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Gatekeeping and Creativity in Higher Education: A Mixed-Methods Study of Professors' and Students' Perceptions of Practices in Freshmen-Level College Courses

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GATEKEEPING AND CREATIVITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A
MIXED-METHODS STUDY OF PROFESSORS' AND STUDENTS'
PERCEPTIONS OF PRACTICES IN FRESHMEN-LEVEL COLLEGE
COURSES

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Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
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Title: Gatekeeping and Creativity in Higher Education: A Mixed-Methods Study of Professors' and Students' Perceptions of Practices in Freshmen-Level College Courses

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The purpose of this study was two-fold. First, this study attempted to ascertain the perceptions regarding creativity of both professors and students of freshmen-level college courses. Specifically, students enrolled in fall 2012 courses were targeted because they experienced different pedagogical styles of professors in the earliest stages (freshmen-level courses) of their academic careers in higher education. Those freshmen-level courses were perceived as the gateway of academics and creativity within higher education. Professors who taught freshmen-level courses in the fall 2012 semester were also part of the target population. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1990), different members of society access certain “various symbolic systems” (p. 333). His research supported the concept that creativity thrives within the broader social context of community, namely institutions of higher education.

The second goal of this study was to contribute to the body of knowledge surrounding gatekeeping practices of professors and the resulting impact, if any, upon students in freshmen-level courses. A systems theoretical framework was utilized to view creativity in higher education through a lens as a system of gatekeeping (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The researcher proposed that educators may implement creative pedagogical methods and forms of assessment more frequently and with greater

resolve when they are able to see the impact of gatekeeping upon students' creative potential.

This study aimed to determine both reasons for, and hindrances to, implementing and sustaining creative practices in the classroom. By examining professors' perceptions of creativity which were categorized into four creative constructs--i.e., fluency, originality, flexibility, and elaboration, as well as faculty members' practices for implementing creativity, conclusions were drawn concerning the presumption of professors, as gatekeepers, within a social system of education.

Results from the quantitative portion of this study revealed that students and professors believe that professors integrate creativity into their freshmen-level courses. Results from qualitative interviews offered insights into potential benefits and hindrances to creativity from gatekeeping practices. These findings suggest that the combined investigation of gatekeeping practices and creativity in freshmen-level courses is worthy of further study.