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# MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF APPLYING FOR AN ONLINE DEGREE

– A Thesis for IB Online at Turku University of  
Applied Sciences



BACHELOR'S THESIS | ABSTRACT

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# MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF APPLYING FOR AN ONLINE DEGREE

- A Thesis for IB Online at Turku University of Applied Sciences

This thesis was conducted for the IB Online Team at Turku University of Applied Sciences. The focus for the research was to determine motivational factors that influenced the applicants of spring 2017 to apply to the International Business Online Degree Programme. A mixed method approach was used as the author conducted a survey and interviews with the target group.

The results of the survey and the interviews show that the motivational factors influencing the applicants are the flexibility the online course offers and the future possibilities that the applicants would have upon finishing the degree. The applicants are from all over the world and are generally older than applicants to on-site degrees. The majority are working and have families at the same time.

Therefore there is a need for the online degree to accommodate this factor as well as being open to people who are not part of the general applicant profile. Reaching applicants in the future can be done through a close collaboration of the IB Online webpage and the social media accounts. Continuous monitoring of the accepted applicants and their feedback should be done to further improve the attractiveness of the course and ease the implementation of the accepted applicants into an online degree.

## KEYWORDS:

Motivation, IB Online, Online Degree,

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS (OR) SYMBOLS**

IB Online – International Business Online Degree Program

MOOC – Massive Open Online Course

TUAS – Turku University of Applied Sciences

# 1 INTRODUCTION

According to (Allen & Seaman, 2017), the overall enrollment to higher education has decreased from 2012 to 2015, whereas the enrollment to online courses has managed to be on a steady rise. The number of students taking at least one distance education course increased 3.9% over the previous year, and grew by 11.0% in the three years since 2012. The 3.9% growth rate exceeds that observed between 2012 and 2013 (3.4%) and between 2013 and 2014 (3.3%).

The purpose of this thesis is to establish the motivational factors behind why current applicants at the International Business (IB) Online Degree at Turku University of Applied Sciences chose to apply to the online degree programme. Secondary objective was to create a profile of the applicants as well as suggestions on how to best reach potential applicants in the future.

The interest for choosing the topic area of motivation came about through several discussions with the staff of Turku University of Applied Sciences. The International Business Degree program which the author is currently studying, is going to be solely online starting from the summer of 2017. For that reason, the IB Online Team was interested in researching the motivation behind choosing to do an online degree over a conventional one. The author was intrigued by the possibility to research and analyze this specific area as it would allow the author to provide Turku University of Applied Sciences with a better understanding of the people who chooses such a degree. Furthermore, the chance to provide usable knowledge and findings towards the future of the program is what has really inspired the author throughout the thesis. The opportunity to make such a contribution has meant that throughout the whole process.

## 1.1 What is motivation?

Motivation is the internal and external factors that stimulate desire and energy in people to be continually interested and committed to a job, role or subject, or to make an effort to attain a goal.

Motivation results from the interaction of both conscious and unconscious factors such as the intensity of desire or need, incentive or reward value of the goal, and expectations of the individual and of his or her peers (Business Dictionary, 2017).

Motivation is an area in which we can make assumptions about others, but until one truly find out the reason for the actions of the target group, you are simply operating based on assumptions rather than facts.

This thesis aims to clarify the motivation of the students who have chosen to study at Turku University of Applied Sciences through the online degree and to provide facts and statistics, which can be used to further improve the implementation of the degree program.

## 1.2 Research Questions

Working together with TUAS meant that from the get go, it was clear what the expectations have been towards the writing of the thesis. Through discussions with the IB Online Team, the research questions and approach has been decided, which meant that both the author and the case company was in agreement and in full cooperation towards the completion of the thesis.

To fully understand the motivation behind choosing to apply to the online degree, a specific set of questions were developed to limit the research area and assist the author in using the optimal tools to explore the chosen area of research.

The reseach questions chosen for the thesis are as follows:

1. What are the key motivational factors influencing the target group to apply to the IB Online Degree Programme at TUAS?
2. What are the characteristics of the target group?
3. What would be the best channels through which to reach the target group in the future?

In the following chapters, the literature review, methodology and research methods chosen will be explained in greater detail. The results of the conducted survey and interviews will be displayed and analysed to give the reader a thorough understanding

of the motivation of the target group. From here, a profile of the target group will be created and used to suggest the optimal ways to reach potential applicants of the IB Online Degree program in the future.



## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The used literature for the thesis have been researched with the purpose of explaining motivational factor and habits among learners when it comes to choosing where to study and which media are most commonly used among the target group of the thesis.

Abraham Maslow (Maslow, 2013), a world renown psychologist, has developed the framework of Maslow's Hierachy of Needs. The theory was first published in his paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" in 1943. The idea behind the theory is that the needs of individuals, divided into five levels, must be met in order for people to become motivated. The theory works as a steppin system where each level of needs have to be met in order for people to be motivated enough to move onto the next level. The five levels of maslow's Hierachy of Needs are: *The Psysiological needs, the Safety needs, the Love/Belonging needs, the Esteem needs and the Self-actualisation needs.*

The first need is called the psysiological needs which are the needs that a person have to meet in order to physically survive. These are basic things such as food, water and shelter. This is a need that educational institutions can only affect in small amounts as the students are only present in the institution for a given amount of time. When it comes to online learning learning instututions will be even less likely to affect this need and therefore it has to be accepted that this is a need where the students themselves have the responsibility to ensure this need is met. Failiure to realise this need can lead to negative effects causing the students to not be able to follow the online learning.

Secondly the safety needs are related to personal health, financial security and the overall wellbeing of the individual. According to (Burluson & Thoron, 2017) If a student does not feel safe at school, due to bullies or a feeling of dislike from the teacher, the student will also have trouble completing work and learning material, because the primary concern is safety. Learners also view safety through a predictable and orderly world—they have an undisrupted routine or rhythm. If learners do not have a routine, or the routine is in jeopardy, learners can feel anxious and unsafe. This will lead to underperformance by the learner.

Thirdly the love/belonging needs are also called the social needs, where an individual seeks to be include and part of something. Friendship, relationships and family is to be found within this group of needs. This need in online learning can be fulfilled by

developing group collaboration projects where learners must work together to complete an online assignment, such as developing a blog or presentation. You can also encourage them to discuss key topics with their peers on social media pages and online forums and give them plenty of opportunities to connect and communicate with other learners to avoid feelings of isolation (Pappas, 2015).

Fourthly there is the esteem needs. This is the need to feel confident in one's abilities and to be respected by your peers. (Burlison & Thoron, 2017) points out that teachers must take advantage of every opportunity to reinforce positive learner behavior and self-esteem and let learners know that they appreciate the effort they are making during the time together in the learning environment. This reinforcement will aid in a learner's development of a favorable self-image.

Lastly the self-actualisation needs are to be found at the top of the hierarchy. This is the need to be more and achieve your goals and dreams to become the best you that you can possibly be. This need is a personal goal set by an individual to reach a point where they feel they have achieved great things in life. These can differ greatly from person to person and in an educational environment this can for example be that a person wants to finish a university degree due to this being their way of reaching a higher goal in life. Learners online learning need to have realistic goals as these will be reachable and will further enhance the self-actualisation.

Meeting the needs of the hierarchy are crucial for an individual to become motivated to perform at their best both in- and outside of the learning environment and the different needs have influenced the questions asked in the survey and the interviews conducted.

Looking at the media use of the target group Stat.fi and Statista were very helpful sites with thoroughly researched information regarding the topic and they were used to great extent in gathering the primary information regarding the target group. The findings from the sites were used to create the questions for the media usage part of the survey to see if the findings were similar or different within the target group.

Following the statistics of the media use of Finnish residents it is evident that people are using the internet more and more often (Statistics Finland, 2016). Eighty-eight per cent of the population aged 16 to 89 used the Internet in 2016 and almost everybody aged 55 or under used the web with ninety-six per cent of those people being online many times a day. (Statista, 2017) shows that in 2016, over 60 percent of the Finnish population aged 18 to 64 participated in social networks. The number of social network users in

Finland is projected to exceed 3 million users in 2017 and increase annually thereafter. The most popular social media channels for Finns in 2016 were Facebook, YouTube and Instagram and the daily social media usage grew by over 20 percent in 2017. Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp ranked highest in messaging applications, leaving behind both YouTube and Instagram in terms of daily usage. With the increasing use of online tools and social media it has been included in the survey to find out how the media use of the target group compares to that of the previous statistics. The results from the survey can be found in part 4 with appropriate figures showing the findings in an easy to read manner.

## 3 METHODOLOGY

When choosing the methodology for the research, there are several approaches, such as inductive, deductive and mixed method approach (Saunders, et al., 2016). Selecting the correct approach is a crucial for the development of the research as it allows the author to utilize the correct tools and theories within the approach to thoroughly investigate the area of interest. The following parts will take a closer look at the three beforementioned approaches and what they entitle.

### 3.1 Different approaches for research

#### 3.1.1 Inductive Approach

The inductive approach uses a qualitative research design and is often associated with an interpretative philosophy (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). It starts with the observations and theories are then proposed towards the end of the research process as a result of the observations that has been made (Goddard & Melville, 2004). The approach is utilized with interview design and can't be generalised. It is therefore not possible to replicate the results as the qualitative research design is not focused on numbers and graphs, but rather to collect statements, which can then be analysed and used to develop a final theory based on the results.

The characteristics of the approach are that the sample size is usually small, but will provide a detailed in dept picture from the collected samples.

#### 3.1.2 Deductive Approach

The deductive approach focuses on “developing a hypothesis (or hypotheses) based on existing theory, and then designing a research strategy to test the hypothesis” (Wilson, 2010). It is an isolate form of research, where for example a questionnaire will be based on theory and can be replicated.

According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (Saunders, et al., 2016) the approach is associated with a quantitative research design. However, it can also implement an

inductive approach where data is used to develop the theory. Quantitative research is usually done through questionnaires, structured interviews or structured observation, which is commonly yielding a large sample, with a very general result.

### 3.1.3 Mixed Method Approach

Cresswell and Plano Clark (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2011) use the following to define the mixed method approach: “as a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone”.

The approach therefore utilizes elements from the two earlier mentioned approaches and combines these into a method, where it is possible to gather information regarding the topic of interest both quantitatively and qualitatively. The method is therefore suitable when researchers want to conduct both interviews and surveys in order to get a deeper understanding of the topic area and gather more information from the target group. This of course means more work for the researcher, however, it will yield a clearer picture of the target group and provide the researcher with a way of cross referencing between interview answers and survey answers.

## 3.2 Choosing the Approach

In conjunction with the research questions, it was decided together with the IB Online Team that the mixed method approach would be the most suitable for the development of the thesis. In choosing said method, it was decided that both a survey and an interview would be carried out to gather as much information as possible.

The target group for the survey and the interview, was the applicants who were invited to the entrance exam for the IB Online Degree in spring 2017. The reason for choosing this specific target group is that the group of people are the ones who have chosen themselves to apply to the IB Online Degree and therefore, they are the best suitable candidates to examine. Understanding who the applicants were, their reasoning behind their choices and how they heard about the degree would mean that the author would

be able to create a thorough analysis of the target group and make valid suggestions towards the future development of the IB Online Degree program.

### 3.3 Developing the Interview Questions

As stated in section 2.4 line 3-4, it was decided that both an interview and a survey would be created for the sake of understanding the target group of IB Online Degree applicants.

In the process of developing the interview it was decided that a semi-structured interview conducted face to face, would be the ideal way of reaching the target group. In semi-structured interviews there are a set of written questions to keep the conversation within the area of interest, but it also allows for additional questions, should the interviewee make a statement or comment that might be useful for the research (Saunders, et al., 2016). A semi-structured interview is used in the mixed method design to explore, explain or validate themes that have emerged from the use of a questionnaire (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

After drafting the initial interview questions, the interview was field tested on one of the applicants on April 10<sup>th</sup> 2017, which is before the actual entrance exam that took place on April 19<sup>th</sup> 2017. The reasoning behind testing the interview questions, was that there could be room for improvement and testing it live with an applicant would give the author an idea of how long the interview would last. The pilot/field testing went well and the interviewed applicant gave constructive feedback that was then used to create the final interview questions. The final interview questions and the transcript of the interviews can be found in the appendices.

A total of seven interviews were conducted on the day of the entrance exam. The interviews were held after the applicants had their written test and were waiting for their group interviews. During this time it was noteworthy to mention that some of the applicants looked nervous, however, after interviewing some of them it made them feel less nervous as the interview design allowed for the applicants to be themselves and give their honest opinion, since the interview was anonymous. The results of the interviews will be analyzed in the next chapter.

### 3.4 Developing the Survey Questions

Developing the survey for the target group, was a project in which it was crucial to ensure that the questions were linked to the research questions mentioned earlier in part 1.2 to establish a coherent and useful base from which a proper and valid analysis could be carried out.

The survey was created over a period of several weeks in cooperation with the IB Online Team. The questions chosen and the style of the survey was linked with survey design theory from Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (Saunders, et al., 2016). The place of delivery was at the IB Online entrance exam at Turku Univeristy of Applied Sciences on April 19<sup>th</sup> 2017. The questionnaire was delivered by hand to the applicants as they left the written part of the entrance exam and was then collected after the group interviews and handed over to the author. The survey itself was created using the survey design tools in Webropol.com. Since it was handed out by hand, the original draft from Webropol was not pleasing to the eye and therefore the draft was converted into a Word file, where the last adjustments were made, resulting in the survey that can be found in the appendices.

This method of survey distribution is know as a self-completed delivery and collection questionnaire and can be subject to a low response rate if the right preparations has not been made. The surveys were solely distributed to the applicants of the IB Online entrance exam and the applicants were told that they were expected to fill out the survey and hand it in during the group interviews. 106 applicants were invited to the entrance exam at TUAS and 66 applicants managed to show up. Out of these 66 applicants, 48 of them answered the survey, resulting in a response rate of 72.73%. Baruch and Holtom (Baruch & Holtom, 2008) mentions that for most academic studies involving individuals or organisations' representatives response rates of approximately 50 per cent and 35 to 40 per cent respectively are reasonable.

With a reponse rate of 72.73% in the carried out survey, it can then be concluded that the survey is valid and reliable and that the analysis of the answers are representative of the IB Online applicants. The final survey draft as it was handed to the applicants can bee found in the appendices. In the following chapter, the answers from the survey will be analysed and displayed for the reader to showcase the results in an manageable manner.

## 4 SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESULTS

### Question 1

The gender distribution of the respondents from the survey were 50/50. There were exactly 24 female and 24 male respondents to the survey. Keeping in line with being politically correct, the question asked was: Choose the answer that fits you the closest. With the answer options being I am male or I am female.

### Question 2

According to the Official Statistics of Finland (Official Statistics of Finland, 2013), nearly one-fifth of students starting to study for a university Bachelor's degree are aged 25 or over. Thirty per cent were aged 19, 21 per cent were aged 20 and 13 per cent were aged 21. Of all students studying for a university Bachelor's degree, half were aged 25 or over. The data includes both universities and universities of applied sciences as there was no available data on universities of applied sciences alone.

From the survey conducted, 72.92% of the applicants were aged 24 or over, indicating that more people applying to the IB Online Degree Program are older than the ones applying to on-site bachelor degrees. It is also worth mentioning that the survey conducted on April 19<sup>th</sup> 2017, had applicants aged above 38 years old, showcasing a larger spread of ages among the applicants.



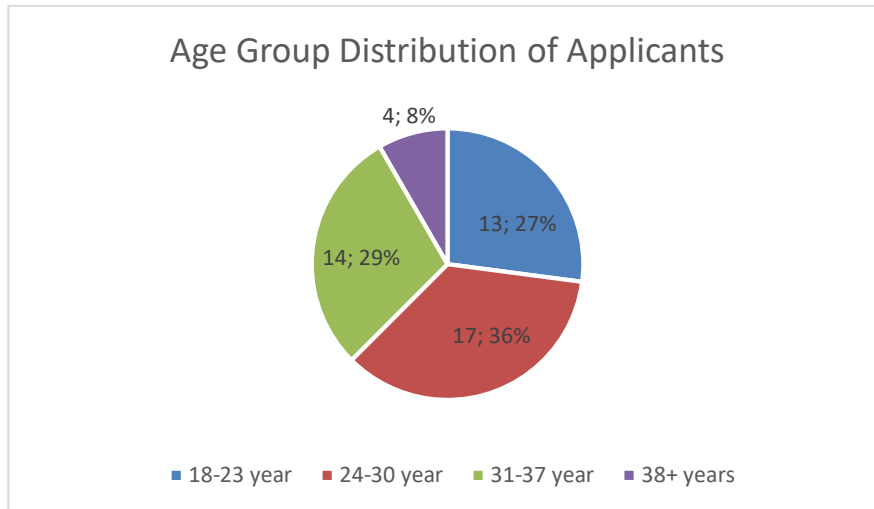


Figure 1. Age Group Distribution

### Question 3

The international perspective of the degree is certainly visible from the answer to this part of the survey. The 48 respondents were from a total of 20 different countries. Finland was the leading country of origin with 25 (52.08%) of the respondents coming from there. The remaining respondents were from a wide mix of countries like China, USA, Ghana, Venezuela and many more as seen in the figure below. It is certainly eyeopening to realise that people are coming from all over the world to apply to the IB Online Degree Program, which gives a proper indication of the level of internationalism that the applicants are bringing to the degree. There was a possibility to do the entrance exam at selected locations abroad for applicants who were not able to come to the physical location at TUAS. It is therefore important to mention that the answers of of the survey are only relatable to the applicant who did the entrance exam in Finland.

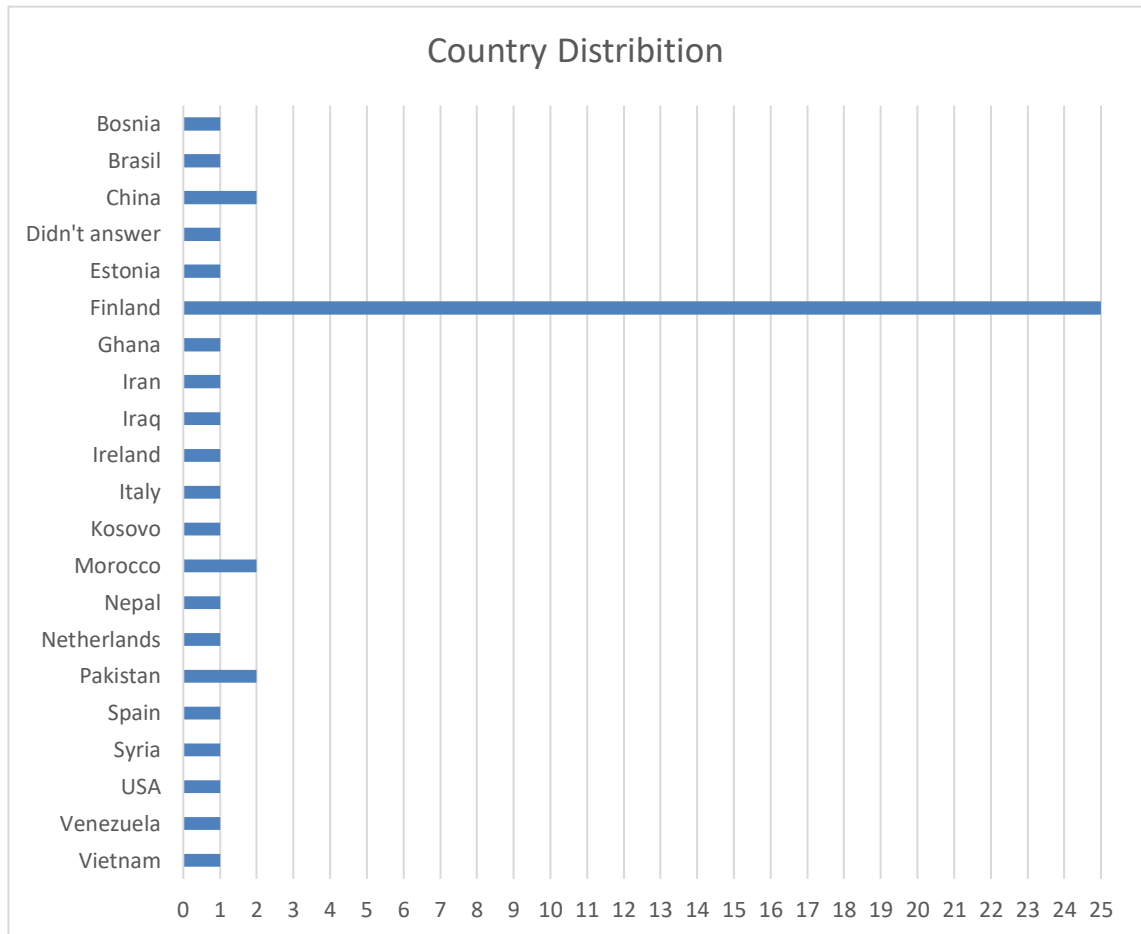


Figure 2. Country Distribution

#### Question 4

When looking at the relationship status of the respondents, you can see that 35 out of 48 respondents are either in a relationship or married and 13 (27.08%) are single. This is 72.92% of the respondents who are in a relationship and could suggest that this is a reason for applying for the degree as marriage and relationships can be difficult to balance with a full time degree.

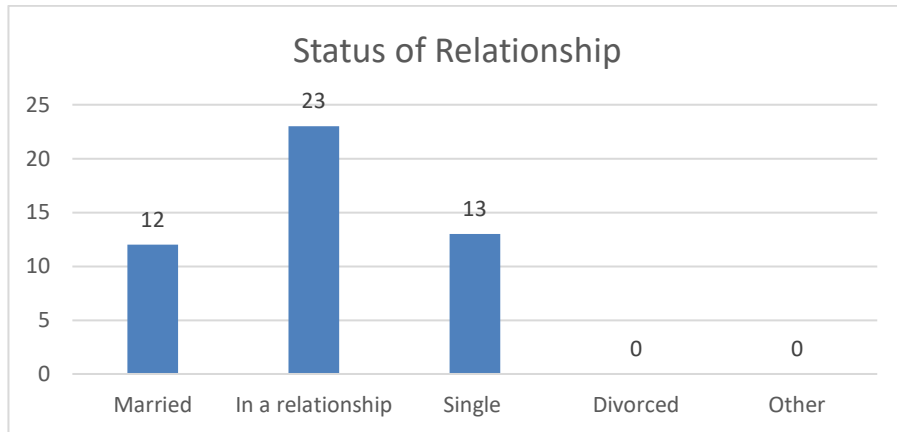


Figure 3. Relationship status

### Question 5

This question is concerned with how many people there are in the household of the applicants and together with the answers from the above question can give an insight to the family status of the applicants.

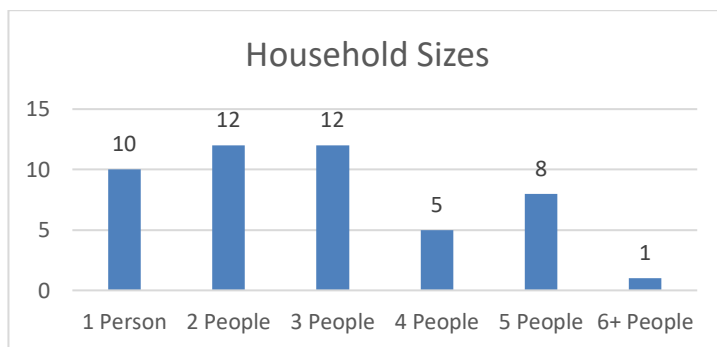


Figure 4. People in the household

Looking at the figure, only 10 out of 48 of the respondents were living alone, with the remaining 38 respondents living in a household of 2 or more people. Some of these can of course be shared student apartments, but based on question 4, it is more likely that people are living together with a spouse and their possible children, depending on the household sizes.

## Question 6

The working situation of the respondents were as displayed in the figure below.

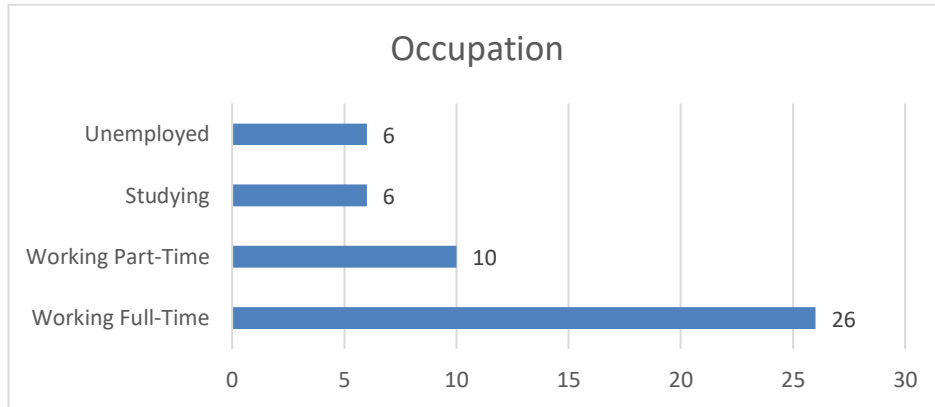


Figure 5. Working situation

It can be seen that 36 (75%) of the respondents are having either a part-time or full-time job. Six (12.5%) respondents are studying and six (12.5%) respondents are currently not studying or working. People who answered both studying and working part-time, have been grouped in the part-time section as the purpose of this question was to establish the amount of people who are working.

With with more than half the repondents (54.17%) having a full-time job, it shows that the need for an online degree could be their way of balancing the job together with studies. One of the applicants answered the following in the interview shown in the appendices:

“I think this is the first online course in Turku and I think it will help me with my part time job as I am currently working in a restaurant so I think it is convenient if I can get a place so I can balance my time between work and home”.

The indication of the flexibility the IB Online Degree program can provide looks to be a major factor on the reason for the applicants applying to the degree.

### Question 7

In this questions, respondents could choose multiple options and therefore the amount of responses is higher than the number of respondents. The results from the question are clearly showing the effect of the website, when it comes to the first point of contact with the applicants. 67.80% of the responses were linked to the website as where they heard about IB Online. Social media, friends, family and other IB students were all lower than the webpage. This shows that the applicants have done research from home and have used electronic devices to look for available degrees. With such a dominant point of first contact, the webpage of TUAS is where it should be expected that most applicants in the future are going to read about the program before doing any further research.

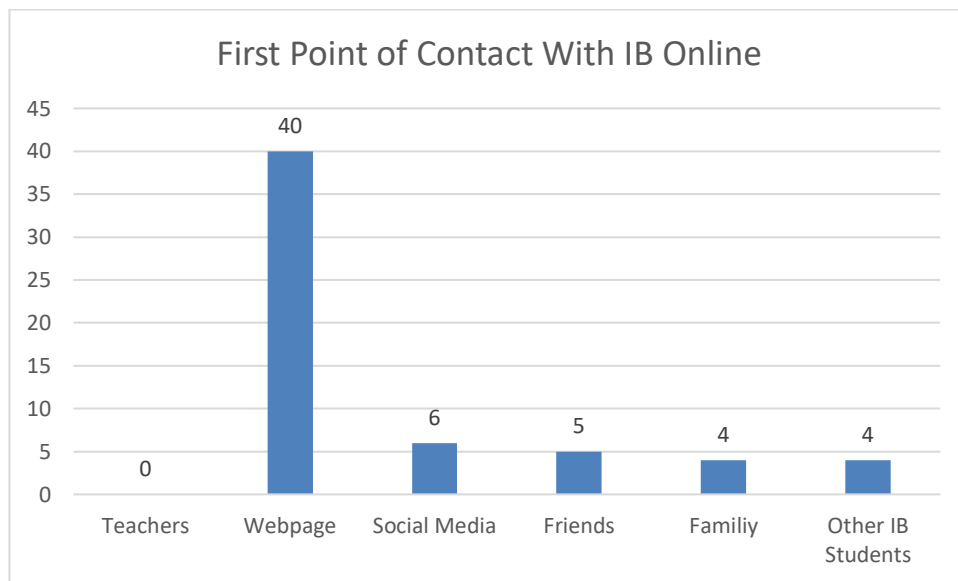


Figure 6. IB Online first contact point

### Question 8

In this section, the applicants were asked to rate a set of statements regarding their expectations towards the IB Online Degree Program from strongly disagree to strongly agree. As can be seen from the figure below the three statements that most respondents either agreed with or strongly agreed with were:

1. It will provide me with useful knowledge
2. It will challenge me intellectually
3. It will help me expand my professional network

All the statements were rated fairly close to one another, however, the three beforementioned statements are the highest rated from the survey. It highlights the areas in which the applicants are hoping the degree will help them further. The three highest rated statements are all about improving one’s situation for the future, and the applicants are hoping that the degree will provide them with new knowledge. An important mention is that all the results were fairly equal, as the majority of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to all the statements.

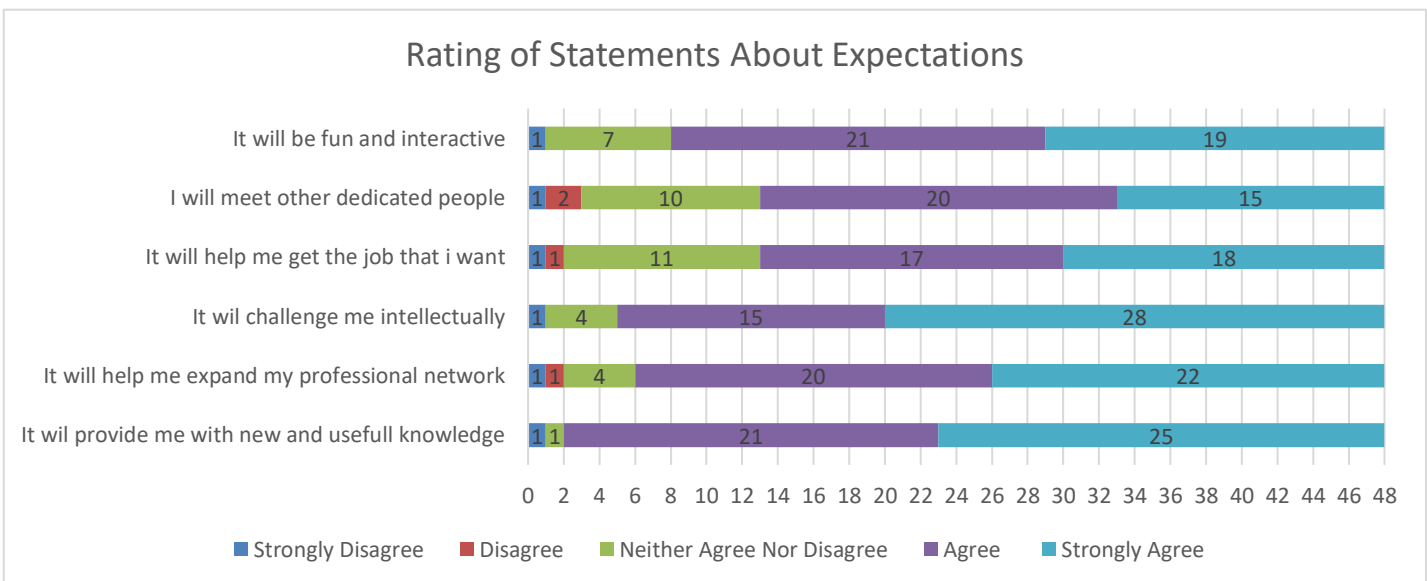


Figure 7. Expectation rating

### Question 9

Looking at who the applicants are and what they have previously done before applying to IB Online is interesting in the way that the degree planners and teachers will be able to get an understading of the overall acedemic level of the applicants that are trying to

get into the degree program. The question asked here was focused on the level of previously finished education among the applicants.

27 (57.45%) of the respondents had previously finished a highschool education before applying to the IB Online Degree Program. 11 (23.40%) respondents had previously finished a bachelor degree and 2 (4.26%) respondents had finished a master degree before applying. 7 (14.89%) respondents had finished another kind of education before applying. One respondent did not answer this part and therefore, the total number of respondents are 47 for this particular question. From the results of this question, it can be expected that the majority of the applicants have finished a highschool education. It should also be expected that among the applicant will be people who have finished bachelor degrees and some have even finished a master degree. The expected educational level of the applicants should therefore be a mix of people who are not familiar with university academic standards and people who are already used to the standards. It will be up to the program planners and teachers to design lectures that will accommodate the need of both experienced and inexperienced students.

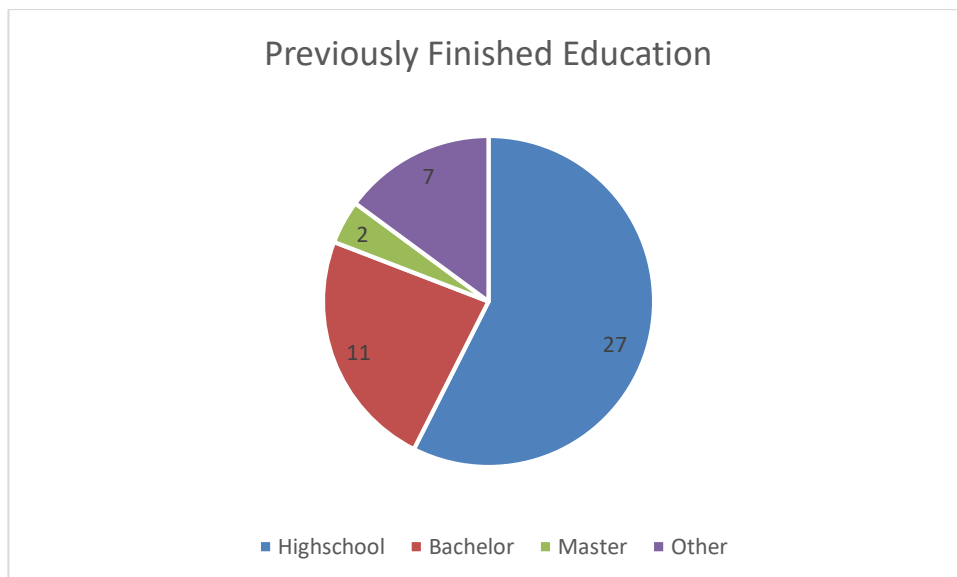


Figure 8. Previously finished education

#### Question 10

When asked if the respondents had previously studied a MOOC (Massive Open Online Course), 45 (93.75%) answered with no and only 3 (6.25%) answered with yes. This result shows a level of inexperience towards online courses from the applicants, that will have

to be taken into consideration when planning the course units. Since people are not familiar with online studying, the workload and expected contribution from the students should be made clear, as this will allow them to make the necessary preparations needed to meet the course expectations.

The following statement is from one of the interviewed applicants and does show that this particular person does not know the extent of the degree:

"I was just talking with one of the other applicants here how I'm confused because it's an online version, I don't know if there are studies here (at the physical location) or what, so I pretty much have no clue".

This statement could suggest that the applicant had not done enough research or it could also suggest that the information is too difficult to find.

#### Question 11

Respondents were asked to rate a given set of factors from not important to extremely important on their decision to study the IB Online Degree. The degree being internationally recognized, allowing the applicants to work at the same time and that they are able to do the course from home, were the three highest rated factors in the extremely important category. This again highlights the need for the flexibility among the



respondents, which would allow them to do the studies and continue to work at the same time. The possibility of being able to do the course from the home also adds an element of flexibility as the respondents would not have to travel to the physical location of the school to do the courses.

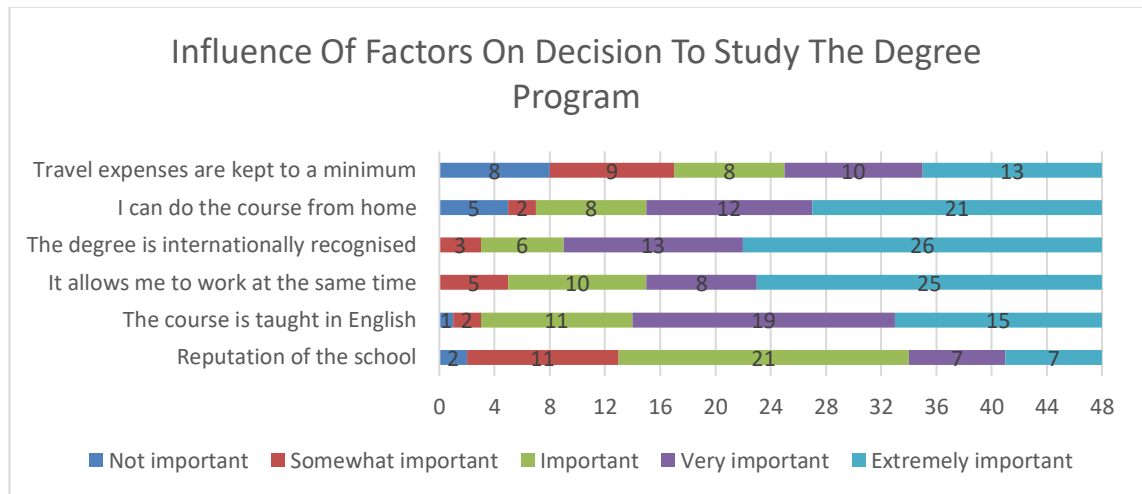


Figure 9. Influence of Factors

#### Question 12

On a scale of 1-5 with 1 being the lowest, the respondents was asked to rate the importance of information when they decided to apply to the degree.

The most important information according to the respondents were information regarding the possibilities after finishing the course, the offered courses/classes and the duration and timeline of the course. The least important information was the feedback from previous and present students.

The respondents were interested in the future possibilities after finishing the course and this goes well in hand with the answers from the interview where the following was said:

"I chose this degree because I want to have my own business in the future and I think that this will help me collect some basic elements for that. I am a foreigner and I moved to Finland, so there are many things I need to learn, like the local laws and culture if I want to have my own business" and "I have been working in the service industry for a really long time and I decided I wanted to change my career path so that's why I'm doing this course".

Using this information it is clear that the applicants already have a plan in mind before applying to the degree. They want to know what to use the degree for and how the specific courses can help them with their future plans. The timeline aspect also comes in with the consideration of future plans as knowing the duration of the IB Online Degree, will allow the applicants to dedicate their time within the given study period.

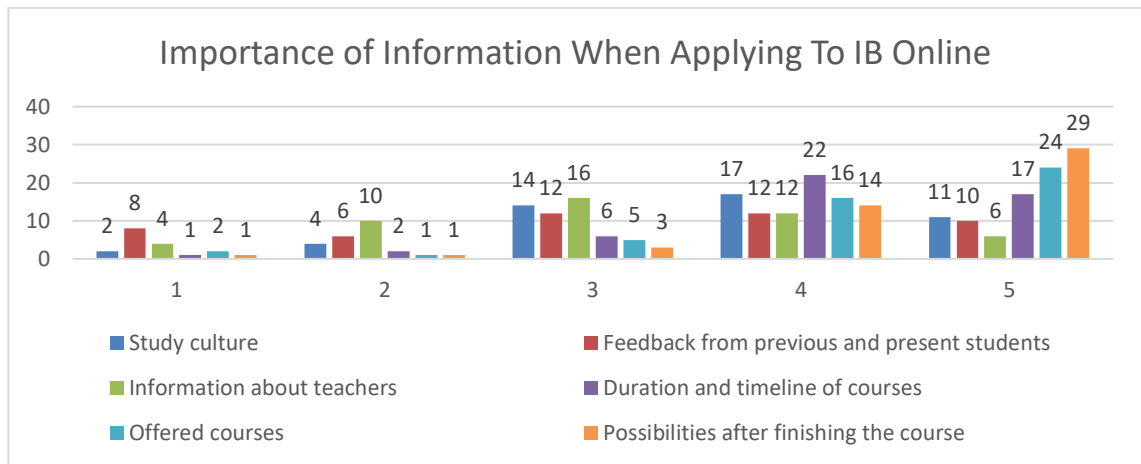


Figure 10. Importance of Information

### Question 13

From here the next set of questions were focused on the social media usage of the respondents and their knowledge of the IB Online social media accounts.

45 (93.75%) respondents answered that they use social media and 3 (6.25%) answered that they do not use social media. With 93.75% of the respondents using social media it would be wise to look at the usage and specific social media sites that the respondents frequently visit. This is the goal of the following questions.

### Question 14

From the answers of the survey, it can be seen that the top three social media sites used by the respondents are, in ranking order, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. Facebook had the most usages multiple times per day with 30 out of 47 (63.83%) respondents answering that they are using facebook multiple times a day. Facebook Investor

Relations (Facebook, Inc, 2017) reported the following numbers in their third quarter 2017 report:

Daily active users (DAUs) – DAUs were 1.37 billion on average for September 2017, an increase of 16% year-over-year.

Monthly active users (MAUs) – MAUs were 2.07 billion as of September 30, 2017, an increase of 16% year-over-year.

With the amount of daily users, it comes as no surprise that Facebook is also the most commonly used social media among the applicants. However, even though Facebook is the most commonly used social media of the respondents, the majority still found the information about the degree from the university webpage. This trend indicates that more efforts should be made to link the two together. Looking at the current webpage for the IB Online Degree (Turku University of Applied Sciences, 2017) the link to the Facebook page is in very small writing at the bottom of the page and could be made clearer, showing that there is more information to be found regarding the degree on the Facebook page.

YouTube and Instagram were the second most used social medias on a daily basis. The IB Online team has already created a YouTube channel with videos explaining about the online aspect of studying and how the current students have adapted to the environment, which can be used to encourage future applicants to apply for the IB Online degree.

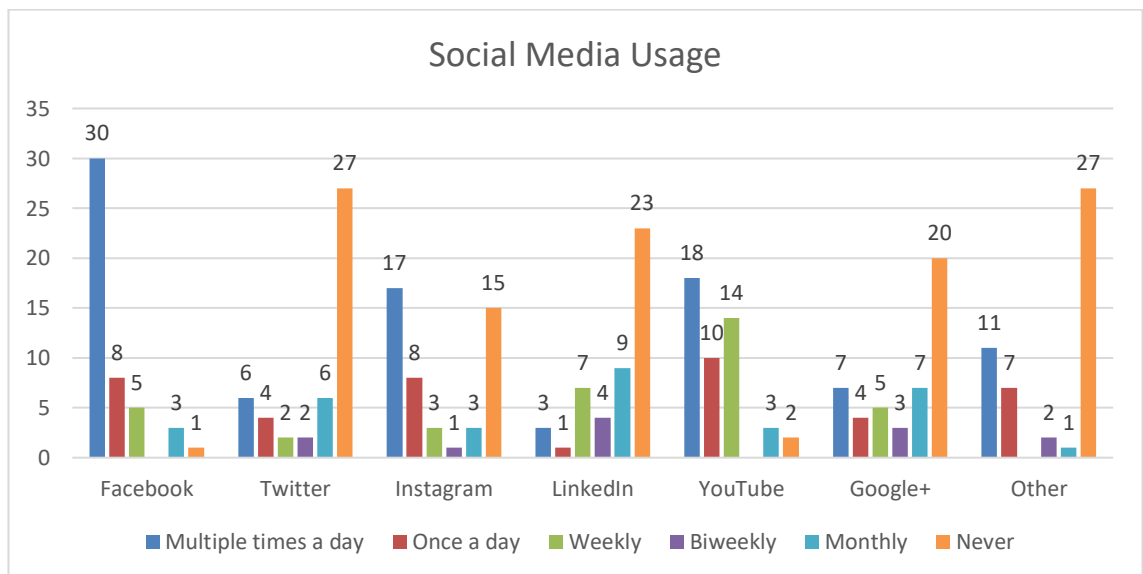


Figure 11. Social Media Usage

## Questions 15 and 16

To the question about whether the respondents have heard about/seen the accounts IB Online has on social media, 32 (68.09%) of the respondents answered no. The social media account, that the most respondents knew about was the Facebook account with only eight (17.02%) of the respondents being aware of this account.

The following question asked the respondents if they are following IB Online on social media and here yet again the response was rather disappointing. Six (12.77%) of the respondents follow IB Online on Facebook, two (4.26%) follow on Instagram and 1 (2.13%) follows on a non specified social media. A stunning 38 (80.85%) of the respondents do not follow IB Online on social media, suggesting that this is an area in which there needs to be improvement done to attract more applicants in the future.

## Question 17

In a follow up question to the above mentioned questions, the respondents were asked about what kind of posts they would find interesting and useful. Respondents could choose multiple options and therefore, the amount of responses is higher than the amount of respondents. The top three answers were tips from students, advice from teachers and articles. The two least interesting posts based on the answers from the respondents are student profiles and teacher profiles. This shows that the respondents are more interested in the advice they can get from students and teachers, than they are in actually learning about the students and teachers themselves. This knowledge can be used for the further improvement of the sites in which IB Online is presented and it also shows which areas should be minimized as not to overshadow the posts, which the applicants would be more interested in.

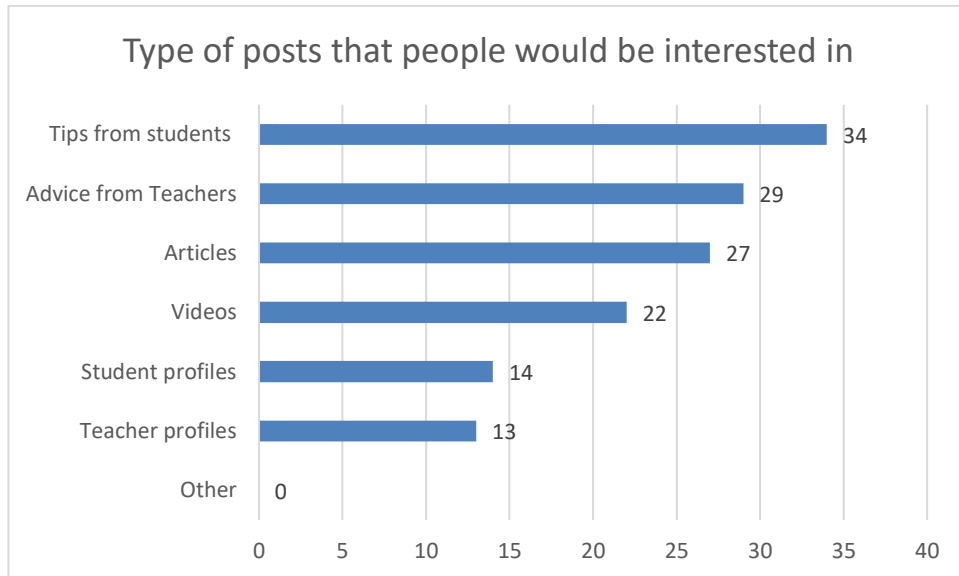


Figure 12. Posts of Interest

#### Question 18

This question asked the respondents how many hours they would be able to dedicate to the studies on a weekly basis. According to the course plan (Turku University of Applied Sciences, 2017), the degree is a full-time degree requiring 210 ECTS to finish. This means that the workload expected would be equivalent to 40 hours per week.

Looking at the result from the survey, only 6 (12.77%) of the respondents would be able to dedicate from 36-40+ hours a week to the studies. 7 (14.89%) of the respondents could dedicate 26-31 hours per week, 16 (34.04%) could dedicate 16-25 hours per week and finally, 16 (34.04%) of the respondents would only be able to dedicate up to 15 hours a week to the studies. With the amount of respondents working, it would be expected that they can not dedicate all their time to the studies. However, it is alarming that the respondents have not realized that even though the degree is online, it is still a full-time degree requiring just as many hours as the ones at physical locations.

Looking at what Xu and Jaggard (Xu & Jaggars, 2013) are suggesting, the trend shows that the impact of online learning has a negative influence on the grade of the students studying online.

“For the typical student, taking a course online rather than in person would decrease his or her likelihood of course persistence by 7 percentage points, and if the student

continued to the end of the course, would lower his or her final grade by more than 0.3 points on a 4-point scale. Before expanding online courses, colleges need to improve students' time-management and independent-learning skills, the researchers say" (Harvard Business Review, n.d.)".

This is an area in which the IB Online Team needs to be aware of the challenges the online degree can present for the students accepted into the course. Having a look at Kellers' ARCS model (Keller, 2009), could help the program managers and teachers understand how to design the course in a way that would accommodate the needs of the applicants and help ease the transition into doing a full-time online degree.

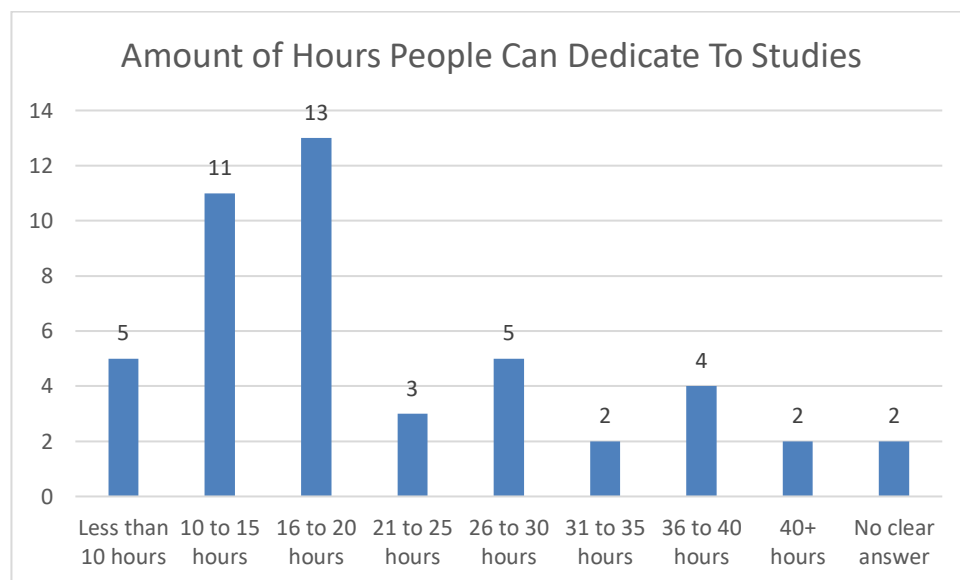


Figure 13. Hours Dedicated to Studies

## 5 CONCLUSION

From the analysis of the survey and the interview questions, it can be concluded that the key motivational factors influencing the choice of the applicants applying to the IB Online Degree Program are:

**Flexibility** in the sense that it allows the applicants to balance the studies together with work and other daily duties they might have. Studying online means that the accepted students will be able to work from home or when mobile, without having to be restrained by having to be at the physical location of TUAS, whenever they are having lessons and/or need to work together with their class mates. Students can plan the workload of the program to fit their schedule as long as the expected workload has been made clear from the teachers in order to eliminate any doubts and misunderstandings that might occur if all information regarding the courses is not available for the students.

With only a few of the applicants being able to dedicate the time required to study a full-time degree, it is necessary that the teachers and program managers work closely with the students to help them create the time they need to finish the course in a timely manner and with acceptable grades. It should also be made clear that the course is a full-time degree as it seems that many of the respondents of the survey were either not aware of this, or they thought that they could do the course without having to put in the amount of hours expected from the course description.

**Future possibilities** that the course offers also play a large role on the reason the applicants have chosen to apply to IB Online. The applicants come from all walks of life and some already know what they will be doing, while others are still deciding. The wide aspect of the degree means that students are not bound to a specific area as the degree offers many future possibilities. Some applicants want to change their career path, with others wanting to gain knowledge that can assist them in realising their goal of having their own business. With some of the applicants coming directly from highschool it is to be expected that they do not fully know what they want to do in the future. The wide aspect of the program will offer these applicants a glimpse of the different business areas that could potentially capture the student and help them decide on the career path they will be likely to pursue.

The applicants who have chosen to apply to the IB Online Degree Program can be said to be internationally minded students from all over the world with an even gender ratio of 50/50 male/female. The applicants are generally older than the applicants who are applying to on-site degrees with 72.92% of the applicants being 24 years or older at the time of applying for the degree. 25% of the applicants are already married and 47.92% are in a relationship. These numbers, combined with the fact that 79.17% of the applicants have two or more people in the household, indicate that the applicants are people with family status. This would also explain the difference in age between on-site degree applicants and the applicants to the IB Online Degree program. 75% of the applicants will be working either part-time or full-time, supporting the conclusion that flexibility is one of the key motivational factors for deciding to apply to IB Online.

The applicants have a mix of educational backgrounds, with some having previously finished master and bachelor levels of education before applying to IB Online. With the mix of educational backgrounds, it is interesting to see that only 6.25% of the applicants have previously done a MOOC or completed closed online courses. Inexperience is to be expected and it will be up to the teachers and program planners to ensure that the applicants who are accepted get the proper guidance they need to be fully equipped to take on a full-time online degree. In order to improve the IB Online Degree, the accepted applicants of spring 2017 should be asked for feedback regarding areas they think could be better handled. Such information could then be used for other universities as well, which are looking at starting up online degrees and do not already have access to the information provided in this research and to the information that can be gathered from the accepted applicants during the duration of the course.

Reaching the applicants in the future can be done through the use of social media. 93.75% of the respondents to the survey said that they are using social media, however, only a handful of the respondents were aware of the social media accounts that IB Online has. The first point of contact with the degree program comes from website visits and it therefore suggests that there should be a closer link between the website and the social media accounts. With the two supporting each other, it can make it easier for interested applicants to find the information they are looking for, without too much of a hassle. The three most commonly used social medias among the applicants are Facebook, YouTube and Instagram. These three should therefore be the ones that IB Online has the most focus on, when looking at ways to attract potential applicants. The most sought after



information in the posts on social media is tips from previous students and advice from teachers. These can be made into short videos or little articles that can then easily be distributed to the interested parties through the social media accounts. Encouraging present students to follow the social media accounts of IB Online will further increase the reach of the program and thereby expose it to more potential candidates.

The IB Online Degree Program is now entering the first semester of being a purely online degree. Teachers and program managers should rely on each other for assistance in improving their individual courses and together help create the best possible online experience for the accepted applicants. Utilizing feedback from previous students regarding their experience with the degree is a way of identifying areas that could be improved for the online degree. As mentioned, the continuous monitoring of the accepted applicants and their feedback to the course, will be the most critical task for the future development of the IB Online Degree Program.

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## 7 APPENDICES

### 7.1 IB Online Survey



#### SURVEY FOR APPLICANTS TAKING THE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION IN THE SPRING 2017

This survey is meant for applicants that have participated in the IB Online Degree entrance exam in spring 2017. The purpose of it is to collect information from the applicants for a Bachelor Thesis as well as developing the IB Online Degree Program. Answering the survey is done completely anonymously.

##### 1. Choose the answer that fits you closest

- I am Male
- I am Female

##### 2. What is your age group?

- 18-23
- 24-30
- 31-37
- 38+

3. Which country do you come from?

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4. I am

- Married
- In a relationship
- Single
- Divorced
- Other (please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

5. I am / we are

- 1 person in the household
- 2 people in the household
- 3 people in the household
- 4 people in the household
- 5 people in the household
- 6+ people in the household

**6. I am**

- Working full-time
- Working part-time
- Studying
- Unemployed

**7. How did you hear about our online degree program? Select one or more options**

- Teachers
- Webpage
- Social Media
- Friends
- Family
- Other IB students

8. How would you rate the following statements about expectations for the online degree?

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree Disagree	nor Agree	Strongly Agree
It will provide me with new and useful knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It will help me expand my professional network	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It will challenge me intellectually	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It will help me get the job that I want	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I will meet other dedicated people	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It will be fun and interactive	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



**9.** What level of education have you previously finished before applying to our course?

Highschool

Bachelor

Master

Other (please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

**10.** Have you previously studied any MOOC (Massive Open Online Course) or closed online courses?

No

Yes (please specify what kind)

\_\_\_\_\_

11. From not important to extremely important, how would you rate the influence of the following factors on your decision to study our degree?

	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important	Extremely important
Reputation of the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The course is taught in English	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It allows me to work at the same time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The degree is internationally recognised	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can do the course from home	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Travel expenses are kept to a minimum	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. On a scale of 1-5 (1 being the lowest) how would you rate the importance of the following information when you decided to apply to our degree?

	1	2	3	4	5
Study culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Feedback from previous and present students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Information about teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Duration and timeline of course	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Offered courses (subjects)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Possibilities after finishing the course	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Do you use social media?

No

Yes (please specify which in descending order in terms of usage)

\_\_\_\_\_

14. How often do you use the following social media?

	Multiple a day	times a day	Once a day	Weekly	Biweekly	Monthly	Never
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Instagram	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
LinkedIn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
YouTube	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google+	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Other	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. Have you heard about/seen the accounts that we have on social media?

No

Yes (please specify where)

\_\_\_\_\_

**16.** Do you follow us on social media?

No

Yes (please specify where)

\_\_\_\_\_

**17.** What type of posts would you find interesting and useful? Choose one or more

Teacher profiles

Student profiles

Tips from students

Advice from teachers

Articles

Videos

Other (please specify)

\_\_\_\_\_

**18.** How many hours per week do you think you can dedicate to the studies?

\_\_\_\_\_

**19. How can we help you create that timeslot?**

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**20. Can we contact you in the future?**

- No
- Yes (please write your e-mail address)
- \_\_\_\_\_

THANK YOU FOR TAKING YOUR TIME TO ANSWER THIS SURVEY!

## 7.2 Transcript of Interviews

Text in **bold** writing is the interviewer talking. Normal text is the response of the interviewee.

Interview 1 - 2:41 minutes

**In your own words, why did you choose to apply to our degree?**

I have been working in the service industry for a really long time and I decided I wanted to change my career path so that's why I'm doing this course.

**So the course offers something different?**

Yes.

**What are your expectations to the course?**

Probably that it is going to be something that I haven't done before and a challenge, because I have studied in university before, but that was English Literature, so it's a bit different.

**Was that an Applied Sciences as well?**

No, that was a "normal" university.

**Was that online or on-site?**

It was on-site.

**What is your motivation, besides that you wanted to change paths? Why Finland?**

In Ireland, the Unemployment rate is really high, so even though my degree wasn't the best for jobs, you are not very likely to get a job within your field, no matter what it is. For me, moving to Finland I have more of a choice and an opportunity to study for free and hopefully get a job in the actual field whereas at home you will have to leave the country eventually.

**Are you working now?**

Yes.

**Part time or fulltime?**

Fulltime

**Okay, so that is why the online comes in as well as the flexibility it offers is also a big part of it?**

Yes, it would be really helpful.

**How many hours do you think you would be able to dedicate to the studies?**

Probably between 15-20 hours a week, it depends on my work weeks because I don't work regular shifts, so my work weeks can change quite drastically from one week to another, but hopefully this is the average.

Interview 2 – 2:43 minutes

**In your own words, why did you choose to apply to our degree?**

I mainly wanted the English version of the marketing and all that and I don't know the specific field I am going for, so this was more optimal for me. Also, the exchange year and all that because I was an exchange student in high school so I want to keep doing that.

**What are your expectations to the course?**

I was just talking with one of the other applicants here how I'm confused because it's an online version, I don't know if there are studies here (at the physical location) or what, so I pretty much have no clue.

**So, you are missing some information?**

I don't feel like they shared if you have days here or the exams here or what it is. I'm just waiting to see if I get in so I can figure all that out.

**Are you working at the moment?**

Yea. Full time.

**So that is also part of why you chose an online course?**

Yes, because I can still keep working and I like to travel I go to the states a lot, so I don't have to try and figure that out through the school.

**How many hours a week do you think you can commit to the studies?**



I haven't decided an amount, because I don't know how much it takes me and how many courses I have at a time, but pretty much all my free time around work. I don't have a specific amount, however much I think I need based on the studies.

Interview 3 – 2:30 minutes

**In your own words, why did you choose to apply to the degree?**

Firstly, because I live in Turku so I think that this school and campus is a go for me. I chose this degree because I want to have my own business in the future and I think that this will help me collect some basic elements for that. I am a foreigner and I moved to Finland, so there are many things I need to learn, like the local laws and culture if I want to have my own business.

**Do you have any expectations to the course?**

I think this is the first online course in Turku and I think it will help me with my part time job as I am currently working in a restaurant so I think it is convenient if I can get a place so I can balance my time between work and home.

**So, you are working part time? How many hours a day?**

Yes, about 5 hours a day, because as I said, I want to have my own business one day and I want to work here to get some experience for that.

**How many hours do you think you can commit to the studies?**

I think 30 hours is fine for me on a weekly basis, because before I applied here I used to attend a full time Finnish course and had to arrange between working and studying at the same time. It is hard, but we are still young, so work is not a problem.

Interview 4 – 2:47 minutes

**In your own words, why did you choose to apply to the degree?**

Actually, I have a small business starting up in the country where I live in right now. I'm starting it with my friend and it's just a small business and I think that I can get some new skills that help me to develop my business to the next step and leave my paid job so I can realise what I want to do.

**So, you are working at the same time?**

Yes, I am working full time in a company and in my spare time I am working on this project.

**So, you are working full time as well as having the project, I guess that's where the online comes in?**

Yes, the online would be awesome because with that I would have a way to organise my schedule better than having to go to one place to do my studies.

**Do you know how many hours you would be able to commit to the studies?**

I have already been making different online courses in Coursera, mostly to refresh the skills in my own profession. I have been able to put 10-15 hours in a week. This has been good, I try to make it into 3 or 4 days a week and of course I also include the weekends especially if the weather is bad outside. I actually live in Germany. I'm born in Venezuela but I also have a Finnish nationality, I used to live in Finland, but then moved to Germany for other reasons.

**Do you have any expectations to the course?**

In business, there is not really a basis to how you do work. People like Richard Branson and Elon Musk have been using entrepreneurship to make business on their own and these are people I want to follow. I guess I can learn some skill about international parameters here in Europe about business with this course.

Interview 5 - 1:28 minutes

**In your own words, why did you choose to apply to the degree?**

It's online, it's very convenient, it gives you the flexibility to live and be able to work at the same time.

**What are your expectation to the degree?**

I hope its demanding and intense, but you can work on it at home. If you need to work with other people you can do it through Skype.

**So, you are working at the same time?**

Correct, basically part time, I have two different jobs.

**So, the course would allow you to schedule around that?**

Exactly.

**Do you know how much you time you would be able to commit to the studies?  
Hours a week?**

10-20 hours a week. It's a pretty decent amount of time, I like working in the evening since I'm most productive then from 6pm (18:00) and on.

Interview 6 – 1:32 minutes

**In your own words, why did you choose to apply to the degree?**

Because I was already studying before and I wanted to graduate as fast as possible and I was living here already.

**So, what your expectations to the degree?**

I was majoring in marketing, but it has been a while since I left my university so now I'm trying to apply again. I was hoping to continue from where I left off and try to learn as much as I can and get more proficient with it.

**Are you working at the moment?**

No, I am helping out sometimes but nothing full time.

**So, you would be able to dedicate your time to the studies?**

Yes, as much as possible.

**I guess the flexibility means a lot to you?**

Of course, yes.

Interview 7 – 22:22 minutes

**In your own words, why did you choose to apply to our degree?**

I applied last year, but I would like to know more about the business side of things in Finland, more than anything.

**Like the Finnish aspects?**

Yea, like business administration applicable to business run in Finland.

**What are your expectation to the degree?**

I expect it to be more practical than theoretical, that way I can use it more here in Finland.

**Do you have any expectations to the people you are going to be working with (class mates)?**

I expect them to be quite lively and have lived a bit I imagine that an online course would be able to procure people who know what they want. So, we won't just be "dilly dallying".

**Are you currently working?**

I am.

**Full time or part time?**

Full time.

**So, the concept of an online course applies to that?**

Yes. It has a major factor as I will be quite busy in general. Being 27, you have to have some sort of work going.

**So, you think you can structure this around the work?**

Yes, a lot of it has to do with motivation, now, later in life.

**How many hours do you think you can approximately commit to the studies on a weekly basis?**

I would probably equate it to a part time job, so 20-30 hours a week, for reading and assignments and such.

