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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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**Experiences of Faculty and Learners Participating in a
Project-based Distributed Learning Environment**

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of faculty and learners participating in a project-based distributed learning environment, the MBA Without Boundaries program, at Ohio University. The qualitative data were collected through interviews with 54 learners/program graduates and 12 faculty members, participant observation during residencies, asynchronous interactions in the program's databases, and document analysis.

Both faculty and learners consider that teamwork skills, communication skills, computer skills, and tolerance for ambiguity in the project problems are needed to teach and to study in a project-based distributed learning environment. In addition, self-discipline and time management skills are critical for learners who make commitments in a distributed learning environment.

The time and place flexibilities of the online environment, adult learners with different business backgrounds, and the combination of online interactions with residencies are reported as the most important advantages by both faculty and learners. Also, active participation in the learning process, experience with authentic problems, and transferability of learning issues to the work place are significant for most learners. Faculty members consider the creation of a learning community with motivated adults and the experiment with project-based teaching in an online environment to be other advantages.

Learners report teammates who do not make enough contributions to a team project as the most common problem. Some learners complain about the distance barriers and technological failures due to modems and local Internet service providers. Also, several faculty members are concerned about the workload and the time they devote to the program. However, most learners and faculty highly value the program and feel positive experiences outweigh the disadvantages. The combination of project-based approach and distributed learning complements the teaching and learning activities, and this combination is more effective for active learning than a simple delivery of course content through the Web to passive learners.