards recognized by the Department of Education: professional affiliations and educational institutions (Accreditation, 2013). See Appendix B for Professional Accrediting Agencies. The professional accrediting boards primarily certify institutions that meet their strict guidelines and standards according to the profession (Accreditation, 2013). The Association of Specialized and Professional Accreditors, with sixty member organizations, are responsible for decisions of accrediting in specialized or professional schools (Accreditation, 2013). These organizations insure enrolled students get the proper training in the form of courses and coursework, professional ethics, and guidance deemed appropriate in their fields, rather than curriculum based (Accreditation, 2013). An example of a professional association accrediting board is the American Psychiatric Association (APA) or National Council for

Accrediting of Teacher Education (NCATE). These associations are not geographically bound, but bound by subject matter (Accreditation, 2013).

Educational accrediting agencies insure the college or university reviewed meet quality educational standards (Accreditation, 2013). The majority of accrediting agencies are private organizations specifically formed for educational review (Accreditation, 2013). Although colleges and universities do not always apply for accrediting, it is to the institution's benefit to meet accrediting board's standards (Accreditation, 2013) to give their institution credibility and for students searching for a school to attend.

Accrediting bodies recognized by the Council for Higher Education (Appendix B) recognize eight associations (Accreditation, 2013). These associations accredit schools based on their curriculum content rather than subject matter (Accreditation, 2013; Accrediting, 2013). Many universities and colleges apply to and get accrediting from both professional as well as educational accrediting agencies. These associations meet the Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education accreditation standards. These organizations divided by geographic locations and are listed in Appendix B. (Accrediting, 2013; Department of Education, 2008–2013)

The public misunderstands the concept of accrediting agencies, as often do the students themselves (Accrediting, 2013; US Department of Education, 2008–2013). As part of my professional job responsibilities of evaluating and designing alternative methods of assessment, I had to compare and contrast goals and objectives for some of the accrediting agencies in order to review and design evaluation standards for corporate training programs for college credit. This training led to a stronger comprehension and familiarity with the standards governing both professional and educational agencies

(Accreditation, 2013). The structure and design of the not-for-profit colleges and universities, in general, hold to a stricter standard more in line with the concepts of traditional academia and education (Accreditation, 2013; US Department of Education, 2008–2013). The bottom line is only of small importance for the accredited not-for-profit schools, as compared to their goal of retention and quality education for both traditional and nontraditional students (Accreditation, 2013). These schools have stricter values for grading policy and a more focused understanding for granting degree levels (Accreditation, 2013). On the other hand, the accredited for-profit schools shy away from accrediting agencies with too strict or educationally focused guidelines, and identify various degree titles such as Independent Study Degrees as opposed to more traditional and credit-based programs (US Department of Education, 2008–2013).

The Department of Education, as part of the checks and balances system imbedded in government, reports to the Government Accountability Office, which monitors all federally funded financial aid programs to students. As the admissions in accredited for-profit colleges and universities began to climb, the Government Accountability Office and the Department of Education were deluged with complaints from students. Based on the number of complaints, Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa embarked on a study compiling data and released a report conducted on accredited for-profit colleges and universities in 2012 (Harkin, 2012). The compilation of the investigation took place in 2008 and 2009 and considered the status of over one million students enrolled in colleges and universities across the board (Harkin, 2012). The report evaluated some 30 companies owning colleges and universities, leading to some interesting results and charges levied against these corporate owners (Harkin, 2012). The

table in Appendix A identifies just a few differences between the accredited for-profit and accredited not-for-profit colleges and universities. The results depicted in this chart along with some of the details listed below are the reason this research is important (Harkin, 2012).

Senator Harkin's report, formally titled *For Profit Education: The Failure to Safeguard Federal Investment and Insure Student Success*, has been public but has not caused significant changes in the educational structure as it stands (Harkin, 2012).

Nontraditional students as well as potential adult learners find themselves bombarded daily with advertising from accredited for-profit schools leading, students to believe the dubious advertising and resulting in unwary students spending money they do not have (Crotty, 2012). Schools like Kaplan University have open enrollment policies and admissions advisors who are good at hard selling education as a product (Crotty, 2012; Harkin, 2012). According to Harkin's report, institutions like Kaplan University trained admissions personnel on the methods of enrolling students using high pressure and leading information (Harkin, 2012). Complaints levied against Kaplan University by staff under the Whistleblower's Act indicated numerous improprieties, leading to a number of infractions of law by the Washington Post organization, the owners of the Kaplan chain of schools (Harkin, 2012). In addition, the company pays a monetary reward to faculty who are able to maintain good enrollment (Crotty, 2012; Harkin, 2012). This means not discouraging students and helping them write assignments. Students can repeat weekly tests with recording of highest grade (Harkin, 2012; Crotty, 2012). It is unfair to the student who cannot meet the rigors of college-level work in the remedial sense and giving them a false sense of hope (Crotty, 2012). What the Harkin Report

stresses is that the majority of students are eligible for federal financial aid. When the student is unable to keep up with the rigors of college education, the student drops out and is financially responsible for the loan in its entirety. The student, not having completed the curriculum, has no degree or the chance of achieving that hoped-for financially rewarding job, then defaults on the loan, leaving the taxpayer to pay the balance.

Summary

Morality involves right and wrong judgments (Aristotle's psychology, 2008–2012). Some moral standards are universal, while others are not (McCoy, 2011).

Universal standards are those in which value of the act is consistent in every culture, such as stealing or murder (McCoy, 2011). As individuals progress through life developing as learning theorists explain, there is also the development of moral and ethical concepts running concurrent with societal beliefs (Minch, 2010; Crane, 1985). Then, teaching morality is simply a case of praise for correct actions and punishment for wrong actions (Crane, 1985). This concept fits comfortably with Kohlberg's Development of Moral Stages (Crane, 1985; Minch, 2010). Kohlberg believes there are three levels of moral development similar in design to learning developmental stages (Crane, 1985).

Kohlberg's levels develop slower than learning stages, with the last level of development sometime around midlife (Crane, 1985). This last level concerns the philosophy and idealistic foundations of society in general and often leads to questioning the values, giving credence to the concept that along with age comes wisdom (Crane, 1985; Minch, 2010).

The study of business ethics and moral behavior goes back in history to philosophers such as Kant and Marx, whose interpretations of ethics and morality in business began with the basic philosophy of Plato (McCoy, 2011). Later, philosophers believed that to teach morality and ethics correctly means not only to teach children right from wrong, but also to substantiate it with foundations of religious beliefs (McCoy, 2011). To them the fight between good and evil equates to the fight between God and Satan (Life Application Study Bible, 2007). Now, saying that the historical perspective on ethics and morality has come full circle is somewhat of an understatement (Menzel, 2009). Based on talks regarding the state of American society, it is evident there is enough to be concerned about, especially as it relates to the younger generations (Nash, 2010; Zingales, 2012).

The understanding of the school and its function according to the founders of our country begins with the philosophical teachings of Plato and Aristotle (Spring, 2014). Ethics, not taught in schools today, may have a consequential effect on students and their application of ethical behavior (Spring, 2014; Zingales, 2012). For centuries, Western Civilization held ethics and morality based on the Judeo-Christian foundations of civilization (Minch, 2010; Spring, 2005, 2014). This cultural perspective is the foundation of our American society and derived from the Ten Commandments; interpreted as the basic tenets of a good life (Smith, 2014; Spring, 2005, 2014). Further, these beliefs are not only evident in Judeo-Christian teachings but are evident in many religious beliefs worldwide (Plinio, 2010).

Until the 13th century, teaching followed the format set by Plato and Aristotle, where the learned stood or sat on platforms and spoke to the followers. The followers,

being the aristocracy, were responsible for the welfare of the poor or the workers under their employ (Rail, 2012). During the 13th and 14th centuries, teaching moved from the countryside to the college institution and the halls or buildings (Rail, 2012). Students began their study through an initiation into guilds or societies in which they would practice their craft. Eventually, the guilds or societies would set the standards including the moral code students would follow. Benefactors and the church then responsible for the success of the guilds enforced moral and ethical standards as well as the curriculum guidelines (Rail, 2012).

The founding of our schools initially painted a picture of the European aristocrat who through education was able to articulate and communicate on a level that was only a dream for the common folk majority (Spring, 2014). The availability of higher education to the wealthy insured the division of classes (Smith, 2013; Spring, 2014). As schools developed in this country through the 1800s, schools were open to both classes giving the commoner the opportunity to become educated; however, their education only went as far as the ability to read and write (Spring, 2005, 2014). The real opportunity for higher education did not reach the poorer classes, but only the rich (Spring, 2014). The K-12 system today reaches every student with relatively few falling between the cracks (Spring, 2014). In the current system, any child is capable of getting a higher education (Spring, 2014). If the opportunity does not present itself for private nonprofit school, there are always the very vocal and heavily advertised for-profit colleges and universities appearing in the Harkin Report waiting to invite students to apply (Statistics, 2013).

In the 1960s, the Supreme Court removed prayer from schools (Friedman, 2006; Gensler, 2011), resulting in the cessation of all implications concerning religion including

the traditional training in ethical and moral behavior. Today, *politically correct* means to not in any way hint, imply, or mention religion unless in a world religion course (LaMorte, 2011). Teaching of ethical and moral behavior now defaults to the parents and through religious instruction (Lau, 2010). Traditional students today see a conflict between teachings and real-world experiences, thus increasing the pressure students feel to succeed (Cartwright, 2013). These students often have no other choice but to find alternative means of success, equating to amoral behavior (Cartwright, 2013; Zingales, 2012). For the nontraditional student, the pressure is just as great (Why, 2013; Zingales, 2012). Family- and job-related dependencies often lead to stress factors causing problems within the family unit or job (Pinchera, 2009; Tate, 2013). Since jobs are a difficult commodity to come by these days, the family unit is the most likely target of stress outlets (Van Camp, 2013). Nontraditional students are generally smart shoppers (Menzel, 2009). The advertising money spent by many of the for-profit schools is triple what private, accredited not-for-profit schools spend (Harkin, 2012). These accredited for-profit schools encourage students into enrolling, and then leave them to flounder with coursework, piling debt, and few alternatives (Crotty, 2012). Enrollment counselors for the master's and doctoral degree students are masters at their craft, often getting students enrolled in classes before the paperwork is completed (Lewin, 2012). In addition, for the doctoral student, time is usually an issue, giving these schools the appearance of the best option (Lewin, 2012). For the successful student looking for the doctoral degree, challenges only increase with their inability to write academically (Lewin, 2012). The number of students enrolling greatly offsets the successful candidate (Harkin, 2012).

Everything sounds so simple, and of course, grades are only a mentioned afterthought—an important fact to remember (Lewin, 2012).

Since these schools run as a corporation, the accredited for-profit school is relying on student withdrawal (Harkin, 2012). The bottom line is the most important factor, with little or no regard for the student or what they face (Clark, 2011; Crotty, 2012; Gearhart, 2001; Harkin, 2012, Lee, 2012). This study focuses on the students and the experiences they encountered while attending accredited for-profit schools. Since reading the entire Harkin Report, I discovered it is important to substantiate the documentation not in terms of the financial data but as regards faculty, instruction, and retention rates using credible case studies (Harkin, 2012; Lewin, 2012). Although the issue of degree achievement is of concern to all accrediting agencies, not all agencies identify achievement based on the same characteristics (Johnson, 2012). In the case of Middle States, the characteristics of degree achievement are less strict than, for example, Southern Conference. Much of this differentiation is based on the types of institutions affiliated with the agency (Lee, 2012). Middle States does a great deal of accrediting with two-year or junior colleges, in which the concentration is to bring students up to academic rigor rather than forcing them to meet stronger standards of academia unprepared. Those corporate industries cognizant of these differences will also be wary of hiring individuals who failed to meet stricter academic rigors (Lee, 2012). As is often the case, the employer has the upper hand when it comes to hiring and the selection of the best candidate for the job. Employers are not only looking at institutional affiliation, but are also influenced by prior knowledge and reputations of institutions. Should there be a choice between candidates from a traditional institution as opposed to a for-profit, allowing for an equal playing ground, the

traditionally educated candidate will be selected. All too often students succeed in these accredited for-profit schools only to find the “dream job” is still unattainable. Based on findings published in the Harkin Report, the ability for graduates of accredited for-profit institutions to land the dream job is not nearly as high as expected (Lee, 2012). Again, based on findings from the Harkin Report, institutions from accredited for-profit institutions must report placement success on a regular basis. Preliminary findings, according to Harkin, indicated that many of the accredited, for-profit institutions have no placement services for graduates. As a result, graduates were left to fend for themselves as far as successful introductions to corporate partners (Harkin, 2012). In an overview of some voluntary demographic surveys, graduates reported they received no assistance from placement services and found securing positions independently a difficult road (Johnson, 2012). Under the current structure, failure to do so violates federal aid guidelines and could result in the loss of federal finding.

The method and design for this study takes the best components from two methodologies designed specifically for holistic case studies by examining the same instance in multiple cases. Yin begins the research with a question, the components, examining the data and the relationships, then the results (Yin, 2012). For this, the use of the scientific method for a systematic approach is used. Saldana, on the other hand, used the data to work towards developing a theory. The difference is the compilation of data begins the research concept having a question, a systematic approach to the evaluation and the results become more refined with each iterations and information from each case is included (Saldana, 2012). The nice part about using an initial coding methodology is that the coding can begin immediately with the first case study rather than waiting to the

end. The In Vivo coding is particularly good since it uses the participant's own words keeping the voice constant (Saldana, 2012).

CHAPER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this case study was to examine moral and ethical decisions some doctoral students face pursuing doctoral degrees attending accredited, for-profit colleges and universities. As previously stated, for the purpose of this study, doctoral students are defined as nontraditional students who completed their coursework for doctoral degrees and may be, at a minimum, in the comprehensive examinations stage just prior to entering the dissertation phase. Accredited for-profit universities are, as previously defined, those institutions accredited by the Middle States Commission for Higher Education, which engage in open enrollment policies, and are business-oriented for the sole purpose making money.

Some unethical practices in higher education have been under investigation by the Council for Higher Education as well as the United States Department of Education (Lewin, 2012). As colleges and universities try to stem the tide of student plagiarism and academic improprieties, the restrictions and changes seen in pursuing a doctoral degree requires a constant process of vigilance (Accreditation, 2013). For the student pursuing a doctoral degree, the pressure leading to success has increased significantly in the past few years. Not only is the pressure from requirements of academic performance, but also outside pressures from job and family increase what the nontraditional doctoral student has to face (Fisher, 2002; Gearhart, 2001).

The theoretical foundation for this study is Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development (Crane, 1985). Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development explains the process of moral and ethical development in individuals in our society (Crane, 1985;

Ormond, 2012). These stages do not follow a systemic progression of human growth and development from infancy to adulthood, but rather follow cognitive and emotional development (Crane, 1985; Ormond, 2012). As described, the moral and ethical development pertinent to this research actually occurs in midlife—just at the age the target doctoral participants for the study (Crane, 1985). Further, this chapter describes the intended design, participant selection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

The development of the study followed the basic Programming Development Life Cycle for researching and defining a problem and developing a solution (Badke, 2004). The basic design principle is a methodical process moving through five to eight stages depending on the problem or scope of research (Badke, 2004). The actual process used for this study selected the five-step process with a slight variation to the last step.

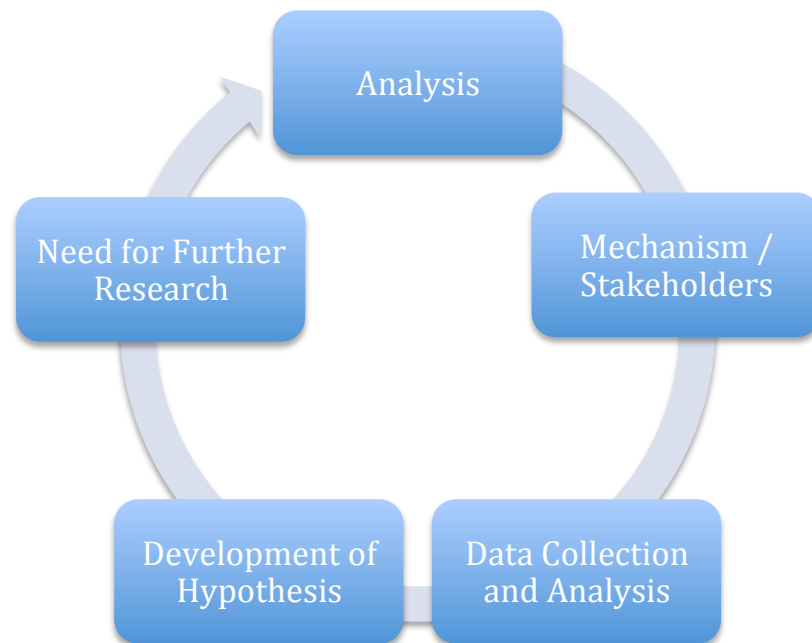


Figure 4: Program Development Life Cycle

The first step was the analysis of the problem. This included identification of the problem, or in essence, the questions targeted for the study. In this case, the questions targeted for this research project concerned the examination of ethics in for-profit schools through case study research (Suryani, 2008).

The Developmental Life Cycle's second step was to identify the mechanism, the stakeholders, and component parts involved in contributing to the problem (Badke, 2004). This means understanding all of the components relevant to the research and understanding how they contributed to the issues experienced by participants (Saldana, 2013). In this case it is the understanding of ethics and morality, understanding the purpose behind education, the development of educational process in this country, any related theoretical grounds such as adult experiential learning, and Kohlberg's Moral Development theory, along with understanding the key issues: accrediting boards, structure of for-profit universities, and the nature of the student population (Behrman, 2008).

An all-important phase in any developmental cycle is planning or the method of data collection, or the third step (Badke, 2004). In this case, some of the data come from personal observations and encounters, including the knowledge of and structure of accredited, for-profit colleges and universities. The main component of the data comes from the discussions by participants of the case studies (Maheshwari, 2011): actual and factual experiences of doctoral students who attended accredited for-profit schools and were not successful in their quest (Nash, 2010).

Lastly, steps four and five are used to identify the implementation procedure and the maintenance schedule to insure proper adherence to a new and improved design

(Badke, 2004). However, these stages actually confirmed the need for further research and alternatives to the performance of this current study for duplication (Maxwell, 2013).

The foundation for this case study research comes from information and personal experiences inadvertently collected over time (Maheshwari, 2011). The method of participant selection actually yielded the targeted three participants, providing informational foundations for future research and substantiate the Harkin Report as valid (Mintchik, 2009; Maheshwari, 2011).

Design

This qualitative research project used the single holistic case study design in order to gain a better understanding of moral and ethical issues some students pursuing doctoral degrees face from accredited for-profit colleges and universities. The single case study design is an approximate equivalent to a single experiment (Yin, 2009). This research design met the single case design in that it (Yin, 2009):

1. Tested for a set of goals anticipating a “true” result
2. The case is unique
3. Intended to capture an account of circumstances and/or conditions
4. The examination was firsthand and not dependent on assumptions or interpretations
5. The situation exists at different sites, in this case, universities

In this instance, the single case study examined multiple instances of the same phenomenon or issue (Yin, 2009). Since the cases involve no one particular university, the study assumes the holistic design (Yin, 2009).

Three participants engaged in dialogue relevant to this research. Although some of the foundational work comes from personal conversations relevant to doctoral program coursework, the information gleaned from personal encounters did not play a role in the actual research.

The case study approach is a perfect fit since it looks at a group of individuals, such as the nontraditional student, involved in a similar situation, as attending an accredited for-profit university in pursuit of a doctoral PhD degree (Gerring, 2012). This study attempted to find a pattern, or commonality, and to find relationships, gather data for further study, and generate a hypothetical instance (Gerring, 2012).

Research Questions

Kohlberg's Moral Developmental Theory is a common topic worthy of mention in the study of ethics in colleges and universities. Kohlberg's Level I predominantly focuses on the self and pleasure/pain (Crane, 1985; Ormond, 2012). Level II focuses on the self with respect to others and the acceptance of the parameters in which most individuals live (Crane, 1985; Ormond, 2012). For a select few who reach Kohlberg's Level III sometime in middle age, the focus is on justice and dignity (Crane, 1985; Ormond, 2012). As described by Kohlberg's stages, the majority of doctoral students fit into Level III regardless of age (Ormond, 2012). The significance of the focused topic for the doctoral student attending the accredited for-profit institution is that their training included at least one course on ethics (Committee, 2008; *Moral Foundations Organization*, 2013). Questions this research asked were:

1. Were there ethical decisions some nontraditional doctoral students made in pursuit of their doctoral PhD degree?

2. What was the rationale behind the decisions these students had to make?
3. What factors did the nontraditional doctoral student take into account before making these decisions?

Participants

The approach I selected for this study is the holistic case study, since its functionality comes into play in the examination of a single instance or event in order to make comparisons or to find commonalities (Ormond, 2012). In this case, the single event was to understand what ethical decisions some doctoral candidates had to make in pursuit of the degree specifically attending accredited for-profit institutions. For me, as a member of a number of organizations focused on adult learning practices, instructional designs, and methods of assessment, I encountered into a number of people who experienced firsthand the situation this study addresses. Sharing some downtime with these individuals, I compiled a list of about 20–25 who might be interested in sharing their experiences. A number of these colleagues already voiced interest in active participation although no selection was considered until the actual study with IRB approval began. Along with ethical and morally based vignettes, participants answered short demographic-type questions insuring they met the initial qualification which was: (Behrman, 2008; Saldana, 2013):

1. Be a nontraditional adult learner over the age of thirty with both family and work responsibilities
2. Completed all doctoral coursework
3. Completed or in the process of completing the comprehensive examinations
4. Have a conflict with an accredited, for-profit institution

The demographic questionnaire linked the participant with Survey Monkey, an online survey tool that asked the participant to answer questions pertinent to qualifying for participation. This additional survey served to triangulate the data giving the research a stronger credibility status. These questions served to:

1. Insure the conflict involved a moral or ethical decision the participant found themselves facing
2. Insure the conflict was one based on factual information
3. Insure the conflict involved an accredited for-profit institution named in the Harkin Report

Initial contact was via e-mail to see if the participants were still interested in participation. The demographic questions were included in the e-mail. See Appendix G for the e-mail and initial questions. The vignettes followed electronically for those who met the criteria for inclusion in the study.

The selection of actual participants was dependent on individuals who met the criteria:

1. The initial questions documenting that the participant was in the final phases of their doctoral program
2. Met the standards set forth in the questionnaire pertinent to their decisions
3. Satisfactorily answered the vignettes
4. Attended one of the for-profit institutions included in the Harkin Report (Bledsoe, 2005; Yin, 2009)

The questions from Survey Monkey validated the conflict between the participant and the institution. The issue of conflict must be with an accredited, for-profit institution

named in the Harkin Report. The Harkin Report, or *For Profit Education: The Failure to Safeguard the Federal Investment and Insure Student Success*, is a study spearheaded by Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa concerning the avalanche of complaints submitted to the Department of Education regarding problems with the quality of education students felt they received. These institutions were predominantly accredited for-profit schools under the jurisdiction of the Middle States Accrediting Board. The research, validated by the Government Accountability Office, confirmed actions regarding the 30 of the 150 for-profit institutions violating one or more laws concerning student rights, educational protocols, and financial aid.

For study qualification, the participants had to be:

1. Nontraditional adult learner over the age of thirty with both family and work responsibilities
2. Completed all doctoral coursework
3. Completed or in the process of completing the comprehensive examinations
4. Attended a for-profit institution named in the Harkin Report

The first part of the survey was the qualifier for the study. Participants had to meet the following criteria:

1. Be nontraditional adult learners over the age of thirty with both family and work responsibilities
2. Have completed all doctoral coursework
3. Completed or in the process of completing the comprehensive examinations
4. The issue of conflict should be with an accredited, for-profit institution

Adult learners bring to their education work experiences as well as prior classroom learning (Pinchera, 2009, Wertheim, 2011). Often their understanding of circumstances is different from many of the educators today, especially those spending the majority of their time in educational facilities. Based on personal experiences, this understanding sometimes differs from what the educator perceives as fundamental or true. This is not to say either one is correct in their estimations, but differ based on experiences. This difference of opinion is what this study examines. Therefore, it is important that the participant falls into the experiential learning category.

Secondly, this research does not look at the student completing coursework, but at the nontraditional student who successfully completed coursework but experienced difficulties with the comprehensive exam or the writing of the dissertation; basically the second and third components of the doctoral process.

Finally, based on results from the Harkin Report, the majority of complaints target the accredited for-profit institution as opposed to the traditional brick-and-mortar counterpart. Of the 150 plus accredited for-profit schools, only 30 offer PhD doctoral degree programs. The questions on gender and employment are not currently relevant at this point; however, the questions may be relevant or important if the research warrants further examination

The three vignettes were based on questions found in an ethics and morality research website. This site invites researchers and instructors teaching both ethics and morality classes to freely use the questions specifically designed to gain a better understanding of how today's young adults perceive moral and ethical situations. The questions on the site are specific situational questions and the respondent uses the Likert

scale to answer. However, this project redesigned the questions into scenarios common in a school setting as:

1. A new first year teacher on vacation
2. A male bully bumping a female student
3. A class clown student enrolled in remedial classes

Each vignette asks the respondent to agree or disagree with no mitigating explanations. The intention was to get all participants responding with the same answer thus viewing the scenario the same way.

Lastly, the participants had to meet the following criteria:

1. Struggled with a moral or ethical decision involving the completion of the requirements for a doctoral PhD degree. The participant briefly described the problem. The problem had to be severe enough to cause conflict between the two parties, student and institution staff, and have ethical or moral issues at its core
2. Conflict was between student and faculty and/or staff of the institution
3. Attended an accredited for-profit institution named in the Harkin Report. These institutions are identified as being in violation of proper academic protocols, many of which included financial improprieties as well as reporting incorrect completion rates for degreed programs

The exact questions contained in this section are included in Appendix E.

The sample of participants was all non-traditional students over the age of 35 who attended an accredited for-profit institution named in the Harkin Report. All have family responsibilities with only two not being employed at this time. All individuals included

in the sample experienced conflicts with the staff or faculty of the institution, which resulted in their dismissal or failure to continue in the doctoral program. Based on the list of potential participants compiled over the last two years, a total of 32 e-mails were sent, 12 of which were unable to participate in the study. There were an even number of males and females in the initial sample pool. At last contact with those indicating a willingness to participate, all were gainfully employed in their chosen careers. For each of these individuals, their conflict resulted in a moral or ethical dilemma causing their failure to complete their program. The Demographic Survey resulted in the elimination of four prospective participants since they had not yet completed their coursework for a PhD doctoral program. However, these four individuals did have moral or ethical issues during their last phases of their Masters programs in accredited, for-profit institutions.

Setting

The challenging part was to gather information from individuals scattered nationwide. In addition, the need for privacy and making the participant comfortable is of prime importance (Behrman, 2008). Although there is not yet an extensive amount of research on using online media to conduct research, there is some information available in order to make informed decisions. The Department of Health Review Board to date has no clear-cut decisions using the Internet or its various methods of communication. However, what is clear is the protection of human subjects. Research shows studies conducted using tools such as Second Life, where an alternately named avatar cloaks the user's identity. This method indicates a first-level security method where only the researcher and the individual creating the avatar know the true identity. Some of the research investigated targeted Skype, where a computer phone-like connection exists

between the researcher and the participant or focus group. According to the Secretary's Advisory Committee, the use of the Internet tools such as Skype or other telephone-like applications is acceptable methods of data collection to glean subject data (SACHRP, 2013). In addition, Skype's security protection is the provision of a SSL, or Secure Sockets Layer, much like the one used by banks, which encapsulates the connection between users insuring a secure, private connection (Skype, 2014).

The list of potential participants was entered into the Bento database. Bento, a database software package for Apple computers, was designed to include all confidential information concerning the potential participants. This information included contact information; information concerning our meeting and pursuant conversation; and the computer-generated generic identity used for shielding the true participant's identity. The e-mail also included a request for additional participants. Yin (2009) expresses one important part of research is obtaining consent and for the participant to fully understand the parameters of the research. To comply with the research design, the e-mail sent to potential participants included a Letter of Intent, which described the research in detail, a Letter of Consent to participate, and a clear and simple bio of myself, including all contact information. Badke believes asking for written permission early on lends credibility and a sense of seriousness to the research.

The intent was to conduct the interviews in person as long as the individual was in proximity to Farleigh Dickinson University in Teaneck, New Jersey. Also considered was the number of area conferences and the possibility to meet there. The last alternative was a Skype conference call, which was arranged in each case.

According to information published by CAEL and the American Council of Education, over 76% of the higher education population is comprised of the non-traditional student. Therefore, the non-traditional student predominates in the enrollment of doctoral students (Statistics, 2014; CAEL, 2014). According to CAEL and the American Council of Education the numbers alone indicate experiential learning is a factor that must be considered in the evaluation of non-traditional students (CAEL 2013; ACE, 2014). Therefore many doctoral candidates often base their research on experiential learning and their careers. Validity in assessing what the doctoral student knows to be true based on industry standards often differs from the concepts held by academia (Flynn, 2013) and may contribute to conflict. The sheer volume of students looking to gain post graduate degrees is staggering and is often difficult for institutions granting degrees to maintain the number of required faculty to serve as mentors and facilitate the doctoral degree process. In addition, the method of handling the non-traditional students requires a degree of diplomacy because of the experience and position the non-traditional student holds in their career. Giving this due consideration, the sample was required to be over the age of 35 and having work and family responsibilities. Thus, the sample used in this case study accurately represented the general population of doctoral students.

Procedures

Maxwell (2013) and Yin (2009) both detail a solid participant selection process, which was followed. The initial communication included a Letter of Intent defining the scope and parameters of the research study along with the demographic requirements.

Yin (2009) explains there must be an initial qualifier determining qualifications to participate, which were:

1. Be nontraditional adult learners over the age of thirty with both family and work responsibilities
2. Completed all doctoral coursework
3. Completed or in the process of completing the comprehensive examinations
4. Attended an institution named in the Harkin Report

Thus, the components of qualification are:

1. The demographics validate the characteristics insuring all participants have the same educational background, experiential learning, and situation concerning a moral and ethical decision
2. The initial questions determine the qualification of potential participants (Vorbin, 2008; Yin, 2009). The survey questions serve to identify the issue, the stakeholders, and the conflict as perceived by the participant. The intent is to cross-reference this information with the interview in order to validate the information gleaned from the interview process. Although the questions are similar, the wording differs enough to gain the same information without being overly obvious.
3. The three vignettes serve a twofold purpose: to determine the ethical outlook of the participant and as an opening conversation for the interview (*Moral Foundations*, 2012; Yin, 2009). As the Moral Foundations Organization points out in their publications and related materials for

research, there should be a smooth transition moving from the opening to the actual purpose of the questions in research. Yin (2009) says the important factor in research is having the participant feel as comfortable as possible especially with face-to-face interviews. Opening with a question irrelevant to the prime purpose takes pressure off and allows for a smooth conversational atmosphere (Yin, 2009). The intent is to glean as much information as possible from the participant in a setting conducive to sharing and participation.

One of the nice features of using Saldana's design for coding, once the interview is completed, the conversations can be entered into the spreadsheet created specifically for the interviews. Saldana (2010) says this is a first step in the case study method. The development of the initial spreadsheet should be the first step since the initial interview may yield some unexpected data (Saldana, 2010). Once the interviews are complete, the data transcribed and entered into the spreadsheet, then similarities were compiled for a final report and points of interest noted. It should be noted that none of the research—with the exception of creating the Bento database and the initial setup of the required spreadsheets—was done until authorization was received from the Liberty University IRB.

The Researcher's Role

After getting my master's degree, I started attending conferences and meeting people who felt as I did about academic integrity. In workshops and discussions, I presented concerns and issues pertinent to faculty and staff. The attendees of these conferences were all in academia and faced the same issues in our positions within our

respective colleges. It was during some of the conferences I learned how faculty dealt with academic integrity and some of the reasons why. I overheard a conversation between faculty members that anytime there was even a hint a student performed academically but questioned evaluation rationales, the instructors were encouraged to have students dismissed. This hit a chord in the back of my memory banks for storage and retrieval later. These two experiences influenced me to pursue this line of research. I could never understand why a person would choose to copy or plagiarize; and I thought professors had the utmost integrity.

Attending Jones International University for my master's degree, I had some amazing professors who restored my faith in the education. I clearly understood my direction taking me into the classroom: online or face-to-face. Through the assistance of some very understanding professors, I learned the difference of the tiered school, accrediting, and the difference between for-profit and not-for-profit schools. Jones International University was at that time affiliated with the United Nations and opened a completely new experience in education and professional opportunities. I learned the importance of globalization and where we, as a nation, stood on the world stage. To say the least, it was very discouraging to learn this country has fallen from one of the top nations in education to its current standing at number 39. By participating with international organizations, I understand what we must do in order to regain the summit.

This case study research project is based in part on observations with schools after attending Jones International University. Some of these schools were accredited for-profit schools not concerned with student achievement, but adopting the methods most commonly associated with amoral business practices as described earlier in the Literature

Review. In addition, there was one occasion where the school at which I was taking some classes was closed by the Department of Education for its implication in selling diplomas to the European state of Georgia. I came to understand how difficult it can be for a student to have no contact with administration and only be told that the school is closed.

Life here at Liberty University for me has been interesting. I always prided myself on my moral and ethical behavior and practices, whether in industry or education. I felt a little more at ease in a school that professed an ethical and moral outlook the same as mine. For reasons best left unexplained, I abandoned my ten-year study of the adult and experiential learner and looked toward a different but just as important topic. It is my personal belief that, because the foundations of religious principles have changed over the years, this change has affected the quality of life and significantly changed our practices, especially toward education and how we perceive the educated individual.

Data Collection

I planned on active participation by conducting each interview and the initial tabulations. To date, I am the only one who knows the identities of the participants and the institutions they attended. Developing the proper identification codes and assigning them to the participants afforded me the opportunity to keep safe the identities of the participants and the institutions (Colby, 2010; Oakleaf, 2001). As a result of my active participation, all their personal identification was deleted before an assistant reviewed the responses for accuracy (Colby, 2010). The best way to organize an analysis is using an Excel spreadsheet using the following table (Oakleaf, 2003; Saldana, 2013):

Table 2: Survey Analysis

Demographics			Code
	Gender:	Male / Female	DM1/D2
	Employed	Yes / No	EY1/EN2
	Coursework completed	Yes / No	CY1/CN2
	Comprehensives	Passed / Failed	CP1 / CF2
	Proposal	Passed / Failed	PP1 / PF2
	Dissertation	Passed / Failed	PD1/DF2
Vignettes			
	Vignette 1	Agree / Disagree	1A1 / 1D2
	Vignette 2	Agree / Disagree	2A1 / 2D2
	Vignette 3	Agree / Disagree	3A1 / 3D2
Survey			
	Conflict description	Fill in	
	Faculty member	Agree/Disagree	FY1/FN2
	Staff member	Agree/Disagree	SY1/SN2
	University	Fill in	

The demographic information was broken down into categories and coded according to the table above (Saldana, 2013). The scenario questions responses require only agree or disagree (*Moral Foundations*, 2013). The scenarios as they stand are clearly one-answer comments intended to measure the moral and ethical standards of the participant (*Moral Foundations*, 2013; Yin, 2009). Responses logged into a spreadsheet compare and analyze the content, similarities, differences, and the development of any other pertinent information revealing itself in the comparisons.

Triangulation is often defined as an “intersection of three different reference points” (Yin, 2007). In other words, it is the verification of research data using three separate methods to get to the same point and each time getting the same result. The main purpose of the research question comes under scrutiny using three different lenses.

This research project used three methods of evaluation to verify the credibility of information received through the interviews. The demographic survey determined the qualification of potential participants insuring they met the criteria as previously identified.

The first segment of triangulation was the vignettes. The vignettes identified the moral outlook of the potential participants insuring all of those participating in the final stages of the case study had the same outlook, moral and ethical beliefs, and used the same values to evaluate their situations. The questions developed using open resources from The Moral Foundations Organization, which makes available to anyone questions and other materials for use evaluating moral and ethical values. Using some of the ideas generated from the site the three questions were developed using bogus yet true-to-life situations that could be easily explained given ample opportunity. However, these situations require a single response. In this way, the participant is using personal resources from Kohlberg's final stage of Moral Development to make a judgment call (Corey, 1995). The issue in question must be viewed as yes or no; black or white; with no room for discussion. The potential participants had to all score the same in order to qualify. This meant each one of the participants viewed and evaluated the situation similarly.

The pre-interview questions, the second phase of triangulation, asked the potential participants to explain the situation in their own written words. They had to explain the conditions, circumstances, and participants involved and what they determined was the "right thing to do". These questions were to be stand-alone questions not requiring further explanation. The questions mirrored the actual interview questions. For the interviewed

participants the responses were compared to the interview validating the credibility of the data. In all cases, the information from the pre-interview questionnaire and the interview were comparable. For the written responses needing clarification from participants not interviewed, a second e-mail was sent asking for clarification and the results included in the evaluation of data.

The interview was the final segment of the triangulation. Although only the verbal responses were recorded, as the interviewer, I made note of the more visible attributes of the interview. Using visual cues the participant presented such as picking at nails, playing with items within reach, nervousness, determined the credibility of the data harvested (Saldana, 2012).

The Harkin Report, a separate evaluation tool, was used to evaluate the credibility of the institution. The Harkin Report, compiled by the Congressional Committee on Education, or HELP, and determined a credible source of information by the Government Accountability Office. Based on the findings of the Harkin Report, 30 institutions were found in violation of federal guidelines.

Interviews

Colby (2010) believes the best way to gather information is through semi-structured interviews. This means letting the participant talk while you, the gatherer of information, takes down what the participant says along with any observable behavior. This semi-structure allows for a natural flow of conversation and allows for some unstructured questions as needed. In his description of a valid interview process, Colby (2010) presents the scenario of being at a party and talking with a casual acquaintance and taking notes about the conversation and their behavior. As described by Colby (2010)

the semi-structured interview begins with an exchange of pleasantries followed by an explanation of the research project, commitment to confidentiality, and making the whole interview painless as possible (Colby, 2010). After the formalities of the research project, the semi-structured interview began with the selection of one of the initial questionnaire questions focusing on the situation and rationale for response (Gerring, 2012; *Moral Foundations*, 2013; Yin, 2009). Although the prime purpose of the vignette was to determine the moral and ethical views of the participant, it also served as a lead-in for the interview. Review of the vignettes and interview questions require they be written (Gerring, 2012):

1. Exact
2. Insure use of bias-free language
3. Free of confusing or conflicting language
4. The question asks only a single instance so interpretation is not misunderstood
5. That the questions are not broad or too vague

The interview required privacy (Vorbin, 2008; Yin, 2009). The plan was to meet with the participant so the discussion could take place face-to-face. However, as the physical location of the participants prevented this from happening, times were set for Skype connection (Yin, 2009). The interview required a visual component in order to see the participant and read such things as body language and facial expressions, which cannot be done blindly (Maxwell, 2013; Yin, 2009) or by phone.

The three selected participants were all out of state requiring the interviews be held via Skype connections. All of the interviews were held in the same week but

different days to give me enough time to review and compile notes taken during the interviews. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes, which included the time to initiate and cover the purpose of the study, understanding how the results would be used, insure the participant their identity would remain confidential, and close the session. The three interviews were held on a Monday, Wednesday, and Friday early afternoon just after their lunch giving consideration to time differences between each of the participants and myself.

A voice recording was made of the interview with full knowledge of the participant (Maxwell, 2013; Saldana, 2013). The recordings required the use of Garage Band, proprietary Apple software, Good Screen Recorder, and Soundtrack Pro, both apps downloaded for use on the iMac, which was the computer used to record the interviews. Some of the edits to participant recordings required the use of more professional software such as Apple's Final Cut in order to make the replay clearly understandable (Saldana, 2013; Vorbin, 2008).

The following questions were used for the interview, although the order and/or format varied based on the conversation:

1. Tell me what happened.
2. Who are the people involved and what role did they play?
3. How did you communicate?
4. How did you respond to the people involved?
5. How did you respond to all the people involved?
6. What was their reaction?
7. What choices did you feel you had?

8. What made you choose the option you did?
9. Is there anything else you would like to say?

Gerring (2012) and Hom (1998) require interview questions be constructed in such a way as to leave little doubt as to what you are asking. This means asking exact, nonthreatening questions without leading the participant to a specific response. The purpose of these interview questions was to glean all the information possible about the experience. The accredited for-profit schools are strictly interested in the bottom line rather than student achievement. Having some personal experience with such schools, I was curious to see what the student experience was and what their reactions entailed. Maxwell (2013) states often it is important especially if conducting case study interviews on a topic of familiarity to keep personal biases out and report on the facts and nothing else. Therefore, it is very important that the questions asked meet the criteria listed above, and for me as the interviewer to not display any kind of bias or predetermined conclusions.

The first question after the exchange of pleasantries was designed to be a smooth transition into the exact situation or problem. In essence, it is the synopsis of the situation (Oakleaf, 2003; Suryani, 2008) as the participant views the situation. As Colby (2010) states, listening is an important component in interviews. During the interview, the important piece was to let them talk and for me to listen, taking note of verbal and nonverbal communication. The situation should be as clear as possible and void of all emotional reactions, especially on my part (Suryani, 2008). The purpose and intent was to get as clear a picture as possible of the situation (Nash, 2010). Based on the limited knowledge of the participant, this aspect took on the characteristic and form of casual

conversation (Colby, 2010; Suryani, 2008) while keeping a clear focus on the importance of the information (Saldana, 2013; Yin, 2009).

To build the clear picture of the situation, I built on the progression of the development of the problem by breaking the situation down into component parts. First, the identification of key players, in the second question, makes clear the people who were involved. The key players were individuals interacting directly with the participant and having a direct impact on the result. Any stakeholders involved in the dispute but not having a direct impact on the result is not of importance at this point since there is no way of knowing to what extent the situation existed. In addition, players indirectly involved and influencing the outcome were also excluded. The unidentifiable factor here is what the key players might have discussed without the participant's knowledge that may have impacted the outcome.

Another important factor is the method of communication. Research shows (Gerring, 2010) that e-mail and other written forms of communication can be grossly misinterpreted, leading to further degeneration of communication. It is, therefore, important that there be open discussion where all parties verbally discuss their view and avoid any further miscommunication and misunderstanding. This is an essential component of conflict resolution and is the foundation for questions five, seven, eight, nine, and ten. As an integral component of conflict resolution, all parties are given many opportunities to discuss their frustrations openly. The majority of conflicts are resolved with discussion arriving at a reasonable solution for all. The unfair parameter is that the faculty or administration is not afforded the same conversation as the participant, resulting in a one-sided view.

The question on appealing the decision is asked to confirm this was one option open to all participants as with any student having issues with a grade or academic situation. If this was not an option open for the participant, it is of interest to fully understand the reason.

The final question asked if there is anything else the participant wished to offer to shed more light on the outcome.

Following each interview I recorded any thoughts or observations not already noted (*Moral Foundations*, 2013; Oakleaf, 2003). The notes included physical, non-physical, visible and hidden behaviors; eye contact; and dress (Oakleaf, 2003; Yin, 2009). The interview itself was voice recorded only, providing a layer of anonymity to the research. The responses for each of the topic questions was rated for content, relevance, clarity, and spontaneity of the response (*Moral Foundations*, 2013).

The intent was to record only the interview with the participant's written consent (Yin, 2009; *Writing Case Studies*, 2012). Notes taken corresponded with questions asked (*Writing Case Studies*, 2012). Once the recordings were edited and saved as complete, the recordings were transferred to my iMac and saved as a Garage Band recorded format. Once the compilation of the interview is completed, and the data transcribed, the recording was transferred to a keychain identified specifically for confidential data and stored in a safe location. The written content coming from the recordings comprising the notes will contain data intended for the study and nothing else (*Writing Case Studies*, 2012). Based on information from an online manual developed for writing case studies, the data will be kept separate so there is no contamination of evidence (although I felt there was enough information for another research report).

For each interview, I had a fresh list of questions to discuss with the participant with room for notes and comments (Oakleaf, 2003; Saldana, 2013; Yin, 2009). The questions were not asked in any order, but in an order conducive to regular conversation (Yin, 2009). In addition, I had the vignettes, the demographic survey, and the pre-interview questions on hand during the interview for reference if needed (Yin, 2009). As part of the initial housekeeping details, I also discussed the intent of the research, why the information shared is important, confidentiality, and how the results of the study will be recorded (Yin, 2009). Only one participant voiced interest in having another copy of the Intent and Confidentiality sent to their e-mail, and this was done prior to the beginning of the interview. In addition, it was repeated that all identification to indicate who the participant was and any reference to the institution would not be included in the final report (Yin, 2009).

The results of the interview were evaluated according to a rubric developed specifically for the interview and include the questions and information on how the verbal responses were made, and include notes on body language and eye contact (Colby, 2010; Oakleaf, 2003; Saldana, 2013).

Reviewing the recordings of the participant responses, I looked for commonalities and similarities (Maxwell, 2010). After the first interview, the discussion component was handled in the following way:

1. Personal data was deleted from the recording, eliminating the possibility of identification

2. Questions identified, responses, and the resulting comments minus editorial comments were transcribed using transcription software and recorded in the Excel spreadsheet created for that participant
3. Based on the transcription, key phrases were highlighted and recorded in another column on the Excel spreadsheet

The spreadsheet was then prepared for the second phase of the analysis process by matching commonalities and similarities in responses (Saldana, 2010) between participants. Once all of the responses were recorded, it became easier to identify commonalities and differences in response. These recordings identified and defined the components to target moving forward (Yin, 2010). In addition, it also proved the aspects of the research questions that were not important and not show the expected result.

The interview portion began with a detailed description of the intent, the focus of the research, and description of how the compiled information would be tabulated (Maxwell, 2013). The identity of participants was kept confidential, and any detail leaning toward the identity of the participant excluded (Vorbin, 2008). The participant signed a confidentiality statement prior to the interview call (Trudeau, 2012). The statement also explained that the participant could end the interview or change the direction by indicating an unwillingness to divulge information asked (Vorbin, 2008). All questions the interviewer asked were general and designed only to elicit the portion of the response the participant was willing to share (Vorbin, 2008).

All interviews took less than 20 minutes. The participant was asked to select a location they felt most comfortable (Maxwell, 2013; Saldana, 2013). My location was in my home office at my computer with no one else present.

Credibility in any research project is important. To a researcher looking to validate information on a sensitive and personal nature such as ethics, there are a number of considerations to take into account, including the level of acceptable behavior. For a researcher in social sciences, evaluating the “human condition” is difficult (Wright, 2014), and an evaluation including ethical considerations can be regarded as very personal (Wright, 1014). The vignettes were intended as a first step in determining the ethical outlook of the participant. The intent was to determine the views of the participant so all participants would be considered similar. These vignettes, in essence, leveled the playing field by insuring the participants all felt the same way regarding issues of importance (Yin, 2009).

The process of selecting and speaking with possible participants required the recording of any notes pertaining to ideas, thoughts, impressions, or any other information relevant to the study (Hom, 1998). For that reason, a journal (or field notes) was kept for the duration of the study. The recorded information was included in the spreadsheets tabulated with the participant responses (Saldana, 2013). All data pertinent to the research will be included in Chapter 4 and noted as a field note observation (Saldana, 2013).

Data Collection for Vignettes

Maxwell believes qualitative research looks at the meaning and influence of society, requiring more open-ended questions and an inductive approach to research (Maxwell, 2013). Accordingly, the questions should result in yielding the expected data contributing to the research (Maxwell, 2013). Thus, open-ended questions should be indicative of a situation, or in this case, a conflict, as to elicit an honest response

(Maxwell, 2013, Saldana, 2013). The use of open-ended questions in qualitative research answers the question how a scenario plays out (Maxwell, 2013).

Shanahan, along with Hayman, developed a virtue ethics scale to for use in business settings. Murphy and Solomon founded the roots of this scale in 1999. Shanahan and Hayman's goal was create a scale measuring the two types of morality imbedded in business. The first was to measure basic right and wrong or the basic ethics of actions, while the second looked at the consequences of these actions. Their research questionnaires used scenarios compiled from 45 traits, which the participants evaluated according to the Likert six-point scale. Although the research was quantitative in nature, the use of the open-ended questions proved valuable in identifying the characteristics of a successful businessperson as having a "protestant work ethics" characterized by self-reliant, self-driven, creative, and charismatic individuals (Shanahan & Hayman, 2003). The main contribution of this scale is as an indicator for personal beliefs, thus projecting potential conflicts, continuity, or compatibility of new and existing employees. Thus, the vignettes, based on the concepts developed by Maxwell (2010) and Shanahan (2003), determine participant qualification to participate in this study, and to give the participant a glimpse as to the content in the interview portion or the actual data-gathering instrument (Halloway, 2012). The vignettes, as identified in Appendix E, contain questions determining participant views on particular instances pertaining to ethics and morality and use a simple agree/disagree format (instead of the Likert Scale that Maxwell preferred) for making decisions with no mitigating circumstances (Maxwell, 2013; Shanahan, 2003). The reason for the initial vignettes is to insure the participants have the same or similar ethical standards (*Moral Foundations*, 2013). Each scenario looks to

elicit an initial reaction of moral right or wrong (*Moral Foundations*, 2013). As in any scenario, there are mitigating circumstances, but as the instructions indicate, participants must make the judgment based on the information given, and nothing more (*Moral Foundations*, 2013; Yin, 2009). Selection for participants will depend on the survey responses. The intention is that participants will respond similarly to each of the scenarios (*Moral Foundations*, 2013; Yin, 2009).

Data Collection for the Pre-Interview Questionnaire

The survey is the most common tool for collecting data that summarizes, explains, or verifies a body of knowledge pertinent to the research (Fink, 2009). Surveys take various forms, with the most common format being multiple-choice. In this case, the format will be the fill-in format so the participant can complete the question in their own words, while the form serves as a guide to evaluate the relevance of the issue to the research questions. Again, the participant must identify the ethical or moral conflict, the initial participants involved in the conflict, and the university in question. For the sake of conformity, participants will fill in or express in their own words the conflict rather than choosing the best fit from a list of options. Choosing from a list of options makes scoring easier, although the options may or may not best describe the conflict. In this case, using the multiple-choice format leaves too much room for error in interpretation for both the scorer and the participant.

Data Analysis

Saldana (2012) gives researchers a detailed method for coding interviews for case studies. His method of data collection is a tree analysis starting from the branches and working toward a central theme.

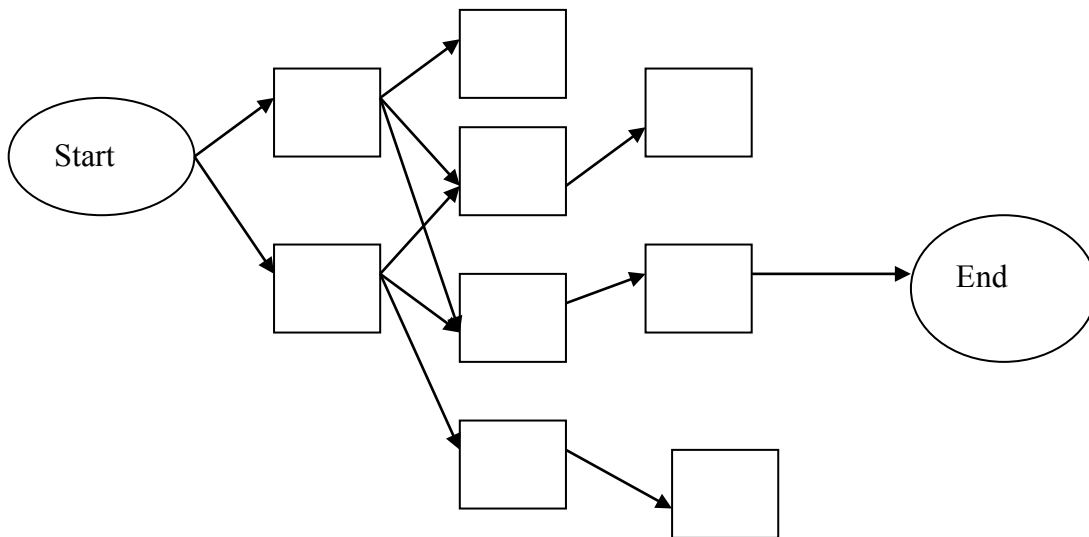


Figure 5: Diagram of a Tree Data Collection Method

Saldana (2012) also tells researchers that the initial data collection format will most likely have two or three iterations, since the first iteration may not suffice. Saldana (2013) suggests—just as Yin (2009)—to record the conversation, breaking it down into phrases or short sentences. Then next to each response, write a catchphrase. Matching the catchphrases is why Saldana (2013) says the process may require several iterations. The iterations are bunched into groups of similarities, then into bigger groups by matching similarities to come up with a definition or result as indicated in the figure above. Saldana also states that the coding process can take place after each interview and does not have to wait until all the results are tabulated. This is the process I used for coding the interview.

In the meantime, a roughly drafted rubric type template evaluated discussion progress in the interview (Colby, 2010; Oakleaf, 2003). The categories within the rubric have a rating scale evaluating answers. In this way, the research and the analysis of data

can be made on an equal balance. Saldana (2013) uses the following categories to rate the components of an interview:

1. Objectives – confrontational, motives – action verbs
2. Conflicts or the problem – disrespect, obstacles
3. Strategy tactics – accountability, honesty
4. Attitudes or the conflict – ironic, disbelief
5. Emotions – confused, frazzled – participant feelings
6. Unspoken thoughts– impressions

This insures the data collected is evaluated fairly and objectively, leading to the same conclusions.

Once the dialog from the interview was transcribed into written word, the dialog was entered into the assigned spreadsheet and coded for tally. The expectation was the coding would reveal a commonality and general trend toward a more definable theoretical construct (Saldana, 2013). Although this sounds simple enough, the categories used identifiable verbs and terms distinguishing one from the other (Saldana, 2013).

Saldana (2013) identifies several methods for coding interviews, including an exploratory interview process. This process begins the research project by identifying commonalities and distinguishable terms between participants (Saldana, 2013). In this process, as the sentences are broken and identified to a category, the corresponding action terms become apparent. This process is often best used as an investigatory or pilot addressing any potential inconsistencies (Yin, 2009).

Trustworthiness

The initial needs-analysis used to develop the context of this study involved a superficial look, considering all possibilities influencing this study and its credibility, integrity, and trustworthiness (Saldana, 2013). The Congressional Committee headed by Senator Harkin did a significant amount of work in the area of comparison of accredited for-profit colleges and universities. These institutions, according to Harkin's report, exhibit the same characteristics in structure, goals, academic achievement, and financial picture. A number of these characteristics evidently differ significantly from the traditional not-for-profit colleges and universities in addition to the physical presence of the school.

The significance of this case study demonstrated that accredited for-profit colleges and universities are primarily concerned with the bottom line rather than student success and turning out graduates who cannot compete within ever-changing global markets. This may mean the academics involved do not meet the same criteria and academic standards as the accredited not-for-profit and more traditional colleges and universities. For these reasons, the doctoral student is the most likely to have serious issues to face and decisions to make (Statistics Research, 2012).

Credibility

As with any qualitative research, how do you determine if what you are looking for is what you actually get? By insuring a consistent focus on the questions asked. Saldana (2013) uses a diagram that starts with the problem statement and works outward. The tree format helps keep focused (Saldana, 2013). The methods of research have been established and written according to accepted methods of questioning and interviews (Maxwell, 2013). Triangulation using an outside based questionnaire for participants,

establishing their level of ethics and a valid form of identification of universities with questionable ethics, is established.

Transferability

I used thick, rich descriptions for participants, the setting, and experiences both personal and those of participants (Lincoln & Gubda, 1985; Yin, 2009). In addition, I anticipated assistance first from Senator Harkin and then his successor Senator Alexander to access some of the data they collected regarding reports from graduate students and their complaints regarding accredited for-profit schools for some verification. My intention was to use direct quotes from the participants having the most impact on this study.

Dependability

Dependability means that if duplicated, the research will yield the same or similar results (Maxwell, 2013; Saldana, 2013). This means consideration of the data, the analysis, the collection process, and the ability to draw conclusions similar to and consistent with the original. For triangulation, even though these were case studies, I used two types of data analysis: the coding method developed by Saldana (2012) and six components of rating interviews. The use of the vignettes helped to identify the moral and ethical beliefs of the participants. The intended target—accredited, for profit universities—is the kind of university the participant attended, and the Harkin Report (2012) measured their credibility.

I also intend to have peers review all data analysis methods and insure the conclusions I reached are consistent with my findings, along with any journal notes I took during the whole process. This handwritten journal will be available for review.

Confirmability

Lincoln & Gubda (1985) and Yin (2009) talk extensively about establishing accuracy in any research project. Objectivity in the human strain is sometimes difficult (Wright, 2014); however, if the researcher is true to the investigative method, the results will be valid regardless of whether the actual anticipated result is attained. Yin (2009) gives several methods of checking for accuracy. The journaling is a true record including every detail of data analysis including the amount of time for any data analysis session. Where applicable and for reasons of privacy, true names were not used but fictitious names used and were consistent throughout.

Ethical Considerations

Protecting participant confidentiality is a prime concern (*Writing Case Studies*, 2012), having faced issues involving ethical or moral decisions requires discrete handling as described in an article found on the Moral Foundations website (Yin, 2009). Even though some portions of each participant's story are familiar, every attempt to keep factors pointing to specific individuals were taken (Yin, 2009). Identifiable information such as names, dates, and specific areas of study were altered in order to keep participant speculation to a minimum (Saldana, 2013; Yin, 2009). In addition, participants do not know the true identity of other participants (Saldana, 2013). The true names of the institutions will not be published to protect the universities, even though named in the Harkin Report. Rather, a fictitious name has been given to the university protecting its identity, all faculty, and staff.

The compilation of data has been limited to one computer not connected to the Internet. A newly purchased and formatted keychain will hold the results of data

compilations, personal and confidential information, including names, contact information, and personal and confidential information for the duration of the study. At the end of the study, the keychain used solely for the study will remain in a separate and secure location far away from any computer data. For security and data preservation, the use of hard copies will be at a minimum. All hard copies are to be scanned for storage on the study keychain and originals securely destroyed.

Before any contact with possible participants or data collection, IRB approval was obtained. Completing the required IRB course at the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative at the University of Miami included not only the required electives but also additional modules as well, insuring a full well-rounded knowledge base of the protection of human research.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

While waiting for IRB approval, some of the initial spreadsheet and result recording sheets were created. This included the reporting spreadsheet for the Demographics, Vignettes, Pre-Interview, and Interview Survey. The original intent was to create a spreadsheet for the list of participant personal information; however, Bento, a database management system created specifically for Apple computers, proved more effective in creating an additional layer of security and privacy protection for the participant and university identity. Bento recorded the participant name, contact information, an identification code, and the computer generated name, among other data. The computer-generated name, a name lacking gender identification, will be used for all participants in the resulting spreadsheets. The information initially entered into the reporting workbook titled Research Grid were column titles, required headings, and the sheet name. The actual interview recording sheets were left in the initial design stage along with a list of the questions pertinent to the research and labeled Interview 1, Interview 2, and Interview 3. Since the interview would be voice recorded, the design might have to be altered in the course of the actual interview. Once the interview was completed, the interview was transcribed, and the information broken down into chunks according to the Saldana design. The following reports document each step of the research process and the results recorded therein.

The Harkin Report

Former Senator Tom Harkin of Iowa as leader of the US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions was responsible for overseeing legislative

jurisdictions on all issues including funding and operational matters concerning institutions listed as higher education. This jurisdiction included what were originally termed proprietary schools and institutions of higher education, otherwise known as for-profit colleges and universities. These institutions were eligible for funding under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965 as amended, meaning students of these institutions were now eligible for federal student loans and grants.

In 2010, the Senate Committee headed by then Senator Tom Harkin and the Federal Department of Education were inundated with complaints from students who felt they were unjustly misled and misinformed regarding education opportunities from these accredited for-profit institutions. The Majority Committee Staff Report and Accompanying Minority Committee Staff Reviews of the United States Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions Committee published the Harkin Report, formally called *For Profit Education: The Failure to Safeguard the Federal Investment and Insure Student Success*, in 2012.

Although not a considered a formal study in the sense of an educational research project, the Governmental Accountability Office, which is responsible for the validation of all reports and statistical analysis produced and published by the US government, validated the 600-plus page Harkin Report. The importance of this document is not the identification of “bad” schools, but the validation of the accredited for-profit institution’s inability in assisting the enrolled student to complete their degree.

According to the Harkin Report, the success rate in some accredited for-profit institution is not as advertised at 85%, and is clearly a misrepresentation. The Harkin Report does not detail all instances how the 30 identified institutions reported as

misrepresenting the actual pass rate, but indicates that 85% is more representative of the fail rate.

The list of findings by the Harkin Report are lengthy and not relevant or significant to this research; however, there are segments of the Executive Summary that directly address the goals of this qualitative research project, being:

1. The investment of billions of tax dollars with more than half of the enrolled students leaving within the first four months of enrollment without attaining their degree.
2. The failure to counterbalance taxpayer demands for stricter educational controls in the form of learning outcomes and effective curriculum designs, thus improving student achievement.
3. Failure to institute the necessary student support programs resulting in large turnover rates and low retention rates. Examining required staff, the Report found the number of admissions personnel significantly outnumbered career and support services, leaving students floundering. According to the report there are two and one half recruiters to each support and career staff person.
4. The report predicts a yearly increase of students leaving without a degree. The current dropout rate is approximately 65% across all degree levels in accredited for-profit institutions, including doctoral students.
5. There are no incentives in place to insure a relevant and direct correlation between the success of the school and student achievement.

6. Internal corporate records indicate a redesign of academic goals in accordance with the business corporate structure, especially in addressing tuition profit goals. These goals have little to do with the actual academic costs.
7. Documents produced by the Government Accountability Office using undercover agents and tactics verified they deliberately misled prospective students especially with institution reputation and accreditation, federal aid, program costs, completion rates, and job placement.
8. These institutions target students who are facing difficult situations and unfamiliar with traditional higher educational structure, and tend to “push the right buttons” concerning life’s difficulties and creating a sense of urgency in enrolling into programs that may not be representative of the student’s best interest.
9. GAO undercover activities also uncovered questionable or academic integrity policies that often go unheeded by administrative staff.
10. Use of part-time faculty is key component in accredited for-profit institution in ensuring academic accountability. The report indicates that ten company institutions employed 80% part-time faculty and five institutions used 90% part-time faculty, which is high but in line with keeping costs down.
11. Support services is extremely lacking after a student is enrolled. For example, Career Services in two of the largest institutions reported had no placement services for graduates.

According to the Harkin Report, there are several reasons the above violations exist. These tactics are in part due to the economic situation in which governmental agencies find themselves. For example, the individual states often lack the resources to regulate and enforce policy. Often states rely on the 90/10 Rule, or the number of students who can default on federal student funding without the school losing the federal funding. According to the report, institutions often “employ questionable tactics” in order to meet requirements for accreditation and funding. This means these organizations might report misleading documentation involving campus reports, scholarship awards, enrollment fees, tuition increases, and loopholes in the Department of Defense educational benefits for veterans. Some corporations also hire third party companies whose specialty is heading off the student-loan problem, thus moving the institution outside the timeframe for repayment.

Career Service centers for the accredited for-profit schools tend to claim higher placement rates than actually exist. Open job placement data for career options are often used in place of actual the school data. This falsification of data was uncovered by the GAO in its investigations and was found to be a practice over five years before the release of the initial report findings in 2010. The Harkin Report offered the following data concerning staffing levels showing recruiting or academic advisors as opposed to career services. The chart depicted in the Harkin Report,

[http://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/for_profit_report/PartI-PartIII-](http://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/for_profit_report/PartI-PartIII-SelectedAppendixes.pdf)

[SelectedAppendixes.pdf](http://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/for_profit_report/PartI-PartIII-SelectedAppendixes.pdf) , made public the lack of adequate advising and the

overwhelming number of recruiters as opposed to the availability of career services to aid

students in locating and securing jobs. Figure 6 is part of the public record published by the Harkin Report

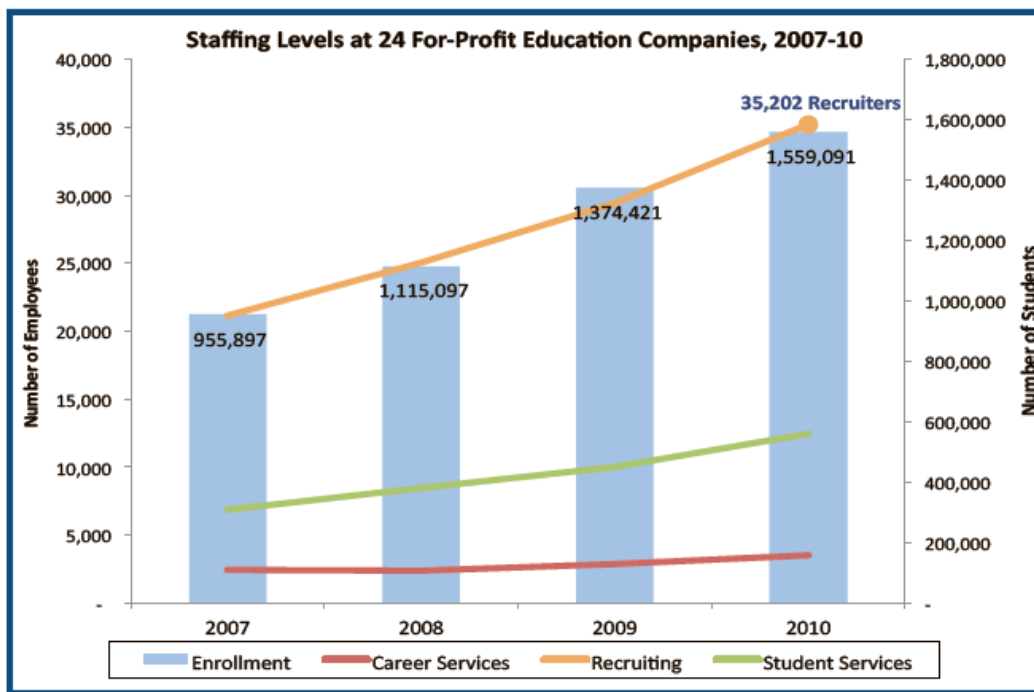


Figure 6: From the Harkin Report found at

http://www.help.senate.gov/imo/media/for_profit_report/PartI-PartIII-SelectedAppendixes.pdf

What the report does not specify is the ratio of full-time instructors as opposed to part-time and adjunct staffing, which reduces costs significantly. According to the report, many company schools employ over 90% part-time and adjunct faculty and attribute the high number of student attrition rates to poor instruction from concerned faculty. The findings also indicate the inability for staff to properly address concerns the nontraditional student especially finds relative to course completion and achievements. The report quotes several instances of formal student complaints concerning the inability of teaching faculty and staff to address their course objectives. These complaints range

from complex medical issues to understanding unclear assignments and assessments. The registered complaints range from certificate programs to post-graduate degree programs. The biggest problem seems to be a clear understanding of the accrediting process and the types of accrediting available. One of the problems cited was the inability of accrediting agencies to cope with the high number of for-profit schools.

Senator Lamar Alexander of Tennessee currently chairs the US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP). He, in conjunction with the Congressional Committee assigned, developed several reports, which are summarized and attached (see Appendix L, M, N, O). These drafted proposals concern the redrafting of the accrediting system, transparency, and student federal financial aid. The Harkin Report findings and subsequent proposal amendments that detail changes in funding and educational reform range from 12 to 17 pages in length and serve as another layer of verification for the study findings.

Demographic Survey

The potential respondents came from personal interactions at conferences and workshops nationwide, resulting in the collection of business cards saved specifically for this study in the event it came to fruition. Besides the contact information, the business cards related the locations of meetings at conferences and workshops we attended nationwide over the past two years. These contacts initially stated they might be willing participants should a study done involving decisions doctoral students face in pursuit of their PhD degree. Initially the intention was to keep everything in a single workbook and saved in a single location. However, Bento, a database program designed specifically for Apple computers, added an additional layer of security protecting participant identity.

The software is not free, and although not overly expensive is not something that most casual users would purchase. In addition, access to the information stored and password protected in the database is not easily accessible with any other software program. The database also came in handy using mail merge and personalizing the e-mail concerning the Invitation to Participate (Appendix G) and the Consent Form (Appendix H). Not all of the information put into the database was necessary. However, for the purpose of this research project, it eliminated the need to keep the business cards, and documented the following information, which may assist in future research designs:

1. Full name
2. Work affiliation
3. E-mail
4. Phone number
5. Cell number
6. Place of meeting (workshop, conference, city, year)
7. Gender
8. Identification code
9. Participant computer-generated name
10. The actual participant response to Demographic, Vignette, pre-interview, and interview

In keeping with the initial design of the research project, some of the information was also recorded in a locked and password-protected worksheet named Identity within the Research Grid so it would be readily available. Upon receipt of the IRB approval (see Appendix I), the study began with sending out 32 e-mails to the potential

participants. The e-mail briefly explained the reason for the contact, stating the following:

At the (name of the conference) we attended in (City), you suggested you might be interested in a study I was working on involving moral and ethical decisions doctoral students make in pursuit of their degree. Attached please find the Invitation to Participate (see Attachment G) in this study. The invitation will explain the details of the study. Please return the attached signed Consent Form (see Attachment F) within the week and you will get the Demographic Survey and link to Vignettes, which begins the process.

Once the participant responded with the Invitation to Participate and the Consent Form, the participant received the Demographic Survey and link to the Vignettes. The Demographic Survey and Vignettes could not be anonymous since it was necessary to know the respondents in order to arrange for the interview, which was the final step. The Consent Form and signed Invitation to Participate was scanned and saved as comments in the database. The originals, once verified with the scan, were securely shredded. All data in the database and Research Grid Workbook is contained and stored on a keychain along with all controversial and sensitive documents rather than on any singular computer.

Of the 32 e-mails sent, 38% were eliminated immediately and broke down thus:

1. Four were undeliverable
2. One could not participate because of time constraints
3. Three elected not to participate leaving 24 potential participants.

4. The Demographic Survey eliminated four more participants who were not finished with their coursework. In each case, the coursework was the initial coursework and not coursework intended for another doctoral program, which resulted in their elimination

The Demographic Survey asked for the following information:

1. Gender identification
2. Employed (Y/N)
3. Coursework completed (Y/N)
4. Comprehensives taken and passed (Y/N)
5. Proposal Phase completed (Y/N)
6. Dissertation Phase completed (Y/N)

The responses came back surprisingly fast. The participant responses, when returned, were identified with the Identification Code and computer-generated name derived from the database and entered immediately into the spreadsheet. The rest of the spreadsheets only contained the Identification Code and the computer-generated name. Spreadsheet 1, appropriately named Demographics, contains the information returned from the Demographic Survey. The Demographic Survey reported in the Research Grid contains no identification other than the Identification Code and is stored in the Bento database separate from the Research Grid Workbook. Once all participants returned the survey, and the information compiled, the analysis in terms of percentages and graphs began.

The gender identification was not a necessary component for the purpose of this study; however, it served as an additional resource for future research. For the purposes

of this study, the gender identification served as additional information tracking the number of males / females as the study progressed. As explained in the chart below, the participating responders to the Demographic Survey yielded the following information:

1. There were 11 males and 13 females
2. 83% completed the coursework required by their institution while four did not complete the coursework and were eliminated
3. The same 83%, or nine males and 11 females, completed coursework and made it to the comprehensive examinations
4. 63% of the seven males and eight females made it through the proposals but did not make it through the dissertation phase while only 33% of the females progressed

Chart 1 shows the academic progress for each respondent.

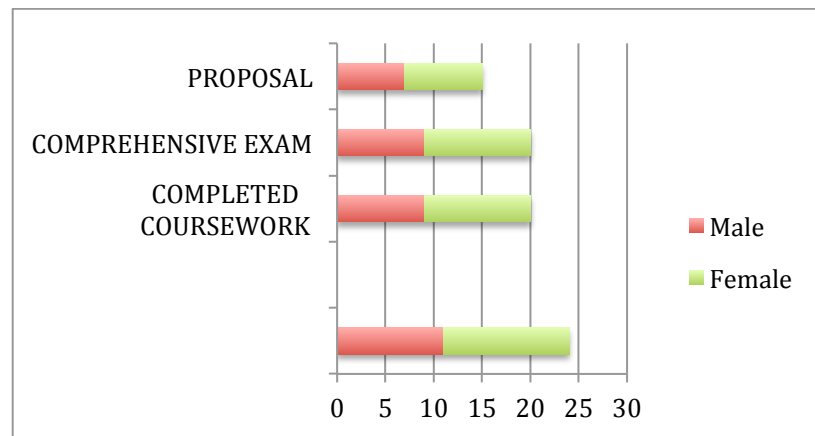


Figure 7: Study Participant Academic Progress

The Vignettes

The Demographics included a link to the vignettes in Survey Monkey. The four participants who did not complete their coursework were not included in the Vignette phase, although their responses were saved in the Bento database under comments (as

part of the requirement, participants must have completed coursework). The four participants received a separate e-mail determining if the coursework was from another school or for the initial program. For each of these respondents, the additional information verified the four were completing the initial doctoral work and then confirmed the coursework was the original doctoral program but the problems they encountered were on a master's level, and therefore were eliminated from the study. The information might prove beneficial if further study required a deeper look at concerns students encountered at various levels of study in for-profit institutions.

The intention of the vignettes was to measure the moral and ethical outlook of the participant. It was necessary to have all participants score the same on this phase in order to insure they all had the same perspective. The vignettes included three scenarios the participant had evaluate and agree or disagree with the decision with no additional comment. Initially evaluating the Demographic Survey, only 20 participants were actually eligible to participate in this segment. To review, the vignettes included:

1. A new teacher, after completing her first term, found herself in a wet T-shirt contest that went viral. The expected response was to agree with the outcome. Of the 20 responses, five were incorrect.
2. The classroom bully turned out not to be a credible resource measurement since none of the participants got this one incorrect. This vignette, if research is repeated, should be eliminated and replaced with one that requires more of a moral dilemma and not such a clear-cut situation.
3. The class clown also registered some concerns and related more to a moral and ethical dilemma. Again, of the 20 responses, five were incorrect.

Evaluating the vignettes on the strength of bias and validity, questions one and three exemplified good validation of the moral and ethical issue while question two was too clear-cut. The problem with not being able to “test” questions prior to use in studies is that although a question may meet all of the earmarks of a sound question, the participant may perceive the wording differently and not see the intended problem, which, in this case is having to apologize to a parent even though the situation is justified. In retrospect, this question does not signify a good moral situation requiring sound judgment. A question involving personal choices such as the decision to attend a party that may attract police attention if you are under age is a better choice. The question must clearly and distinctly cause a problem knowing the act may cause a moral or ethical dilemma.

In Vignette 1, the new teacher is clearly to blame since she was more intent on finding her friend than paying attention to the clearly marked signage and the crowd both inside and out that such an event would attract. The wording is clear and sends the clear message to the participants responding. In addition, a 25% fail rate indicated the question, based on a psychometric scale, is difficult enough for a novice to respond to correctly, but not one who has the value for the trait intended to measure (Furr, 2008).

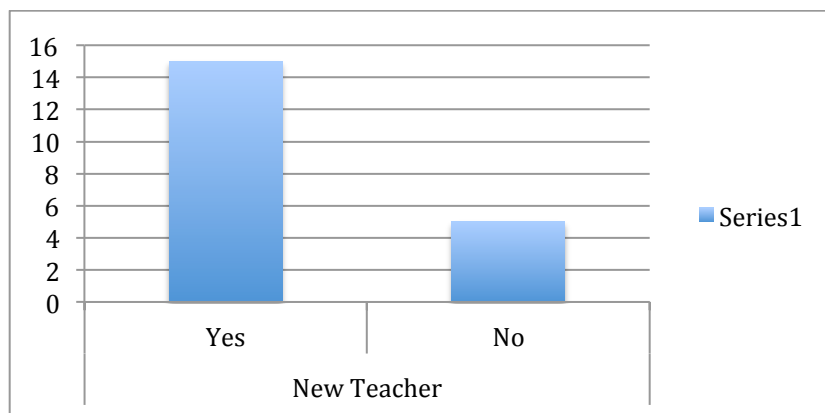


Figure 8: Breakdown for Vignette 1

Vignette 3, depicting the class clown, also received a 25% fail rate. However, the problem participants might have issue with this scenario is if the participant had not worked with youth. The responses indicated the participants had some knowledge either personal or perceived in youth / teens who are not adequately challenged in the classroom. Again, psychometrically, the same simple analysis applies as the one above. However, this vignette also finds support by a publication *Teaching the Class Clown*. (Purkey, 2006) In this book, the authors specifically point to research they conducted involving class clowns and their success rate in changing their program. In addition, between personal evaluations and evaluations done in the field, studies suggest familiarity with the class clown is either personal or from recollections from K-12 education.

In any case, the vignettes yielded the following information:

1. Five males and four females correctly responded the three Vignettes
2. Two males and three females got Vignette 1 wrong
3. One male and four females got Vignette 3 wrong

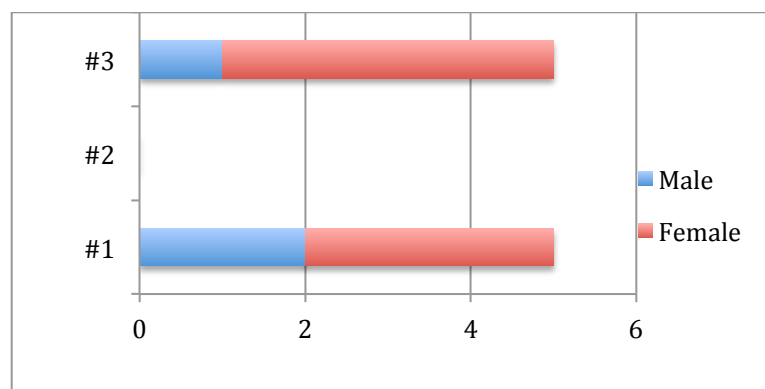


Figure 9: Vignette Statistics

The responses to the vignettes significantly reduced the number of eligible participants from 20 to nine. The interviews will come from the participants left to answer the pre-interview survey who meet the following qualifications:

1. Attended an accredited for-profit university
2. Have completed all coursework for the doctoral PhD degree
3. Be a nontraditional student meaning having both work and family responsibilities while attending school
4. Having to make a moral or ethical decision concerning completion of the program

Statistically, the breakdown of vignettes looks like:

New Teacher	Yes	15
	No	5
Bully	Yes	18
	No	2
Class Clown	Yes	5
	No	15

Table 3: Vignette Statistics

Preliminary Interview Questionnaire

The preliminary interview questionnaire was of most interest since the results of this survey would yield the actual participants. When designing the research, the goal was to have at least three participants participate in the actual case study. The known factor was the 32 business cards from participants who expressed interest. According to business statistics on general mailing, a mailing producing 10 to 12% is considered successful; thus, if this project were designed correctly, the response would yield the intended goal of three participants. If lucky, and participants carefully screened, the participant total could yield as many as eight. The process the preliminary and the interview would follow seemed relatively simple following a simple and logical path:

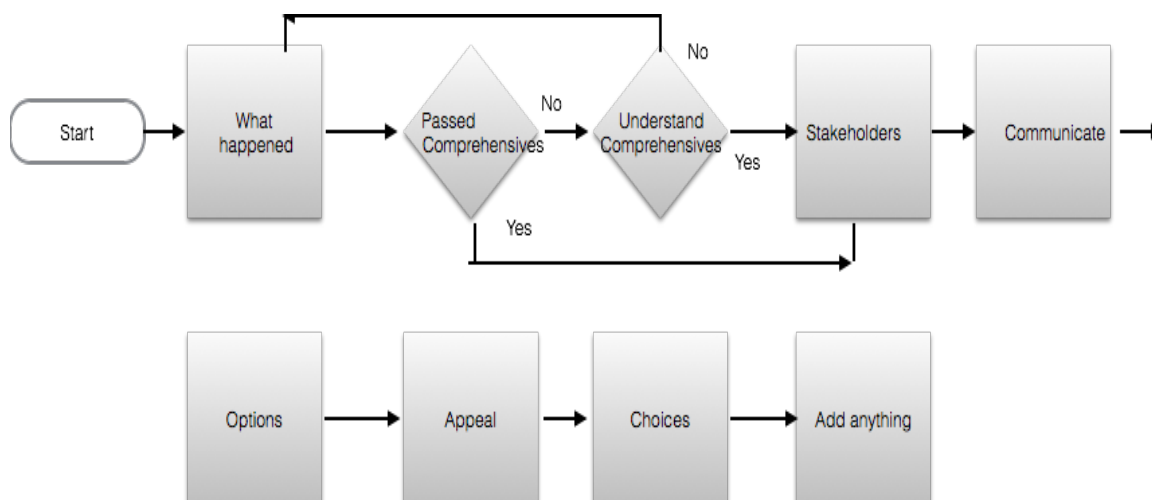


Figure 10: Case Study Logic Path

The possibility of eight participants is highly unlikely because of the qualification requirements, especially that they be PhD doctoral students from accredited for-profit institutions. The moral and ethical value requirement was also a determinant. Participants have a choice, as we all do, in facing difficult situations. The question here

is if the degree was worth the sacrifice of one's moral and ethical values. Lastly, the actual conflict has to pose a moral and ethical dilemma. The results showed what some perceived as ethical value choices were not even a close consideration between right and wrong. However, there are clear indications the failure was not completely the participant's doing. Of the remaining 10 contenders for an interview for the actual case study, the following did not fully qualify:

1. Peyton: Described a conflict between the dissertation chair and department head. All contact was face-to-face; there was no appeal and the whole process dropped at the end of the term. The reason was, "their argument spoiled it for me (personal communication with participant, 07,2015)." Qualification: no. In actuality, the problem did not constitute a moral or ethical dilemma but required action on the part of the participant and there was no attempt to resolve the conflict. In addition, the school was a state university and did not qualify as an accredited for-profit school.
2. Jesse: Described a conflict concerning the comprehensive exam questions and the chair of the committee. As reported, "the questions were not clear." All contact was through e-mail, without even one attempt to make phone contact. There was no appeal, resulting in a failing grade decision. Qualification: no. The situation as described was vague in that it does not identify what was "not clear." This required a better understanding before an actual decision could be made, meaning spending time to research what the requirements actually were before rendering a decision. This meant accessing the school website and finding the requirements involved in the comprehensive examination.

According to the student handbook, the comprehensive exam questions are as follows: one question pertaining to research methods, one question on a required department course, one question on APA writing standard, dissertation standards, and/or academic integrity, and one question specific to the intended research. In addition, according to the manual, all questions have content and writing guidelines assigned before writing and are discussions between student and chair prior to the actual exam. The school is a young for-profit institution just breaking into academia. The school was not included in the Harkin Report. Based on the handbook publication date, the complaint was not justified as a moral and ethical choice.

3. Alex: Described a dissertation conflict in that the dissertation process resulted the selection of a research project that “could not be adequately defined or researched.” Alex did not identify participants and claimed not all coursework was relevant for topic selection or the dissertation process. Qualification: no. Sharing additional information, the participant added the school has a very different approach to the dissertation process in that the topic and research method is chosen at the beginning of the coursework process and all relevant work sets the pace for completing the writing of the dissertation. The participant shared that the problem was not appealed since there was apparently “no option left for me.” In addition, the university is not an accredited for-profit and did not appear in the Harkin Report.
4. Reed: Wanted to pursue a double dissertation where one topic delved deeply into the current career path while the other closely followed the School of

Business program. Reed explained the conflict included the committee chair and the department head. The only contact was through e-mail and then one phone conference call; however, following the decision, no appeal was made. Reed described the phone call as unproductive since “I was so mad at the final meeting, I was told I was unprofessional and the conversation ended with them hanging up (personal communication with participant 07,2015).”

Qualification: no. It is not uncommon to have two choices for a dissertation; however, almost all universities will tell students it is difficult enough to complete one dissertation satisfactorily, let alone two, and a student should pursue the one most likely to achieve the degree before completing the other. Secondly, showing anger at those trying to help is considered unprofessional behavior however understandable, but is not acceptable especially when you are arguing for your defense. Reed should have asked for a break to get back under control; it shows poor understanding of navigating through an ethical challenge.

5. Kelly: Kelly described the problem as getting “committee members I knew, knew me, and would help me get through the process (personal communication with participant, 07, 2015).” This is a common perception among PhD doctoral students in the accredited for-profit institutions, helping make students feel more confident in the process. Kelly got a list of available committee members from her chair along with their credentials. Kelly rejected the list of available committee members and dropped the program at

the for-profit school. Qualification: no. This does not indicate a moral or ethical challenge.

6. Kennedy: Two of the committee members could not get along with each other. Kennedy tried to bring the members together to resolve their differences through phone calls and exchange of e-mail, to no avail. Kennedy commented, “I could not believe they were acting this way (personal communication with participant, 07,2015).” Qualification: no. The situation did not constitute an ethical decision on the part of the participant. Kennedy had the option of replacing committee members.
7. Pat: Reported the coursework was not substantial enough to support doctoral level dissertation research. After completing the required coursework for a doctoral degree, Pat complained to the Department Head, and Dean of Students that the actual dissertation process was not supported by the coursework and additional time and work would be required to complete the dissertation successfully. Pat stated that the complaint registered with the Department Head and Dean of Students constituted the appeal process and did not take the appeal a step further, although the option was available. Qualification: no. There was no evidence of a moral or ethical decision in Pat’s description. The description “enough time” is not defined, although a follow-up e-mail was sent for an explanation. Therefore, it can only be assumed Pat felt the coursework was weak in its content, requiring taking additional courses outside the institution.

The three remaining participants out of the ten who qualified for the interview, based on the moral and ethical challenges as depicted by the vignettes, were:

1. Jules selected a committee that would be a guide through the entire dissertation process but was, in actuality only assigned for the comprehensives. The problem was the committee did not understand the focus of Jules's research, nor were they familiar with the topic. Jules, enrolled in the School of Business and Technology, met with the committee, who explained what they wanted as responses. Jules knew little about them other than they were faculty in the School of Business and taught midlevel business classes. Based on the preliminary questions, Jules felt they did not understand the research topic, let alone the specific direction the research would take. Jules did appeal, asking for a new committee, but the request was denied. The school was an accredited for-profit institution listed on the Harkin Report.
2. Sage's problem was with the manner of conducting the research. Sage wanted to do an initial qualitative study; however, the instructor assisting with the production of the study strongly suggested changes making it a quantitative research project. The change in methods was not as much of a concern as the addition of some questions that would take the research project in a direction contrary to the intended goal and change the hypothesis significantly. Sage tried to explain the study was based on research already completed where several major characteristics manipulated caused significant changes in structure. Sage was consistently turned down, resulting in the rejection of the project. An appeal did not help and Sage dropped out of the

program. Sage, already a research assistant in the field of health science, worked closely with pharmaceutical companies. The school was an accredited for-profit institution listed in the Harkin Report.

3. Toby described a problem that incorporated components of the above two situations. Toby was presented with a comprehensive question created by the committee (in this case an “advisor” comparable to chair, and an “assistant” comparable to a coach) to assist in formatting the comprehensive questions. The questions did not even address the direction of the research project and only in general terms, relevant to the course of study. Toby appealed to the department chair, then to the student advocate, with no success. Toby, a career military officer active in training soldiers assigned to specific military operations, said the “questions as stated could not be answered in a limited number of pages” and “by the improper use of buzzwords, it was clear the question designer had no idea what they were talking about.” Toby appealed and tried unsuccessfully to explain the problem, and offered to reword the question so the question would have a viable response to anyone at an expert level in the field. The appeal was denied and Toby was required to answer the questions as stated

Many students experience difficulty navigating through the dissertation process in any university, especially if they have no prior experience with higher education (as Senator Alexander describes as “first generation students”). For example, many accredited for-profit schools will tell prospective students the success rate for students entering the PhD program is as high as 85%. At face value, the number is insignificant;

however, this number is high and gives the prospective student a false hope of success. The problem is, where does this number come? At what point in the doctoral program does this statistic represent?

Students may be able to navigate through the coursework process but not be able to navigate the comprehensives. Based on personal interactions with cohort students assigned to the comprehensive course preparation in an accredited for-profit institution, it was very clear many that students were unable to successfully satisfy the course requirements. In addition, based on self-assessments given in the course, colleagues could not write on a college level, but also had difficulty communicating their thoughts and ideas just to navigate the sample questions we were given to share with one another for comments.

In the case of the three remaining participants who successfully responded to the questions, the following findings are evident:

1. Jules was assigned committee members for the comprehensive phase of the dissertation who were unfamiliar with the topic content. Jules questioned the assignment, asking why the faculty submitted in the beginning of the comprehensive phase was not assigned. Jules, like others who complained, was told the main focus of the committee is to “insure the responses meet the academic rigors of a doctoral degree.” Thus, the comprehensive committee did not matter. Although this phase implies to doctoral students that the questions are relevant to the research project, in all cases, the purpose is not to “test” the academic knowledge of the student but the ability for the student to write academically, and to be able to provide viable research to validate the stand the

student takes. This information only becomes evident in the student handbooks made available for students at this phase. Jules included in the problem one named participant, the department head, who strongly suggested the questions be shared with others in an attempt to gain their input for a passing grade. In essence, the department head told Jesse, ask someone to “help you write responses for the questions you are having difficulty with (personal communication with participant, 07,2015).” This clearly indicated Jules could cheat as long as the desired goal was attained. Jules thought it over and felt that the help was clearly cheating and against his moral code. Clearly, Jules had to make a judgment call, cheat and pass, or write the responses and fail. Jules chose failing

2. Sage worked hard on developing the direction of the research project selected for the dissertation. From research completed in another lab on a chemical element for a pharmaceutical drug, Sage identified several characteristic element options available for a research project, and selected the one characteristic that would be the easiest to alter and to monitor the resulting changes from instead of the three or four Sage felt would alter the result drastically. The research was conducted under very controlled circumstances. Sage wanted to know if the selection and monitoring of one of the several minor characteristics from the original research would have a significant impact on the outcome. Sage met with some of the researchers in the field, explaining the research project and asking them to comment on the concept before selecting a specific research method. Sage felt the considerable

amount of work put into detailed writing of the project initially would pay off in the end. The problem was with the research advisor, who wanted Sage to put in additional measures to insure a viable research project, which Sage was willing to do. However the only measures the research advisor would approve were ones that moved the focus of the project and redefined the goal, and ultimately the hypothesis. Sage met with the research advisor, bringing all of the documentation and notes relevant to the project, and divulged some recognizable names in pharmaceutical research along with their comments, all to no avail. The appeal was denied and Sage dropped the program. Sage's choice to drop rather than "sacrifice the integrity of my research (personal communication with participant, 07, 2015)" was a noble one, but left Sage without the coveted degree. Sage's choice was to either bend and accept the revised proposal in order to get the degree and complete the research another time or drop the program. Sage's comment was "a significant amount of time and money was already spent, a job and promotion now trashed, and I do not have what it takes to go do this all over again (personal communication with participant, 07,2015)."

3. Toby's situation contains elements common to both Jules and Sage. Toby attended an accredited for-profit institution with a program that differed slightly from the traditional program. The school Toby attended allowed doctoral students to work on the components of their research project from the second semester of study, with the first term setting the framework and parameters in which doctoral students would conduct their research and

preliminary writing. In this program, students learned to write assignment responses within a given number of pages. The purpose was to gain the experience needed for the comprehensive questions and the writing of a dissertation in a compact and concise manner. Toby began work with the coach and assistant, explaining in some detail the goal of the dissertation. Their conversations also included job and career directions and paths. Toby, in one of their discussions, mentioned attending a recent lecture given by a well-known fiction novelist who spoke on some “tools of the trade” that were completely unrealistic for academic writing. The coach and the assistant both took note of the comments and devised a question composed of a hypothetical situation completely based the information from the lecture on fiction writing. Toby appealed and explained the conversation with the novelist concerned a work of fiction, which was so well written and included all of the common buzzwords and some half-factual information that someone not in the field would believe to be true. Toby was directed to answer the question as written. Once graded and evaluated, the question was graded as incorrect because the response was not relevant to the topic.

In each case, five of the rejected participants did not register complaints at the accredited for-profit institutions with the exception of two. The two, also rejected, did not attend accredited for-profit universities, which shows there are occasions the same situation occurs in the traditional university, but based on this sample, there are not as many occurrences. However, all of the complaints actually lacked substance. On first glance, it seemed the participants failed to register complaints on a higher level and

through proper channels. However, to understand fully what the participants referred to as unethical resulted in downloading the student manual students were given to comprehend the actual focus and design of the comprehensive examinations. The examination of the student manuals governing the comprehensive and dissertation process for the participants surveyed clearly outlined grievance procedures that in each case were not followed. In addition, the information was easily found on the university websites. The choice to do a cursive investigation at this point of the complaint process was noted for future reference as something requiring attention in a full quantitative research project.

In each case, the student manuals defined the dissertation process, which began at the comprehensive stage. The major focus of the comprehensives, as explained, concerned the ability to write academically rather than knowledge of materials studied in the coursework. In addition, although the APA format was a requirement in the coursework, instructors seemed lenient or lax in grading on the APA format, focusing instead on the essay content rather than the ability to communicate ideas and facts effectively, and to write on an academic level. Each student manual described the APA manual as published, but also added or changed formatting to a “university approved APA format.” Any student following the actual APA format rather than the “university approved” version was doomed to fail. Each manual explicitly expressed the importance of academic writing and the use of the APA format. Again, it implies students with grades passing the coursework should be able to pass the comprehensives, which was not always the case.

A cursory inspection of the situations between Jules, Kelly, and Jesse added one component not yet revealed. That was the function and choosing of a committee at the comprehensive phase. Again, examining the committee assignments from the accredited for-profit institutions at comprehensive levels was not always clear and is open to misinterpretation. Not all accredited for-profit institutions use a committee or coach for the comprehensives. However, in the original sample of 32 perspective participants, the assignment of a committee was used. Jules, Kelly, and Jesse all had issues with a comprehensive committee and felt the need for a clearer understanding on the issue. Jules was eliminated at this stage since the interview would offer more insight. As a result, an e-mail sent to Kelly and Jesse asking them for a little more information about the comprehensive issue revealed that both Kelly and Jesse, although different programs, were enrolled in an independent study program. The independent study meant they were following a course of study that could easily fit in multiple departments within the school of study or in the institution itself. This meant they could select courses they felt relevant to what would be a better fit for the positions they held in the business world, but were not offered as a study choice. The problem here, indicated from their responses, was that no committee member was familiar enough with the courses Kelly and Jesse selected and became ineffective in helping to design questions in evaluating their level of understanding on the topic. As Kelly described, getting “committee members I knew, knew me, and would help me get through the process” (personal communication with participant, 07,2015) was an important component in selecting people who understood the ultimate goal. The situation is one frequently experienced by some for-profit institutions having an independent study program.

Overall, the statistics revealed:

1. The ratio of males to females was even at 50%
2. 30% appealed the decision while 70% did not
3. 40% involved research questions
4. 30% involved the comprehensive process
5. 40% involved the topic content
6. 30% involved described committee assignments in the comprehensive examination phase
7. All sample participants, or 100% of the participants, did not even reach the stage of writing their dissertation
8. None of the participants attended the same accredited for-profit institution and 20% attended private universities

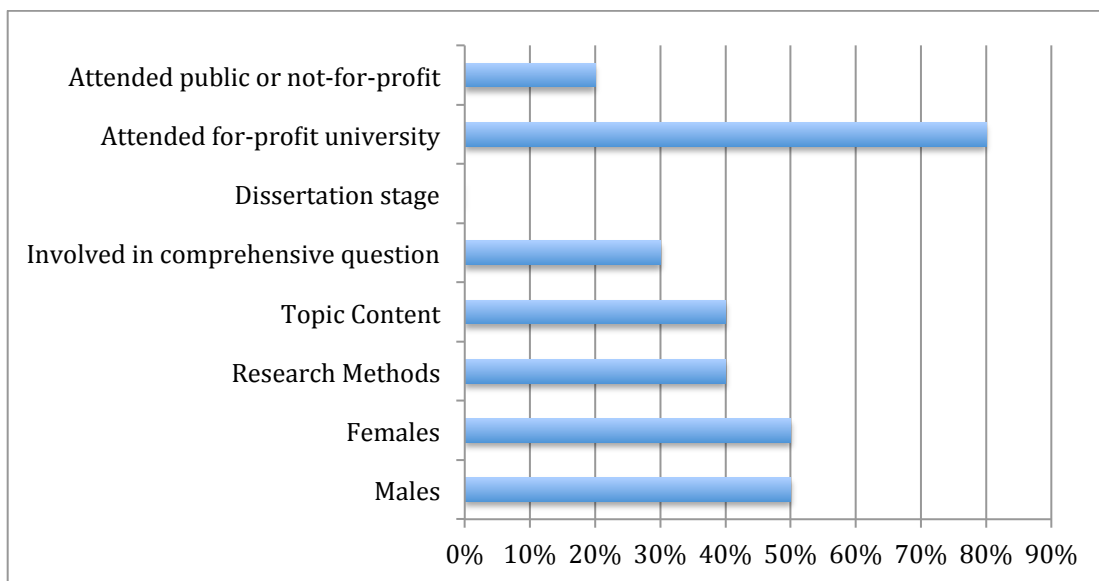


Figure 11: Participant Statistics from Study

Interview Results

I scheduled the three participant interviews in the same week in order to maintain momentum and continuity. The interviews were scheduled on a Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, early afternoon and after the participant's lunch. These interviews took place the third week of July 2015. At the completion of each interview, all relevant interviewer notes were recorded as field notes and the complete interview transcribed through transcription software called Transcription Scribe, which was purchased over the Internet. Garage Band recorded the complete interview. Then, Transcription Scribe, software designed to transcribe voice into text was used to transcribe the complete interview including the recorded field notes and saved it into a Word document. The original transcription included the complete interview as well as conversational tidbits between the interviewer and participants.

Saldana (2013) explains the many variations in coding qualitative studies. Initially, open coding, or In-Vivo coding, began the coding process because it was the best fit the description by breaking down the data into component parts and then dissecting and interpreting the meaning, by looking for differences and similarities. In addition, it is a good fit for small-scale research such as this qualitative study addresses (Saldana, 2013). In the In-Vivo, or open coding process, the discussion question is transcribed, then key phrases are underlined and noted. Once each participant's dialogue was coded, the questions were then combined, looking for the significant words and phrases trying to find the bigger picture.

In order to maintain the integrity of the interview exchange, a reviewer/editor also reviewed the transcription of the original interview, evaluated the aside conversations

with me, and determined their relevance. The reviewer's notes and the original transcription was compared by me and the reviewer/editor to maintain a validity check. The comparison of the transcriptions between us for each question asked of the participants validated the findings with the exception of a few grammatical errors.

Prior to the elimination of these non-relevant conversational asides, the specifics of the conversation and the relevance were examined in order to determine if the conversational exchange included leading or reactionary verbiage, which would negate the question. Once evaluated for content, the irrelevant asides ended up cut from the first iteration review; however, the original transcripts were kept intact and recorded in the Bento database for the added layer of privacy and security. The edited and verified conversations were then transcribed in the appropriate interview spreadsheet titled Interview 1, Interview 2, and Interview 3 and listing the question with the pared-down response without the irrelevant details clouding the raw response and emotion.

The next step was to read the edited response and identify repetitive and significant phrases. Since the interviews produced only audio recordings, the researcher took notes concerning the physical body language attributes such as posture, seating, eye movement, vocal tones, and inflection. The field notes taken followed the transcription of each interview tabulated on the spreadsheet under the heading of Field Notes. Unless the Field Notes produced findings of a significant nature, the findings may or may not be included as part of the second or third iteration as a separate category. The compiled interview transcriptions, included as Appendix J, were used to look for repetitive, significant, and commonly used terms, which would then be put into categories as depicted in the Appendix J.

Saldana (2012) process coding method was used to break down the initial interview into its component parts. However, the examples used in the text were considerably shorter than those resulting from the study. After several failed attempts to make comparisons as depicted by the Saldana coding manual, it soon became evident another format would have to be designed in order to find commonalities in each conversation. By adapting a format commonly used in brainstorming exercises, the compiled key phrases and words were printed, and then cut into segments. The initial layout was placed on a large table using the questions as rows and the responses as columns, so the pieces could be moved around, mixed, matched, and then grouped into categories. Initially, the layout on a table ended up being difficult to manipulate, and because of size, it was difficult to see the whole picture, so the entire study including the question layout was moved to a wall to get a better and wider overall perspective. Appendix K depicts the first iteration of phrases (sample available) that developed into the categories identified as:

1. Communication
2. Reactions / emotions
3. Understanding
4. Research
5. Stakeholders
6. Options

In addition, Appendix J contains the list of phrases placed into the categories. This was the first iteration list and incorporated the key phrases and descriptive verbs used by the participant.

The initial coding method as described in the Saldana coding manual, and the borrowing of the brainstorming method, presented an opportunity to see new perspectives and direction offered by the data. By cutting the data into strips and putting it on a wall in order to look at it straight on, the ability to see various ways of manipulating data in order to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanism at work both physically and emotionally became clear. The only problem encountered was the amount of time the examination and reflection took in order to be able to see the whole picture. However, the data not only presented a picture of the physical and emotional mechanisms at work behind the individuals, it also presented the toll it took on individual self-confidence and determination that is not seen or evident on first examination.

The second iteration meant taking the categories and again combining like terms and phrases, which condenses the content. According to Saldana (2012), this process is repeated until there are no more combinations available, leaving the researcher with questions and characteristics for further research. For example; under the category of emotions, the characteristics listed were:

1. Polite
2. Agitated
3. Kept cool
4. Cry
5. Beg
6. Say more
7. Rough
8. Sadness

9. Don't have what it takes
10. Revised goals
11. Feel like a failure
12. Lick my wounds
13. Not any good for me
14. Help someone else
15. Everything gone
16. Condescending

Under this heading alone, the following terms can be combined: lick my wounds, finished, everything gone, don't have what it takes, no hope, and listed as failure. In this case, it indicates the emotional jolt of having gone as far as a top degree and be denied in the end run. Appendix K indicates the reduced category list and the characteristics indicated. This reduced list, in accordance with Saldana's (2012) coding method, indicates the following path for determining the theory for a quantitative study:

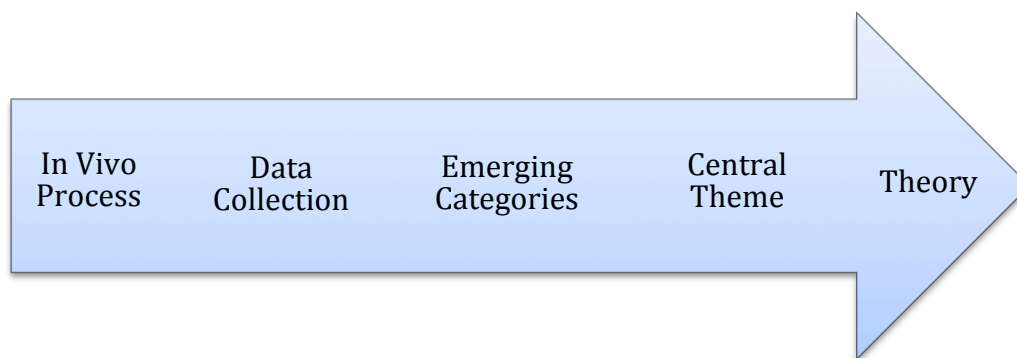


Figure 12: Saldana's Coding Method

Saldana (2012) calls this type model a “Classic Theoretical Development” where the researcher is looking for a theme or trend in what the data produces. In this case, the participant produces the data. Their responses are examined for commonalities in words, phrases, or trends and then combined under one category.

Saldana (2013) also indicated that the coding and evaluation of interview case studies should include:

1. Objectives – confrontational, motives – action verbs
2. Conflicts or the problem – disrespect, obstacles
3. Strategy tactics – accountability, honesty
4. Attitudes or the conflict – ironic, disbelief
5. Emotions – confused, frazzled – participant feelings
6. Unspoken thoughts– impressions

The three participants were not confrontational nor did they seem as if they were looking for some kind of recompense. They were looking for a reality validation for their emotional wounds. For such an earthshaking event, the participants seemed relieved in being able to discuss with openness, candor, and the ability to openly discuss their emotional scars without condescending remarks, as so often is the case. In many ways, the setting resembled a psychological counseling session, with the participant looking for some closure.

Each of the respondents for the study had some emotional conflict connected with their ability to complete the doctoral process. Each one identified obstacles openly and did not try to cover up any truths. In addition, not one of the respondents or participants looked to place blame on any one person, although that might have been anticipated.

Each, in their own way, felt some good came from their experience. One example: Sage, who had a great deal riding on conferment of the degree, seemed complacent with knowing her research had executed exactly as she designed. The individual spearheading the project (in this case, her boss) gave her due credit for the work she put into the project. Sage got a promotion, which was probably better than the degree itself.

Many of the respondents described an initial reaction of disbelief. They indicated through many nonverbal gestures like rolling of eyes, clasping hands, playing with hair, or picking at nails, the initial emotional impact as they recalled the result of their exams. Coming to the realization that a great deal of time, work, and money has gone into financing a degree that will never come to fruition is a difficult experience. Knowing you wrote the correct response to a question that faculty does not clearly comprehend is distressing, but not holding a grudge is even more amazing. For each of the respondents with the exception of one, none held any hard feelings toward the institution or individuals in the events that transpired. What seemed as an unusual implication was discussing the event in terms that seemed to have no physical or emotional impact and treating it as an everyday occurrence.

The impressions did not occur to me at first, and it was not until I listened a second time that I could detect the true emotional toll. Words and phrases the participants used to tell their story like “don’t have what it takes” or “everything is gone” tell the story and true feelings. For these participants, there will not be a return to the classroom for another try. The participants were successful students and knew their individual fields of study. The degree meant a confirmation to what they achieved in the working world. In time, some of the participants came to realize a degree from their

particular institution would not have yielded more money or recognition. As successful individuals, they came to realize the degree was only a symbol for something they already had. Jules told me after the conclusion of the interview, “I often wonder what would have happened if I went to a real school (personal communication with participant, 07, 2015).”

Further reduction and combination of the characteristics and categories as:

1. Research with the following characteristics: research methodologies, literature reviews, research strategy, validity
2. Concerns with the following characteristics: confidentiality, unwillingness for open communication on part of faculty and staff, financial burden, job loss, incorrect use of terminology/industry buzzwords, familiarity with content, credibility, deceit, lies, curriculum titles for study (Independent Study)
3. Options with no obvious or apparent recourse
4. Emotional impact with the following characteristics: don't have what it takes, failure, loss of self-esteem, fear, embarrassment, revised goals and direction

In this case, the information revealed the following:

1. The results indicated there is reason to believe the failure rate is higher from accredited for-profit universities than it is for not-for-profit or private universities however, there seems to be more to examine than the ability to pass or fail the initial comprehensive exams and the acceptance and writing of an approved dissertation. Information in the form of proposals coming from Senator

Alexander's office in Washington, DC, and confirmed conversations with the Senator's staff familiar with the new drafts concerning the findings of the Harkin Report confirmed the majority of complaints were from accredited for-profit universities, with small numbers coming from certificate schools, not-for-profit, and public institutions. However, the hidden question here puts the accredited for-profit institution in a precarious position. Should the institution change its instruction to yield a higher pass rate, then the institution then runs the risk of accusations of being a diploma mill.

The problem with the failure rates in the accredited for-profit institution is not attributed to the actual coursework, but in the ability to complete the degree requirements (Harkin, 2012; Lee, 2012). In many cases, instructors at these institutions are discouraged from failing students because of their inability perform academically or their inability to write on a college level (Harkin, 2012) For many of the accredited for-profit institutions, the program culminates with some kind of portfolio-based presentation of work. Students are asked to present a selection of their academic work, which is then evaluated by their achieved course grade and the adherence to the APA style (Accreditation, 2014). The unfortunate part is the APA format seems to vary not only by instructor, but also by what the institution considers nuances to the APA format by the institution (Middle States, 2014). Therefore, in essence, the APA standard might be accepted by an instructor who is looking for monetary reward by having the prescribed percentage of students pass the course, but not by the final degree review (Harkin, 2012; Middle States, 2014).

Through contact with Middle States Accrediting Agency, such questions were presented indicating the mechanism for evaluation of student complaints regarding the inability of the student to successfully navigate the comprehensive exam policy, the requirements for academic writing, and adherence to the prescribed APA standards (which are purely subjective and are written in the school policy submitted and approved by Middle States). As indicated by the referenced response, the policy and procedure put forth by an institution are used to determine the strength or weakness of the student complaint. In the majority of cases, the Agency indicated the student in its presentation of materials for evaluation and the clarity in the documentation are judged by the policies and procedures from the institution. Unfortunately, judging by the tone of the response, the student should have not achieved that particular level of academia. The “diploma mill” accusations can only be made in the cases of institutions not meeting the criteria for accreditation by one of the approved accrediting boards. This does not say that there are institutions that tout accreditation by privately held accrediting boards that have been formed and established for the sole purpose of accrediting that institution. The Department of Education works diligently to close any institution found to award diplomas indiscriminately. As, for example, in 2008, the president of Northcentral University of Colorado was indicted and later found guilty of laundering diplomas through a bogus university in Hawaii selling diplomas to students in the former state of Soviet Georgia (Federal Department of Education, 2008)

2. Confrontations in the face-to-face meetings pose the question: Did the individuals, both students and faculty, understand the terminology used? There were enough data available through this phase of the study to qualify an educated guess. With the participants not interviewed, the information they detailed in the pre-interview questions leads one to believe there was not a clear understanding of the scope of the mechanism at work. In the cases of the comprehensive exams, the assignment of instructors unfamiliar with the participants and their particular focus of research indicated an unfamiliarity of the topic and scope of work. The comprehensives in many of the accredited for-profit schools rests on the specific focus, or the school in which the participant was enrolled. For example, Jesse described a situation where the questions were not clear. As Jesse described in the full communication, Jesse thought the professor understood what “Sigma Six” kind of learning produced and what it meant to a company or corporation. Jesse, an independent study student in the School of Business, ended up with a chair whose focus was business communications rather than a training or knowledge management background. As a result, the chair had no clear idea how to formulate questions pertinent to Sigma Six training. Instead, the training took on a more military flavor. Occurrences such as this, according to the Harkin Report, is not uncommon since the majority of instructors or adjuncts are part-time faculty and not always familiar with industry training. In addition, when contacted, the Higher Education Council of the North Central Accrediting Agency verified via telephone that any student enrolled in an independent study program can be assigned faculty members who do not have the same focus or understanding as

the student as long as they teach courses within the department. Thus, Jesse's complaint concerning his particular research study and the failure of understanding from faculty assigned to serve as committee members

3. Also verified by the Higher Education Council: For-profit institutions in general do not have to afford students a mechanism for contact other than e-mail. It is up to the instructor of the course to determine if contact should be made. Again, this is because the majority of for-profit institutions operating as online schools do not support more direct means of contact other than e-mail afforded to faculty, especially part-time faculty
4. It is obvious any conversation regarding failure rate causes serious emotions for participants. Even though several years have transpired since these events took place, the emotional impact is still high. For some the loss of a job was critical enough, but the fact that there were no options left for such individuals is even more serious. For the majority of the participants, concern also focused on paying student loans for no education. This is a big concern evident in the Harkin Report since the funds are federal funds stemming from taxpayer dollars. As a result, this increases the stakeholder pool considerably. In addition, the Harkin Report clearly defines that the expenditure of the financial aid went to promoting and advertising the institution, thus increasing profit margins and bonuses at the end of the year to top corporate management
5. Unfortunately, the student has very few options. Upon dismissal from the institution, the student can enroll again under a new focus, or start again at another institution and hope the new institution accepts at least some of the

coursework credit. The problem here is explained in Appendix J; findings show the majority of students enrolled in the accredited for-profit institution are looking for coursework requiring the least amount of reading and written papers that do not exceed 20 pages per course. For some institutions, this means not really having to purchase a book in order to pass a course

Finally, in evaluating the plethora of information gleaned from this research project, key deductions may be made. According to the findings from the pre-interview and the case studies:

1. There is reason to believe significant differences exist in the quality of education between accredited for-profit and the accredited not-for-profit institutions
2. The majority of students have to make some kind of decisions hedging on ethics or morality but not clearly defined. However, the information they were led to believe was false and misleading, severely influencing the credibility and worth of a degree from that institution. From nonverbal communication, it is clear that participants believed they had to make some kind of decision bordering on morality and ethics. The word *cheat* is an obvious indicator; however, nonverbal descriptions surrounding failure and embarrassment indicated some other meaning or interpretation
3. The federal government has and is in the process of taking action to correct measures and protect future students, their families, and the taxpayers from fraudulent actions pursuant to accredited for-profit schools

4. Education in this country has declined severely due to immoral and unethical business tactics controlling the educational institutions, moving learning far from what it is meant to be
5. The system of accreditation requires adjustments to regulate corporate controllers of education, and bring back the importance of educating, not just granting degrees

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings: Reflection and Thoughts

Dealing with academics here in this country, one might not notice as much of a difference in educational formats or tactics among institutions. However, on an international level, there are significant differences and ones not to be taken for granted. Universities around the globe have taken some serious and aggressive steps in education (CAPLAR, 2014). Education means serious understanding of the many facets of research and how it influences several disciplines (RPL, 2013). As part of the Canadian Adult Prior Learning Association for Research (CAPLAR) or the Research Prior Learning (RPL), a distinct segment of researchers took on the task of cataloging current research in education. One of the findings this group realized early on is that a research topic affecting something as simple as education stretches across the disciplines of education and psychology to engineering and chemistry (RPL, 2012). Today's learning, especially throughout the international community, is not limited to one genre. To be an effective researcher today means to look in every nook and cranny for information that may have an overall effect on the outcome of a study (Flynn, 2013).

Attending meetings and seminars nationwide and talking with all levels of academics made me wonder about their experiences attaining their degrees. I was told that people with a PhD only put up with my questions to be kind and not hurt my feelings. Maybe that was true, but how was I going to learn unless I asked questions? At CAEL conferences, I was able to share enlightening talks with some of my peers and found the comment made to me was in error. My peers were more than willing to share and advise. Most of all, they were willing to help and encourage me through my many

school experiences. One conversation in particular was with Dr. David Kolb. We talked about the way adults learn and how experiential learning influences the way and what adults learn. In the short time we had to exchange information, he shared how difficult it sometimes was for adults to attain a PhD because experience in the workplace influenced their thinking, as opposed to the thinking of what he called the pure academic (personal communication, 2012). In the back of my mind, I wondered what the differences were and why they existed. From a business point of view, I could understand how the successful businessperson struggled through traditional courses until the onslaught of the online class, or the for-profit schools, although I did not fully comprehend the difference. Here, the successful businessperson could succeed because like thoughts predominated; and that included the amoral business practices of many large corporations and especially the ones owning the institutions now offering degree programs.

Meeting Dr. Kolb a second time, and again sharing some thoughts, he suggested I do some “off-handed investigative questioning” about the morality and the struggles the non-businessperson experienced (personal communication, 2012). Thus, the birth of an idea that eventually came to fruition. From a former student’s perspective as well as an adjunct in accredited for-profit schools, I learned firsthand how the system worked. By offering the instructors bonuses for each student successfully navigating through a course, many instructors lowered the standard to get the bonus. Speaking with another instructor from an accredited for-profit institution I met at a workshop, we chatted about the way students were treated, and she shared this exchange:

“The majority of students in my introductory computer course has to be spoon-fed every piece of information. As if that isn’t enough, I am constantly resetting the

test bank so students can retake the test three and four times. When I said that I spent a great deal of time resetting the quiz at our monthly meeting, I was encouraged to share the correct answers before a quiz or exam in the weekly discussions by my unit director. Plagiarism runs rampant, and I was told plagiarism is not a reason to fail a student on their work. Instead, I have to praise students were for knowing where to find the correct answer. The do not even try to hide it; they do a copy and paste directly from the website with all the formatting and colors. I really feel like I am teaching kindergarten instead of a college course. I cannot cope with the practices anymore knowing the end result would be a bigger disappointment for these people.”

Students in two institutions that were eventually brought up on charges by the Department of Education hardly needed a book in order to pass the courses. A participant eliminated in the middle of the filtering shared an experience:

“I signed up for a statistics course but it was nothing more than tutorial lesson in using SPSS. After I got going in the course, I realized the course was nothing more than an extended version similar to the tutorials offered in the textbook. But I was an interested and serious student, you know, the kind that will read the books and do the assignments instead of ‘faking it.’”

Instruction in another school offered courses that were truly informative and educational, offering a defined blueprint for serious learning (Bloodgood, 2010). However, the question still plagued me regarding the administration amoral practices advertised as real and effective learning. From the discussion with one of the

participants, the following depicted the initial experience (personal communication with participant, 07, 2015):

“In my first weeks attending Backward institution, I stated I was unsure if this was the right place for me questioning the values I saw taking shape. Most of my cohort just got quiet after voicing my opinion, but another vocal attendee told me clearly to ‘shut up’ and not ruin the positive feeling the rest of the class felt. My response: What may be wrong for me does not mean the same for you.

Unfortunately, I was correct in my assumption. Upon completion of the program, out of the 22 members of the cohort, only 10 completed the degree, seven were dropped for not being able to write academically, five did not pass the comprehensives. Of the ten completing the degree, none of them progressed to the next level in their positions and one even lost her job with the State Department of Education because of institutional credibility. So, why bother?”

Summary of Findings

The case study research method provided enough information for further study concerning the plight of doctoral students fighting against the amoral and presently condoned activities of corporate founded schools (Yin, 2010). In addition, the Harkin Report and its documented findings resulted in the initial presentation of a bill introduced into the 114th Congressional Session known as H.R. 1287 for educational change giving precedence to the cost of education, its impact on taxpayers, as well as the need for educational reform in accrediting institutions.

What is important is that the study substantiated the claim that doctoral students do make decisions, and these decisions are based on their moral and ethical foundational

beliefs. These decisions, obvious or not, are made in accordance with Kohlberg's Moral Foundation Theory, specifically the third level and second stage as adults and able to understand right from wrong, comprehend the ramifications of their decisions, and made on the basis of the society in which they live Kohlberg, . In today's society, attending an accredited for-profit institution means the individual is agreeing to the moral and ethical mission of the institution by accepting its standard as a PhD graduate.

Yin's (2010) research design for a simple case study describes five characteristics being:

1. Tests for a single set of goals with the expectation to be true
2. The case is unique
3. Intends to capture an account of circumstances and / or conditions
4. Examines firsthand and is not dependent on assumptions or interpretations
5. The situation exists at sites, in this case universities

The selection of participants involved in this study tested for a four-prong component being:

1. The participant be a nontraditional student having family and job responsibilities
2. Completed all relevant doctoral coursework towards a PhD doctoral degree
3. Attended an accredited for-profit institution mentioned as noncompliant in the Harkin Report
4. Make a moral or ethical decision concerning the completion of their degree

The single set of goals this study addresses is whether or not PhD doctoral nontraditional students, with job and family responsibilities and at the end of their coursework at an accredited for-profit institution, have to make moral or ethical decisions in pursuit of their degree. The nontraditional student convinced by the advertising campaigns of the for-profit institutions spends countless dollars feeling confident their decision is in their best interest, and often finds their best interest was not served. Instead, the nontraditional student feels inwardly embarrassed and emotionally spent in this decision in finding the means does not justify the end. Rather, there are times these nontraditional students find they are no better off than before and their career advancement prospects are no better than before.

Yin states the case for study must be unique in that the findings are limited to a specific instance. The case of the nontraditional student attending an accredited for-profit institution that is listed as having committed offenses in noncompliance with the Higher Education Act of 1965 as revised, with the student having to make a moral or ethical decision, has been established and warrants further investigation as to the purpose, the source, and the reasoning behind such decisions. Findings by the Harkin Report confirm the fact 30 institutions of higher education have falsified completion reports, indicating the success rates are as high as 85% when, in fact, they are not. The uniqueness is limited to the PhD doctoral student attending the accredited for-profit institution. This does not mean the case is not applicable to all institutions offering doctoral level degrees; however, the number of documented complaints concerning all level students investigated by the Department of Education under the direction of the Congressional Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) has been established and

confirmed by the Government Accountability Office. Personal interest in this research topic and in investigating the quality of education in this country rests on the knowledge the US is no longer a world leader in education. Consequently, US schools are slipping down the scale to the point where some third world countries are producing students of higher quality.

Through the interview and pre-interview questions, the research captured firsthand accounts of instances where participants felt they had to make moral or ethical decisions. Kohlberg, thus resulting in personal conflict and emotional turmoil, made the decisions the participants described contrary to their moral foundation as detailed in the final stage of Moral Development. Based on the firsthand accounts made by participants, there is little difference between the male and female perspectives of the situations. Kohlberg does not differentiate between male and female development; however, the studies done by Kohlberg were based on male input and not on any female interaction. Society at the point where Kohlberg conducted his studies, some 60 years ago, viewed male and female roles differently than it does today. Males were clearly the breadwinners of the family unit and the role of the female was to marry and keep the home constant and steady as both wife and mother. Today, females work together with their male counterparts in the home as well as industry. This means the morality as defined in terms of today's society is the same for both the male and female.

Unfortunately, according to study results made by a Council of Graduate Schools' research project, students attending and passing the PhD programs in 28 selected institutions in Canada and the US saw a 56% pass rate, but the pass rate for females was about 20% less than the male counterpart.

Support and documentation for further study is not based on the interviews alone, but the combined responses stemming from the interviews and participant responses from those not interviewed. Some responses from the participants not interviewed required clarification which was done through e-mail. Based on the detailed explanations received determined the qualification for participant interview. The expectation, therefore, is the results from a full-blown study would yield the same or similar results, thus following Yin's argument for case study research.

Based on the following information gleaned from the interviews and pre-interview participants, there is enough information to expand the research to include doctoral candidates from all accredited for-profit institutions regardless of the complaints registered. Enough information from supporting research concerning fail rates of doctoral candidates suggests that the research should be expanded to include all other institutions offering doctoral programs for comparison. The Council of Graduate Schools compiled documentation concerning the comprehensive phase of the doctoral program. Their conclusions gave insight into some of the questions concerning what the interview participants experienced and pre-interview participants voiced in their responses:

1. The comprehensive phases of doctoral degree programs are so complicated many faculty advisors and mentors have difficulty in grasping the full magnitude of the process. The unfortunate part is there is no way to determine if the faculty designing the comprehensive examination questions were clear on the question formation or if they, too, had some doubts concerning the correct handling of good question design. Based on the statements made by the participants, there may have been reasons the student

advocate remained silent during the hearings. The lack of input from the department heads might be attributed to their lack of understanding as well. The only way to determine the impact the comprehensive phase has both on students and on faculty involved as mentors and committee is to conduct a study concerning the comprehensive examinations. According to the Middle States Accrediting Agency, there is no one standard or guiding documentation concerning the actual design and conduct of comprehensive examinations for doctoral students. Based on a cursory examination of the student manuals from participant institutions, the comprehensive mechanism is unclear, vague, and difficult to understand. The best description is that the comprehensive exam is given in order to determine the qualification of doctoral students. Unfortunately, many of the terms used tend to convolute and skew comprehension. Comprehension of the exam process may be misunderstood for the faculty as well as the student

2. The commonality Yin talks about in making the case for a case study research relates the commonality concerning the comprehensive exams. The interviewees and the pre-interview respondents all (with the exception of one individual) indicated the problem existed with the comprehensive exams and navigating through the process of designing the exam question. The problem compounds itself since no two institutions use the same format for the exam process. Thus, students having associates in other institutions do not have the luxury of comparing ideologies. The formal understanding of the comprehensive exam is to determine student competency in a particular field

of knowledge. The exam format may be written, oral, or a combination of both depending on the institution. Using a general search engine, I looked for the purpose of the comprehensive exams to get a general idea concerning the exams. Each example described a different composition from specific examination of a field of study to a bank of questions, including research methods and research designs, which may or may not be familiar to the student. The information posted ranged from one-page description to a ten-page document describing the content and methods of responding to the questions. To compound the problem, committee members and faculty—although themselves academics may—not be familiar with good test question design. In specific terms, the item, or question for uniformity, requires use of clear, precise terms delineating the specific information requested and freedom from bias. This means, the design and language used in the question cannot be vague or open to interpretation. The unfortunate part is by the time the student sees the question, there is no time for clarification. At an assessment conference held in Princeton, New Jersey, about five years ago, a question containing the word *candy* was used. Attendees from England stated the question would be clearer if the term *sweets* be substituted for *candy*. Therefore, bias-free language is an important factor, especially when designing questions for such a critical component of the doctoral process

3. Carnegie Mellon Research Institute identifies two types of doctoral degrees: philosophical and practitioner. At times, the delineation between the two is indistinguishable and often misunderstood. A person of limited understanding

of the doctoral degree delineation is not familiar with the verbiage and may identify one degree as higher than another. Regardless, both the practitioner and the philosopher are expected to contribute to the body of knowledge through the amount of research or papers in terms of literature reviews and ultimately hypothetical foundations. This understanding may not be clear and may be misconstrued by both the student and the faculty committee

Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1: Are there ethical decisions the nontraditional doctoral student has to make in pursuit of their degree?

There are many decisions the participants made attempting to reach their PhD goal. However, the decisions are not always as obvious as a yes or no, especially in response to this question. The three case studies and the seven who participated in the pre-interview indicated simply by their actions that they made a decision whether aware or not. For example, Jules, looking to further his complex military career, was intent on passing the comprehensives, which he thought he understood but in actuality did not. The communication between the department head and Jules was their only phone conversation and unfortunately no record of the response is possible to prove or disprove the conversation and resulting off-the-record comments. The response “ask someone” indicated that cheating was condoned. Although it may not have been obvious to Jules at the time, he made the decision to work his way through alone. Sage, also intent on writing an acceptable qualitative research project, asked her boss for advice, and asked someone else to read a manual for answers to her questions to insure she was not missing something. Her decision came in not changing her hypothesis to something else but

standing her ground rather than acquiesce. The change probably would have made the journey easier; however, she stood her ground rather than to change to a possibly defective hypothesis, making her look less than competent to her fellow workers. A noble gesture it was, but it did not solve the problem. Toby questioned the knowledge base of the professor coach and told he was “ultimately bound to fail.” Granted, no instructor wants to hear they are less than qualified for a task, but there was another resolution for the issue, I am sure. The decisions were not what the participants wanted to hear, leading to major disappointments. The question here is whether a student facing comprehensive exams is willing to make sacrifices in order to make the grade.

Additionally, a wise man giving advice on a personally undesirable situation said to do what was asked, and then later do what you want. At the time, I wondered about the soundness of the advice. Knowing now what I did not realize then, it just may have been a test.

In each of these cases, the participants made their decisions early in their doctoral qualification process. However, many others made similar decisions later. Documented responses listed in the original Harkin Report substantiated similar reports coming much later in the dissertation process. The Harkin Report’s substantiation came in the form of exposing amoral practices such as untruths regarding the pass/fail rates of other students at the same level of education. Looking at the responses from the pre-interview questions, those that attended accredited for-profit institutions had similar concerns. However, the focus of the participants concerns centered on the unfamiliarity of project content rather than methodology. The documentation in student manuals for each of these institutions concerning available faculty and those who can serve on committees is

vague. The student manuals for doctoral dissertation in each of the institutions the pre-interview and interviewed participants attended were easily found. Calls to the Higher Education Accrediting Commission validated that the institutions have the right to assign committee members to students, providing the faculty is in the same school as the student. Although the Commission was reluctant to comment on the credibility of the assigned faculty, it was not difficult to determine a significant number of faculty were adjunct with significantly little in the way of published academic writing and credible credentials. Thus, when Toby talked about the topic of Computer Forensics and enrolled in an Independent Study Program in the School of Business, the chances of getting faculty who were, in fact, familiar with the subject were minimal. According to the Commission, any Business faculty could serve on his committee and as an advisor for his comprehensive exams. Checking the student manuals at named institutions, the types of questions could range from broad research methods based questions to ones specific and focused on a topic. Depending on the institution, the question wording may vary, but not significantly. In general, the types of questions showed as examples were not significantly different from those in an intensive research methodology course.

Research Question 2: What is the rationale behind the decision students make?

For the participants in the case study there were no options left other than reporting the institution to the Department of Education. Unfortunately, the Accrediting Agency sided with the institution because the approved manuals were vague and open to interpretation. Based on the mission and the structure of the institution, the language in the manuals is intended to be vague and open to interpretation for a reason; not significantly different from comparable corporate documents. From a business

standpoint, unless terminology is expressly written, the terminology cannot be judged on intent or meaning. Again, as part of conversation with an evaluator at Middle States, the intent and implication of the manuals were clearly vague and not intended to be on the side of the student. The Harkin Report also cited various instances where students complained to no avail. Toby was most vocal in stating the conversation with the student advocate did nothing. In fact, the advocate just sat there, contributing nothing, including any type of rectification or resolution to the conflict. The competency of the student advocate in dealing with the situation is in question, and there is no way of telling how many student complaints the advocate successfully and fairly handled.

The actual responses indicated all participant attempts to communicate their problems and rectify their situations by remaining calm and proposing alternatives. In each case, the participants were prepared for the resulting conversation. In prior conversations with individuals having similar experiences, one former student stated it was like preparing for an English exam and getting a chemistry exam instead. Sage stated in her response that everything was at an end so there was no decision to make. In an attempt to get real numbers concerning the actual count of complaints reported in the Harkin Report, specific to graduate level students, the contact in Senator Alexander's office was unable to identify the Harkin Report as the prerequisite for the bill amending Title VI of 1965. At this time, it is unclear if the information is considered confidential or if the contacted press secretary was unfamiliar with the whereabouts and the contents of the Harkin Report or Senator Alexander's HELP Committee Bill.

Verification through the Harkin Report also used examples of students facing similar situations but not necessarily pursuing a doctoral degree. According to the Harkin

Report, there were several hundred complaints about faculty being unable to respond to student questions because of unfamiliarity with the topic. The information was detailed in the section of the report reviewing faculty qualifications stating many of the faculty were not qualified to teach sections of course content. The report stated the majority of faculty were adjunct or part time. In some cases, adjuncts comprised 90% of the faculty, with only department leaders contributing to the 10% of actual full-time faculty but not involved in actual course instruction.

Research Question 3: What factors did the nontraditional student take into account before making these decisions?

For the three case studies and the seven pre-interview participants, nothing had to be taken into account concerning their decision to leave the program. The decisions were made for them. With the exception of two pre-interview participants, there was no appeal. Through e-mail questioning their decision not to appeal, the participants indicated they were aware from other sources and third party comments that the appeal would not be made in their favor with nothing substantiating the institutional claim. Sage stated there was nothing that could be done and did not have what it took to do it again. This seems to be the rule rather than the exception. From questioning senior faculty and academia administrative members, individuals not making the grade the first time did not return for another try regardless of the university. The requirements for a doctoral degree at accredited not-for-profit, private, or state institutions are so rigorous, the fail rate is rather high, and this included Liberty University.

A report, *PhD Completion Project*, by the Council of Graduate Schools in Canada and funded by Pfizer, Inc. and the Ford Foundation, examined the problem of doctoral

student attrition rates in 29 major US and Canadian institutions and 26 of their affiliates. The first of the seven-year study appeared in 2008 and was published twice more with the final report surfacing in 2010.

The report, most recently updated in 2012, stated the reasons for the high rate of PhD doctoral candidate failures is the rigors students face. According to the report, only 56% of students completing coursework actually make it to the end. This 56% success rate remained constant throughout the study, with proponents of the study convinced the number remains steady today. The report attributed the failure to complete financial burden, the amount of advising or mentors assisting the student, and family support. According to exit surveys, 80% felt the financial burden was too much to continue and prospects of career or employability not to increase significantly. Another 65% felt institutional support was not equal to the task of assisting the student, with sound advice lacking and faulty expectations about degree requirements. Another 57% stated although the family was initially behind the degree pursuit, the ten years it took to complete the degree was more than the family was willing to support. The majority of students, who were first in their family to attempt the degree, saw family support waning around the five-year mark, with little support toward the end of the road. In the majority of cases, there were no distinguishable numbers for women; however, women who were the first in the family to work toward a PhD experienced an additional 20% decrease in completion.

The Council of Graduate Schools also reported the expectations placed on students today makes the process extremely difficult. Success is viewed as a direct correlation to intelligence and the ability to think critically. The biggest factor for the successful student is the stamina it takes to complete the coursework and the

comprehensive exams. In addition, the student must be self-disciplined in accomplishing the amount of study and research necessary to complete the entire program, which includes the comprehensive exams with little of what they described as “adequate advising,” since the majority of advisors have not completed their own doctoral programs. Therefore, mentorship is an important factor contributing in some degree to the successful student.

The Council, as part of the findings, feels the comprehensive exam is the least understood component of the doctoral program. In many cases, the Council reported seeing examples of complicated procedures even for the most experienced of faculty and mentors. Complicating matters is the fact the comprehensive phase significantly differs from institution to institution.

According to Carnegie Mellon University (2010), proponents in higher education research want to see reform by creating a set of standards concerning doctoral degrees. This reform comes on the heels of reports concerning the number of accredited for-profit institutions turning out doctoral degrees to individuals not qualified to hold the degrees. In addition, Carnegie Mellon also proposed clear directives differentiating between philosophical degrees such as the PhD and practitioner degrees such as a Doctor of Education, and the frequency of the publication of research papers. Carnegie Mellon University in its research cited the number of philosophical degrees granted and no publications following the degree granting. Many academic institutions require full-time (tenured) faculty produce a predetermined number of research papers on a regular basis. This insures the faculty member is keeping current with research trends.

The problem is the majority of institutions refrain from discussing pass rates as a statistic, since granting of a degree is individualistic in nature and dependent on a number of factors including how well the student is able to defend the findings from their study. In addition, the amount of research published on a particular topic makes it difficult enough to keep current within the scope of reporting findings; it is hard to research new and pending information relevant to the doctoral thesis published worldwide.

Conclusion: Educational Reform

The Harkin Report sounded the alarm for drastic reform in the way higher education institutions are accredited. The report cited some 30 institutions guilty of various levels of improprieties concerning the enrollment, curriculum designs, and amoral business activities of accredited for-profit institutions. This case study research resulted from personal experience and testimony of peer participants who contributed to the development of this study; however, the findings of the Harkin Report did substantiate experiences many students attending accredited for-profit institutions. Of the initial 37 participants expressing interest and contacted for participation in this project, only ten initially qualified as doctoral students faced with making moral or ethical decisions concerning their education and ultimately failed to make the grade. Their failure resulted from methods of communication, and unfamiliarity of subject matter resulting from unfamiliarity of adjunct or part-time faculty employed in the accredited for-profit institutions.

According to reports, accredited for-profit institutions have taken on the corporate structure based on amoral business ethics. For some institutions, these amoral business ethics include enrolling students no matter what the cost (Harkin, 2012). The proposals

the HELP (Committee for Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions) Committee under the direction of Senator Alexander is drafting will not only address the above-mentioned concerns but also will streamline and modernize both the federal financial aid and accrediting system. The expectation is Senator Alexander and the HELP Committee's recommendations be accepted almost as written; the revisions will be drastic and influence the entire educational system.

As part of the reforms put forth by the federal government, and as a direct result of the Harkin Report, Senator Alexander and the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions developed a proposal to improve higher education and reduce the amount of federal involvement. The Committee acknowledges the fact that education, especially higher education, requires reform since students and graduates are not able to communicate efficiently and lack the critical thinking skills necessary for today's working environment. As summarized in Appendix K, radical changes considered for the Higher Education Act of 1965 include (Alexander, 2015):

1. Institutions will also be held accountable for federal aid granted to students failing higher education institutions and who are not prepared for the rigors of higher education
2. Initiate redesign of current method of accrediting
3. Make available data, in the form of a database of institutional information, a true record enabling students to make informed decisions regarding attendance

Another recommendation the HELP Committee proposed concerns the federal student loan program. This proposal directed at institutions accepting federal student aid

looks to reduce the loan rate and increase institution retention. By increasing the retention rate, this proposal seeks to make institutions more accountable. Currently in place is the 9010 Rule, which applies to the accredited for-profit institution directly (Harkin, 2012; Bruhn, 2008). This rule states that at least 10% of enrolled students must not be receiving federal assistance in order to pay their tuition (Carey, 2012). In other words, at least 10% of the students are responsible for paying their tuition. This proposal insures the institution shares the risk of student retention by accepting those students able to accept the rigors of college-level learning (Alexander, 2015).

The next proposed change concerns the amoral activities of accredited for-profit institutions and their student success rate (Lee, 2012). Evidence of misrepresentation documented by undercover agents posing as admissions agents in a number of accredited for-profit institutions provided proof that students were given false information regarding success rates in placing graduates in given professions (Carey, 2012), as well as inflated graduation rates, led to the information summarized from the original in Appendix L concerning the award of federal aid for education. The 17-page document outlined the reason institutions must supply clear and accurate information concerning:

1. Federal role in higher education
2. Identification and reason behind data collection concerning higher education institutions
3. The reason for providing information for students considering attending these institutions

In addition to the above-proposed changes, the HELP Committee proposes a policy of transparency that makes it mandatory that institutions of higher education

present concise, honest, and easy to understand information for potential students. This includes ending the policy of strong-arm tactics for enrollment, the hard sell, and most of all, must outline the rigors of college-level learning (Harkin, 2012; Alexander, 2015). This proposal from Senator Alexander and the HELP Committee, as summarized in Appendix M, reports statistics available today concerning the 6,000 higher education institutions that have 60% of undergraduates and 40% of the graduate student populations receiving federal student aid. These statistics target, in general, the accredited for-profit institutions identified in the Harkin Report and the reasons behind the proposed changes.

In an attempt to get some clarification regarding the above-mentioned proposals, contact was made with Senator Alexander's office. The first two people answering the call soon identified the call as belonging to either the Congressional Office in Washington or the HELP desk. For each person I talked with, the person's name and contact number was recorded in the event of a disconnection. This information was confidential. The last contact failed to understand the published Harkin Report or the resulting congressional bill and proposed changes to Title IV Educational Reform of 1965.

The biggest and by far most important of the proposed changes concerns the Higher Education Accrediting Process. The goal of the proposed changes is to improve the quality of education and raise the student success rate. Because of its importance to the findings of the study, Appendix N contains the concepts and proposal in total (Alexander, 2015).

Although this study targeted decisions doctoral students might have to make, findings show the decisions are contingent on the understanding of the industry-standard

terminology; the participants showed familiarity but felt the faculty had no clear understanding of the terminology. In addition, participants both interviewed and those responding only to pre-interview questions indicated that the quality of learning was not sufficient to master topics as academic writing and research methods. Other problems identified and mentioned as concerns in the proposed changes were:

1. Students showed no significant learning in both the two and four-year colleges. In addition, our graduating students lack basic competency skills in reading, writing, and mathematics
2. Education is change-resistant. Many teaching professors insist on teaching with the tried-and-true methods existing for centuries. This means professors standing in the front of classrooms transmitting learning via lecture. This method, especially today, is not effective with traditional students who lack work environment learning like their nontraditional counterparts. Many students today are aware of and taking advantage of open education initiatives offered by Open Education, Coursera, and MIT, to mention a few. These courses target specific areas of information in which the student is most interested. The problem is the lack of assessment methods to not only certify the courses as college-level learning but to insure the learning objectives match those of the institutions students are attending
3. The accrediting agency for the majority of the for-profit institutions are not geographic bound, but are based on like educational standards. In many cases, these educational standards do not equate land-based institution, offering courses that are at times far below the resident state educational standards. Thus, some

schools are held to higher standards than others. In addition, some institutions undergo the accrediting process more often than others. The intended change is to the method of accrediting, not to corrupt standards but to create a more equal method of comparing like institutions. This comparison may be made by mission or by the number of degree levels

Effectively addressing the problems mentioned above, proposals include:

1. Repealing unrelated accreditation-related regulations that are not directly related to educational quality and improvement
2. Making allowances for flexibility and innovative mechanisms, to allow institutions with goals and a proven track record an expedited process, allowing more detailed information to those institutions that need the additional attention
3. Establishing of a base or minimum for accreditation
4. Separating the association with institutional links to federal aid programs. Not all institutions currently do this, which would separate institutional interest from federal monies

The problem of accrediting is in a large part responsible for the situations doctoral students find themselves, although not all problems the doctoral participants in this study encountered. It is evident that a significant number of doctoral students have encountered such problems, or the proposed changes in the accrediting process would not be a key concern for Senator Alexander and the HELP Committee. The reason the proposals are in part mentioned is that they lend credibility to the result of this research project and bring to light even more issues of concern than initially realized.

Proponents of the educational reform seem to focus on the high cost of education, specifically the amount of debt incurred by students attending accredited for-profit institutions (Alexander, 2015). According to recent publications (Statistics, 2012), the cost incurred by a baccalaureate graduate exceeds \$25,000. In addition, graduates are not able to pay their student loans because they are not able to secure positions in their given professions. In fact, graduates return home and live with parents for at least another two years before they can actually afford to live on their own (Statistics, 2012).

March 4, 2015, a bill was introduced to Congress concerning education reform. Again, the focus was on funding and federal financial aid (Alexander, 2015). Unfortunately, the attempt to specifically reform the accrediting process met with resistance (Alexander, 2015) (Bueschell, 2008). Just as the Department of Education in its inception defaulted control to individual states, revisions to Bill H.R. 1287 allow individual states to design their own alternative accrediting system for higher educational institutions (Alexander, 2015). This system of alternative accrediting is state centered, which allows for the transfer of credits between state-run institutions, and does not necessarily apply to institutions beyond state borders (Alexander, 2015). However, contained in the language is a method of reporting the number of successful students not only obtaining the degree or certificate but also who have been placed successfully in related job positions .

Opponents of the bill as it stands now are concerned since it takes the review process from a peer review to something that may end up in the hands of community leaders more interested in a political venue rather than educational reform—a polite way of saying it would become a political football. Academia is no longer accountable for the

curriculum and educational standards. As it stands now, education, already a political issue, has deteriorated significantly, resulting in the loss of the United States' leader status in education worldwide (Gerhard, 2001; Hoy, et al, 2012).

Implications for Stakeholders

The non-traditional student pursuing their doctoral degree from an accredited for-profit institution, are the primary stakeholders. The research indicated students have the most to loose in selecting the wrong institution for further education (Cartland, 2008). If the student fails to complete their education, the students are liable for all federal aid. In many cases, the accredited, for-profit institutions are guilty of falsifying information given to potential students at all levels and not only those pursuing doctoral degrees (Harkin, 2012). According to the Harkin Report, the majority of students entering into doctoral programs at accredited for-profit institutions are told of high completion rates although the information is not clear at what phase of the degree process is identified. In addition, the Data shows the actual success rate of doctoral students across the board is much lower (University Consortium, 2010)

Faculty are also unwilling victims. Often, faculty advises students, again at all levels of education, in what they believe to be true and what may not actually be the case. Institutions often implement changes affecting both students and faculty without thoroughly understanding the ramifications for both the student or faculty (Cartland, 2008). The student not fully comprehending the mechanics of change often attack the faculty and place blame at their feet before fully identifying the actual source. From all indications according to the Harkin Report, faculty are the least informed of the actual comprehensive and dissertation process. Department heads and administrative staff are

often unable to satisfactorily explain reason for change for the students. In addition, with the non-traditional student in the majority, clarification is a necessity in effective communication.

Today's system of accreditation is faulty and in need of redesign (Harkin 2012, Alexander, 2015). Although the majority of states fall under the accrediting system, there are those who chose not to comply and form their own accrediting (Accrediting, 2012). In addition, the majority of for-profit institutions fall under the direction of the Middle States, which is the least effective of the accrediting agencies. According to the Middle States Commission, they evaluate student complaints based on the Policies and Procedures on file. For the majority of institution, the Policy and Procedures are written based on corporate structures, which may not be in academic best interest (Middle States Commission, 2012).

Taxpayers are the final stakeholders since they are responsible for funding the federal student aid system and are ultimately responsible for footing the enormous bill for federally funded educational programs (Alexander, 2015). Taxpayers are handling the burden of the growing number of defaulting student loans since students cannot find jobs so they can repay these outstanding loans. According the HELP (2015), the number of outstanding student loans has doubled in the last five years and expected to double in number in the next five. The for-profit institutions found guilty of falsifying student success rates and having inefficient placement services for graduates has contributes significantly to the numbers. Senator Alexander's Committee is designing a system that will aid students in making informed decisions and rectifying the current situation.

However, the success of such an endeavor is dependent on passage of some proposals by Congress.

Limitations of the Study

The study was a pilot for developing the theoretical foundation for a more intense research project. However, the research may not be focused simply on a doctoral degree but rather the comprehension of what the degree entails. Many of the doctoral students from accredited for-profit institutions have no real comprehension of what their degree might require. For example, with a PhD in Educational Psychology one might be expected to produce further scholarly work in the field such as measurements of some learning standard or how manipulating one learning strategy in education changes the picture of success for some segment of the population (Carnegie Mellon, 2011). A faculty or administrative staff member may be quite knowledgeable in a particular field, but that does not mean competency in another. For example, one might question how a PhD in Hebrew Literature translates into approved psychometric methods especially when no credible academic research has been completed or accomplished. For the Hebrew Literature faculty member, years of study and independent fieldwork in approved psychometric analysis might just qualify for expert level knowledge, even though nothing tangible can be documented that makes the individual a recognized expert.

The study limits itself to the nontraditional learner. This means those with a significant amount of experiential learning, and the actual knowledge may vary for the theoretical foundation for course or curriculum foundations (CAEL, 2014). This type of learning, while an excellent source of information for the traditional learner, is not enough for the expectations of the experienced workforce nontraditional learner. This

study does not address the traditional learner segment of the population, nor does it examine the expectations of either the traditional or the nontraditional learner. In addition, the study does not compare or contrast the differences between the traditional brick-and-mortar institutions from the more nontraditional online learning environment. The instructional design of the brick-and-mortar classroom and is vastly different from the online version, even though the content is the same (Fiedler, 2006). Spoken word for the traditional classroom and the spontaneity between instructor and students is missing in the virtual class; therefore, the interaction between students and instructor is mechanically constructed (Colvin, 2011). In addition, there are students in the virtual classroom who prefer the individualistic method of learning than class interaction, which may go off tangent (Pinchera, 2011).

Another limitation of the study targets doctoral candidates from 30 institutions offering PhD degrees. There are many other accredited for-profit institutions that are not listed in the Harkin Report and are considered fine institutions of learning (University Consortium, 2013). Doctoral candidates from these institutions were not even a consideration. The closest the study comes to addressing such a student is one who attended a state institution and could not cope with the arguments between committee members.

The study did not intentionally address the current accrediting process. Understanding the methods used in accrediting speaks volumes in itself (Accreditation, 2014). The current accrediting process is cumbersome and does not address the major flows in the current educational environment (Harkin, 2012). According to current publications put forth by the HELP Committee under Senator Alexander's leadership, for

the more than 6,000 institutions accreditation addresses, the current system of accrediting does not address the major issues facing education today. Besides being a costly endeavor, accrediting today does not assist the struggling institution, nor correct its faults, nor does it provide any advice for dynamics for correction other than identifying what needs correction (Beaudoin, 2003). The reason the Harkin Report and subsequent reform of the Title IV Act of 1965 is included is the independent verification the publication supplies toward the study. Addressing the need for accrediting reform and the 30 institutions found in violation of the Department of Education is the sheer volume of complaints registered by students, both traditional and nontraditional, of accredited for-profit institutions (Harkin, 2012). Institutions blatantly presenting false information concerning completion, graduation, and job placement is beyond reproach. These institutions intentionally enrolled unsuspecting students into a false promise of success in order to make money; money through federal student aid, which comes from the taxpayer. This “caveat emptor” model of business practice demonstrates the amoral business ethics seen in all levels of business today from the Bernie Madoff scam to the intentionally mislabeled can of corn on a grocery store’s shelf (DeGeorge, 2012).

The more unfortunate part is the revision so necessary to provide for the continuity and standardization of the accrediting process; academia must be cognizant of the intended changes (Carey, 2012). Academia needs to be proactive in monitoring the changes to insure that standardization of the accrediting process is fair and balanced (Carey, 2012).

Another unfortunate part includes the legal ramifications uncovered by this research (Alexander, 2008). There is no way to influence the political forces in this

country into doing the “right thing” for education (Alexander, 2008). The most disconcerting realization was that regardless of the level rectifying the accrediting process, no one person or group is ever going to fully comprehend its significance (Carey, 2012). Examination of the proposed changes submitted by the HELP Committee suggests that the verbiage and good intentions written to strengthen the accrediting process will only be weakened by those who want to further lower the educational bar instead of raising it (Lee, 2012). The intent of reporting the findings in conjunction to this research is not intended as a political move, but to bring awareness to the broken accrediting system and understanding the significance and importance of its repair Carey, 2012; Lee, 2012).

Implications

The two questions concern the reasoning behind the decisions PhD doctoral students made and the factors the participant in each case study took into consideration, which although seemingly important at the time, held no real significance in the conclusions. Other issues that took their place are:

1. The importance in an education, from certificate to post-graduate degrees, that allows graduates to compete on an international level seems to be lacking in our current college-level education
2. Graduating students are not able to think critically. They exhibit a *laissez-faire* trait I term lazy-brain syndrome. This means the individual does not want to think and looks for the path of least resistance. In many cases, it means doing nothing and waiting for someone else to take the lead.

Documented evidence in educational research journals addresses the

importance of thinking critically. In addition, an organization specifically addressing this issue is rallying support to address this important issue in Congress

3. Educational reform and modifications to the accrediting system, as is proposed and subsequently revised, foretell a grim future for educational reform. The US has fallen to a place behind some third world countries, and this is directly attributed to failure or lack of educational reforms in this country. Reports published by the Department of Education (DOE, 2010) indicate a high school graduate can read only on a seventh grade level. This means we are constantly lowering the bar for quality education in this country rather than raising it. Our college graduates are not capable of communicating on the world stage. What may be worse is that education has taken on the amoral persona of big business and now leads our culture in opposition of what our forefathers believed in strongly, and thus turned it into something weak and pitiful. We no longer believe in the highly educated as leaders, but see instead the lazy-brain attitude running rampant.

According studies done by the Council of Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL, 2012), the nontraditional learner constitutes almost 80% of the college population today. This means changes in the classroom and the method of presenting information has significantly changed or is in the process of changing. This is not to say the traditional learner is left in the cold and without the benefits of learning, but the format of blending the theoretical with practical experience has changed the methods of presenting

information to the general student population (Ormond, 2012). The traditional learner who goes on to college from high school is not as much interested in the online format for a degree as the nontraditional learner (Ormond, 2008). The traditional learner is used to a primary focus on education and lacks the experience a work environment produces (Ormond, 2008; CAEL, 202). Therefore, many of the issues addressing adult student do not exist for the traditional learner who feels at home in the brick-and-mortar format.

Currently what does exist is the number of accredited for-profit institutions who enroll students filled with the idea they will take the easy road to a college degree and a higher paycheck (Harkin, 2012; Lee, 2012). These advertisements run unceasingly on radio, television, and on Internet pop-up ads. Much needs to be done to bring a level of awareness to the public concerning the buyer-beware tactics of some educational institutions (Gerhardt, 2001). What is worse, is the testing that can determine college-level learning success is absent and leads a student with “damaged self-esteem” down another path to failure. Although important, this is not one of the highlights of this study, but it does bring a level of concern to both the traditional and nontraditional learner who needs to make informed decisions based on credible information (Alexander, 2015).

The problem with the proposed educational reform is the involvement of political issues influencing votes and the passage of bills (Alexander, 2008; LaMorte, 2011). Even though the intent might be in the right place, unless academia is actively involved in the decision-making process, the H.R. 1287 Bill to Amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 will become nothing more than a broken tool in the spokes of educational reform that is so important today, especially if we are going to compete in the global marketplace.

This study can serve as a pilot study for more in-depth research. The research might include the moral and ethical fiber of students today. The generation entering the college halls has grown up with the absence of any kind of religious influence in the classroom (Genaier, 2011). In addition, research shows that the student today sees nothing wrong in cheating their way through school (Pinchera, 2012; Cartwright, 2013). This may be a reason for the poor academic performance; however, research also shows students today live in a more stressful environment than did generations before (Cartwright, 2013). The absence of any religious influence may attribute to the stress factor and the heightened rate of teen suicides (Cartwright, 2013). Clearly the rhetorical question asks if the amoral influences in the big business focused educational institution what can we expect from the traditional college competing for funding and academic standards. Clearly educators are not leading the call for educational reform, leaving the path for the corporate lobbyists and the manipulation of the higher educational system (Cartland, 2008).

The foundations of this research project came from discussions with peers pursuing their degrees. At that time, the importance was the accredited standing of the institution. The portion not understood was the meaning of for-profit and the exact mechanism driving accrediting (Cartland, 2008). Many of these accredited for-profit schools came into existence quickly, and major advertising campaigns drove many students to their doors (Lee, 2012). In addition, a number of tenured professors are fearful of sharing the accrediting process with both nontraditional and traditional students and their families (Lee, 2012; Alexander, 2015). Many feel that understanding what it means to be accredited is something you learn as a student in higher education and not

relevant beforehand (Harkin, 2012). The cost factor which includes expenses such as tuition, enrollment fees, technology fees, processing fees and such was not as evident in the beginning, but the known factor of the traditional graduate course cost was a consideration in figuring the time spent commuting to and from the brick and mortar classroom (Alexander, 2015). Today, cost is an even more important factor, especially in view of the fail rates exposed through the Harkin Report and word of mouth.

What would be interesting to find out is the number of actual graduates in the 30 institutions who felt they had to make decisions regarding the completion of their degree or certificates. For example, in a 1998 a certificate-bearing institution closed by the Department of Education for the misappropriation of student funds, the number of faculty and students who shared questions and answers on Microsoft certification exams in order to inflate the number of certified faculty teaching students. The school boasted a 75% success rate for students pursuing Microsoft certification exams and a 90% rate of certified instructors. The 90% rate included faculty who only passed one exam, not all components of the certification process or all exams offered, and the 75% success rate of students inflated. The school was caught falsifying advertised information and was closed after a third warning to present documents proving that the practice had ceased. That school, with several thousand students in nine states, left students locked outside their doors, with students owing student loans for an education they did not receive and no options. State officials ignored student complaints.

Students on the losing side, meaning those owing student loans for education not received, must have some recourse (Harkin, 2012). Even today, students have no other alternative but to pay loans (Harkin, 2012; Alexander, 2015). Such students duped by the

accredited for-profit institution should have some recourse. Currently, there is no alternative in place to mend the hurt felt by students who lose everything they invested in a degree. Sage, one of the interview participants for example, is watching her research project under way, headed by her boss, as a means of saving her job. Her name will be included as a research assistant, even though the entire study was her design and hypotheses. In addition, any future research stemming from her research can be her design but cannot use her name since she does not have the degree to back up the project. This is needed to give the research credibility in the drug community, however unfair it may seem to Sage.

Based on the limited amount of data, the findings imply that the biggest stopping point in the doctoral program is the comprehensive exams (Alexander, 2015; Middle States, 2014). The comprehensive exam differs from institution to institution. There is no standard dictating what to include or what the comprehensive exams should be (Middle States, 2014). The general expectation is the comprehensive exams prepare one for a specific area of interest. This is probably the most misunderstood component of the doctoral degree. The comprehensives are expected to test on the basic knowledge in a field of interest (Accreditation, 2008). It is up to the student to do volumes of research and reading in order to comprehend the nuances of the field. Most comprehensives, especially the ones in which the participants in this research are concerned, are composed of four to six questions and include a research methodology, a compare-and-contrast either of a characteristic of the field of study or of research methods, a course specific question based on the theoretical foundation of the topic, and one question specific to the general focus (accreditation, 2008). For our participants the biggest problem question

was the one concerning field specific or accepted forms of research methods. Again, the student, being at a disadvantage, is told to use recent research and is limited to five previous years; however, the information the faculty uses is usually based on their familiarity with the field, which may be beyond the five-year period. In this study, one of the participants shared this:

“First of all, much of what I do is confidential and is corporate specific. We use the Sigma Six format to train our people because for us, it works, and works well. We get a team together and teach them the mechanics of the Sigma Six. Now, this format does not work for all organizations and it is not meant to. Generally speaking, this format works for training teams that are going to work internationally on a segment of a project... For example, for a global transportation design, I am one of a team of trainers that goes from place to place and train teams on one or two segments of the project design. When the team we train gets full grasp of the concept, we move on to the next component. When the teams we train finish our training, they have a project design that works for their type of industry. And, every one of these is different. I could not get my coach to understand this. He kept insisting and relating it to some kind of covert military project, which is not the case at all (personal conversation with participant, 07, 2015).”

It is almost impossible to get faculty who know all areas of a field of study, and there are bound to be gaps where the student knows more than the faculty. There is no harm in sharing the information as long as the information is accurate and understood. The unfortunate part for the students involved in this project is that failure in the

comprehensives eliminated them from progressing on to the next step, which is the dissertation. For some institutions, the amount of research and reading required for the comprehensives is so arduous that by the time the student completed the exams, the student was too exhausted to progress (Accreditation, 2008).

Recommendations

Chapter 1 states this research builds on information available with reference to the increasing problem of cheating and plagiarism plaguing higher education today.

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Development form the theoretical foundation for this research. In essence, the nontraditional learner builds on life experiences and applies new learning. The majority of adults seeking the PhD doctoral degree find themselves in Kohlberg's third level and final stage, which focused on dignity and justice as they apply to society today. Thus the doctoral student, nontraditional or traditional, find themselves facing their personal moral and ethical foundations as they navigate through the program from coursework to dissertation. As part of the process, whether cognizant or not, the student must make some decisions concerning the path they take (Crane, 1985. For some, the moral and ethical decisions are more clearly delineated than others. For example, Toby shared the exchange with his department head implying it was acceptable to seek assistance in the writing of the comprehensive question. Toby's moral code would not allow that kind of decision, resulting in his failure and the end of the program. To that end, the three questions this research asked were:

1. Were there ethical decisions the nontraditional doctoral student had to make in pursuit of their degree?
2. What was the rationale behind the decisions the student made?

3. What factors did the nontraditional doctoral student take into account before making these decisions?

The findings indicate the majority of participants did have to make a decision, and the decision was made according to their beliefs as right or wrong (Crane, 1998). Sage, in order to see her research fulfilled, had to acquiesce to another as project lead. The reward? For Sage, it was seeing the project completed, resulting in additional studies. For Toby, losing his cool lost him the chance for additional levels of credibility by failing to pass the comprehensives and offending the faculty by stating they “didn’t know what they were talking about.” Toby could have gone to another institution, however this would require approval through the military. Instead, the military took their own action by considering events and making the determination they would not allow students to attend. In addition, they raised Toby’s rank, giving credibility from another perspective.

From my own personal experience in an accredited for-profit school, I have seen many students pass the courses and get to the comprehensive phase without success. Statistics indicating the number of students passing the comprehensive phase from accredited for-profit schools is not available would be of interest and easily incorporated into the next stage of research (Alexander, 2015).

The case study was an excellent choice as a beginning research project; however, for a full and accurate picture, a quantitative study should be the next step. This means the selection of accredited institutions offering PhD doctoral degrees that are for-profit or private, so comparisons can be made. The study should be a three-prong investigation including the following components:

1. Understanding the PhD degree. Many students believe the PhD brings instant fame and fortune and really do not comprehend what the degree entails. To understand why this degree is so important, investigative research should encompass the level of understanding of the PhD, the reason for the degree, full understanding of the financial responsibility including expectations and costs, and the amount of family support the student feels confident will be provided
2. School experiences. Experiences describe handling the course load each term, the expectations and amount of knowledge gained through the learning experience both in the course and based on personal reading and research, then lastly the confidence in navigating through research methodologies by knowing what works best and when. To that end, this segment should address the three levels of the doctoral degree: classes, comprehensive exam and dissertation
3. The dissertation is by far the most focused of the process. Although the comprehensives are intended to measure theoretical foundations and the student's ability to apply new learning, the focus on the dissertation centers on the personal need to know more and why. In this segment the reason for selection, the expectations of the field, and the amount of applicable research is important

Ideally, the study should be an exit survey, completely voluntary for students who have completed the degree or chose to drop the program. The exit survey should be given to those who chose to drop the program in order to get a complete as possible look

at why so few can complete the degree requirements. For many, the reason for dropping the program even before the completion of the coursework is that the academic rigors are so strong, the nontraditional student is unable to satisfy even the minimum amount of work the course demands.

Many articles, such as the ones that may appear in-Higher-Ed newsletters, question the worthiness of the degree (Carnegie Mellon University, 2008). For the first family member going for the degree, it is clear the family usually does not understand what is involved in becoming worthy of the doctor degree title (Alexander, 2015). The stress involved in having to rely on family for the confidence, patience, and understanding year after year is not an easy task. Family members soon tire of having to make sacrifices when others are having fun. For the woman from a first time family, the stress is even more when the sacrifice involving the family unit is compromised (Alexander, 2015). Research shows that only 58% of doctoral students actually make it to the end, 52% for women. However, the most exhaustive component is not the actual dissertation writing and defense, it comes for the amount of preparation for the comprehensive exams coupled with the stamina, self-discipline, and the ability to persevere, even without adequate advising from faculty (Alexander, 2015).

As described, the above-mentioned analysis would not determine any details concerning the comprehensive examinations, nor therefore a study investigating the comprehensive exams themselves. The most surprising issue that came to light in this fact-finding research was the state of and understanding of the comprehensive exams. Based on the limited information available, the Council of Graduate Colleges

substantiated the fact the comprehensive exams were the most misunderstood component of the entire doctoral program. This research project would include the investigation of:

1. Faculty and administration understanding of their institution's comprehensive exam process
2. Having a detailed document for both students and faculty coaches to assist in preparation for the exams
3. The assignment of qualified faculty to help formulate the comprehensive exams
4. The analysis of components in order to eventually design a set of unified standards so the comprehensive exams can become standardized in its components of evaluation
5. The standards would also include some kind of question guidelines assisting in the development of writing clear and precise questions

The eventual design of a set of standards for the comprehensive exams would help eliminate some of the confusion both assigned faculty and students experience. Some kind of standardization would also eliminate the variations as currently depicted from institution to institution (Council of Graduate Colleges, 2012).

The successful launch of the above mentioned studies would need the assistance of an institution or organization that is well known and identified as world-renowned. There are many institutions that would be ideal for this type of project; however, it may be beneficial if the project in its entirety were conducted by an independent organization. Funding through large corporate donors is not out of the question, but the conducting and evaluation by an independent source may eliminate the question of integrity and bias.

Organizations like CAEL might be interested in taking on such a project independently or in conjunction with a university.

Conclusion

This document consists of:

1. 250 pages
2. 56,720 words
3. 312,103 characters, and including spaces the count reaches 369,875
4. 1500 paragraphs
5. 6,073 lines of text

This trivial information identifies the culmination of years of time and effort put into the preparation of this document. In some ways, it is an end to a means, but in others, it is only the beginning of a new venture and the identification of a new and budding researcher.

The conclusion was probably the single most difficult section to write. In these many pages lies the birth of an idea requiring years of pondering, development, writing, researching, and the evaluation of a singular topic of interest. Each of the four preceding chapters sets the stage for these final comments; this section actually closes the research and brings to an end to a body of work encompassing many hours of work. Now finally completed, there are only a few things that remain to be said.

Education, meaning the way we teach and pass on knowledge has changed significantly from the forums of Ancient Greece with philosophers at the head of the group of students to the development of guilds leading to the stately buildings holding a body of knowledge called universities. Teaching in this century has taken on a new

meaning with the development of the Internet where the classroom is virtual with both teacher and student in front of a screened device through which ideas and thoughts are communicated. All of this is a good thing since we are now able to share ideas, communicate learning, and manage research and resources promoting the expansion of our knowledge. Yet with all this there still looms a grey sky.

As a new generation is about to take the reigns of teaching we have lost one great characteristic teachers developed over time; the respect the teaching profession held for so many years. From the Ancients until this new day, those who were educated were seen as leaders and possessors of great vision with the ability to comprehend truths and commanded an air of morality and ethics, which was one of the distinguishing marks of the well-educated individual of times past. In this country, with the removal of any kind of religious connotations, we are seeing a disintegration of the moral fiber, which was instilled in the Baby Boomer generation. Not only has any kind of prayer been removed from our classrooms, but even the moment of silence of reflection has also disappeared. In its place, we are seeing the amoral characteristics of big business filtering into all aspects of our educational system. Instead of raising the bar and challenging our students to thirst for knowledge and learning, we have reduced learning to its lowest common denominator resulting in our freshman college students reading and writing at a seventh grade level. We are no longer the leaders in education, but have fallen to a rank of 39, behind some third-world countries. Our young students suffer from lazy-brain syndrome; a condition that lulls students into a false sense of placidity while waiting for others to come up with the solution for a problem.

The amoral business practices are leading businesses into a fertile ground in which to make a fast dollar. Many institutions called the accredited for-profit institution of learning leads many of our non-traditional students to a place with a very high price tag for its education. Not only have these students left with massive student loans to pay, but find they are not competitive in the job market and a degree that may not be worth the time and effort.

This study specifically targeted doctoral students, who were over the age of 35, having both job and family responsibilities, and attended accredited for-profit institution and were not successful. The three case studies examined in detail, supported by documentation from seven other potential participants not included in the interviews, comprised the bulk of the examination. Based on records held by the Federal Department of Education, there are hundreds of stories similar to those told here; and all with the same unhappy results.

For those who develop educational coursework and especially for the doctoral programs, the mechanisms in play behind the doctoral candidate process have not changed significantly in many years; however, the audience has changed, and changed significantly. No longer are students looking to work through the college process from start to finish culminating with the doctoral degree while young, the doctoral student is approaching middle age or older and has a great deal of experiential learning thus challenging the evaluation and body of knowledge. This experiential learning now challenges the system and is looking for a change in the exchange of knowledge with more of the real world and actual rather than the theoretical. Carnegie Mellon University within its educational consortium is looking to make the doctoral degree stronger by

requiring possessors of such degrees to become active in teaching and learning. This includes research, writing of academic papers, publishing of books and articles assisting in the transfer of learning not only here in the US, but globally. A cursory look at many instructors teaching in our accredited institutions shows very little professional growth, and a wealth of stagnation in a very mobile world.

The last component this research unwittingly uncovered is the system of accreditation, which requires extreme change and a complete overhaul calling for learning institutions to become accountable for what they advertise, their level of college-level learning, and their honesty and integrity with potential students. According to the proposals set forth in their original formats through the work of Senator Alexander of Tennessee, these proposals for the restructuring of accrediting, for state monitoring, and for the handling of federal funding, have little chance of progressing or for revamping the system. Accrediting has become lax in upholding the highest level of educational standards. The level of learning of our graduates has deteriorated leaving our college graduates unable to compete for jobs. Unless academia becomes active in insuring the successful outcome for the future of our students, these proposals will find they fall into the hands of lobbyists working for business rather than education. From general comments made by the participants indicated there was a great deal of conflict within the comprehensive phase indicating the lack of understanding of conducting research and the preparation going into this phase of doctoral work. Pat, for example, stated clearly, "I did not feel the coursework supported the preparation for my research. There was too much I still had to do in order to prepare myself for the actual writing of a dissertation proposal." Although not a direct fault of accreditation, it is a fault of institutional

practices and the faculty charged with preparing doctoral students. The sad part is future students will pay the price while our national reputation will suffer.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A: Comparison of For-Profit and Not-For-Profit Colleges and Universities

Table 2: Comparison of For-Profit and No-for-profit Universities from Harkin Report

		FOR-PROFIT SCHOOL	NONPROFIT SCHOOL
Growth	Year 2010	2.4 million	
Cost	Associate's Degree	\$35,000	\$8,300
	Bachelor's Degree	\$63,000	\$52,500
	Certificate	\$19,806	
Loans	Graduate Median Debt	\$32,700	\$20,000 to \$24,600
	% With Student Loans	96%	57%
Recruitment	Amount spent on marketing	\$4.2 billion	
	Spent on Career Services Staff	\$3,512	
	Full-time Instructors	\$7,239	\$15,321
Completion Rates	Bachelor's Degree Awarded	31%	52%

In essence, the report (Harkin, 2012) found the following:

1. In 2008/9 there were one million students attending for-profit schools under investigation

2. Tuition was much higher in for-profit schools than nonprofit schools
3. 97% of students attending for-profit schools applied for and received student loans
4. 47% of these students defaulted on those loans without receiving their degree
5. Even though not-for-profit schools about 12% of students, they still get 25% of the student aid funds
6. For the fifteen companies investigated that operate colleges and universities, 86% of their educational revenue is from taxpayers
7. In general, these for-profit companies gave misleading information to students on transferability of credit, graduation rates, and program costs

Appendix B: Professional Accrediting Agencies

Professional Accrediting Agencies certify courses based on the following criteria:

- (a) Mission and Planning
- (b) Organization and Administration
- (c) Student Support Services
- (d) Ethics / Integrity
- (e) Evaluation and Assessment of Outcomes
- (f) Faculty Qualifications
- (g) Finance Resources
- (h) Teaching and Resources
- (i) Library, Information, and Learning resources
- (j) Physical, Laboratory, and Training Facilities

There are five steps in the accrediting process (Accreditation in the United States, 2013; US Department of Education, 2008–2013). Once the institution makes the request, the school conducts an internal review before the onsite evaluation and visit by the review committee from the member agency. The compiled report serves as the foundation for the decision to accredit (Accreditation in the United States, 2013; US Department of Education, 2008–2013). The committee also takes into consideration complaints and outside reports regarding the institution (Accreditation, 2013; US Department of Education, 2008–2013).

Appendix C: Accrediting Agencies Recognized by the Council for Higher Education, Divided by Geographic Location

1. New England Association of Schools and Colleges oversees schools in the Northeast: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. This agency also includes American International Schools globally.
2. Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools evaluates and grants accreditation to schools in Delaware, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Washington DC, Puerto Rico, the US Virgin Islands, and other overseas schools.
3. North Central Association of Colleges and Schools covers the north central area including the states of Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, West Virginia, North and South Dakota, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.
4. Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities covers the northwest US including Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington.
5. Western Association of Schools and Colleges accepts both public and private schools this agency covers a wide area of the Eastern Asia and areas of the Pacific covering US schools in those areas and work with nation schools wanting to be covered in US accrediting.
6. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools is probably the strictest accrediting board and includes the Commission on Colleges, which is a member of the College Delegate Assembly covering North and South

Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. In addition the Commission covers Latin American schools of higher education offering degree granting programs.

- (a) Two other accrediting agencies, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business and the Association of Collegiate Schools and Programs, work with business schools and educational facilities of higher education dealing with business related topics including but not limited to administration, human resources and management.

At the time of accrediting review (Accreditation, 2013), a team of members visits the institution doing a complete audit. This includes course and curriculum goals and objectives, strategic planning, methods of measuring student achievement, student retention, and records (Accreditation, 2013; US Department of Education, 2008–2013).

Appendix D: Moral Foundations Questionnaire

The Moral Foundations Questionnaire was taken from the Moral Foundations Website.

Part 1. When you decide whether something is right or wrong, to what extent are the following considerations relevant to your thinking? Please rate each statement using this scale:

[0] = not at all relevant (This consideration has nothing to do with my judgments of right and wrong)

[1] = not very relevant

[2] = slightly relevant

[3] = somewhat relevant

[4] = very relevant

[5] = extremely relevant (This is one of the most important factors when I judge right and wrong)

- _____ 1. Whether or not someone suffered emotionally
- _____ 2. Whether or not some people were treated differently than others
- _____ 3. Whether or not someone's action showed love for his or her country
- _____ 4. Whether or not someone showed a lack of respect for authority
- _____ 5. Whether or not someone violated standards of purity and decency
- _____ 6. Whether or not someone was good at math
- _____ 7. Whether or not someone cared for someone weak or vulnerable
- _____ 8. Whether or not someone acted unfairly
- _____ 9. Whether or not someone did something to betray his or her group
- _____ 10. Whether or not someone conformed to the traditions of society
- _____ 11. Whether or not someone did something disgusting
- _____ 12. Whether or not someone was cruel
- _____ 13. Whether or not someone was denied his or her rights
- _____ 14. Whether or not someone showed a lack of loyalty
- _____ 15. Whether or not an action caused chaos or disorder
- _____ 16. Whether or not someone acted in a way that God would approve of

Part 2. Please read the following sentences and indicate your agreement or disagreement:

[0]	[1]	[2]	[3]	[4]	[5]
Strongly	Moderately	Slightly	Slightly	Moderately	Strongly
disagree	disagree	disagree	agree	agree	agree

- _____ 17. Compassion for those who are suffering is the most crucial virtue.

- _____ 18. When the government makes laws, the number one principle should be ensuring that everyone is treated fairly.
- _____ 19. I am proud of my country's history.
- _____ 20. Respect for authority is something all children need to learn.
- _____ 21. People should not do things that are disgusting, even if no one is harmed.
- _____ 22. It is better to do good than to do bad.
- _____ 23. One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal.
- _____ 24. Justice is the most important requirement for a society.
- _____ 25. People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong.
- _____ 26. Men and women each have different roles to play in society.
- _____ 27. I would call some acts wrong on the grounds that they are unnatural.
- _____ 28. It can never be right to kill a human being.
- _____ 29. I think it's morally wrong that rich children inherit a lot of money while poor children inherit nothing.
- _____ 30. It is more important to be a team player than to express oneself.
- _____ 31. If I were a soldier and disagreed with my commanding officer's orders, I would obey anyway because that is my duty.
- _____ 32. Chastity is an important and valuable virtue.
-
-

To score the MFQ yourself, you can copy your answers into the grid below. Then add up the 6 numbers in each of the five columns and write each total in the box at the bottom of the column. The box then shows your score on each of 5 psychological "foundations" of morality. Scores run from 0-30 for each foundation. (Questions 6 and 22 are just used to catch people who are not paying attention. They don't count toward your scores).

Appendix E: Vignettes

Vignette 1

A new teacher goes on vacation with some of her friends to celebrate a successful first year of teaching. They rent a house in a quiet beach town for the three weeks of their vacation. One night, one of the girls called and said she would be late coming back, intending to do some shopping. The friends decide to go out looking for her. As the teacher goes into a local pub, she gets a bucket of water thrown at her while someone else took her picture. The picture was for an entry into the wet-T-shirt contest indicating clearly a bar scene. The picture ended up posted on social media where one of her students found it. This enraged parents who met with the principal demanded her immediate dismissal. Do you agree with the principal's decision to dismiss her?

Intended response: Yes. Regardless of the circumstances, teachers represent a model of integrity, ethics, and morality. It was the teacher's choice to enter the pub without first reading the advertisement outside.

Vignette 2

A high school teacher in the hallway observed a male student deliberately slamming into a female student carrying a pile of books. The teacher pulled the boy aside by his shirtsleeve. The next day, the boy and parent met with the principal demanding an apology for inappropriately touching the student. The teacher apologized. Do you agree with the teacher apologizing?

Intended response: Yes. Even though there was reason for the physical intervention, teachers cannot lay hands on a student.

Vignette 3

A high school history teacher requested a meeting with a student, parents, and the school advisor. The student, labeled a class clown, was enrolled in all remedial classes. The teacher felt the student was not challenged enough, thus the reason for the antics in the classroom. The parents were relieved to hear what the teacher had to say, but the advisor objected, saying the student had no regard for academics and should remain in the remedial classes because of the academic record, the classroom antics, and her inherent distaste for wasteful students. Besides, the student already missed too much of the work overruling the teacher. Do you agree with the advisor?

Intended response: No. Many students are not challenged enough in the assigned subject class, which results in boredom and “acting up.” The chances of this acting up behavior was the rule rather than the exception in the latter part of the 20th century. However with the No Child Left Behind Act, students are broken into their respective cognitive ability groups within their grades. The smaller groups make it easier for teachers to identify the bored students.

Appendix F: Informed Consent

Consent Form

CASE STUDY: MORAL AND ETHICAL DECISIONS SOME DOCTORAL STUDENTS MAKE IN PURSUIT OF THEIR DEGREE FROM AN ACCREDITED FOR-PROFIT UNIVERSITY

Anne Pinchera
Liberty University
Department of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of the moral and ethical decisions you were faced with in pursuit of your PhD degree from an accredited for-profit university. You were selected as a possible participant because you requested to be contacted at the beginning of this research project. I ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

Anne Pinchera, a student/doctoral candidate in the Department of Education at Liberty University is conducting this study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to determine if there is enough evidence to pursue further research involving moral and ethical decisions doctoral students make in pursuing advanced degrees at accredited for-profit colleges and universities.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

- Answer demographic survey pertinent in pursuing your education for a PhD degree
- Your current educational status
- Your decision concerning three ethical decisions in an educational circumstance
- A preliminary questionnaire concerning your ethical or moral decision at the university
- A voice recorded interview lasting approximately 20 minutes

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:

The study has several risks:

- The risks are minimal and no more than you would encounter in everyday life. If you are uncomfortable in discussing the situation leading to the failure to complete your PhD degree, you may prefer to opt out of participation
- If we encounter any discomfort during the interview session, you have the option to cease discussion and not participate any further
- If I believe you are experiencing discomfort, I may make the decision for you
- Participation will in no way have any impact in overturning the university decision

The benefits to participation are

- You have the knowledge you made it possible for others to avoid the pitfalls you found

- Impact the operations of accredited for-profit schools in educating doctoral students

Compensation:

Participation is voluntary. There is no monetary compensation for this research project.

Confidentiality:

All documentation that can in any way identify you, the research participant or the university you attended will be stricken from the actual results of the study. Your name will be replaced by a fictitious name I select as well as that of the university. All identifying information that can directly or indirectly identify you will be deleted from the reported results. The compilation of data will be on a computer owned by me and not connected to the Internet. Once the data is captured and analyzed, the entire file will be transferred to a keychain and stored in a bank safe deposit box to which only I will have access.

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with any university you are attending. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Anne Pinchera. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact me at ampinchera@liberty.edu or Dr. Ackerman at mackerman@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or e-mail at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

(NOTE: DO NOT AGREE TO PARTICIPATE UNLESS IRB APPROVAL INFORMATION WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN ADDED TO THIS DOCUMENT.)

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix G: Invitation to Participate:
RECRUITMENT NOTICE:
TO PARTICIPATE IN A DOCTORAL RESEARCH PROJECT

Date: May 2015
[Recipient]

Dear [Recipient]:

As a graduate student in the Department of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a Doctor of Education degree. The purpose of my research is to understand the moral and ethical decisions some doctoral students face in pursuit of a PhD degree from an accredited for-profit university, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study since you previously expressed interest.

If you are a nontraditional student, attended an accredited for-profit University, and failed to attain your PhD degree because of an ethical decision you had to make, and willing to participate, you will

- Answer some demographic questions
- Respond to 3 vignettes
- Complete a questionnaire concerning the situation you faced
- Then an approximately 20-minute interview discussing your event

It should take approximately five (5) minutes for you to complete the procedure listed. Your participation will be completely anonymous, and no personal, identifying information will be required.

To participate, complete the demographics and the vignettes on the attached PDF document and the Informed Consent and return it to me via e-mail. You will then receive the Participation Survey and a place where you can suggest times we meet. Please include your contact information. None of your personal information, including your contact information, will be shared with anyone else.

The attached consent document contains additional information about my research.
Please sign the consent document and return it to me along with the demographics and vignettes.

Sincerely,

Anne Pinchera

Liberty University Doctoral Candidate

Appendix H: Questionnaire

Pre-Interview Questionnaire

1. In a few sentences explain the situation

2. Who were the key people involved (titles only – no names are necessary)?

3. What was your main method of communication?

4. How did you respond to each communication?

5. Did you respond to everyone involved?

6. What were your thoughts to what you were told?

7. Did you try to appeal?

Appendix I: IRB Approval

Signature Page for IRB Form



Appendix J: Edited Participant Responses

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT:		JULES
QUESTION	RESPONSE	
1 Tell me what happened.	<p>You know I am military and there are things I cannot discuss about my work. My CO felt it would be advantageous if I went for my doctorate giving me additional credentials. So ... I went to school and chose the best option - so I thought. As part of the comprehensive course, I had to submit three names for committee members who would work with me through the dissertation process. So, I contacted three of my professors I had in my courses and asked them if they would serve on my committee. They said yes, so I put their names down and waited for the approval. In the meantime, I worked with a group of other students so we could talk about what we had to do next and how we would attach the questions they threw at us.</p>	
Did you understand the comps Process?	I thought I did, but actually no	
How about the rest of the class?	I have to say no to that too since we all seemed to be working in the blind and questioning one another about their thoughts	

2 Who are the people involved and what was their role?

Well, I have to say the person who conducted the course, the committee members I contacted and I tried to get through to the department head with no success. The person who conducted the course just gave me standard answers even though I tried to explain my situation. She said it would become clear later on and not to worry. I contacted the two committee people but they said they did not hear anything from the department head who made the assignments and did not think they were assigned for this section. The department head never responded to the e-mails I sent

3 How did you communicate?

everything was through e-mail. I had phone numbers, but the advisor I spoke to said they rarely returned calls because students might know how to contact them. I did ask the advisor if she could get the department head to call me and she finally did return my call. I explained the problem and was told that none of the students got the committee they asked for but not to worry since I would get the committee I wanted later. As far as the questions were concerned, I should do the best I could including asking someone for advice on how they would answer the questions and write what they told me. Again, I tried to explain about not being familiar with the question content - she reiterated ask someone. I asked if that was cheating. I got no answer. Do what you have to in order to understand the question and answer it properly

4 How did you respond to the people involved?

At first, I started out polite, but as the communications went unanswered, I got more and more agitated. I know there was at least one mail that sounded pretty rough and that was to the department head who kept avoiding me. But I kept my cool and tried to keep the conversation lite as I could

- 5 How did you respond to everyone involved?
- In the beginning, I just was looking for help and an explanation. I could not understand why I got the committee I did. There wasn't even one name I had as part of my courses, and I was concerned because I had a feeling they would not understand my ultimate goal.
- 6 What was their reaction?
- Couldn't be sure. The instructor started out, like I said, with the canned script. Then he acted as if I had no brain in my head and implied he was the teacher and I had no reason to doubt what he said. What did he think, I was 10? I wanted to understand where this was going, and frankly, it was starting to stink. The department head voiced no opinion. She just continued to ignore my mail and I was copying both of them -- you know what I mean, answer one and cc the other. Reaction from them? none
- 7 What choices did you feel you had?
- I sat and thought about everything over a weekend the week before the actual comps were slated to begin. I heard from the committee - one of the two-people committee, did I tell you that? Anyway, we talked about my topic and interests. From our conversation, I was not too hopeful about what I would have to answer. Even though he was a business instructor, I had the feeling he knew very little about my direction in the business field. I was not confident as to what the result would be. I was right when I saw the questions. The questions did not address my specific interest but business generally. I asked for clarification, but was told the questions were clear and specific

- 8 What made you choose to do what you did?
- What choice? I could decide not to answer the questions, but what would that prove? So, I sat and used my time to try to construct answers for the questions. I searched the Internet for some kind of direction, even looked for possible responses, but found none. I even looked a Wikipedia for something I could start with. For the questions, I found at least a glimmer to begin with and started looking in that direction for responses. I guess I could have asked someone to look at the questions for advice, but didn't. I thought that would be cheating.
- 9 Is there anything else you would like to say?
- Just one. When I enrolled the advisor told me they had a completion rate of 85%. I knew I could do the coursework, so I figured this was a surer bet than going through the traditional route. I figured if the school was so well advertised, it couldn't be all bad. I never thought about a problem down the path. Then, after calling another school, I realized I was going to have to start all over again. Maybe later, but not now. I never did find out why I didn't get my committee.

INTERVIEW
PARTICIPANT:

Sage

QUESTION

RESPONSE

Tell me what happened.

I am familiar with the scientific method of research. And, under that format of research, you examine one characteristic and see what effect that has on validity or on the result of the research. I read a research paper that was only a few years old and wondered what would have happened if the researchers only altered one characteristic they were researching instead of the three. So I started fiddling around with the study looking at other research that examined two of the three characteristics. I compared the research and tried to narrow it down to finding the research project looked at the least. That would be the one I would do. So, I spent over 8 months looking at studies on these characteristics and classifying the research based on characteristics. Finally, I found the one that had the least number of results. By keeping the 2 other characteristics constant, I then played around with altering or manipulating the third. During the quantitative study class, I asked my instructor if she would look over my research paper and see if it made sense. She said it did and there might be a few changes she would suggest as far as validity testing. I incorporated her suggestions and put it aside for later. Since the research was sort of job related, I asked my boss to

read over my paper for his
comments. I noted the comments
and put it aside.

So, this had
nothing to
do with the
comps?

no

You passed
the comps?

yes

Who are the people involved and what was their role?

We had to write up a 2 page synopsis on our research method to hand in during the second week of the course on writing the dissertation. Based on what we wrote, we would be assigned a research coach who would help us develop the strategy. I was careful as I wrote up the report and used a semi outline format because I thought that would best answer the questions she would have. I heard about the person I was assigned. Her reputation was not exactly paying attention to some of the details causing other students to have to repeat the class. I was bound and determined to move on especially since I had a job hanging on my research. After reading what I wrote, she commented that the research had be done before and what changes was I proposing? I pointed to the section addressing the question. Her next comment was that I should add some 'safeguards' in place to prove validity and linking it to the original research. I looked at the list of changes she wanted made and then looked at the place where she suggested a rewording of the hypothesis. Changing the hypothesis changes the whole focus of the study. I wrote her that and she said I could do a study repeat or use the study to look for a new hypothesis but I couldn't do what I wanted to do. We argued back and forth. I saw it done many times, especially in retraining.

		all by e-mail. I asked her for a time we could talk, but she said she had no time for conversations especially on the topic of research methods. I also sent my instructor a note and was told there was nothing she could do
3	How did you communicate?	
	How did you respond to the people involved?	The research coach? I asked for a meeting. I composed a list of research similar to the one I wanted to do and told her I was modeling my study on what these researchers wrote. She said it was not viable research and discarded it. The instructor, nothing else but asked if she could attend the meeting which she did. I was calm and brought my documents to prove my point. I thought I had all the bases covered. She listened as did my instructor, but it was if I was talking to a wall. Nothing and still no. I sat there grasping at straws. "Look, I said, I have my job resting on this. PLEASE let me do it as I have it outlined. I'll use these studies as a guide and I will put in all the things you said." Still no.
4		
	How did you respond to everyone involved?	I did appeal, or so I thought. Just nothing. They said I had to do original research and not reprove anything even though it was different
5		

	What was their reaction?	Just sat there. No expression, no comment, just nothing. I wanted to cry, but I swore not to show weakness any more than I had by begging for my job. Believe me, I wanted to say more. So I asked politely for them to point out where in the manual it said original research, and why didn't anyone tell me this before? Still nothing. "Go home and read the manual. It's in there."
6	Was it?	no. and I searched every inch. I even had someone else look for it.
7	What choices did you feel you had?	none. Absolutely none. Everything just went down the drain. I was finished.
8	What made you choose to do what you did?	What else could I do. I pointed everything out. I had no more alternative - well, maybe I had one and that was to report the school. But even if they found for me, it would be too late. I would be paying of the student loans and probably working in Burger King since I had my job riding on it. Dept of Education - But I heard they never got back to you
	Report the school? Where?	

Is there anything else you would like to say?

I wish there was. I actually appreciate you listening to me. I know it will not do me any good, but if it helps someone else, well, that is a good thing. I tell everyone who will listen to me not to go with XXX University. It's a scam from the word go. I know you had problems too, I just don't have what it takes to do this again. My goal now is to convince my organization to let me stay and complete the study under someone else's name. Maybe I'll get some satisfaction that way.

INTERVIEW
PARTICIPANT: Toby

QUESTION

RESPONSE

- When we first enrolled, and met in our cohorts, we were told to start taking note of professors we had and make a list of those we would like to have help serve on our committee. So, that is what I did. After we finished our regular classes, we had to pick a chair and assistant, only they called them a coach and assistant. Their job was to understand our research and help form the 6 questions we had to answer. Basically, the kinds of questions they asked did not pertain to my research directly
- 1 Tell me what happened.
- Things like compare and contrast qualitative and quantitative research. Kinds of questions you would consider for a survey. I think the problem began when I selected independent study and got actually my third choice professors. Although they taught some basic computer classes, they had no idea what they were talking about when it came to computer forensics. They used the buzzwords they heard and not correctly
- What did they ask?
- Who are the people involved and what was their role?
- 2 Initially my coach and assistant who were to help me format questions, give me page limits and what to include like literature reviews and such.
- 3 How did you communicate?
- We had only 1 phone conversation then it was all e-mail. The phone was to discuss the question content

	How did you respond to the people involved?	I tried to explain that the work I was getting involved in was government work - police and such and it was very technical. It involved graphics, recordings and kind of work like fingerprints, but on a larger scale. So I tried being helpful and explaining some of the finer details and they told me I was condescending.
4	What did you do next?	I appealed to the Department head and Student Advocate
	How did you respond to everyone involved?	I guess I tried pulling the "I'm the expert here" card. And it wasn't appreciated. The Department head was the most vocal telling me how wrong I was. The Student Advocate just didn't say much - no help at all.
5	What was their reaction?	Not as well as I expected. The Department head explained I made 'enemies' of my committee because I went over their head. And, as an aside, I was bound to fail now
6	What choices did you feel you had?	None. I could take my chances and answer the questions, or just lick my wounds and go away. My family encouraged me to give it one more try. So I did and I got my results back in 2 days instead of 2 weeks - fail - no repeat. Did you ever try to compare and contrast qualitative research to quantitative research in 4 pages?
7	What made you choose to do what you did?	If I didn't try, I would not have known. I talked to some of my classmate and a few of them said they had the same problem. Especially the ones who had uncommon topics.
8		

Is there anything else you
would like to say?

9

One thing. If anyone tells you go
Independent Study because you are the top
expert in that area - run like hell. They are
lying to you. It don't make a difference, and
anybody in HR will tell you they don't hire
people with and Independent Study degree.
It looks phony

Appendix K: Question Key Phrases

What happened?

1. Military
2. Confidentiality
3. Advantageous for degree – credibility
4. Choose best option
5. Select professors – committee
6. Worked with classmates
7. Form strategy – answer questions
8. Scientific method of research
9. Examine characteristic – effect on research
10. Focused on research a few years old
11. Researched similar projects
12. Spent 8 months researching
13. Classifying
14. Asked instructor for opinion
15. Asked boss for opinion
16. Changes concerning validity
17. Cohort
18. Take note of professors for committee
19. Job to understand research
20. Comprehensives – 6 questions
21. Compare and contrast research methods

22. Good questions for survey
23. Independent Study
24. Third choice professors
25. Unfamiliar with topic
26. Using buzzwords incorrectly
27. Tried using buzzwords
28. Thought I understood
29. Actually I didn't understand asked for clarification
30. Working in blind
31. Question one another

People Involved

1. Course Instructor
2. Unsuccessful committee members
3. Department Head
4. Coach and assistant
5. Research coach
6. Instructor reputation
7. Advisor
8. Student advocate

Method of Communication

1. E-mail
2. One phone conversation
3. One face-to-face meeting

4. No time for conversation

Your Responses

1. Polite
2. Agitated
3. Ended up pretty rough
4. Kept my cool
5. Tried to explain
6. Tried to be helpful
7. Asked for meeting
8. Compiled list of projects similar to mine
9. Pulling “expert” card
10. Cry
11. Beg
12. Say more
13. Wanted to appeal
14. Show me where to correct
15. Asked politely

Their Reaction

1. Couldn’t be sure
2. Canned script
3. Condescending tone
4. “I am the instructor”
5. “You have to follow directions”

6. Ignored e-mail
7. No response
8. Not what I expected
9. I made enemies
10. Now bound to fail
11. Just sat there
12. No expression
13. No comment

Your Choices

1. None
2. Everything gone
3. Finished
4. Take my chances anyway
5. Lick my wounds
6. Family encouraged me
7. Give it one more try
8. Fail
9. No repeat
10. Thought about it
11. Not too hopeful
12. Knew very little about my work
13. Did not address specific areas or topics
14. Ask again for clarification

Your Selected Option

1. What else could I do
2. Pointed everything out
3. Too late
4. Paying student loans
5. Now work at Burger King
6. If I didn't try, I wouldn't have known for sure
7. What chance
8. Try again to construct a strategy / answers
9. No glimmer where to begin
10. Ask someone for advice
11. Take the school's advice (to cheat)
12. Lie and cheat my way?

Anything Else?

1. Completion rate of 85% based on what
2. Could do coursework
3. Surer bet
4. Well advertised
5. Couldn't be all bad
6. Never thought (this would happen)
7. Problem down the road
8. After calling another school
9. Start all over

10. Independent Study
11. No such thing
12. “Run like hell”
13. Lying to you
14. Human Resource people don’t hire Independent Study degrees
15. Looks phony – is phony
16. Wish there was something
17. Appreciate listening
18. Not do me any good
19. Help someone else
20. Don’t have what it takes
21. New revised goals

Physical characteristics or signs

1. Voice quivers when talking about event
2. Some tears
3. Picking at nails
4. Hand through hair
5. Taping
6. Talking about event produced vocal nervousness
7. Sadness
8. “Damaged” self-esteem
9. Tone reflected attempt to fight unhappy results

Appendix L: Proposal for Reform from Senator Alexander

To Improve Higher Education, Scale Back Federal Improvements

Proposal for Reform

Schools today are inefficient, expensive, and at the present time, have little to do with learning objectives. Students, and this includes graduates, are not able to communicate effectively and think critically. As a result, they are unable to secure meaningful employment. Senator Lamar Alexander currently chairs the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions taking over for Tom Harkin. Senator Alexander is now responsible for the complaints concerning higher education and effectively handling the Harkin Report. Alexander, former university president prior to his election, wants to see radical changes and reform to the Higher Education Act of 1965:

1. Place responsibility and financial consequences for the failure of students who have secured student loans and are not prepared to handle the rigors of college or the responsibility of learning preparation on a college level
2. The current accrediting system is in bad need of reform
3. Provide essential data for students in order to make informed decisions

Past experience dating back as far as the Spelling Commission (1965) shows that reform efforts have been largely ineffective. These initiatives include the financial aid system including alternative private funding are ineffective. The accurate reporting from schools including graduates and non-graduates have been blocked, and paint a grossly inaccurate picture. In actuality, financial aid funding is spent on administration rather than teaching faculty and curriculum design, which results in declining competencies of the college graduate. The purpose of the federal loan system and grants was to help fund

the poorer student attain the college degree and open up new possibilities for employment. Federal intervention in the student loan system has resulted in increased tuition, unemployed student graduates having to rely on parental support, and failing grades in education. Instead of raising the bar in education, we lowered it, and reduced the US from the leadership position in education worldwide.

The process of accrediting is also in dire need of repair. Board members have vested interests in educational institutions thus creating a conflict of interest. In addition, it is a very rare occurrence when a school loses its accreditation. Reporting from accrediting agencies detailing inefficiencies are confidential and not available to potential students.

Appendix M: Concepts and Proposal Edited from Senator Alexander Proposal

Senate Committee Report

Risk Sharing / Skin-in-the-Game

Concepts and Proposals

Goal: Federal realignment for stronger school responsibility to reduce costs for students and increase retention rates

Strategy: Design and implement of college / university accountability and share the risk in student loans

The purpose of this proposal is to make institutions responsible for some of the costs of educations for students by making the institution share the responsibility for student success by implementing programs to help the unprepared student. The problems addressed by this proposal concerning stakeholders, (schools, taxpayers, and government agencies) by the realignment of the Higher Education Act:

1. Problems stemming from student loan
2. Establishment and enforce default student loan rates from dropout rates, which are currently inconsistent
3. Increase completion rates
4. The current 90/10 Rule which applies to for-profit schools where 10% of the total tuition paying body is not reliant on federal assistance

Risk sharing, or as it is currently referred to as Skin-in-the-Game, means schools included in federal aid programs be held partially accountable for student success. This means enrolling students who are not capable of successfully completing the rigors of

college learning so they have an opportunity for a “test run” at college courses, and the options of academic assistance and support services helping students to attend, thus increase success rates. The program clearly defines:

1. Participation – what schools are included
2. Measuring or assessment of college or university
3. Triggering liability
4. Impact on school in terms of penalties or sanctions

Appendix N: Concepts and Proposal Edited from Senator Alexander Proposal

Senate Committee Report

Federal Postsecondary Data Transparency and Consumer Information

Concepts and Proposals

Goal: consumer access to accurate institution data. Clear, concise, and accurate information for students to make informed decision on best-fit institutions

Strategy:

1. Identify federal role in post-secondary education
2. Implementation of a data collection method
3. Identify student informational needs that are clear and user friendly

In 1876, Congress passed a bill sponsored by then Congressman Garfield creating the Department of Education. The purpose of the agency was for the collection of statistical data of school systems and teaching methods. Statistical data for post-secondary schools encompassed degreed programs, faculty, student enrollment, and later increased to include libraries and financial reports. The Higher Education Act of 1965 requested institutions submit survey data increasing the amount of data required. However, the surveys were not mandatory until the 1992 reauthorized version. Although the amount of information drastically increased, there was no mechanism for real accountability. Today, according to statistics for 2014–2015, students have a choice in attending one of the 6,000 colleges and universities, which now have 60% of the

undergraduates and 40% of graduate students, request federal financial aid. Even with the plethora of information available some of the problems exist are:

1. Data required from surveys is of no real value to students and policymakers.
Even though the amount of information is extensive, very little of the information is of real value.
2. Survey mechanisms are cumbersome and grossly ineffective.
3. Navigation of the data on post-secondary institutions is not widely used by students. Mechanisms driving search engines do not easily “find” government informational sites.
4. In many cases, data available has been altered to give something other than the true picture of various institutions. Thus the topic of transparency in education does not give potential students enough valid information to make unbiased informed decisions concerning education.
5. First generation and nontraditional students without a structured support system network have difficulty in making marginally informed decisions and poor success rates. This relates to students deciding to attend their first choice school is more likely to graduate. Students who are poorly prepared to attend college and attend lower-priced public facilities are more likely to not complete their education. Gainful employment is directly related to program enrollment.

The revisions for the new authorization include:

1. Surveys include only questions on finance, student success, or safety
2. Evaluate actual information from students, student families, and policymakers

3. Allow third party organizations to capture information not included in federally mandated data; however, they must first obtain signed voluntary participation by authorized institution personnel
4. In order to maintain necessary data collection, must monitor what is required by law

For data integrity and determine the quality of transparency of federal agencies and students, these points must be put in place:

1. Put in place the Outcomes Measures Integrated Postsecondary Education Data Systems, an outgrowth of the 2008 reauthorization prior to moving forward with additional new improvements
2. Analysis and reporting on investments in federal financial aid programs
3. Redefine student data reporting student demographics, determining the sample from the comprehensive collection
4. Rely on third-party data to determine institutional success to insure data is uncompromised by political interests

The student can access information provided by the Bureau of Labor Statistics for regular and professional information on regional statistics concerning salaries and success rates in the job market after graduation. In addition, consideration has been given to the Bureau graduate data collection system. Institutions will be required to include a full disclosure page on their website and include an easy-to-use calculator so potential students can accurately calculate total costs for attending the institution. As part of the privacy issue, student identity will not be accessible. The collection of information will

be a requirement for new students, including those students who are not getting federal aid.

Any data collection, whether adjustments, additions, or new data collection systems or mechanisms, is to be authorized by law as part of accountability. The authorization is by Congressional approval. Any institutional adjustments concerning data are to be made public as part of the transparency. Concerning institutions, any legal process regarding arbitration is to be made public.

Appendix O: Concepts and Proposal Edited from Senator Alexander Proposal Higher Education Accreditation

Concepts and Proposal

Goal: improve quality of education and student success

Strategy: redesign the accrediting process in order to improve the quality of education; create an atmosphere of innovative actions thus promoting competition between institutions and insuring a system of accountability to stakeholders

Accreditation is a peer-reviewed system insuring that institutions meet standards of established academic excellence and success. Generally, accreditation begins with an internal review of the mission, educational and performance objectives, and is measured against the accrediting agency standards. The accrediting agency then sends a peer review team to insure the institution is meeting the defined standards and making recommendations for accrediting. This process can take place as often as every two years up to every ten years. For the institution, accrediting is a mechanism providing quality improvements, peer feedback, and determining the quality of credit worthiness for acceptance. As for the stakeholders, for students, federal government, and the federal student loans, it determines the worthiness of the institution.

Problems:

The accreditation process serves as a monitor for federal funds on the government side and for academia on the other. To that end, Congress is questioning the integrity of the process as the number of complaints from students increases concerning the quality,

integrity, and cost of higher education as well as institutions' academic rigor and student success. Thus, the problems identified are:

1. Accrediting has not always produced educational quality, citing examples such as: 45% of the students showed no significant learning in the first two years and only 36% did not demonstrate significant improvement in four years. As it stands now, colleges are lacking in teaching students on a college level. Survey results show over half of the students enroll in college level courses where the writing requirement does not exceed 20 pages and the reading does not exceed 40 pages per week. At graduation, 20% of the students lack the competency in basic skills. This translates to one-third of corporate employees feeling that students are well prepared to enter the workforce and just over 25% feeling that students lack basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics.
2. Academia is perceived as change-resistant. Open education initiatives are offering serious students options by offering free courses online. These new and innovative techniques in learning, especially for the nontraditional student do not fit the mold; however, they very often offer instruction in a target-specific area. The problem is there is no real way to certify the quality of instruction since there are no provisions for assessment.
3. The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association is not reliant on geographic locations. This association accredits institutions scattered across the US. In addition, the mission, target audience,

admission requirements, and levels of quality control vary from institution to institution. Consolidating these diverse institutions has corrupted the standards by which these schools are judged. For an accurate accounting that is fair and balanced, the accreditation standards might be changed from a mission focused or institutional type rather than geographic.

4. Costs related to accreditation for some institutions are astronomical.

Larger institution departmental costs are often equal to those of smaller institutions in total. The cost analysis is complete, incorporating staff and faculty involvement, a breakdown of tangible and intangible items included in the analysis. In order to better evaluate costs, some items can and should be eliminated.

5. Integrity of evaluations is also a consideration. Some institutions are held to higher standards than others. This difference is attributed to many factors including institution members serving on boards, a clear indication of conflict of interest, popularity of the institution, etc. Accountability standards implemented will address this issue.

This report, besides identifying problems, puts forth several proposals for restructuring:

1. Repeal unrelated accreditation-related regulations that are not directly related to educational quality and improvement.
2. Make allowances for flexibility and innovative mechanisms. This allows institutions with goals and a proven track record an expedited process, allowing more detailed information to those institutions that need the additional attention.

3. The establishment of a base or minimum for accreditation.
4. Separate the association with institutional links to federal aid programs. Not all institutions currently do this, which would thus separate institutional interest from federal monies.

Redesigning the accrediting agencies will:

1. Allow for innovative thinking, thus promoting next generation curriculum.
2. Offer federal aid and assistance to those institutions offering professional degrees and certifications.
3. Move from a geographic based system to a specialization or non-traditional sources of education. This allows not only grouping according to institutional mission, but also according to characteristics by which the institution prefers to be associated such as special focus, tribal, or doctoral degree granting institutions.
4. Maintain an accrediting process independent from political or special interest groups.