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Résumé de l'article

This study investigates how time intersects with student learning in Canada’s first, and only, Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) in an online teaching and learning stream. Thirty-two students responded to a survey that asked about their experiences, perceptions, and challenges after their first year of the program. Descriptive statistics and NVIVO 10 were used to analyze survey responses and to develop themes through open coding. The findings indicate that time shapes students’ decisions to pursue the MLIS online, their perception of what the degree might mean for their future, their experience in the program, the quality of their relationships, and their learning. The perceived flexibility of the MLIS program was incredibly important to students. However, the majority of students described themselves as “time poor” and many students underestimated the time commitment necessary to complete the program, to manage coursework, and to build and maintain relationships with others.

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Abstract

This study investigates how time intersects with student learning in Canada's first, and only, Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS) in an online teaching and learning stream. Thirty-two students responded to a survey that asked about their experiences, perceptions, and challenges after their first year of the program. Descriptive statistics and NVIVO 10 were used to analyze survey responses and to develop themes through open coding. The findings indicate that time shapes students' decisions to pursue the MLIS online, their perception of what the degree might mean for their future, their experience in the program, the quality of their relationships, and their learning. The perceived flexibility of the MLIS program was incredibly important to students. However, the majority of students described themselves as "time poor" and many students underestimated the time commitment necessary to complete the program, to manage coursework, and to build and maintain relationships with others.

Keywords: online teaching and learning, time, graduate students, Master of Library and Information Studies (MLIS)

Introduction

The MLIS (Master of Library and Information Studies) program at the University of Alberta is a 16-course, 48-credit, ALA-accredited (American Library Association) program that offers online and on-campus teaching and learning streams. The American Library Association is the oldest and largest library association in the world and is responsible for program accreditation and promoting libraries around the world (American Library Association, 2018). While recent research (Consillium, 2015) suggests that 93.15% of Canadian universities offer online courses and programs, a country as large and diverse as Canada should be a leader in distance education for librarianship, but it is not. The School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS) at the University of Alberta offers Canada's first, and only, MLIS degree that students can opt to take completely online. To complete the degree, students in the program are required to take five core courses and two technology courses, nine course electives, and finish an ePortfolio capstone project. The online teaching and learning stream is asynchronous to accommodate a geographically dispersed cohort (Canada itself has six different time zones) and the learning management system (LMS) used in the program is eClass (Moodle).

The MLIS program is itself time bound. Students have six years to complete their degree in a semestered system. Courses are designed to be delivered sequentially with a number of electives requiring pre- and co-requisites. Furthermore, many of our students are already working in libraries, completing their MLIS as a second career, or to further their current career, while raising families or any combination thereof. How these students manage their time and strike a work/life balance is crucial to their success (however "success" is personally defined) in the program. Given that time is a critical, constitutive context in which students are situated, and that time permeates all aspects of lived experience, this research explores the following two questions:

1. How do students situate themselves in time as it pertains to the MLIS program and their future careers?

2. How does time shape online student experiences in the MLIS program?

Related Literature

Conceptualizations of Time and Space in Education

While standard dictionaries define time as a noun, adjective, and verb, Gourlay (2014) argues that time is neither "a thing unto itself" nor an entirely abstract concept and states that "time and how it is conceived of is a crucial constitutive dimension of human life, rather than a neutral and unchanging backdrop against which action takes place" (p. 141). Time permeates every aspect of education from learning experiences to pedagogical approaches, to relationships between and among students and teachers, to course structure and content (Allan, 2007; Cho & Tobias, 2016). The intersections of time and distance in education have been theorized for over three decades with Mardsen (1996) posing the question "How,

given the spatial and temporal separation of teachers and learners, is education possible?" (p. 222). Evans, writing in 1989, argued that 'distance' in distance education results in the convergence of time and space in that distance education fosters new connections between disparate places and that time can measure this distance. For example, in the online environment, instructors and students must consider time in a very basic sense (time zones and the rhythms of night and day) when thinking about online education for students at a distance (Evans, 1989). In turn, delivery of distance education must take into account that various actors will have different perceptions of time, place, and distance (Evans, 1989). Increased offerings of online courses and programs of study have created what Barbera and Clara (2012) dub "new time conditions" (p. 3) which have prompted greater urgency in understanding the relationship between time and learning.

Temporal Aspects of Computer-Mediated Interaction

With advances in distance education and online delivery, time has become a salient element in relation to computer-mediated interaction (Allan, 2007; Barbera & Clara, 2012; Luppicini, 2007). Almost three decades ago, in 1988, Hesse, Werner and Altman presented a transactional framework for studying the temporal aspects of computer-mediated interaction. Hesse et al. (1988) suggested that educators need to consider both the linear dimension of time, which refers to past, present, and future, as well as the cyclical or spiraling dimension of time, which refers to recurring events such as when a "student regularly logs on to LMS discussion board but has varying purposes and experiences that make each event distinctive" (p. 150). Related to linear, spiraling, or cyclical dimensions of time in computer-mediated learning are synchronous and asynchronous interactions (Hesse, Werner, & Altman, 1988). Hesse, Werner, and Altman suggest that the "asynchronous modes of computer communication give considerable flexibility to temporal scale allowing the user almost unlimited time for editing, composing, sending, and retrieving messages" (p. 151). While asynchronous discussions might allow for temporal flexibility, there are implications and consequences for online learners. For example, Luppicini (2007) reports on research that found face-to-face students presented better counterarguments during class discussions (synchronous time) whereas online students outperformed face-to-face students in identifying different arguments and thinking of alternatives (asynchronous time). Other research indicates that students often perceive asynchronous discussion boards as goal and task oriented which can lead to feelings of isolation when students do not receive immediate feedback from instructors (Valenta, Therriault, Dieter, & Mrtek, 2001).

In addition, online discussion boards become not only the space and time where students and instructors interact, but also the locale whereby "each actor displays a hidden, direct or indirect influence on the others" (Kabat-Ryan, 2014, p. 165). For Kabat-Ryan (2014) "it is through these time and space coordinates that the life of the distance learner is organized and ultimately fixed" (p. 166) which underscores how temporal and spatial elements in computer-mediated interactions shape not only individual and collective learning, but also how they act as organizing principles for the learner. A final temporal aspect of computer-mediated interaction concerns the behaviours of learners themselves (Cavanaugh, Lamkin, & Hu, 2012; Lazaros & Flowers, 2014). Students who tend to complete online courses and enjoy online learning score higher on scales measuring self-regulation (Barnard-Brak, Lan, & Paton, 2011), tend to procrastinate less (Michinov, Brunot, Le Bohec, Juhel, & Delaval, 2011; Rakes,

Dunn, & Rakes, 2013), and cite the structure of online courses as positive (Paechter & Maier, 2010). This research indicates the importance of understanding the temporal aspects and consequences of computer-mediated interaction of online learners. However, less attention has been paid to how temporal scales and cycles are related to other aspects of the situation such as overestimating and underestimating the time needed to complete course work, to update IT skills, and to communicate online (Winter, Cotton, Gavin, & Yorke, 2010).

Time and Pedagogical Approaches

Time also plays an important role in terms of course content and pedagogical approaches. The following section focuses on three types of pedagogical time as identified by Ihanainen and Moravec (2011): (1) temponormative, (2) pointillist, and (3) cyclical time. Temponormative pedagogy embraces a linear sense of time where "learning has a beginning and an end, with predictable and measurable waypoints between" and where temponormative knowledge is "typically encoded in predefined curricula, transmitted through 'banking' pedagogies, and transmits just-in-case information and knowledge (e.g., memorization of the world's capitals) that might be useful outside of the learning event's timeline" (Ihanainen & Moravec, 2011, pp. 28-29). The question for Ihanainen and Moravec is whether temponormative learning works in online learning environments. They suggest that dialogues mediated by information and communication technologies (ICTs) require the creation of new virtual conceptualizations of time as it relates to social interactions (Ihanainen & Moravec, 2011). These new concepts are

- pointillist (dot-like) time, which reveals "itself through discontinuous, separate acts that participants can return to;" and

- cyclical time, which is "illustrated by clusters of events in which intensive interactions occur for a period of time, and then cyclically reemerge as bursts of activity in the same or different forums after a certain amount of time has passed" (Ihanainen & Moravec, 2011, p. 28).

Pointillist learning is based on the idea that learning is made up of masses of fragments and pieces such as Twitter posts, YouTube clips, and blog posts, which "transmit separately beginnings, middle points, and endings of events in an order that may seem perceptibly vague. Among other things, they comprise experiences, opinions, perceptions, comments, and what-if scenarios" that are fragmented and unanticipated (Ihanainenn & Moravec, 2011, p. 29). Conversely, cyclical learning considers the participation in discussion forum threads where "learners experience both densification and diffusion of learning intensity" (Ihanainen & Moravec, 2011, p. 30). These authors suggest that there are phases of intense activity of discussion, usually around a specific theme or question, followed by periods of calm and that in cyclical learning students acquire the ability to learn within intensive time periods. Finally, Ihanainen and Moravec (2011) argue that these three types of learning (temponormative, pointillist, and cyclical) are not independent of each other and that they coexist within a course.

Time and Online Learners

Researchers have explored the intersections of time and the online student experience and suggested that time is not "a neutral and linear framework in which all students are equally positioned" (Burke, Bennett,

Ramsay, Stevenson, & Clegg, 2016, p. 20) and that assumptions about "naturalised understandings of student temporality" must be interrogated (Henderson, 2016, p. 21). For example, McNeill (2014) argues that there has been an increase in the number of postsecondary students taking courses and programs online while at the same time, these very students are experiencing increasing demands on their time. McNeill highlights the three main dimensions of time in a student's life: home life, work life, and student life and argues that each dimension must be balanced for the student to be successful. He suggests that students create a "time budget" for online learning in order to make conscious decisions about how they are spending their time and how, when, and where they will study.. Furthermore, research by Romero and Barbera (2011) posited that the time demands of family, work, school, and other commitments affected learning in online programs. They explored the quality of time that students devoted to their studies and found that time flexibility and ability to learn in the morning were highly correlated to better grades (Romero & Barbera, 2011).

Method

In the fall of 2013, SLIS welcomed the first fully online cohort of students who were completing the MLIS degree part-time (one or two courses per term). After a full year in the program (fall 2014), students were given a survey that asked about their perceptions, experiences, and expectations of the program and the MLIS degree. To answer the research questions an online survey with 23 closed and open-ended questions was distributed to 39 students in our first online cohort. Thirty-two students responded for a response rate of 82%. Closed questions were used to collect demographic data such as age, gender, work experience, and last degree earned. Open questions centered on five separate areas with three open-ended questions in each area: Pursuing an online MLIS; Being an online MLIS student; Connecting in the online MLIS program; Building the online MLIS program; and Becoming an LIS professional. The questions posed in the survey examined the students' experiences in the online program and were analyzed to understand how time intersects with learning and student experiences in the MLIS program. The open-ended questions were designed to illicit student stories, thoughts, and reflections (Smyth, Dillman, Christian, & McBride, 2009). The closed question data were analyzed using frequency counts and descriptive statistics and open-ended data were analyzed for common themes and trends that emerged across questions and throughout the comments (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Miles & Huberman, 1998) using NVIVO 10. We used constant comparison to develop the codes and themes that are listed below.

Ethical Considerations

This research study received ethics approval from the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Board. The Research Ethics Board pays considerable attention to studies involving current students. In their ethics application, the researchers needed to clearly explain how participants could opt to participate or not to participate in the study, how anonymity and confidentiality was assured, and most importantly, how the researchers would guarantee the students that their decision to participate or not would in no way effect their program or courses. Because this was the first cohort in the online teaching and learning stream, the researchers consciously decided not to collect other forms of student-generated data such as discussion posts, time on eclass, or questions posed to various forums. While these data sources would have been

useful to include to triangulate the findings, the researchers concluded that the first cohort had already experienced many firsts and that the focus of this study was on student perceptions and not on collecting data that may provide insight into their actual behaviour such as class participation or student work.

The Participants

MLIS students in the online teaching and learning stream differ from the face-to-face students in a number of ways. More students in the online stream have children compared to those in the face-to-face stream. Over 70% of SLIS online students are currently working in libraries while just two out of the 32 reported having no library-related work experience. Nine of the respondents had over ten years of experience in libraries in positions ranging from circulation assistant, children's programmer, and public service in a rural library system, to working at Library and Archives Canada. Sixteen percent of online students have a library technician diploma.

Study Limitations

This was the first cohort of students in the online teaching and learning stream and it is possible there were "novelty" effects whereby these students were different from others in terms of risk-taking, trying unknown or new things, and dealing with uncertainty. Furthermore, the online teaching and learning stream is new, the only one of its kind in Canada, and the students are part-time, graduate students. Consequently, application to other programs may be limited. Because this was the online stream's inaugural cohort, we expected to be alerted in some of the survey responses to specific issues that were problematic for students. Furthermore, we relied on a single data source (open-ended survey questions regarding students' perceived experiences) for reasons mentioned above. Lastly, there is a limitation in the survey instruments themselves: as people report their self-perceptions, such reports may or may not correspond to their actual behaviour.

Results

Situating the Self in Time

Students situated themselves in time to frame expectations, hopes, and planning for careers when asked "What factors led you to decide to pursue an online MLIS?" In the past, they "were unable to take the degree" for whatever reason (with four respondents citing timing and other obligations as a primary constraint). Other respondents reflected on their past by asking themselves what their likes and dislikes were when they considered their future careers. For two respondents a career in LIS made sense because they "have always loved libraries."

Respondents also considered the online MLIS teaching and learning stream by taking into account their self-knowledge. One participant stated that flexibility was important because "I tend to be a night owl, so I like doing my homework in the wee hours of the night" and another added "I did not have to be tied down attending classes at specific times." For several respondents the flexibility of the program was a

primary factor in pursuing the MLIS because online delivery gave some agency in determining how and when respondents spent time on their courses.

Eleven of the 32 respondents chose the online MLIS teaching and learning stream because the online stream removed some of the time-related barriers such as commuting to a physical campus, relocating, or having to quit a job and then find a new one. These are incredibly important considerations in a country such as Canada where many people live in areas in which an MLIS program is unavailable. "I liked the flexibility of being able to stay and work in my home province while obtaining an MLIS." One respondent highlighted the connections they had already accrued in their city. "I really wanted to do the MLIS, but I was quite happy with my current living/life situation and my network of library contacts in the city." Online access to the MLIS enabled students to maintain some control over their current living, work, and social situations. Furthermore, maintaining jobs was a priority for a number of respondents and often provided reassurance. "Being able to continue living where I was and stay in my job meant that I felt less pressure going into the program to make it work."

External time commitments to their families were also a significant factor for many people when they were deciding whether to do the MLIS in the online teaching and learning stream. Spouses and significant others may not be in a position to move. For example, one military spouse reported that "we move every 2 years, often not to major cities." Twelve respondents out of 32 had children and major time commitments to their families: "As a parent and someone working full time, no other program type was really doable." When considering their expectations of the program, respondents indicated some control over their time and learning was critical: "My most positive experiences [in the program] have been the ability to work school around my shifts at a public library and also being able to work on school from my home." Similarly, the following respondent noted that "being able to do the courses without stopping the rest of my life, doing the work on my own time and still being able to work full-time" was the most positive aspect of the program. These findings support a large body of research that indicates that flexibility is one of the most positive aspects of any online learning endeavor (Collis & Moonen, 2011; Romero & Barbera, 2011).

Employment and finances constrained and expanded the possibilities of the present and future. One participant stated that "there are some retirements coming up in my library and I want to be qualified for the job. My work suggested I go now [take the MLIS] (as opposed to two years from now, when I wanted to go)." This respondent's supervisors have implied that an investment in the MLIS now will pay off in the future when the respondent is qualified to fill upcoming professional librarian positions due to retirements. In this case, time is a resource to be invested now in a necessary credential. Because the respondent's employer "suggested" that he or she enroll in the MLIS program now rather than the time that the respondent thought was more advantageous, the employer influenced not only how the employee spends his or her time at work but also how he or she spends their time outside of work. Others noted that lack of employer support for those already working and taking the MLIS was demoralizing with one respondent reporting that the biggest obstacle in the program was an "unsupportive employer." While fifteen respondents mentioned the advantage of maintaining employment due to online delivery, two respondents acknowledged their current financial situation as a constraint on making the time

commitment to the MLIS. "I was hesitant to drop out of the workforce and pursue an MLIS degree full-time due to financial constraints."

When respondents considered their future, they focused on three primary issues: careers, self-improvement, and the process and benefits of professionalization. Respondents highlighted "better job prospects, better pay, wider and greater opportunities," "a desire to find a fulfilling career that matched my skills and interests," and "an MLIS degree would provide an entry into a field as well as lots of transferable skills for many fields." One respondent highlighted the benefits associated with full-time work: "the vacation time for full-time librarians was very tempting!" In terms of self-improvement, respondents spoke of wanting greater challenges, opportunities, responsibilities, and meaningful work with two respondents stating "I thought that the courses could enhance my knowledge and help me approach my job in new and better ways," and "I was in a job that was starting to feel stagnant and that wasn't going anywhere."

Professionalization, a process of enculturation that occurs over time, potentially offered many benefits, exemplified by statements such as "I would not be hired for my current position if I was applying today. . . I am looking for ways to access greater challenges in my work life," "I wanted to continue working at the library but in a capacity that would give me more responsibilities and more creative control," and "I wanted to know how to be a better professional in the library setting." Gaining knowledge and the professional credential were seen as time investments made now for greater autonomy, opportunity, and career advancement in the future.

Time and Student Experiences

Time management.

Twenty-eight respondents mentioned or referred to time management as a factor that shaped their experiences in the program in both positive and challenging ways. Time was perceived as a resource to be managed, experienced as psychological pressure, and related to course load, class participation, achieving a work/life balance, and the ability to develop relationships with others in the cohort.

> The biggest challenge has been time management … on top of full-time work, readings and assignments, it can be difficult to actively participate. I often fall behind and feel intimidated, as a lot of classmates do not seem to struggle with this aspect whatsoever.

Four respondents, including the one above, viewed others in the program more favourably in terms of contributions to discussions, commitment to the program, and time management skills compared to themselves. Time management could affect motivation, commitment to learning, and have psychological effects such as "I feel like I'm never "off" when I'm in class, knowing that if I do take a day off of eClass I will have a lot to catch up on." These findings are consistent with those of Eriksen (2001) who argues that an unintended consequence of technological innovation mean that all of us are available all the time. Furthermore, time management was crucial in balancing work commitments with the MLIS program. On the one hand, work provided time constraints in terms of how much time students could devote to their studies (which could be both an advantage and a disadvantage) but on the other hand, some respondents

remarked that working while taking the degree enabled them to make concrete connections between theory and practice with one participant stating a program highlight was "being able to apply what I'm learning to work."

Course content and structure.

Course structure, design, and course assignments mediated time in both positive and challenging ways. The temponormative aspects of the online program, particularly course structure and assignments, could assist students in managing their time and building knowledge. "I like how structured the courses are in terms of discussions and assignments. For me, this works as a safety net so I don't fall behind." Another respondent focused on scaffolding knowledge: "My most positive experience was completing a difficult paper…and receiving full marks for my effort…it was very challenging and satisfying." Others stated that they "have gained knowledge in some of the theoretical areas in the field" and that the "course material has been very good, learning has been the most positive experience." Conversely, one respondent wrote that:

> not having classes at a set time each week allows for flexibility, but also makes it more difficult to stay on schedule…it can be a challenge to learn difficult concepts on my own, without being in a class where the instructor may be able to better explain the topic.

This respondent raises a number of important issues. The first has to do with disciplining the self and the trade-off between program flexibility and maintaining a steady schedule. Some students are more successful with stricter structures. Second, the respondent highlights the relationship between students and instructors. Seven respondents mentioned the interaction with professors and instructors as positive, but this respondent clearly articulates his or her view of the instructor as having expertise and not merely as a support.

Over half of respondents (17) stated that their peers were the most positive aspect of the MLIS program thus far, with one student listing "diverse learning experiences of all of the students in my class," as a positive aspect, and another stating that it was "really interesting learning with other students who are from all over the world and have very different life and work experiences than I have." These relationships were built over time and often facilitated through discussions and group work. During the program as students are building expertise, the diverse lived experience of other members of the cohort made significant contributions to learning and discovery.

However, these positive perceptions were countered by many structural constraints such as keeping abreast of readings, participating in and monitoring discussions, and working with students across different time zones. "The volume of reading that has to be done is significant for anyone working full time, and I can't imagine what it's like for those with full time work and children." Another respondent confirmed this speculation. "I work full-time and have a family, so I have been finding the sheer volume of work that is expected to be quite overwhelming." Ten respondents discussed the time required for participation in the online courses. "The added time requirement of posting is not the same as doing the reading and having to participate in class, which is spontaneous." Another respondent commented that

one of the greatest challenges is "keeping up with the discussions." One respondent reported that "it is time-consuming to read through 20+ comments and by not keeping up I feel isolated from my classmates." Conversely, Brown and Green (2009) found that students in online programs spent the same amount of time participating in online discussions (reading and writing) as what students did in face-to-face courses. If this is the case, the above responses suggest that class participation and the psychological pressure of time is experienced differently in online courses and in the above instance, has led to feelings of isolation. Others found the structure of class discussions challenging, with one respondent reporting: "I had the idea that it [the program] would be a bit less structured, in that I hadn't anticipated discussions each week being between certain days and times."

For others in the program, dealing with the long-distance aspect of the program, particularly assignments involving group work, was a major constraint. Group work required students to adjust to the different geographical time zones and other time commitments and schedules of each group member. Several respondents made comments similar to this one: "We are in different time zones, different work schedules, different work/life commitments. Group work should not be tied to major assignments." However, group work also facilitated relationships and learning.

Half of all respondents mentioned course load and time commitment as a challenge, with one respondent reporting that they "found this degree to be 'part-time' in name only." When providing advice for future students, the most common refrain was to recognize the intensity of the workload and time commitment, with comments such as "Takes much more time than I realized. I anticipated 15 hours/week per course, but is actually taking much more than that." Conversely, two respondents stated that they would gladly take more courses if the option were available. Another respondent expressed surprise at "just how self-directed it [the program] is while still having due dates and incredible interaction with classmates and professors."

Respondents noted that program structure impacted their free time, leisure, and sense of motivation. Because students in the online teaching and learning stream take courses year-round, four explicitly stated they wanted more breaks incorporated into the semester.

Furthermore, in the summer of 2014, compressed courses were offered. In response to these courses, one student reported that:

> Summer courses were killer. They were so intense that the few weeks off before this fall semester started in no way felt like enough so I felt a lot more tense than before and it took longer to get properly motivated.

This response supports Akyol, Vaughan, and Garrison's (2011) finding that duration of courses (6 weeks compared to 13 weeks) influenced students' critical thinking. In addition, technology was a double-edged sword in that it could facilitate communication with other students and instructors but also alienate students. Two students reported that the greatest challenge was computer-related: "HAVING to be on a computer so much of the day" and "having others understand what it means to be in grad school because you are just on your computer."

Finally, some respondents noted that they would like additional signposts and markers indicating their progress through the program:

> We're not terribly well advised as to where we are in the program, and what's to come. More touchpoints from an advisor, even to the group en masse would be welcome and make us feel less like we are just floating out there.

This respondent experiences time and space in the online program as being unmoored. Others mentioned wanting "more updates on long term plans (graduation dates, capping project expectations, etc.)" and "a regular check-in with students with how they're handling the program (I know I feel pretty overwhelmed right now) and I don't know who I would feel comfortable talking to about it." It was important for respondents to feel connected to the program, to SLIS faculty and staff, to the University of Alberta, and to each other to avoid feelings of isolation. These findings support Ross, Gallagher, and McLeod (2013) who argue that it is incumbent upon institutions of Higher Education to foster a sense of "nearness" in distance education, with "nearness" defined as a temporal assemblage of people, technology, and circumstances that serves to support online learning. Conversely, one respondent stated "even though the distances are large, we are made to feel like we matter."

Relationships.

Many of the positive experiences reported by students reflected relationship building that occurred over time with one respondent registering his or her surprise at "how well I've gotten to know some of the other participants. I figured because we're never actually in the same place at the same time, that it would be difficult to get to know each other." The structure of courses could also facilitate relationship building. "Discussion groups also helped create a sense of community because you're sharing with these 5-6 people week after week." A number of respondents mentioned the importance of meeting others in the cohort (where possible) who lived in the same, or nearby, community: "someone in my first course invited all the members in my area to meet for coffee…We have only met 2 times, yet I feel that helped me to feel a sense of community." One respondent stated that "Meeting local members of my cohort, forming bonds with cohort members outside of my geographic region" led to "reigniting my passion for libraries and validating my career change." In-person interactions were uniformly perceived as a positive time investment.

However, time also served as a constraint to building and maintaining relationships, not just with fellow students but also with families. Six respondents stated that they did not develop a sense of community due to time constraints. "I don't have time to really enjoy or develop a rapport with my fellow classmates." "I think it has been really difficult being so spread out and not actually seeing them [classmates] on a regular basis." Time played a crucial role in whether students felt disconnected from others in the program. "I work full-time. I often don't have the time to read each one [comments]. Because of this, I feel that I haven't been able to connect the way I want to with my classmates." Family relationships could also be affected by the time commitment necessary for studying:

> my schedule does not line up with my children's school schedule very well, and when they have time off, I am not able to devote as much time to them as I want as I have to do school projects…I hate saying no to them…but I just don't have the time.

Discussion

There are two contradictory findings that arise from these results. First, students seek an MLIS program that fits into their lives. By far, the most appealing factor in taking the MLIS in the online teaching and learning stream is the perceived flexibility of the program. However, perceived flexibility was tempered by students' various time commitments, having to conform to program structure, and underestimating how much time the courses require. How can (perceived) program flexibility be reconciled with students' lived experience of taking the program? The second contradictory finding relates to Brown and Green's (2009) conclusion that if face-to-face students and online students spend the same amount of time on reading and writing for courses, why do online students experience learning and class time differently?

To answer these questions the work of McNeill (2014) is particularly helpful. McNeil notes that part-time and distance students traditionally have families and "social and domestic demands on their time that the full-time student does not normally have" and while these students might be rich, "their job and other commitments make them time poor" (p. 28). The results of this study support McNeill's hypothesis but an important caveat must be acknowledged. Our data source consisted of self-reported perceptions and experiences and not actual behaviour. It is possible, and perhaps likely, that time rich students are the ones who struggle the most with time management. Future research that triangulates self-reported data with other data such as time spent in eClass may provide greater insight into how students think they spend their time versus how they actually spend their time. However, for these online students, balancing external commitments to family, work, and others with taking MLIS courses often led to stress and feelings of guilt and isolation. Furthermore, many participants noted financial constraints. McNeil has previously observed "many [students] are becoming increasingly time impoverished as term time employment is required to subsidise fees and living expenses" (p. 27). In the case of MLIS students working in libraries and information centres, this can be particularly problematic because employment not only enriches the student financially so that they can continue their program of study but work also enriches them professionally by enhancing the learning experience. MLIS students have a number of reasons to pursue employment while earning their degrees even though this may mean they have less time to devote to their studies. Finally, students conceptualized the MLIS as a time investment that would pay off in the future with improved opportunities, challenges, and meaningful work.

To answer the second question "Why do online students experience learning and class time differently?" a number of factors are at play. As Eriksen noted in 2001, in everyday life short time gaps such as a five-minute wait in the grocery line or time spent commuting are increasingly being filled. In many instances technological innovations have eradicated time and space, making an "off" switch unavailable. While the MLIS program is time bound, course work can be experienced psychologically as open-ended for

students. At the same time, research indicates that deciding work hours in advance, deliberately stopping work, resting, and taking breaks are ways to activate an "off" switch (Newport, 2016). Furthermore, self-reported data does not indicate the quality of time spent on courses. Students who engage in "deliberate practice" when learning, for example, can be more productive despite spending less time studying (Romero & Barbera, 2011).

Other findings indicate that face-to-face meetings facilitated a sense of community among students, instructors, and SLIS staff. Furthermore, shared online space could also facilitate a sense of community even when students were in different time zones and separated by geographical space. Conversely, other respondents felt disconnected because of the perceived psychological distance and physical distance in the online teaching and learning stream. In response to these perceptions of time, online educators might consciously try different pedagogical approaches that draw upon different senses of time such as pointillist, cyclical, and temponormative time discussed by Ihanainen and Moravec (2011).

Implications

Findings from this research have implications for the School of Library and Information Studies' MLIS online teaching and learning stream, for online program planning and course design, and for further research. Students in online programs need clear expectations in terms of the time commitment required for completing a degree online and suggestions for how to structure their time to include rest and breaks. This information should be included in promotional materials as well as on the SLIS website. To support students during the online program, tutorials should be created to help students harness technology for managing their time, organizing their course work, communicating with instructors and students, and staying connected. Students who have completed the program or who have found successful ways to manage their time while working and parenting could provide video and/or audio testimonials. It is important to create a repository of time management articles, suggestions, videos, as well as student testimonials.

Advisors also have a role to play in supporting students with time issues. They can facilitate small group get-togethers where students can connect, share strategies for connecting and communicating, and for building community to help students feel connected to the institution (the University and the School of Library and Information Studies).

When planning programs, faculty should consider ways for students to connect including mentoring, small group advising, regular cohort online get-togethers, face-to-face meetings when possible, Facebook groups, etc. Clear course schedules with planned breaks can also help students see times when they can "get away" from course work. Faculty might keep abreast of current research about students who are enrolled in programs part-time and who work full-time to better understand students' experiences and to assist with course planning. In designing individual courses, instructors should provide experiences that build community (small group discussions and projects, for example), help students stay connected to each other, consider time in terms of online discussion expectations, consider time in terms of assignment deadlines (that meet the needs of students rather than preferences of instructors), and plan for natural breaks where students are not expected to be on discussion forums.

This study, while interesting and informative for the SLIS program, reminds us there is still much to learn about the experiences of online students. Further research should explore multiple data sources such as instructor interviews, student discussions, and statistics from eClass to better understand student time online. Individual interviews would allow students to tell their stories and may encourage a richer discussion about issues relating to how time is experienced by the part-time student who is also a full-time worker. Yearly exit surveys could also be used to help faculty see trends, patterns, and changes in the online student experience as new initiatives are undertaken.

Conclusion

This study explored two questions: "How do students situate themselves in time as it pertains to the MLIS program and their future careers?" and "How does time shape online student experiences in the MLIS program?" Findings indicate that students situate themselves in time and that time management, course content and structure, relationships, and feelings of connection or disconnection are time dependent. Further research is needed to better understand how time shapes the experiences and learning of online students. Finally, conceptions of time are embedded in ideas and notions about future plans and careers, which is another area of inquiry for future research. Through the process of enculturation both into the profession and into the online program, students are positioning and imagining themselves in time. Time is a useful lens to understand student experience in the MLIS online learning stream and to enrich online pedagogy.

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