

## Chapter 5.10

# Factors Influencing Students Intention to Take Web-Based Courses in a College Environment

**Hamid Nemati**

*University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA*

**Marcia Thompson**

*University of North Carolina at Greensboro, USA*

### ABSTRACT

The growing use of a web-based environment for college education is gradually replacing some aspects of the classroom in a University setting, and it is shifting the long accepted paradigm of understanding how students learn and introduces the question of what influences a student's decision to learn in an online environment. In a web-based course, students gain a level of interaction with the material not possible in the classroom, yet lose other components that are only available in a physical environment. Educators struggle to determine what influences a student to take web-based college courses, and how they best learn in that environment. This study proposes that the student's learning style, their self-efficacy and self-regulation when it comes to learning, and their expectations regarding online classes, are

all factors in their choice to take web-based college courses. To validate this, students currently taking college level courses were surveyed and their responses analyzed.

### INTRODUCTION

Instructors that have honed their teaching skills in the classroom quickly learn that their time-tested methods do not necessarily translate into an online environment. They discover that students enrolled in their web-based classes are often in college for different reasons than those students in the classroom. An instructor may understand that students learn in a variety of ways, but likely did not explore the impact it had in the classroom. The online environment provides new and exciting ways to meet the needs of students, and it ensures that an online course can meet a student's

individual style of learning in ways not possible in the classroom.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There is a great deal of literature available that compares the effectiveness of online instruction versus instruction in a classroom. However, the demands placed on colleges by students interested in web-based classes has transcended the need to compare the two since the students themselves are likely not choosing between the two. The distinction between distance and classroom learning has nearly vanished (Dunn, 2000), and the concept of 'distance' has gone, too, since physical distance is often not the main reasons students take online classes. Most students do not consider online classes a replacement for the classroom (Cooper, 2001). Today's students are impacted by factors such as convenience of college classes and perceived ease of use of those classes (Grandon, et al, 2005). Students are looking for higher education that meets their schedules and circumstances, such as full-time jobs and family (PSU, 1998). A profile of online students has suggested they are generally older, and have more life and academic experiences than their traditional classroom counterparts. These are attributes that make a student well suited to the self-directed and independent study associated with online learning (Diaz, 2002). The sheer pervasiveness of the Internet for most adults has created a dramatic demand for online learning opportunities. A 2002 study by the Alsanian Group, a non-profit consulting company that serves colleges and universities, found that 80 percent of adults preferred a traditional classroom for learning. Five years later, a follow up study revealed that the percentage had dropped to 40%, with 30% of adults preferring an exclusive online learning experience, a dramatic shift in only five years (Forsythe, 2007). A study from the U.S. Department of Labor predicted that by early 2008, one in ten postsecondary students

will likely be learning in an online environment (USDOL, 2007).

Learning is a very complex process, and individuals learn in a variety of ways. Numerous models for determining an individual's learning style have been developed, with each focusing on different dimensions of the learner. However, it is generally agreed that each student learns differently, and that they will be more satisfied and have a higher level of learning outcomes when there is a fit between how a course is taught and how the student learns (Eom, et al, 2006). In their research, Diaz and Cartnal found that students in an online environment likely have different styles of learning than their equivalent students in the classroom (Diaz & Cartnal, 1999). They concluded that online students were more independent, and appeared to be driven by intrinsic motives and not by the reward structure of the class.

The VARK (Visual, Aural, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic) typology focuses on the psychological aspects of learning. It is easy to derive the clear differences between the traditional classroom and a web-based class when using this technique. Online environments may not have aural components of the physical classroom, and the Aural learner may not be as effective in an online class, yet Visual and Read/Write learners may fair better in an online class as those classes tend to have a higher level of reading and writing components.

The influence of the intrinsic motivation of students on their learning has also been studied, and has shown that there is a link between self-efficacy and the cognitive engagement of the student. Students finding their school work interesting and important also led to them to be cognitively engaged with it. While the self-regulation of a student may not lead to higher grades, it may lead to greater engagement in the class (Pintrick & De Groot, 1990). The Motivational and Self-Regulated Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) introduced by Paul Pintrick and Elizabeth De Groot was originally used to evaluate the motivational beliefs and self-regulated learning strategies of junior

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