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Instructors’ and Students’ Perceptions of Online Classes

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Abstract

Online learning has become increasingly popular over the last few years. In order to meet students’ needs, universities are offering more online courses. Many instructors have teaching strategies that they use in face-to-face classes; however, these strategies may not be the best way to deliver an online class. It is important to remember that online classes are a different environment than face-to-face classes and require a different set of teaching strategies. This research uncovered instructors’ and students’ perceptions of online classes using a quantitative research methodology. Primary data was collected through two different online surveys. The first survey was taken by instructors and the second survey by students of Indiana University-Purdue University Columbus in the fall of 2014. In comparing both studies, we found that there is a disconnect between students and instructors about how often instructors are communicating with their students in online classes. It was also found that while instructors often assign group projects, students feel they take away from the flexibility of online classes. The results of this project will give instructors the opportunity to better develop their online classes by implementing the most effective online teaching strategies.

Review of Literature

Research shows that keeping students engaged and actively participating in an online class will help develop critical thinking skills (Zappala, 2012). Students express that active participation makes for a “good” university course, while lecture-only formats are considered “poor” university courses (Harrinton, 2012). In addition, it is important to establish good instructor-student relationships in an online course (Sull, 2009). In order to do this, the instructor must understand the students’ needs.

Methodology

- Quantitative Research
- Online Survey through Survey Monkey
- 1900 undergraduate and graduate students and 199 instructors (full time and adjunct faculty) at Indiana University-Purdue University Columbus

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Instructor Response Time

- Less than 1 day
- 2 days
- 3-5 days
- 6 or more days

Student Perceptions of Instructor Response Time

- Less than 1 day
- 2 days
- 3-5 days
- 6 or more days

Results

- Improving oral and written communication skills
  - Students’ Responses: Individual projects/assignments 59.71%
  - Instructors’ Responses: Individual projects/assignments 75.00%

- Increasing participation and engagement
  - Students’ Responses: Individual projects/assignments 65.00%
  - Instructors’ Responses: Discussion Forums 60.61%

- Developing team work skills
  - Students’ Responses: Group projects/assignments 38.57%
  - Instructors’ Responses: Group projects/assignments 42.42%

- Learning the course material
  - Students’ Responses: Individual projects/assignments 67.63%
  - Instructors’ Responses: Individual projects/assignments 81.25%

- Developing critical thinking skills
  - Students’ Responses: Individual projects/assignments 56.12%
  - Instructors’ Responses: Individual projects/assignments 68.75%

Surveys also indicated that while 53% of instructors require group work, many students feel it is too difficult to organize face-to-face meetings. Students also indicated that they need more instructor involvement during their online classes and would like an opportunity to meet face-to-face at least once.

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