

# Student Opinions on Web-Enhanced Courses

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## Abstract

*This study examined student satisfaction with technology enhanced traditional courses. Students were enrolled in two courses where the instructors used Blackboard to supplement the course content. Student responses indicated that students were very satisfied with the technology-enhanced course and liked the availability of lecture notes, links to additional resources and online discussions. Students also provided feedback about face to face and online discussions. Students who preferred online discussions, liked the flexibility and convenience of the medium of communication. Students who preferred face to face discussions felt that online discussions lacked personal touch. Implications of the results for instructors and future research are also discussed.*

## 1: Introduction

In the recent years, the rapid advancements in technology and telecommunications, especially the Internet, have led to an explosive growth of Web-based courses. The World Wide Web (WWW) is emerging as the most popular medium for delivering instruction and an increasing number of instructors are integrating various features of the Web in novel ways to provide exciting learning opportunities for their students. While some instructors use the World Wide Web to offer totally Web-based classes, others use technology to enhance the content of a traditional course. However, there are many challenges associated with incorporating the World Wide Web in instruction. The research examining student feedback about the use of World Wide Web, multimedia and online discussions is varied and mixed [1]. Many students like the convenience and flexibility of Web-based instruction (WBI) as well as the access to large amount of the information in WBI [2]. On the other hand, studies have also reported that students experience feelings of isolation, anxiety and confusion [3]. Students are primary participants in a learning environment, their satisfaction with the learning environment is important for the success of implementing web-based instruction. In addition, student feedback about the use of technology in a course can be valuable for the instructor for designing effective Web-based courses. This study assessed student

satisfaction regarding the use of web components in two traditional classes and gathered their feedback to examine the advantages, disadvantages and effectiveness of using the Web course activities to enhance the traditional class content.

## 2: Procedures

The authors used different features of Blackboard like discussion forums, virtual chatroom, bulletin board, e-mail and group features to enhance the traditional course content of the two courses they were teaching. The learning materials were arranged into small learning units or modules, which included course syllabus, lecture notes, examples, and links to additional reading and resources. The students were required to participate in online discussions in addition to classroom discussions. This allowed the classroom discussion to be ongoing and extended beyond the classroom boundaries. The classroom activities and classroom discussions required that students access the additional readings and resources. Students worked in groups on projects and were encouraged to use group features provided in Blackboard to facilitate group work.

At the end of the semester, students were asked to provide their feedback regarding the use of technology in the courses. The survey was completed by 89 students enrolled in the two classes taught by the authors. Thirty one students were enrolled in a Special Education course and 58 were enrolled in a Management Information Systems course. Out of the 89 students, 17 students were graduate, 72 undergraduate, 61 students were full time and 28 were part-time. Fifty nine students were male and 30 were female. Twenty one students reported that they had taken an online course before they were enrolled in this class. Students reported that they accessed the class web site from home, school or work. All survey questions were on Likert scale, from 1-5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

## 3: Results

In general, the students' feedback regarding the use of technology in the class was positive (Table 1). Students liked the fact that the course syllabus was available on the

course website for reference. Majority of the students found the lecture notes as being one of the most useful features of using Blackboard. They agreed that having the class presentation available before class on the course website allowed them to focus on the lecture in class rather than taking notes in class.

Items	Mean
Having the course syllabus available on the course website was useful for reference	4.38
Having the class presentation (Lecture Notes) available before class on the website allowed me to focus on the lecture in class rather than taking notes in the class	4.34
Discussion Forums allowed me to participate in discussions at my own pace and gave me time to think and reflect before responding	3.94
I prefer online discussion forum over the traditional in class discussions	2.69
The file exchange in the group account increased the productivity of the group	3.22
The email feature under the group account increased productivity by allowing me to communicate easily with my groups	3.38
The group feature allowed me to collaborate and communicate with other group members using virtual chat rooms available for our groups	2.98
The group feature allowed me to communicate using discussion forums just for my group	3.03
I found the links to resources on the course website useful	4.01
Packages like Blackboard increase overall productivity of students	3.84

Table 1: Student opinions on web-enhanced courses

Students also found the links to additional resources useful. A possible reason why students liked this feature is because it was integrated in the lectures, classroom activities and assignments, thus prompting students to explore and access that information. Students also reported satisfaction with using discussion forums in the courses. Students agreed that discussion forums allowed them to participate at their own pace and gave them time to think and reflect upon before responding. It is interesting that although most students believed that online discussions were beneficial, only 40 % of the students preferred online discussions to traditional face to face discussions, 47% preferred face to face and 12% students were neutral about it. Students provided several reasons for their preferences. Students who preferred face to face discussions reported that online discussions were impersonal because they lacked non-verbal cues and body language. For example, one student wrote: "*Online discussions are nice for those individuals who may be reluctant to speak up in class, but you loose some of the*

*spontaneity that comes from responding immediately to what others say.*" Another student commented that "*I think face to face discussion is better in that the person can see and interpret their gestures and reactions to things.*" Similarly another student commented, "*I learn more from listening to people than reading responses online.*" On the other hand, students who preferred online discussions liked it because online discussions allowed enough time to think before responding and were flexible and convenient. For example, a student commented "*I like the online discussions because I had time to thoroughly read and analyze the materials and it gave everyone a chance to participate unlike classroom discussions.*"

Student comments indicate that students had different preferences in terms of how they learn-some learned more through online discussions, others felt they had to listen to people. Students also commented that lack of non-verbal cues in online discussions inhibited communication and therefore they found online discussions impersonal. Research related to the effectiveness of Web-based instruction has focused primarily on the student performance in these environments and has not paid attention to the social processes [3]. This social dimension of the Web-based learning environments needs further investigation. According to Vygostky [4], discussions and social interactions are an important part of the learning process. Therefore effectively facilitating social interactions and communications among students may influence both learning outcomes and student satisfaction. For students who prefer face to face communication, enrolling in an online class could lead to isolation and poor performance.

#### 4: References

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