

The background is a dark, gradient surface. Scattered across it are several black, glossy spheres and rings of various sizes. Some are resting on the surface, while others appear to be floating or suspended in the air, creating a sense of depth and movement. The lighting is soft, highlighting the reflective surfaces of the objects.

Supported Yet Isolated: Graduate Student Perspectives on Building Community Through Discussion Forums in an Online Accelerated MLIS Program

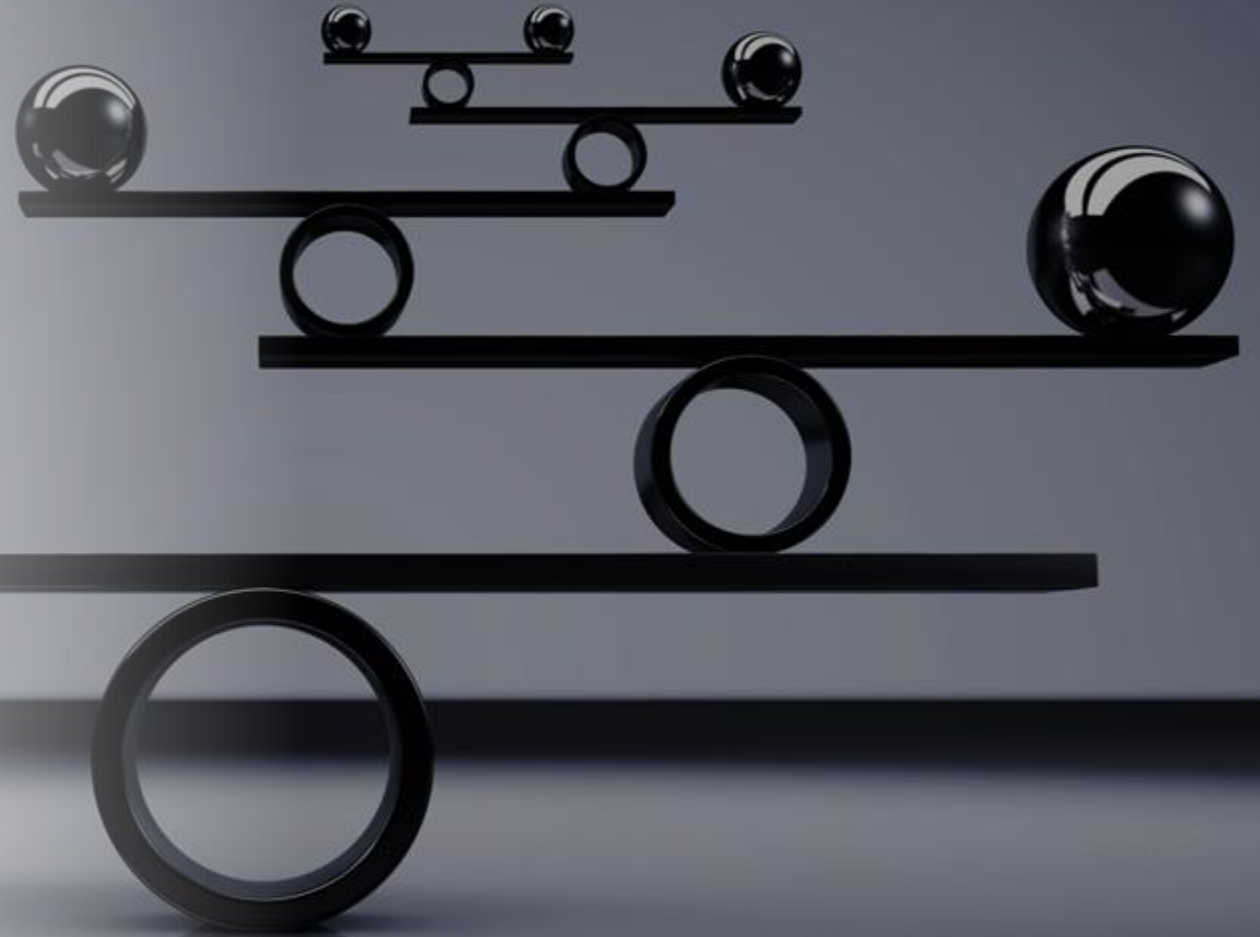
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Introduction

- Online learning can be isolating
- Discussion forums used to build sense of community
- But how do students experience this?





Literature Review

Fostering sense of community has many benefits

(Conrad, 2005; Cooke, 2016; Drouin, 2008; Hulon, 2013; Rovai, 2002a; Shatila, 2023; Wylie, 2023; Zamora et al., 2022)

Multiple ways to use discussion forums to build community

(Cooke, 2016; Liu et al., 2007; Scott & Turrise, 2021; Shackelford & Maxwell, 2012; Trekles & Sims, 2013; Wylie, 2023)

Format challenges successful use of discussions for building community

(Liu et al., 2007; Ke, 2010; Phirangee & Hewitt, 2024)

Research Methods



Research questions

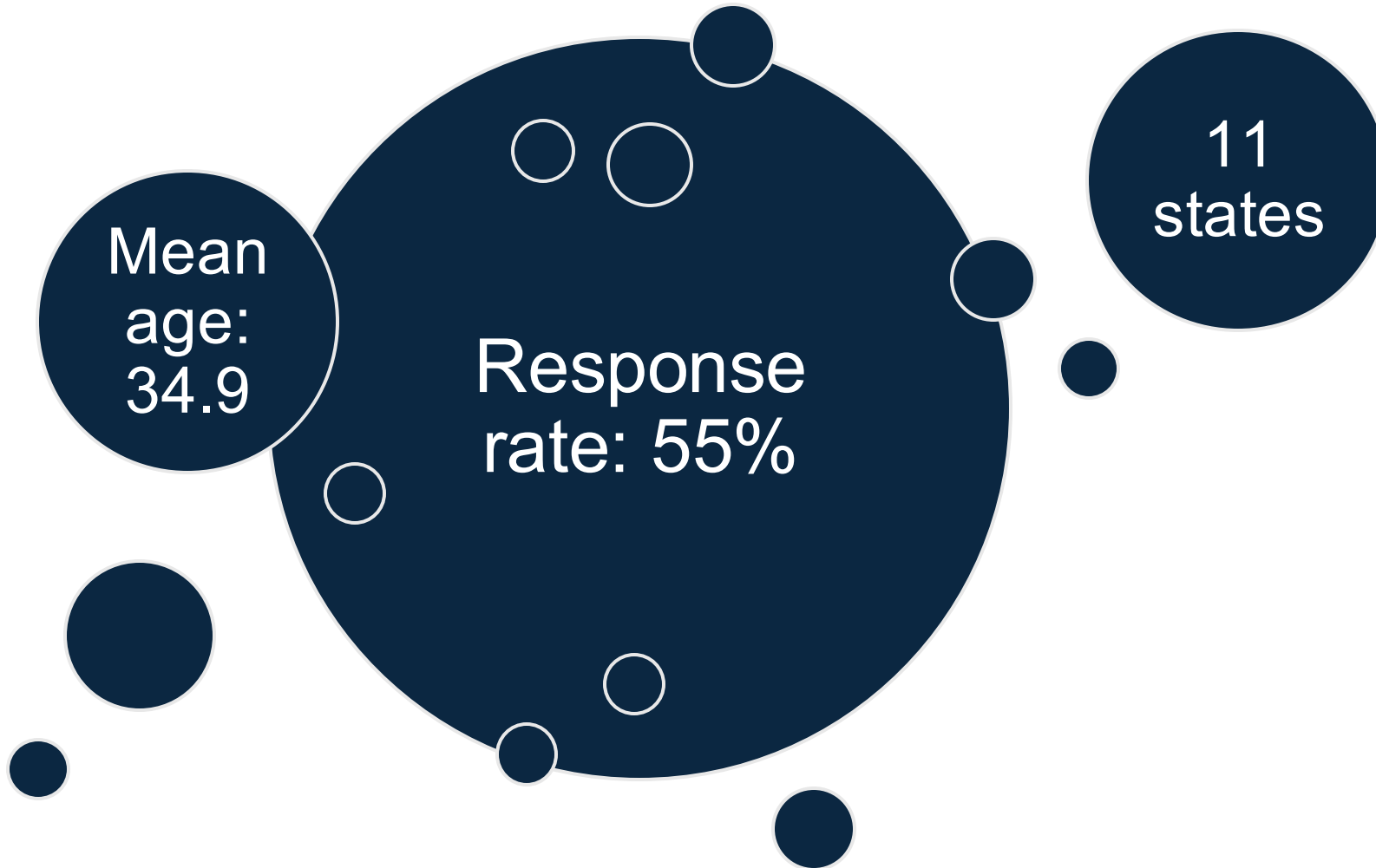
- How do graduate students in an accelerated online MLIS program perceive their experiences in discussion forums in the context of community building?
- What are the successes and challenges of these experiences?



Multi-method study

- Content analysis of syllabi to ascertain forum rules and purposes
- Focus groups to gather faulty perspectives
- Survey to collect student insights

Results



Findings, quantitative

Questions	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
I feel that students in this program care about each other	64.3%	25.7%	10.0%
I feel connected to others in this program	28.6%	27.1%	44.3%
I feel that it is hard to get help when I have a question	28.6%	20.0%	51.4%
I feel uneasy exposing gaps in my understanding	32.9%	14.3%	52.9%
I feel reluctant to speak openly	25.7%	21.4%	52.9%
I feel that I can rely on others in this program	36.2%	29.0%	34.8%
I feel that I am given ample opportunities to learn	78.6%	14.3%	7.1%
I feel confident that others will support me.	55.7%	32.9%	11.4%

Findings, qualitative



Introductory posts
(n=18)



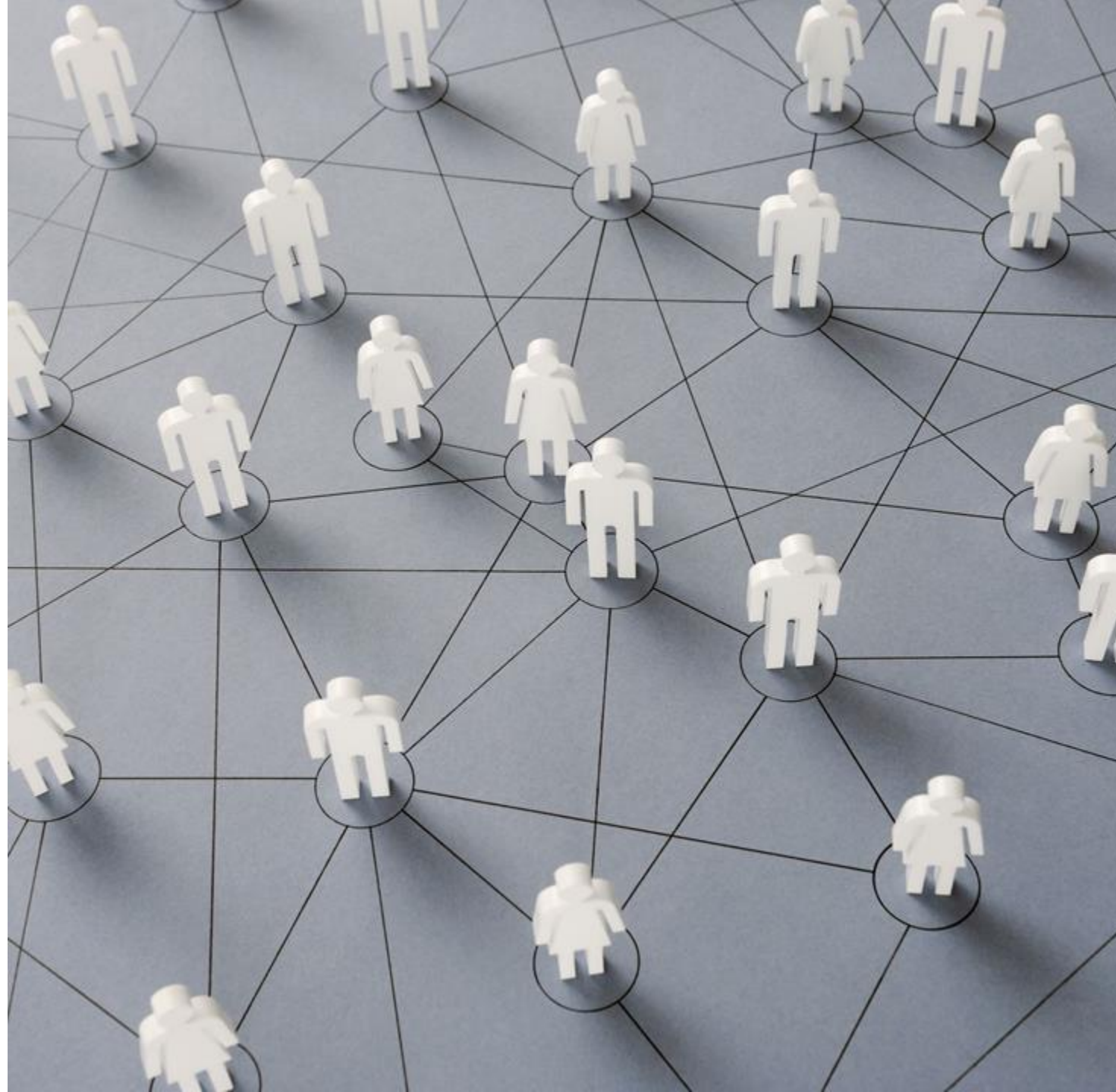
Being in a group (n=13)



Opinion or personal
experience posts
(n=13)

Findings, contradictions

- No consensus on likes/dislikes
- Outright disagreements
- See the need, but don't see it building community



Discussion, building sense of community



Informality



Peer-to-peer
interaction

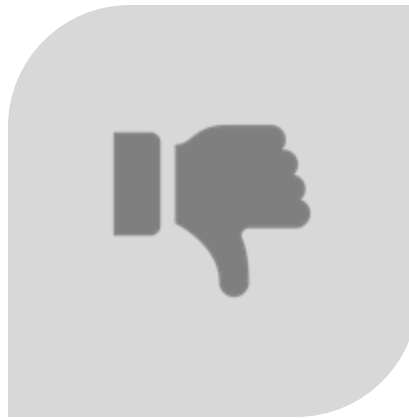


Instructor support

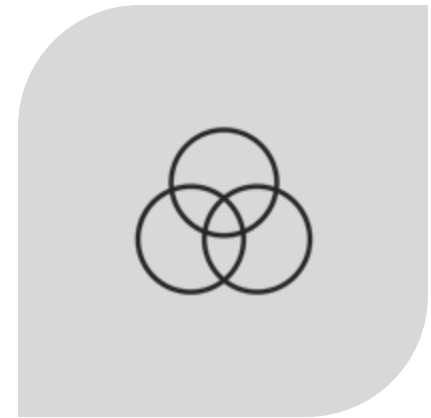
Discussion, barriers to community-building



Strict requirements



Dislike for the
assignment



Variations among
learners

Conclusion and Future Directions



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Questions

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