

# Chapter 4

## Perceptions and Experiences of E-Learning among On- Campus Students

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter explores the experiences of on-campus graduate students in Library and Information Studies (LIS) who take online classes using the relevant literature and analyzing data from an exploratory study to begin to answer the overarching research question: What are the factors influencing the perceptions and affective experiences of on-campus graduate students who take courses taught via Web-based instruction? Specific subareas of the existing research literature addressing student perceptions of online learning and hybrid and blended learning provide direction and frame the discussion. Empirical evidence is provided via qualitative data from a study comprising face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with 20 on-campus students at the Florida State University School of Library and Information Studies (SLIS), all of whom must take online courses to complete the Master's degree at SLIS.*

### INTRODUCTION

The perceptions and experiences of on-campus LIS students who are required to take online classes are essential to extending research in online learning in LIS. Up to this point, most work has examined

*online distance learners in online LIS courses or programs, or on-campus learners in face-to-face classes, and has frequently compared the two. Less studied is the experience of on-campus students taking online classes. Being aware of the factors at play for these students is increasingly important as more LIS programs introduce online instruction locally or through consortia such as*

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WISE (Web-based Information Science Education). More students who anticipate a completely face-to-face curriculum in graduate school will be required to take some classes online. Some will do so because of institutional policy, others by delivery situations (such as those at the SLIS) in which it is not possible to complete the degree by taking only on-campus classes. Similarly, many students nationwide are required to use e-learning technologies in their on-campus classes. Adding the approach of this chapter to research methods in LIS online learning will help us improve LIS education by understanding the issues involved when we require on-campus students to take online classes, and be better attuned to the experiences of these students in order to improve their satisfaction.

We present the major factors identified in this data analysis, putting them in the context of the literature and theory about e-learning in LIS (including hybrid, blended, and mobile forms) and the affective experiences of students in face-to-face *and* technology-mediated settings. This examination draws on two specific sub-areas of interest: students' experiences with teaching and learning that involve combinations of online and face-to-face components (such as hybrid and blended learning), and students' perceptions of e-learning technologies even (or especially) when they are used in non-remote settings. The chapter concludes with implications for research and practice in librarianship.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Convergence: Blended, Hybrid, E-Learning**

In the 1990's, discussions of blended and hybrid learning in LIS were often centered on the importance of, and goals of, including a face-to-face component in an otherwise all-online degree program (e.g., the online programs at Illinois and Syracuse in the mid-'90s; see Barron, 2003).

Following that, a broadened focus emerged that included how online interactive technologies course be used in, and support, classes that would otherwise be fully face-to-face.

Theoretical discussions and empirical work on blended and hybrid learning tended to consider two areas: first, the possible differences in learning outcomes when one mode was added to the other (Lim, Morris, & Kupritz, 2007; Reasons, Valadares, & Slavkin, 2005), and next the intrinsic deficits and benefits brought to the educational process by doing so (Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez, & Rodriguez-Ariza, 2011; Wu, Tennyson, & Hsia, 2010). Examples of deficits and benefits inherent in combining face-to-face with online delivery modes include: increased interaction among students and between students and instructors; increased motivation to read materials and complete tasks on time; and increased flexibility and independence for students and instructors in terms of time and tasks (Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez, & Rodriguez-Ariza, 2011, p. 819). Findings from a recent study of 985 students engaged in blended learning indicate that "the implementation of blended learning has a positive effect on reducing dropout rates and in raising exam pass rates" (Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez, & Rodriguez-Ariza, 2011, p. 824).

In general, though, research on online and blended learning has been primarily directly at the level of the individual course rather than on hybrid approaches at the program level. Little research or discussion has focused on students in on-campus programs, yet enrolled in fully-online courses (i.e., a blended degree program, but not a blended course), considering instead blended courses (Babb, Stewart, & Johnson, 2010, p. 736). Lopez-Perez, Perez-Lopez, and Rodriguez-Ariza (2011, p. 824) found in their study of blended learning at the University of Granada that "e-learning activities complement, rather than replace, traditional forms of learning". According to Babb, Stewart, and Johnson (2010, p. 736), hybrid and blended delivery options

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