

**Online education: A case study on student motivations, intentions, and experiences**

*Trevor D. Bopp, University of Florida*

**Teaching**

**Abstract 2009-176**

**May 30, 2009**

**3:00 PM**

**Poster**

**(Lexington/Carolina Prefunction)**

As the Internet has become more firmly entrenched as a primary communication tool among constituents of higher education, a vast array of distance education tools has emerged, resulting in an increased use and interest of web-based learning environments in higher education (Hoskins & van Hooff, 2005). Progressive and inspiring teaching and instructional opportunities are continually made available, taking education well beyond the scope of the traditional classroom setting. Technologies such as discussion boards, podcasts, streaming audio/video media, and a broad range of online learning platforms allow for asynchronous interaction and have further spurred the growth of distance learning and online courses for students both on and off campus. Possible benefits of an online course include new and innovative techniques for students to learn (concurrently a potential drawback) and instructors to teach (Ascough, 2002), as well as the capability to reach an expansive group of potential students with cheaper costs to run and maintain the course (Hoskins & van Hooff, 2005). Possible drawbacks can include the online students feeling a sense of disconnect to both the classroom and school social community (Rovai, Wighting, & Liu, 2005), the socioeconomic digital divide's reinforcement of privilege and power hierarchies related to social identity (Clark & Gorski, 2002), and time dedicated to the students' learning curve for the new online course platform.

While such means allow for and assist dialogue and involvement between all participants in higher education, there exists a concern that these forms of communication will not always fit into the overall institutional goals of teaching, research, and service. Despite the presence of these new and innovative technologies, at the heart of any online education environment still remains the student. To capitalize on the advantages of online education and curtail any shortcomings, it is crucial that programs account for the needs of the student before all others. In designing an online course, the students' learning needs must be the prime objective with proper consideration also given to institution and course objectives. In accomplishment of this, departments must ensure they realize and address concerns and desired outcomes of the students; it is important to know and understand what it is that the students want and get out of online classes. Ajzen's (2006) theory of planned behavior posits there are three predictors, or determinants of human social behavior (Hrubes, Ajzen, and Daigle, 2001), that can be examined in an effort to identify the intent of an individual's actions. These three predictors are attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control; each of which is shaped by three categories of beliefs: behavioral, normative, and control, respectively. Manipulation of any or all these variables should result in a positive/negative impact on the intention of an individual to partake in an action, and thus, increasing/decreasing the individual actually acting upon said intention (Francis et al., 2004). Ajzen's theory of planned behavior was used to frame this study exploring the motivations, intentions, and experiences of students who chose to forego the traditional classroom setting and enroll in an online course.

Participants in this study were nine students enrolled in sport management courses at a large public university in the Southwest. Six of the students were enrolled in at least one online course, with the remaining three participants enrolled in on-campus courses. Their responses were used to help get an understanding of why students chose not to enroll in the online courses. Open-ended, semi-structured interview questions were conducted over a three week span and were not tape recorded; but rather transcribed using interviewer field notes. A content analysis was performed on collected data to determine the primary themes associated with student intentions, motivations, and experiences. These themes were course content and material, the presentation of said material, student-to-student and student-to-instructor interaction, the feeling of connectedness to the institution, and time and travel conveniences.

The results demonstrate that in general, no single factor was more important in affecting student intentions and motivations enroll in an online course. Rather, students recognized the interrelatedness of each factor and the effects they had on one another. Furthermore, the overall impression received was that the decision to enroll in an online or on-campus class was solely a result of the student's preference. These preferences were a product of personal experiences and opinions (attitudes toward the behavior), as well as the opinions and experiences of those close to the individual (subjective norms). Students seemed to understand and recognize similar benefits and drawbacks to each course section but had to decide which aspects best contributed to their desired learning outcomes (perceived behavioral control). Several of the key findings were the students wanting assurance that they would achieve the same learning objectives in the online section as they would on-campus. Similarly, decisions to take an online course were dictated by the perceived quality of the course content. This perception is largely influenced by the delivery methods used. Online delivery methods provide opportunities and learning experiences not available to on-campus sections. Likewise, on-campus courses make accessible to students and instructors learning techniques and practices that online courses can't offer. One such advantage is that of face-to-face interaction. Students were very specific as to whether or not they believed this interaction helped meet learning objectives. Still, other students were concerned with the

## **2009 North American Society for Sport Management Conference (NASSM 2009)**

workload and demands of an online course. Online workload and knowledge testing should be similar to that of an on-campus course without taking away the freedom to meet course requirements in times and places convenient to the student. Several students were enticed by the perceived ease and workload of the online class, while others decided the personal, daily interaction with the instructor on-campus would best serve their educational needs. In determining whether or not to enroll in an online class, students must realize and often times they do, the tradeoffs with an online and on-campus course. It is suggested that students discuss their concerns and questions with peers, faculty, and staff in regards to which type of course delivery best suits their needs. Similarly, it is also suggested that faculty and staff take note of these issues and attempt to rectify any issues or concerns with them for future classes. Some educators believe in one best model of learning and/or teaching. This is not always the case and offering different methods for both helps students and faculty alike in achieving the educational goals and benefits for all involved in the learning process.