

Chapter 4

Factors Contributing to the Effectiveness of Online Students and Instructors

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ABSTRACT

Identifying the positive attributes of students and instructors in the online environment will contribute to the understanding of how we can enhance the learning experience for the student and the teaching experience for the instructor. This chapter will assist students and instructors in understanding the differences that may be experienced in the online environment versus the face-to-face environment and provide the opportunity to consider whether online learning and/or teaching is a “good fit” for them. Understanding why students and/or instructors might choose the online environment will also assist administrators in developing successful, quality online programs that enrich the experiences for both students and instructors.

INTRODUCTION

As technological advances become mainstream in higher education, web-based learning continues to gain focus and momentum. The number of online courses in K-12, technical, professional and liberal arts education has increased significantly (Allen & Seman, 2013; Picciano, 2001; Setzer & Lewis, 2005). Multimedia technology has changed the landscape of distance education (Zirkle, Norris, Winegardner & Frustaci, 2006). Gray (2013) purports barriers to online learning are being addressed and students have access to more educational opportunities than ever before.

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Online learning programs often tout more interactive, individualized and independent learning (Chen, Czerwinski & Macredie, 2000; Inan, Yukselturk & Grant, 2009; Park & Lee, 2003). However, a major challenge with web-based learning is identifying the idiosyncrasies between learning online and the traditional learning format (Inan, et. al., 2009; Martinez, 2003; Rovai, 2003). Another challenge is identifying the very different profile of online students (Dutton, Dutton & Perry, 2002; Sikora & Carroll, 2003).

Identifying the positive attributes of students and instructors in the online environment will contribute to the understanding of how we can enhance the learning experience for the student and the teaching experience for the instructor. This article will assist students and instructors in understanding the differences that may be experienced in the online environment versus the face-to-face environment and provide the opportunity to consider whether online learning and/or teaching is a “good fit” for them. Understanding why students and/or instructors might choose the online environment will also assist administrators in developing successful, quality online programs that enrich the experiences for both students and instructors.

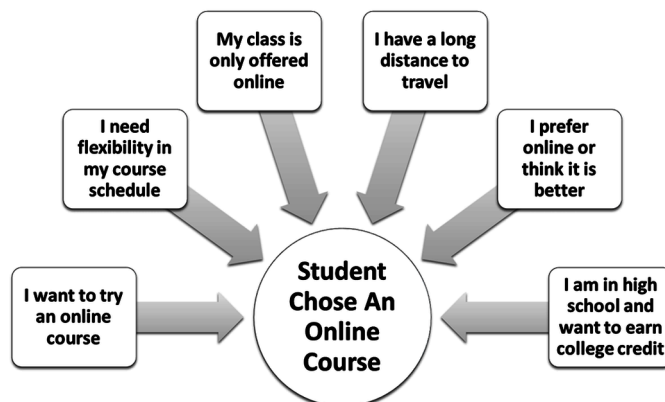
BACKGROUND

In 1981, the first online classes were developed at the School of Management and Strategic Studies at Western Behavior Sciences Institute in La Jolla, California. An evaluation of the program, and the discussions that took place, revealed that the quality of the online course was higher than the information collected in the traditional classroom setting (Feenberg, 1999).

Since that time, a number of studies have compared the effectiveness of online instruction to traditional lecture formats. Findings have admittedly been mixed (Rivera, & McAlister, 2001; Ungerleider & Burns, 2004; Zhang, 2005). Even though a majority of the studies find no difference in student performance and student satisfaction, regardless of the delivery format (Lim, Kim, Chen & Ryder, 2008; McFarland & Hamilton, 2006), there is concern regarding online student retention. Knowledge of student characteristics and how they can possibly affect online course success can provide the opportunity for faculty to intervene before grades are affected or dropout rates increase (Cochran, et al., 2014).

Kilburn (2005) developed the following conceptual map regarding student motivations to take an online course at a particular University in the Midwest. (see Figure 1)

Figure 1. Motivations to take online courses



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