

MOTIVATIONS FOR RESIDENTIAL STUDENTS TO PARTICIPATE IN ONLINE COURSES

Ray Pastore and Alison Carr-Chellman

The Pennsylvania State University

This study sought to discover what motivates undergraduate residential students to enroll in online courses. By exploring this question, we hope to gain a deeper understanding of why students would sign up for courses online which are offered right down the street from their residence. The present study revealed that students tend to enroll in online courses for their flexibility and convenience. Additionally, students find online courses to be just as challenging as face-to-face courses. It is our belief that these findings both fill a gap in the literature as well as aiding future online residential learners and program administrators.

INTRODUCTION

In the last few years, the number of online courses in higher education has dramatically increased. A 2006 report released by the Sloan Consortium, which surveyed 2,251 CEOs from various colleges and universities, stated that there were 3.2 million students enrolled in online courses during the fall semester of 2005 (Allen & Seaman, 2006). This is almost 1 million more than the previous year. Another report from the Sloan Consortium, which surveyed 1,170 CEOs in 2003, stated that 53.6% of them agree that online learning is vital to their long-term goals (Allen & Seaman, 2004).

These numbers indicate that online learning is becoming a popular alternative to traditional

face-to-face classroom environments. Reasons for this increase in popularity include course flexibility and access, global widespread access to the Internet, and the ability to track, grade, and monitor student progress (Rich, 2001; Tastle, White, & Shackleton, 2005). Klein, Noe, and Wang (2006) explain that this popularity is warranted by the assumption that online courses

Au: In APA, sources cited parenthetically should be listed alphabetically.

deliver consistent instruction to geographically dispersed learners, provide learners greater control over when and how the instruction occurs (e.g., the pace and presentation of materials and exercises), provide learners with the opportunity to collaborate and share information with each other and subject matter experts, and offer links to

• **Ray Pastore**, The Pennsylvania State University, 3rd Floor Keller Building University Park, PA 16801. Phone: (732) 766-1140. E-mail: rsp152@psu.edu

The Quarterly Review of Distance Education, Volume 10(3), 2009, pp. 11–25
Copyright © 2009 Information Age Publishing, Inc.

ISSN 1528-3518
All rights of reproduction in any form reserved.

other learning resources including course materials and Web sites. (p. 666)

It is well established that the anywhere/anytime structure of online courses presents an opportunity for students to enroll in classes that they otherwise could not attend due to conflicts with their schedule, work, and family (Beldarrain, 2006). Nonetheless, we have yet to understand if these advantages pertain to residential students and if there are unforeseen motivational factors that are unique to this particular group.

Having said that, there are additional reasons for the current increase in residential students enrolling in online learning options. Some literature has demonstrated that the online classroom environment is just as effective at promoting student achievement as the traditional face-to-face (Lim, 2005). This is confirmed by Russell (1999), who conducted a meta-analysis called the *No Significant Difference Phenomenon*, in which 355 studies comparing online and face-to-face instruction were analyzed. The meta-analysis found that there were no significant differences between the modes of class delivery on student achievement and learning. Furthermore, it has been shown that students and instructors perceive online learning to be just as effective face-to-face (Liaw, Huang, & Chen, 2007). In addition, it has been shown that student engagement in the online classroom increases student satisfaction and their perception of success (Gilbert, Morton, & Rowley, 2007; Selim, 2007). This asynchronous environment gives students a chance to reflect on their discussions and gain valuable insight into the class, which cannot be done in synchronous face-to-face discussions (Browne, 2003). This is reiterated by Rovai (2001), who found that the course flexibility and asynchronous environment helps contribute to a sense of a community that promotes reflection and learning.

As a result of this popularity and potential advantages, online learning continues to grow and has become expected at many universities as an option or alternative to face-to-face

classroom learning among undergraduate populations. Dede (1989) points out that “Distance learning is a strategy educational institutions are initially using to overcome inadequacies of local resources for meeting learners’ needs” (p. 3).

However, for all of the advantages, there are certainly some concerns being voiced as well. Given the rise in online enrollments, most universities are starting new programs to enroll more students, as a potential cash cow. Many large online programs within traditional universities currently operate as cost centers—meaning they have to make a profit or fold up shop. David Noble (2003) wrote that

The major change to befall the universities over the last two decades has been the identification of the campus as a significant site of capital accumulation, a change in social perception that has resulted in the systemic conversion of intellectual activity and intellectual capital and hence, intellectual property. (p. 27)

Many schools are seeking new ways to make money due to funding cuts, and many administrators in higher education are betting that increasing the number of online courses will help alleviate this problem (O’Malley & McCraw, 1999). Tomei (2006) says that many higher education administrators view online classes as a means to gain capital because they assume that online classes can take a higher number of students. Tomei’s study, which compared an online and face-to-face “Educational Technology” class, showed that online teaching demands 14% more of the instructor’s time. While the literature tends to support this (Berge, 2000; Ellis, 2000), DiBiase disagrees. In his study, which compared a course being offered in both asynchronous and synchronous formats, it was discovered that it took 70 less hours to teach an online course versus a face-to-face course (DiBiase, 2000).

Conversely, there are other issues surrounding this rapid increase of online learning. Noble (2003) theorizes that

Once faculty put their course material online, moreover, the knowledge and course design skill embodied in that material is taken out of their possession, transferred to the machinery and placed in the hands of the administration. The administration is now in a position to hire a less skilled, and hence, cheaper, worker to deliver the technologically pre-packaged course. (p. 32)

This implies that there will no longer be a need for the faculty member who designed the course. Instead administrators can take their instruction and hand it off to a less competent facilitator to teach the course. The basic notion here is the danger of commodification of higher education and intellectual knowledge.

However, the threat to traditional professors' classroom domain is only part of the picture. Adams and DeFleur (2005) conducted a survey, which involved 109 committee chairs in humanities, social sciences, science/technology, and professional fields to find out how valuable online degrees were to colleges looking for employees. They found that 98% of the committee chairs said they prefer traditional degrees to online degrees when hiring for their own faculty vacancies. If 98% of committee chairs prefer traditional degrees, then why is there a push in higher education for more online learning? It is likely that online courses are seen as a money-maker via professional training but not effective for producing researchers or deep thinkers at the highest levels.

From a professional perspective, Capozzi (2000) described how a chemical company formed 12 focus groups to analyze employees who varied in job position and length of time with the company because they needed input to develop a learning center. The study indicated that learners are being overwhelmed with technology and are already in front of the computer too many hours per day. They stated, "The good news is that people are becoming more and more comfortable with technology. The bad news is that people are becoming inundated with technology" (p. 37), which helps demonstrate that student motivation to

enroll in online courses may decrease due to constant online exposure. Anderson (2001) reiterates this notion in a study, which sought to examine how the Internet affected student's social and academic lives by surveying 1,300 college students from eight academic institutions. The study concluded that 10% of the students interviewed were socially isolated from society for spending too much time online. The findings of these studies certainly highlight some of the basic disadvantages found by some learners and helps us recognize reasons why some students are not eager to participate in online learning, yet these disadvantages haven't yet stemmed the growth of online learning. Thus there is enduring motivation to pick up an online course or two among most undergraduate residential students today. We were sincerely interested in why this would be the case and delved more deeply into the literature to discover that there is not a clear-cut answer out there.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The growth in online learning is certainly, in part, a reflection of demand for these courses despite the potential drawbacks as we've pointed out above. Carnevale (2004) suggests that most college online courses are geared towards students that are in residence on campus, not commuters, and definitely not the students halfway around the globe. This finding puzzles us and is one of the cornerstones of the present study, which examines motivations for residential enrollment in online courses. That most students are residential does not seem logical because online learning can take place anytime/anywhere making geographic location irrelevant and it would seem that this central feature would be taken greatest advantage of in the online learning enterprise. However, Carnevale explains that most students who take online courses are residential students who enjoy the flexibility of online courses. While Carnevale suggests that, theoretically, the reason for residential students to take

online courses is linked to flexibility, there has not been any research to support this assertion to date. Li and Akins (2005) disagree with Carenevale's assertion that most online students are also residential students, and estimated that only around 15% of online learners are residential students. They highlighted the importance of flexibility to most of the students who took their online courses and found that online students and instructors translate course flexibility to mean less work and easier grading. In referring to both instructors and students, they stated: "They know that you do not need to go to school, or be at a certain place at a certain time; hence they assume that one can cruise through the teaching and learning processes" (p. 56). However, this study is based solely on the author's experiences, so there is not sufficient empirical evidence to support their claims either.

O'Malley and McCraw (1999) conducted a survey of 128 online undergraduate and graduate business students and found that students liked online courses because they believed they saved time, gained flexibility, were able to enroll in more courses, and earn the same or better grade in the online version versus the face-to-face. While this study pointed out what students liked about the online courses they enrolled in, it also offered the confounding revelation that the participants *preferred* traditional, face-to-face courses. This leads us to reevaluate conclusions made in this study because students' responses regarding online learning might not be the reasons they *chose* the course, rather they were reasons the students *liked* the course, which helps justify a need to further explore this issue. It becomes clear, then, that flexibility primarily means timesavings of several types.

However, the notion that time savings is a given has definitely been debated in the literature. For example, Whitney (2006) argues that online classes do not save time. Here, Whitney highlights the theoretical differences between learners in traditional and online environments and clarifies that while there may be greater flexibility in online programs, one cannot

assume that flexibility equals more realized free time. Rather, the flexibility offered may reduce stress by giving students the flexibility to participate in a course at their convenience. This finding, while theoretical in nature, was explored earlier by Beard, Harper, and Riley (2004) who conducted a survey with 42 participants, which compared student's attitudes and perceptions towards an online course that was conducted in Blackboard called "Characteristics of Severe Disabilities." Based on open-ended responses from their survey, they found that flexibility allowed commuter students to save time and money on travel to and from class and that they enjoyed working from home. This is confirmed by Young (2002), whose theoretical review of hybrid instruction explained that the flexibility offered in online classes saves commuter students time because they can choose when to access the online sections of a course. While this study only reflects motivations of commuter students and not residential, it helps support the notion that students perceive flexibility in online courses to be one of convenience.

When students participate in an online course they can access it at their convenience, in a setting of their choice, because they have instant access to all of their course materials (Gebhardt, 2001). This is confirmed by Dutton, Dutton, and Perry (2002), who conducted a survey with 180 participants, which compared a computer science class in both online and face-to-face formats. Their survey showed that 95.3% of students enrolled in their online course because they could work in a setting of choice at their convenience. While this indicates student motivation to enroll in an online course, it does not explain why undergraduate residential students would enroll, because the majority of the online students in their study were returning learners. While this study does not focus on our target population, similar enrollment motivations are reflected repeatedly throughout the literature (Berge, Collins, & Fitzsimmons, 2001; Mihhailova, 2006; Willging & Johnson, 2004).

While conducting a study, which viewed the ways a business college handled its e-learning program, Mihhailova (2006) interviewed 11 residential students who were under the age of 25 to determine what the students enjoyed about their e-learning experience. Three common ideas were uncovered during the interviews that help illustrate why students enroll in online courses, which are: “quick and easy access to learning materials,” “no need for physical presence/possibility to study in a suitable location,” and “studying at a convenient time for the student” (p. 279). While these results focus on student motivation to participate in an online course, they capture the viewpoint from the learner who is enrolled in a fully online program and not just an online course. Berge, Collins, and Fitzsimmons (2001) drew similar conclusions to Mihhailova in their theoretical review of online learning where they stated that training can be conducted at the convenience of the learner, no matter where the employee is located or what time zone he or she is in. They explained, “Training does not have to be conducted during a predetermined timeframe or even during normal business hours. Training can take place anytime during the day and the duration of the training can be varied, depending on the workload” (p. 23). This helps reiterate the notion that students are enrolling in these courses because they are not time and place reliant (Ellsworth, 1994). Willging and Johnson (2004) uncovered similar results when they conducted an online survey with 10 graduate students to find out what influenced their decision to drop out of the University of Illinois online masters program. As part of their survey, they asked students what their motivations were for enrolling in the first place. They found that students enrolled in their online courses because they wanted a schedule that gave them flexibility, allowed them to work at their own pace, and in their own environment. Even though this study focused on motivational factors influencing students to enroll in online courses, it does not draw information

from the undergraduate population, which is our focus. Its participants were graduate students who were enrolled in a fully online program, not residential students, more typically enrolled in a single online course. Similar results emerged from a study conducted by Beyth-Marom, Saporta, and Caspi (2005) whose research focused on students’ reactions to online tutors in both synchronous and asynchronous formats. Out of 288 students who participated in their survey, 48.1% agreed that they had “a preference to manage their learning time themselves” and “felt strongly about possessing their own materials” (p. 251). Although the results from this study do not directly point to motivational factors that influence a student’s decision to enroll in an online course, they demonstrate how students responded in an online setting, which helps explain how students may feel towards the online learning environment.

Here we have examined the literature in the area of online learning to discern the motivational factors that influence enrollment decisions. As demonstrated in the literature review, there is an overwhelming amount of research that touches upon student motivation to enroll in online courses but it does not focus on undergraduate residential students who are enrolling in these courses; instead, most of the research concentrates on graduate students or students enrolled in fully online programs. In addition, many studies were not explicitly interested in motivations to take online courses, but found some motivational or usage preferences related to online learning as a tertiary finding—that is, it was not the primary or stated purpose of the research. After reviewing the literature we remain unsatisfied that there is a clear answer to the question of why residential students are increasingly being drawn to online courses as undergraduates. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following question: What motivates undergraduate residential students to enroll in online courses?

METHOD

Participants

Participants in the study consisted of undergraduate residential students taking an online class through Penn State's World Campus Online. In order to be eligible to participate in this study students had to meet certain criteria, which consisted of being enrolled as an undergraduate student, currently in an online course, and be considered a residential student, which we defined as living not more than 40 minutes from campus. We interpret the term residential to mean all students in the general vicinity of campus who would have an easy and relatively short commute to class. It should be noted that we are not specifically looking at students just living on campus, but rather students who are considered to be residents of the local surrounding communities. Our initial objective was to look at students currently living on campus but the resulting sample was so small that we were concerned about being able to draw any conclusions at all about motivations, and therefore it needed to be expanded. We expanded it to include students that were as much as 40 minutes from campus who were enrolled as residential undergraduate students. While this population is slightly different from those who live strictly on campus, none of them are pursuing an entirely online degree, and therefore still represent the interesting question of why it would be that those who are on campus decide to take an online course when they have easy access to residential face-to-face options. After reviewing demographic data from Penn State's World Campus, we found that fewer students who live on campus are actually taking online courses than we had expected. We realize this is a limitation but still find the results to be significant in terms of explaining the motivations among residential students for taking online courses.

The demographics and makeup of our participants is consistent with previous surveys conducted internally by Penn State's World Campus Online. Therefore, our sample is rep-

resentative of the population we are examining. Gender tended to include more women (64%) than men (36%), 56% of the students indicated they were full time students, 74% of the students were at least 26 years old, 16% were 22-25, and 10% were 18-21. Slightly more than one third—36%—of the participants lived 21-40 minutes from campus, 58% lived less than 20 minutes, and 6% lived on campus. All students were undergraduates. Seventy percent indicated that this was not their first online course experience, and 86% indicated that they intend to take more.

Materials and Procedures

A survey was developed to help answer the question uncovered during our review of the literature in online learning: What motivates undergraduate residential students to enroll in online courses? The survey (See Appendix) consisted of 39 questions and sought to discover why students enrolled in their current online course. The first 10 questions were multiple-choice and were aimed at the students' demographics, asking questions such as age, gender, location, and academic status. The next 26 questions were aimed at discovering reasons students chose to enroll in an online course. These questions were based on a 5 point Likert-scale, which ranged from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). The Likert-scale items were identified from our literature review and were put together for form 3 groups: (a) flexibility and convenience, (b) common misconceptions students have concerning online learning, and (c) external influences that could have motivated students to enroll in the online course. A reliability analysis of the Likert-scale questions revealed a Chronbach's Alpha of .826, which according to DeVellis (2003) needs to meet a .70 threshold to be considered acceptable. The last 2 questions were open-ended and asked students about their motivations for enrolling in the online course to help discover if there were additional motivations not covered in our survey.

The survey was distributed online via e-mail to a total of 408 of Penn State's World Campus Online students in the fall of 2007. In order to be included in this study, participants must have met the following three criteria; undergraduate enrollment status, currently in an online course, and be considered a residential student as defined by residing no more than 40 minutes from campus. A total of 74 students of the original 408 (18%) responded and 50 were accepted based on the inclusion criteria. Twenty-four students did not meet at least one of the above criteria and therefore their data were not used as part of this study. Students completed the survey anonymously and submitted it to an online database. Results for the multiple choice and Likert-scale questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics while the open-ended questions were coded into categories for interpretation.

RESULTS

A descriptive analysis was conducted to analyze the Likert-scale questions, which were aimed at discovering students' motivations for enrolling in an online course. The Likert-scale is reported in three sections: flexibility and convenience, common misconceptions, and external influences. The open-ended questions were coded and analyzed for common themes. In addition, an inferential analysis was conducted to compare age and distance from campus to each Likert-scale item.

Flexibility and Convenience

The first section of the Likert-scale survey was aimed at exploring the effects of flexibility and convenience on student motivation to enroll in online courses. These first eight Likert-scale questions are displayed in Table 1.

A majority of the students (88%) either strongly agreed or agreed that online classes worked better with their work schedule. This indicates that a majority of the students in the study held full or part time jobs that interfere

with their classes. More than half of the students surveyed (58%) suggested that they took an online class because it worked better with their family schedule. A majority of students either strongly agreed or agreed that they took an online course because they were more flexible (62%), that they could participate anywhere (66%) and anytime (62%), and that the materials were available at all times (52%). This confirms prior research claims (Dutton, Dutton, & Perry 2002) that students are motivated to enroll in online courses due to the nature of their flexibility and 24/7 access.

Common Misconceptions Concerning Online Learning

The following Likert-scale questions were geared towards understanding common misconceptions that students have towards online learning. These 12 indicators are displayed in Table 2.

Results of these 12 indicators, which looked at common misconceptions students have towards online learning, suggested that most students do not hold them to be true. This was surely a welcomed revelation. The study revealed that only 12% of students strongly agreed or agreed that they learn more in online courses and 16% felt that they participate more, 8% indicated that they did not feel that online classes are easier, and about half (56%), felt that they could take more online courses per semester, pointing to the idea that students do not feel online courses are easier but that they may involve less work than face-to-face courses. However, when asked if online courses saved them time, student responses tended to be mixed, supporting the notion that they spend at least just as much time online as face-to-face. Only a small number of students (22%) indicated that they enjoyed spending time on the computer, only 28% of students indicated that they wanted to see what it was like to take an online course, and only 16% took the course to diversify their learning experiences. Nonetheless, most students felt

TABLE 1
Flexibility and Convenience

<i>QUESTION</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Percentage of Strongly Agree (1) and Agree (2)</i>
An important reason for choosing an online course was that it worked better with my "work" schedule	1.46	1.05	88%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that it worked better with my "family" schedule	2.14	1.27	58%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that it worked better with my "free-time" schedule	2.24	1.12	59%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that they are more flexible, i.e., I can work at my own pace	2.22	1.23	56%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that they let me participate anytime	2.12	1.17	62%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that they let me participate anywhere	2.02	1.11	66%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that all of the course materials are available at all times	2.40	1.21	52%

* - Likert-scale was measured on a 5 point scale which consisted of: Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neutral (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5)

TABLE 2
Common Misconceptions

<i>QUESTION</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Percentage of Strongly Agree (1) and Agree (2)</i>
An important reason for choosing an online course was that I learn more in an online course than in a classroom	3.34	1.00	12%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that I participate more online than in a classroom	3.2	.99	16%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that they save me time compared to a classroom course	3.04	1.32	26%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that they are easier than classroom courses	3.88	1.00	8%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that I am more comfortable in an online course than a I am in a classroom	3.34	1.00	18%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that I can take more classes per semester if they are online	2.46	1.24	56%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that I express myself better through writing than speaking	3.24	1.13	26%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that I enjoy spending time on the computer	3.22	1.01	22%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that I am more comfortable working independently	2.70	1.01	44%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that I wanted to see what it was like to take an online course	3.22	1.18	28%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that I wanted to Diversify my learning experiences	3.28	.94	16%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that I learn better from reading lecture materials compared to hearing them	3.66	1.02	8%

* - Likert-scale was measured on a 5 point scale which consisted of: Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neutral (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5)

that they were more comfortable working independently.

External Influences

The following Likert-scale questions sought to understand if outside influences motivated students to enroll in online courses. The seven external influence indicators are displayed in Table 3.

A majority of students revealed that external influences had little if any motivational impact on their decision to enroll in an online course. Less than 10% of the students indicated that they had been given advice from an advisor, instructor, or peer to enroll in an online course. Only 12% indicated that the course was required and student responses tended to be mixed when asked if the online course was essential to graduate, pointing to the idea that most students were taking the online course as an elective and free choice. Nonetheless, a majority of the students revealed that the course they were enrolled in

was not only offered online indicating that most of the online courses were available in the classroom as well. Of the courses offered in the classroom, 26% strongly agreed or agreed that they could not get into the face-to-face course.

Open-Ended Questions

Outcomes from the open-ended questions helped confirm results from the Likert-scale questions. Open-ended questions were coded and analyzed. An overwhelming majority of the students indicated that the major three influences on their decision to enroll in an online course were time, convenience, and flexibility. When asked what the most important reason for choosing an online course included, one student responded,

Because it fits better into your busy schedule. You can work on it at all times and have a set date from the beginning for assignments in which you can work at your own pace as long as you get it done by that time.

TABLE 3
External Influences

QUESTION	M	SD	Percentage of Strongly Agree (1) and Agree (2)
An important reason for choosing an online course was that I received advice from an advisor/instructor	3.7	.93	8%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that I received advice from peers	3.7	.97	10%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that it was required	3.74	1.12	12%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that this course was only available online	3.26	1.20	30%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that I could not get into the face-to-face course	3.22	1.28	26%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that I needed it to graduate	2.90	1.3	36%
An important reason for choosing an online course was that I could not get into the face-to-face course and needed it to graduate	3.24	1.39	26%

* - Likert-scale was measured on a 5 point scale which consisted of: Strongly Agree (1), Agree (2), Neutral (3), Disagree (4), Strongly Disagree (5)

Another example included, "I would choose the online course if I wanted to take another course on campus that was offered at the same time." By and large, most students' responses resembled these examples. These findings reinforce conclusions drawn from the Likert-scale survey by showing that students enrolled in online courses due to their flexibility, time, and convenience.

Group Comparisons: Age and Distance to Likert-Scale Items

A series of Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted to compare both age (18-21, 22-25, and 26+) and distance from campus (On-campus, Less than 20 minutes from campus, Between 21-40 minutes from campus, Between 41-60 minutes from campus, and More than 1 hour from campus) to each of the Likert-scale questions. Results yielded insignificant differences in both age and distance from campus groups to each of the Likert-scale questions. However, it should be noted that although insignificant differences were found, there were observable differences in the 18-21 age group when compared to other age groups, and in the on-campus group when compared to other distance groups. Therefore further investigation to compare these two populations is warranted to explore if there is a significant difference.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study sought to understand the motivational factors that influence undergraduate residential students to enroll in online courses. As demonstrated in the literature, there is a good deal of research that investigates student motivation to enroll in online courses, but it tends not to focus on residential students who are enrolling in these courses, and it tends to be theoretical, anecdotal, or experiential. In addition, many studies were not explicitly interested in motivations to take online courses, but found some motivational or usage preferences

related to online learning as a tertiary finding—that is, it was not the primary purpose of their research.

Our literature review identified two critical factors for students enrolling in online courses, which were flexibility and convenience. Our study sought to investigate these factors by examining the motivations influencing residential students. Results of our study confirmed the literature, which showed that residential students attribute flexibility, time, and convenience in their decision to enroll in online courses. Many of the students pointed to factors such as work, family, and anywhere/anytime access. Similar conclusions were made by Gaytan and McEwen (2007) who found that many online students have commitments such as jobs and family, which makes the anywhere/anytime characteristic of online courses all the more desirable. While it is true that the study was significantly limited by the population who responded to the survey and therefore had to expand its boundaries to understand residential in a broader sense as anyone within a 40 minute commute to campus, we still feel that there are important and compelling findings that are likely to represent this larger population of residential students.

Findings in our study suggest that the majority of students feel that online courses are fairly similar to face-to-face courses in terms of rigor, workload, and time spent working in and out of class, which is inline with current research (Merisotis & Phipps, 1999). This dispels previous beliefs that residential students are enrolling in online courses because they think they are easier and less work, although it should be noted that almost half felt that they could take more per semester, which could be attributed to time savings. These result shows that students who are enrolled in online classes are getting a similar education to those students in the face-to-face version. However, it should be noted that this finding applies to individual online classes at Penn State University and certainly may not pertain to fully online programs or programs at other institutions.

A majority of students indicated that they are comfortable working independently, which is often a characteristic of successful online learners (Hale, 2007). As pointed out in Rovai Ponton, Wighting, and Baker (2007), online students are generally self-motivated individuals who are mature, disciplined, and self-regulated. Thus, this leads us to conclude that residential online learners, who are comfortable working independently, are more apt to enroll in online courses.

Furthermore, this study revealed that most students did not enjoy spending additional time on the computer, as is required in the online learning environment. This indicates that students may not be inclined to spend additional time on the computer and supports conclusions drawn by Anderson (2001) and Capozzi (2000) that today's students are being over-inundated with technology, which may hinder their motivation to enroll in online courses. However, this finding does not appear to deter students, as an overwhelming majority stated that they intended to continue to enroll in online courses.

When asked about external influences, which may have affected students' decision to take an online course, it was revealed that neither peers', instructors', and/or advisors' influence motivated the students to enroll in these courses. In addition, it was also noted that a quarter of the students tried to enroll in the face-to-face course but could not get in. Although not a significant percentage of the participants, similar findings have been reported in the literature (Cereijo, 2006) suggesting that a portion of students may be motivated to enroll in online courses because they could not get into the face-to-face version.

While our study examined residential students (i.e., students who were within reasonable driving distance from campus), future research should focus on students taking online courses who are on-campus and in the 18-21 year old age group. Our study included students of any age that met the criteria of being residential students, which we defined as living at least 40 minutes from campus. From

the results in our analysis of the Likert-scale questions, we observed differences in both age and distance to campus but they were found to be insignificant. We attribute this finding to the low number of 18-21 year olds and on-campus students. Therefore, future studies conducted with these groups may yield findings that would further contribute to the literature. This would increase the generalizability of this study's results, which could be used to compare the factors (distance to campus and age) to student motivations for enrolling in online courses. It may be some years before such a study is possible, however. Currently World Campus is among the largest providers of undergraduate curricula online; however, the representative population is still relatively small in terms of those who live in the dorms on campus in the 18-24 age range and therefore a survey repeated with this population in the near term may not be likely to yield significantly different results. It may be wiser to get a sense of their reasons through phenomenological interview protocol as opposed to surveys. While this will not produce a more generalizable result, it could give us some excellent insights into learner's reasons for enrolling in online courses that are also offered on campus face-to-face.

This study helped examine a gap in the research on online learning that is located at the intersection of student motivations for online learning among residential learners. We began by examining the online learning enterprise and its potential benefits and drawbacks. We then turned our attention to the literature in the area of online learning and learner motivation to engage in online learning. Prior research revealed that students enroll in online courses due to their flexibility and convenience but tends to focus on students in fully online programs and/or graduate and commuter students, rather than residential undergraduates. The results of this study upheld these findings as they relate to residential students, which we suggest fills a particular gap in the current literature in online learning. We expect these findings will help to guide future research in

the realm of online learning as we begin to understand the motivations of residential student populations. The notion here is to make sure to draw the distinctions between residential face-to-face, and residential online courses for students. Through this lens, we hope that understanding student motivations will help the future of online learning to become more beneficial to residential e-learners.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to thank the following people for contributing their ideas and time to this study: Jane Klaus, Khaled A. Alkandari, Rucha S. Modak, and Rose Marsh

APPENDIX

Survey Instrument

1. How many online college courses have you taken and/or currently enrolled in?
 - a. 0
 - b. 1
 - c. 2
 - d. 3 or More
2. What is your age?
 - a. 18-21
 - b. 22-25
 - c. 26+
3. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female
4. How would you describe your current academic status?
 - a. Full Time
 - b. Part Time
 - c. Non Degree
5. Are you an undergraduate student?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
6. How far do you live from campus?
 - a. On Campus
 - b. Less than 20 minutes from campus
 - c. Between 21-40 Minutes from campus
 - d. Between 41-60 Minutes from campus
 - e. More than 1 Hour
7. Which college are you in
 - a. College of Agricultural Sciences
 - b. College of Arts and Architecture
 - c. Smeal College of Business
 - d. College of Communications
 - e. College of Earth and Mineral Sciences
 - f. College of Education
 - g. College of Engineering
 - h. College of Health and Human Development
 - i. College of Information Sciences and Technology
 - j. College of the Liberal Arts
 - k. Eberly College of Science
 - l. Undecided
 - m. Other (please specify)
8. Which campus do you attend?
 - a. Abington
 - b. Altoona
 - c. Beaver
 - d. Behrend
 - e. Berks
 - f. Delaware
 - g. Dubois
 - h. Fayette
 - i. Harrisburg
 - j. Hazelton
 - k. Hershey
 - l. Lehigh Valley
 - m. Mckeesport
 - n. Mont Alto
 - o. New Kensington
 - p. Schuylkill
 - q. Shenango
 - r. University Park
 - s. Wilkes-Barre
 - t. Worthington Scranton
 - u. York
 - v. Other (please specify)

9. Is the online course that you are currently enrolled in, or have taken, offered as a classroom course as well?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Don't Know
10. After my online experience, I would like to take more online courses?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
11. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Choices:

 - Strongly Agree
 - Agree
 - Neither Agree or Disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

Questions:
12. An important reason for choosing an online course was that it worked better with my "work" schedule
13. An important reason for choosing an online course was that it worked better with my "family" schedule
14. An important reason for choosing an online course was that it worked better with my "free-time" schedule
15. An important reason for choosing an online course was that they are more flexible i.e. I can work at my own pace
16. An important reason for choosing an online course was that they let me participate anytime
17. An important reason for choosing an online course was that they let me participate anywhere
18. An important reason for choosing an online course was that all of the course materials are available at all times
19. An important reason for choosing an online course was that I learn more in an online course than in a classroom
20. An important reason for choosing an online course was that they save me time compared to a classroom course
21. An important reason for choosing an online course was that I participate more online than in a classroom
22. An important reason for choosing an online course was that they are easier than classroom courses
23. An important reason for choosing an online course was that I am more comfortable in an online course than I am in a classroom
24. An important reason for choosing an online course was that I can take more classes per semester if they are online
25. An important reason for choosing an online course was that I express myself better through writing than speaking
26. An important reason for choosing an online course was that I enjoy spending time on the computer
27. An important reason for choosing an online course was that I am more comfortable working independently
28. An important reason for choosing an online course was that I wanted to see what it was like to take an online course
29. An important reason for choosing an online course was that I wanted to Diversify my learning experiences
30. An important reason for choosing an online course was that I learn better from reading lecture materials compared to hearing them
31. An important reason for choosing an online course was that I received advice from an advisor/instructor

32. An important reason for choosing an online course was that I received advice from peers
33. An important reason for choosing an online course was that it was required
34. An important reason for choosing an online course was that this course was only available online
35. An important reason for choosing an online course was that I could not get into the face-to-face course
36. An important reason for choosing an online course was that I needed it to graduate
37. An important reason for choosing an online course was that I could not get into the face-to-face course and needed it to graduate
38. Are there any reasons, not listed in this survey, which motivated you to enroll in an online course?
39. In your own words, what is the most important reason you would choose to take an online course when the same course is available in a classroom at your college?

REFERENCE

- Adams, J., & DeFleur, M. H. (2005) The acceptability of a doctoral degree earned online as a credential for obtaining a faculty position. *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 19(2), 71.
- Allen, E., & Seaman, J. (2006). *Making the grade: Online education in the United States*. Sloan Consortium. Retrieved November 12, 2006, from <http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/survey/survey06.asp>
- Allen, E., & Seaman, J. (2004). Entering the mainstream: The quality and extent of online education in the united states. Sloan Consortium. Retrieved October 1, 2006 from <http://www.sloan-c.org/publications/survey/survey04.asp>
- Anderson, K. J. (2001). Internet use among college students: An exploratory study. *Journal of American College Health*, 21.
- Beard, L. A., Harper, C., & Riley, G. (2004). Online versus on-campus instruction: Student attitudes & perceptions. *TechTrends*, 48(6), 29-31.
- Beldarrain, Y. (2006). Distance education trends: Integrating new technologies to foster student interaction and collaboration. *Distance Education*, 27(2), 139-153.
- Berge, Z. L. (2000) The context of distance training: predicting change. In *Sustaining distance training: Integrating learning technologies into the fabric of the enterprise* (pp. 3-12). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Berge, Z. L., Collins, M. P., & Fitzsimmons, T. J. (2001). Advantages and disadvantages of web-based training. In B. H. Khan (Ed.), *Web-based training* (pp. 21-26). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Educational Technology.
- Beyth-Marom, R., Saporta, K., & Caspi, A. (2005). Synchronous vs. asynchronous tutorials: Factors affecting students' preferences and choices. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 37(5), 245-262.
- Browne, E. (2003). Conversations in cyberspace: A study of online learning. *Open Learning*, 18(3), 245-259.
- Capozzi, M. (2000). eLearning that starts with the learner, not the "e." *TechTrends*, 44(5), 37.
- Carnevale, D. (2004, July 30). Many online courses work best at no distance at all. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 50(47), A22.
- Cereijo, M. V. P. (2006). Attitude as predictor of success in online training. *International Journal on ELearning*, 5(4), 623-639.
- Dede, C. (1989). The evolution of distance learning: Technology-mediated interactive learning. (Report for the study *Technologies for learning at a distance*). Washington, DC: Office of Technology Assessment.
- DeVellis, R. F. (2003). *Scale development: Theory and applications* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.
- DiBiase, D. (2000). Is distance teaching more work or less? *The American Journal of Distance Education*, 14(3), 6-20.
- Dutton, D., Dutton, M., & Perry, J. (2002). How do online students differ from lecture students? *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks*, 6(1).
- Ellsworth, J. H. (1994). *Education on the Internet*. Indianapolis, IN: Sams.

← Au: Page numbers?

Au: Page numbers? ←

- Au: Foster entry not found in text. →
- Ellis, E. M. (2000). Faculty participation in the Pennsylvania State University World Campus: Identifying barriers to success. *Open Learning, 15*(3), 233-242.
- Foster, A. L. (2006, March 31). A congressman questions the quality and rigor of online education. *The Chronicle of Higher Education, 52*(30), A38.
- Gaytan, J., & McEwen, B. C. (2007). Effective online instructional and assessment strategies. *The American Journal of Distance Education, 21*(3), 117-132.
- Gilbert, J., Morton, S., & Rowley, J. (2007). e-Learning: The student experience. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 38*(4), 560-573.
- Au: Graff entry not found in text. →
- Graff, M. (2003). Cognitive style and attitudes towards using online learning and assessment methods. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning, 1*(1) 21-28.
- Gebhardt, M. (2001). eLearning: Will the next generation of students go to class online? *Inside the Internet, 8*(6), 3.
- Hale, S. J. (2007). Being online. *Academe, 93*(6), Retrieved February 05, 2008, from <http://www.aaup.org/AAUP/pubsres/academe/2007/ND/Feat/hale.htm>
- Klein, H. J., Noe, R. A., & Wang, C. (2006). Motivation to learn and course outcomes: The impact of delivery mode, learning goal orientation, and perceived barriers and enablers. *Personnel Psychology, 59*(3) 665-702.
- Liaw, S., Huang, H., & Chen, G. (2007). Surveying instructor and learner attitudes toward e-learning. *Computers & Education, 49*, 1066-1080.
- Li, Q., & Akins, M. (2005). Sixteen myths about online teaching and learning in higher education: Don't believe everything you hear. *TechTrends, 49*(4), 51-60.
- Lim, C. P. (2005). Online learning in higher education: Necessary and sufficient conditions. *International Journal of Instructional Media, 32*(4), 323-331.
- Au: Page numbers? →
- O'Malley, J., & McCraw, H. (1999). Students' perceptions of distance learning, online learning and the traditional classroom. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration, 2*(4).
- Merisotis, J. P., & Phipps, R. A. (1999). What's the difference? Outcomes of distance vs. traditional classroom-based learning. *Change, 31*(3), 12-17.
- Mihailova, G. (2006). E-learning as internationalization strategy in higher education. *Baltic Journal of Management, 1*(3), 270-284.
- Noble, D. F. (2003). *Digital diploma mills: The automation of higher education*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Rich, D. (2001). eLearning: A new way to develop employees. *Electronic Business, 27*(8), 20.
- Rovai, A. P. (2001). Building a classroom community at a distance: A case study. *Educational Technology Research and Development, 49*(4), 33-48.
- Rovai, A. P., Ponton, M. K., Wighting, M. J., & Baker, J. D. (2007). A comparative analysis of student motivation in traditional classroom and E-learning courses. *International Journal on ELearning, 6*(3), 413-432.
- Russell, T. L. (1999). *No significant difference phenomenon*. Raleigh: North Carolina State University.
- Selim, H. M. (2007). Critical success factors for e-learning acceptance: Confirmatory factor models. *Computers & Education, 49*, 396-413.
- Tastle, W. J., White, B. A., & Shackleton, P. (2005). E-Learning in higher education: The challenge, effort, and return on investment. *International Journal on ELearning, 4*(2), 241.
- Tomei, L. A. (2006) The impact of online teaching on faculty load: Computing the ideal class size for online classes. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education, 14*(3), 531-541.
- Whitney, K. (2006). Online and traditional degrees differ in expectations, not results. Retrieved October 11, 2006, from http://www.clomedia.com/content/templates/clo_article.asp?articleid=1558&zoneid=180
- Willging, P. A., & Johnson, S. D. (2004). Factors that influence students' decision to dropout of online courses. *Journal of Asynchronous Learning Networks, 8*(4).
- Au: Page numbers? ←
- Young, J. R. (2002, March 22). Hybrid teaching seeks to end the divide between traditional and online instruction. *The Chronicle of Higher Education, 48*(28), A33.

