The Relationship between Learner Characteristics, Motivation, Learning Strategies and Students' Preferred Choice of Learning Environment

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The number of college students taking traditional face-to-face classes will plummet from 14.4 million in 2010 to 4.1 million in 2015 according to the report by Ambient insight, a marketing research firm (2011). The number of students partaking in online courses is expected to triple during this time making it comparable to traditional learning. This increase in the demand for online learning is clearly distinguished from more traditional learning environments in which no technological mediation of communication between teacher and students is required (see Berge & Collins, 1995; Hiltz, 1994; Kuehn, 1994 et al.) However, research pertaining to why students may prefer an online environment than a traditional classroom is still sparse. Considering increasing number of online classes in sport management and the unique characteristics of sport management students, this study is designed to address the factors that contribute to individuals' choice of a particular type of learning environment.

Findings in education literature have suggested contributors to students' learning preference include their goal for learning (Ames, 1992), perceived competence in learning (Bandura, 1997) and their specific strategies for learning (Pintrich, Wolters & Baxter, 2000). Accordingly, this study will firstly measure the sport management students' motivation for learning and their learning strategies by using Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia & McKeachie, 1991), then investigate its relationship with sport management students' preference for a particular learning environment. Students' preference for a particular learning environment, traditional, online or hybrid, and reasons for those preferences will be assessed using a questionnaire developed by the researcher.

Based on literature, more variables which reflect sport management students’ characteristics will be adopted to identify its relationship with students' choice of learning environment. For example, questions regarding students’ computer competency, past online class satisfaction, time to commute to school, employment status, and their familiarity with distance education will be asked as well as demographics variables.

One hundred and twenty graduate students in the sport management program at a major Hispanic serving research university in America will be asked to complete a survey at the beginning of Spring Semester, 2012 and discriminant analysis will be conducted to determine whether students who select a traditional learning environment differ significantly from those who select a nontraditional leaning environment given their learner characteristics, motivation, and learning strategies.

This study will contribute sport management education literature by suggesting practical applications. Although numerous academic institutions are moving towards greater incorporation of online learning environments, interestingly, few questions have been asked about how learner characteristics, motivation, and their leaning strategies might be related to their choice of learning environment. According to Palloff and Pratt(2003), online learning might not match students’ preferred leaning style. The result of this study will likely inform the design of effective learning environment for sport management education.