

Chris Yamanaka

Mr. Worth Weller

W233-Internet

19 November 2007

Internet Vs. Traditional Education

As technology advances, computers are becoming more and more involved in our lives. They allow us to shop from home, work from home, access entertainment from home, and now receive an education from home. When technology enters a new aspect of our lives, we often question whether it is a truly beneficial.

I hope to answer that question in regards to distance education. I feel that it is an important issue for those students considering online classes, like myself, as well as teachers who run the classes, and even those people who will interact with students who have received all or part of their education online. While quality and effectiveness varies in both traditional and online classes, with the proper preparation and design, those students who choose distance education can be just as successful academically as their traditionally educated counterparts.

Distance education has many names: virtual learning environment, web-based learning, online learning, and elearning, to name a few. The definitions are sometimes the same, and sometimes vary in some aspect. The same name in two different institutions can be different. For my purposes, internet classes are those based outside the classroom and use a computer for at least part of the communication.

One of the benefits of internet learning is that it allows new populations of students, who would not otherwise be able, to take classes. One of these populations is

those students whose distance from campus restricts them. Another is the physically disabled students who have trouble getting around or with typical classroom requirements. Many times they can more easily participate in an online environment. Other students, nontraditional students, require more flexibility due to increased responsibilities outside of school. Without the option of internet education, many graduates from these populations would not have succeeded.

Nontraditional students have increased with the advent of internet education. Botsch and Botsch found a six year age difference between students of traditional versus distance education(136). Nontraditional students make up the majority of distance learners.

The flexibility of online classes allows more people to advance their education. Nontraditional students are usually older and already have careers or full time jobs. Some of these have families or are married. These responsibilities sometimes prevent taking traditional classes and at the very least make it difficult to attend regularly.

Botsch and Botsch conducted a study over several years comparing the performance of traditional students and distance education students. They offered the same class both ways. They used the same book and went over the same material. Their goal was to compare inline and traditional classes.

They came across the same problem as many studies of this sort do: it was impossible to get a random sample because those interested in online classes tend to have different attributes. It could not be avoided however, as Achen says, "Indeed, lack of random assignment is a major problem in statistical analysis of nearly all field

research with a quasi-experimental design” (Botsch & Botsch 135). Their results were as accurate as possible.

The “fault” of the study is actually not a problem because in the real world, people are split up the same way. They found that students tend to pick the mode of delivery that works best for them. They say, “...our students sorted themselves out by consciously choosing the course format that best met their own needs.” This indicates that internet classes are not the same, but they can be equivalent because the students that pick them can handle the delivery style.

There has been some concern over the lack of feeling connected to other students. Some analysts worry that the students may feel isolated and do poorly due to the absence of a learning community in a distance education class. Jay R. Howard suggests that learning is enhanced when the students are involved with the instructor and with other students. On page one, he cites several studies and says, “...there is substantial evidence to suggest that students learn more when they are actively engaged with the material, the instructor, and their classmates.” I think he is right, for traditional students.

He finds that there is less discussion with more distance and more technology, but further research needs to be done with a larger sample more representative of the population. Even Howard cautions that the sample is small and not random. There are conflicting studies and it is too early to conclude with confidence that student interactions and learning communities are beneficial.

Traditional students are those straight out of high school who generally need more structure. They are younger, single, and more concerned with social interactions with other students. These are the students who count on learning communities and prefer face to face contact.

Nontraditional students are generally more mature and have gained self discipline. They will study the material without being encouraged or motivated by a learning community. Cheol says of distance learning on page 141, "...it provides the learner with a great deal of autonomy- the choice of when, where, and how to learn...However, this autonomy also brings with it responsibility. Students must possess initiative and self-discipline to study and complete assignments." Because of the characteristics of nontraditional students, distance education suits them well.

Actually, because of greater obligations and relationships outside of school, learning communities can be a burden on nontraditional students. Many students choose not to participate. Liu cites the research of Brown and Misanchuk in saying, "Many existing studies seem to be based on the basic assumption that having a feeling of community is always likeable by its members. However, several studies indicate that this might not be the case" (10). Liu proposes that learning communities may not be a necessary or beneficial part of learning online.

Cheating is an epidemic throughout the educational process. Studies by Hollinger and Lanza-Kaduce, Whitley, Eve and Bromley, Baird, Meade, and McCabe and Trevino all found that the majority of students cheated (245). These were studies on traditional classroom settings.

One weakness of distance education is the vulnerability to cheating. . There have not been many studies about cheating online, but one by Davis et al concluded, “both students and faculty believe it is easier to cheat with distance learning classes” (qtd. In Lanier 245). Lanier finds that in a study of 1262 students, there was significantly more cheating online as compared with traditional classroom learning

The most common form of cheating is plagiarism. Lanier shows us the prevalence of plagiarism, “A quick search of google.com (a popular search engine) reveals over 81,100,000 sites listed that deal with term papers (as of February 2006). Virtually all of the first 20 pages of sites provide pre-written papers, most available for a small fee” (248).He mentions that some are free. The access and ease of plagiarism makes it a significant hinderance to all education, especially online classes.

Although this can be a problem, there are some safeguards a teacher can use. There are log in codes and password changes. There are search engines that can check the students’ papers against other papers. Lanier passes on Smith, Dupree, and Mackey’s strategy to “‘personalize’ written assignments with the faculty member assigning specific topics to be written in a specific style” (256). Explaining policy, expectations, and consequences to the students can also help to discourage plagiarism. Although research shows that most students cheat both in the classroom and online, it can be kept to a minimum if the professor chooses to employ some strategies for that purpose.

Some people doubt that those who opt for an online education are as qualified as those who are educated in the traditional classroom setting. The first round of teachers

to graduate from a completely online program were not treated the same as the other teachers. There were people who questioned whether they were truly prepared. An example of the opposition they face is “Parents should be concerned that teachers are now being educated on the internet,” says Shane Davis, President of the Students’ Union at the rival Saint Patrick’s teacher education college in Drumcondra, Dublin. “Would you trust a doctor who had just done a one-and-a-half year online course in medicine to operate on your child?” (qtd. In From Cyber School 1). There are still some people who are unsure of the quality of distance education.

However, this remark compares two situations that are not equivalent. Medical school would require hands on exercises, touching, cutting, and seeing actual examples of bodies, while teaching would not. The speaker also neglects the fact that the teachers had already received degrees before pursuing this further degree. They spent more than a year and a half in total learning to be teachers.

Of course there are good models of internet classes as well as bad ones. This is just as true in traditional classroom delivery. Some classes are better suited for traditional classroom delivery, but the majority can be learned either way. As long as care is taken in the development and maintenance of distance education, the students can be successful.

One danger is the temptation to load the classes as full as possible. Because there is no seating capacity, it would be tempting to increase the profits by making the ratio of teachers to students too large. Simonson says, “Administrators often believe that the number of students can be as large as hundreds because there is no physical

space limitation in distance education”(qtd. In Orellana 230). However, Olson reports, “Instructors also believe that the quality of online instruction is questionable for large sizes” (qtd. In Orellana 231). Common sense tells us that if every student had one question, and there were 100 students, the response time would be unacceptable.

The classes must be kept to a reasonable size to allow the instructor to communicate and give feedback in a timely manner to the students. They are trying to take on more students and run the technology used for the classes. At the same time they need to provide the same feedback and communication if not more to each student. Karen Paulson points out that the roles of faculty are changing, and so the faculty must make changes to accommodate these new roles. She offers a possible solution of hiring paraprofessionals to help and support the teaching professionals to allow for a larger workload (137).

Unfortunately there is no universal maximum benefit class size. The smallest class size possible is not necessarily ideal either. If the classes are too small, it adversely affects the number and quality of the interactions (Orellana 232). The author cites studies that result in online classes taking more time per student and others that result in the same time per student. It becomes apparent that the determining factor for ideal class size is not whether or not it is an internet class. Also, the ideal class size varies with the class.

The online classes work best when the online students are treated the same way the traditional classroom students are treated in regards to admissions, class choices,

guidance counselors, mission statements, access to student services and about every other aspect you can think of.

Michael Simonson summarized the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Postsecondary Education's report "Evidence of Quality in Distance Education Programs Drawn from Interviews with the Accreditation Community." He found many points for developing a good program. One key point was to have the regular faculty deeply involved in the design and implementation of the curriculum and course. There should be design and technological support. He recommends academic advisors for the students. He says the programs should be monitored and assessed for manners of improvement. The points of view of both the students and the faculty should be used to better the programs. The Department of Education believes that if these procedures are followed, the program will have success.

Lewis and Abdul-Hamid conducted a study at the University of Maryland. It is one of the largest distance education providers with more than 87,000 enrollees. Thirty instructors were surveyed to find what they saw as being responsible for their successes in internet education and their information was compared with information from the students.

Timely, frequent, and good quality feedback is one of the most effective qualities that was agreed upon. Another factor was letting the students know ahead of time what was expected in the assignments including examples (Lewis-Abdul-Hamid 90) The teachers should be creative and engaging. If these recommendations are followed, the

distance education students can be just as successful as their traditional classroom educated counterparts.

Many sound studies conclude that whether a class is taken in the classroom or online is not the deciding factor for how well a student learns or the quality of education. Piccoli, Ahmad, and Ives conducted research comparing traditional classroom delivery with a virtual learning environment. They say, on page 401, "Our results indicate that, in the context of IT basic skills training in undergraduate education, there are no significant differences in performance between students enrolled in the two environments."

A study was done at a Texas University with traditional and online students of Math 1100 class. Manochehri and Young also report, "This study also suggested that there was not a significant difference in performance between instructor-based and Web-based subjects. A finding that is consistent with some of the earlier research findings" (316). These studies are examples of the comparison of online and traditional classroom teaching. Their results are typical.

Technology has brought us many conveniences and distance education is an important one. New populations have been able to further their educations, especially the nontraditional students. The problem of cheating, though it is more prevalent in distance education, can be controlled. Surprisingly, the studies show that the method of delivery does not effect the quality of the course. The teachers of distance education follow the recommendations of the researchers, especially the promptness of their communication and feedback, their courses will be at least as successful as their classroom counterparts.

Works Cited

- Botsch, Carol s., & Botsch, Robert E. "Audiences and Outcomes in Online and Traditional American Government Classes: A Comparative Two-Year Case Study." *P.S. Political Science and Politics* 34.1 (2001): 135-141. JSTOR. Helmke Lib., Ft. Wayne, IN. 30 September 2007 <http://www.jstor.org>.
- "From Cyber School to the Classroom." *Irish Independent* (September 3, 2005): 1196 words. LexisNexis Academic. Helmke Li., Ft. Wayne, IN. 3 September 2007.
- Howard, Jay R. "Do College Students Participate More in Discussion in Traditional Delivery Courses or in Interactive Telecourses? A Preliminary Comparison." *The Journal of Higher Education* 73.6 (2002): 764-780. JSTOR. Helmke Lib., Ft. Wayne, IN. 30 September 2007 <http://www.jstor.org>.
- Lewis, C. & Abdul-Hamid, H. "Implementing Effective Teaching Practices: Voices of Exemplary Faculty." *Innovative Higher Education* 31.2 (2006): 83-98. Academic Search Premier. Helmke Lib., Ft. Wayne, IN 18 November 2007
- Manocherhri, N & Young, J. "The impact on student Learning Styles with Web based learning or Instructor based learning on student knowledge and satisfaction." *Quarterly Review of Distance Education* 206.7.3 (2006): 229-248. Academic Search Premier. Helmke Lib., Fort Wayne, IN 18 November 2007
- Orellana, Anymir. "Class Size and Interaction in Online classes." *Quarterly Review of Distance Education*. 7.6 (2006): (229-248). Academic Search Premier. Helmke Lib., Ft. Wayne, IN 24 November 2007
- Oh, Cheol H. "Information Communication Technology and the New University: A View on eLearning." *Higher Education in the Twenty-First Century* 585 (2003): 134-153. JSTOR. Helmke Lib., Ft. Wayne, IN. 7 October 2007 <http://www.jstor.org>.

Paulson, Karen. "Reconfiguring Faculty Roles for Virtual Settings." *The Journal of Higher Education* 73.1 (2002): 123-140. JSTOR. Helmke Lib., Ft. Wayne, IN. 7 October 2007
<http://www.jstor.org>.

Piccoli, Gabriele et al. "Web-Based Virtual Learning Environments: A Research Framework and a Preliminary Assessment of Effectiveness in Basic IT Skills Training." *MIS Quarterly* 25.4 (2001): 401-426. JSTOR. Helmke Lib., Ft. Wayne, IN. 30 September 2007
<http://www.jstor.org>.

Schmidt, Sarah. "Dell ad irks some university professors: Online lectures should not replace attending class." *National Post (Canada)*(26 September 2006): words. LexisNexis Academic. Helmke Lib., Ft. Wayne, IN. 3 September 2007.