Online class versus traditional classroom essay

Online Class versus Traditional ClassroomOnline courses are an important and growing part of higher education. However, various opinions have arisen over the matter.

Both proponents and opponents have come out to defend their stand on the issue. Proponents of online education note that computer technology has provided opportunities for learning that were previously unavailable to those not well served by traditional brick-and-mortar universities. Opponents see online courses as a fringe activity and worry that technology is guiding pedagogy. Whatever one's position, the fact is that the distinction between the traditional classroom and online instruction will continue to blur as traditional classes add online components and online courses gain mainstream respectability. In this climate, investigations aiming to uncover individual, situational and institutional factors that influence student performance and satisfaction in new learning environments will become increasingly important. Russell (1999) found no significant differences between the effectiveness of distance education and that of face-to-face classes in 355 comparison studies. Distance education, as defined by Russell (1999), includes the delivery of education through a variety of electronic communication forms, including television and the internet. Recent studies compared student performance, satisfaction, and persistence between online and face-to-face classes.

Summers et al. (2005) found no significant difference in grades between online and traditional classes; however, students in the online course were significantly less satisfied with the course on several dimensions. Family and consumer sciences (FCS) educators have joined the discussion and have

enumerated the benefits of online instruction. Students enrolled in an online section of an introductory FCS undergraduate consumer economics course scored higher on the achievement posttest than did students enrolled in a traditional classroom setting.

Despite numerous studies on distance education in general and web-based learning in particular, the research centered on comparisons between traditional and online instruction is in its infancy. Much of the existing work focuses on student experiences in the online condition and tends to avoid direct comparisons with analogous traditional learning environments (Huang, 2002). Another set of studies in this area focuses on the instructors' experiences. Smith, Ferguson and Caris (2001) interviewed 21 online instructors with the goal of describing the faculty members' perspective.

They found that online classes are not necessarily alienating experiences for students, but provide intellectually stimulating forums which create a sense of equality between professor and student. Wang and Newlin (2002) used their experience as instructors of web-based psychology classes to offer useful advice to online educators about identifying and helping low-performing cyber-students. They suggest course assessment quizzes, cyber-study groups and heightened social presence by the instructor as techniques for assisting online students. In one experimental investigation Schulman and Sims (1999) set out to extend the earlier work of Schutte (1996) by comparing pre-test and post-test scores of students in online and traditional classes. Their results, however, were inconsistent with the work they replicated. While Schutte found online students performed significantly

better than their in-class counterparts, Schulman and Sims concluded that the learning of the two groups of students in their sample was equal.

Schutte notes that his online students' frustration with their inability to ask questions in a face-to-face environment led them to form study groups, which may have contributed to their higher test scores; there is no evidence of heightened student-to-student interaction among the online students in the Schulman and Sims study. MacGregor (2001) also compared students in online and traditional classes. Using survey questionnaires containing both closed-ended and open-ended items she evaluated how the two groups of students rated various aspects of the classes including: work load, satisfaction, comfort level and perceived amount of learning. While students in the online and traditional classes gave similar ratings of amount of learning and satisfaction, the online students had lower comfort levels and perceived the workload to be higher than the students in the traditional classes. The two types of classes studied in this case were taught by various instructors from three different disciplines, thus making the comparisons less than ideal. The present research contributes to the emerging literature that compares students' experiences in online and traditional classes.

Using a research design that employs pre-test and post-test measures and controls for the instructor effect, the goal was to examine what differences, if any, exist in class performance and attitudes between students in online and traditional classes. Two opinion items that did yield significant effects are understanding the course content and recommending the class to other students. On both of these items the students in the traditional class have

reported greater understanding of the course material and a greater likelihood of recommending the course.

Consistent with this were the results of the question about overall satisfaction in the course; students in the traditional class are more satisfied with their experience than those in the online section of the course. Another notable similarity between the two groups is the low rate of attrition during the course. The traditional and online classes both have almost the same number of drop-outs. This deviates from an earlier pattern of high dropout rates in online instruction (Merisotis, 1999). ConclusionComparing the experiences of students in online and traditional classes, results indicate that exam scores for the students in the traditional group are significantly higher than the scores for the online group.

Student attitudes and level of satisfaction with the two methods of course delivery do not vary significantly. Online courses are reported to be particularly well suited to meet the needs of students who have responsibilities beyond school that make it difficult for them to attend regular university classes. The self-directed format and general flexibility allows them to pursue a degree without compromising work and family obligations. Studies have also shown that women make up a greater proportion of the online group than men, the number of men and women in the traditional class was approximately equal.;;;; ReferencesHuang, H. M.

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