

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

ONLINE TEACHING IN AN ONLINE WORLD

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Welcome to the first of a series of research reports and survey results related to the use of the Internet in teaching and learning. This initial report addresses the use of the Internet by postsecondary instructors. We conducted this survey in response to the proliferation of college instructors using the Web as a resource in their teaching. Instead of randomly surveying college instructors about their Web-based teaching needs, experiences, and support mechanisms, this study targeted those with some experience in using the Web as a teaching and learning resource. More specifically, this sample was selected from instructors who had at least shared an online version of a syllabus, posted an instructor profile, or reviewed and critiqued online resources on the Web.

The objective of this research was to learn about the common obstacles, supports, and experiences as well as the tools used among early adopters of the Web as a teaching resource. The findings indicate that many college instructors already have extensive online teaching experience. In fact, the participants in our sample have some strong opinions and suggestions for college administrators and courseware developers.

Whereas most studies simply ask about online experience, time investments, and common complaints, this study attempts to understand some of the pedagogical tools and mechanisms that could benefit college faculty today as well as 5-10 years from now. For instance, what is missing from current Web-based learning courseware from an experienced user's point of view? How can we move from courseware that simply warehouses or registers students to tools that engage them in interactive and collaborative events and experiences? And how can college faculty share their online learning successes and failures with other instructors and experts in their fields?

Still more questions confront instructors. For instance, what training and reward structures need to be in place to foster successful online teaching and learning experiences? Who is making the decisions about which Web-based teaching tools to acquire? What type of support mechanisms should decision makers provide for online instructors? And do such decisions and supports mechanisms vary between public and private, or large and more modest-sized, institutions?

The results of this survey begin to answer many of the above questions. For instance, early adopters of the Web for teaching seem willing to share course resources, consult the Web for expert teaching answers, and offer their instructional services to others. While these post-secondary instructors employ a wide range of tools and tasks in their online teaching, they point to a myriad of pedagogical tools that are not yet available. As a result, they are suspicious of the motives of administrators promoting Web-based education without the appropriate technical or pedagogical support.

Even though most of these college instructors voluntarily share course information and resources online, they caution that Web-based teaching efforts will require additional time and compensation for online instruction to become a more widely accepted practice. Institutional positions regarding ownership of course material is one issue that remains unresolved according to our study participants. The development and sharing of course material and ideas online will certainly be limited until universities clarify their policies (Goldberg, 2000).

Respondent Background

Description of Survey Respondents

- Sixty-four percent of our sample were drawn from instructors using the MERLOT Web site (see <http://www.MERLOT.org>). Another 36 percent were from the World Lecture Hall (WLH) Web site (see <http://www.utexas.edu/world/lecture>).

Type and Size of Respondent Institution

- Over two-thirds of our respondents were from public institutions (19 percent from 2-year and 51 percent from 4-year institutions). Only 21 percent were from private institutions (1 percent from 2-year private and 20 percent from 4-year private institutions). Nine percent were from other types of instructional situations or were not specific about the type of public or private institution they were in.
- Most of our sample worked at large institutions (54 percent) followed by medium-sized (26 percent) and small (20 percent) institutions.

Years of College Teaching Experience

- The teaching experience of our respondents was mixed with 36 percent having more than 20 years of experience, 34 percent with 10-20 years of teaching experience, and only 10 percent with fewer than 4 years of experience.

Respondent's Age, Gender, Rank, and Educational Background

- Most respondents were established instructors with extensive educational backgrounds. Nearly half of the instructors in this study were over 50 years old. Another 44 percent were between 36 and 50 years old.
 - Sixty percent were males.
 - Most were ranked at the professor or associate professor level (60 percent), while another 17 percent were assistant professors, 8 percent were adjuncts, and 5 percent were lecturers. The remaining 10 percent were in other categories such as learning center directors, instructional designers, or administrators, most of whom had some teaching responsibilities.
 - Nearly 70 percent had a doctoral degree and 6 percent were ABD. The highest degree level for the remaining participants was a master's degree (22 percent) or a BA (2 percent).
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Level of Courses Taught

- Surprisingly, nearly all of the respondents had undergraduate teaching experience (95 percent), while 62 percent had taught at the graduate level and 40 percent had experience teaching non-credit and other types of workshops, programs, or courses.

Participation in Online Course Sharing**When and How Did They Discover Sharing Resources?**

- More than half of the respondents first posted to MERLOT or the World Lecture Hall within the past year, indicating that sharing resources online is a recent trend among college instructors.
- Most discovered these course-sharing resources through Internet links (39 percent), colleagues (27 percent), or institutional announcements (25 percent).

Why Did They Share?

- Nearly half (45 percent) of the respondents shared Web resources as a means of professional growth. Many posted to the Web to share pedagogical theories or strategies with their colleagues (38 percent). More than half believed in the importance of course sharing.

Type and Number of Resulting Contacts

- Many respondents had been contacted as a result of sharing resources online. Of these, most contacts were from students (30 percent) and instructors (32 percent). Some, however, had been contacted by publishers (14 percent) and other companies or institutions (12 percent).
- Many of these instructors had more than 10 student contacts as a result of posting Web resources or information online.
- More than 90 percent of the respondents indicated that they welcomed comments from colleagues on their online syllabi and other resources.

Attitudes about Online Learning**Course Material Ownership**

- Extremely few respondents (i.e., 16 percent) felt that online courses were the property of their institution.
 - Sixty-three percent of respondents indicated that their institution did not have clear ownership policies, and another 21 percent responded that they were unsure about ownership policies at their institution.
 - Despite this lack of clarity, only 3 percent of these college instructors do not plan to abide by the ownership guidelines of their institution.
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Quality and Accreditation

- There were mixed reactions regarding whether learning is improved in online environments with 32 percent agreeing that it is, 29 percent disagreeing, and 40 percent unsure.
- More instructors were supportive of bachelor and master's degrees earned entirely online (44 and 45 percent, respectively) than doctoral degrees (19 percent). In fact, sixty-two percent were opposed to doctoral degrees earned entirely online.
- Eighty percent believed that accreditation for online distance education was necessary for high course quality.

Instructor Compensation for Online Teaching?

- The preferred mode of compensation for online teaching for these college instructors was additional salary (34 percent). Some instructors preferred nondiscretionary stipends (14 percent), course royalties (15 percent), release time (10 percent), or recognition (4 percent).
- Twenty percent believed that there should be no additional compensation for teaching online compared to traditional classroom teaching.

Current Online Teaching Situation**Online Teaching Experience**

- When asked about their experience with different forms of online instruction, nearly 40 percent of the respondents had taught courses partially online; 18 percent had taught courses fully online (i.e., without any face-to-face contact between students and instructors); and 19 percent of the respondents had done both partial and completely online courses. Only 24 percent had no online teaching experience.
- In terms of overall experience, survey respondents with online teaching experience had taught an average of 4 to 7 courses either partially or fully online; those with both partial and fully online experience had, on average, close to 7 such teaching experiences.

Instructor's Web-Related Skills

- Respondents had a high degree of comfort sending and receiving file attachments via e-mail (93 percent) and creating HTML pages (62 percent).
- Fewer than half of the respondents were highly comfortable using a Web-based courseware system (48 system), moderating a Web-based asynchronous discussion forum (44 percent), or hosting an online chat session (33 percent).

Time Commitment and Attrition

- Over 80 percent of the respondents indicated that teaching online was more time-consuming than teaching traditional courses.
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- According to the respondents, the dropout rate was higher in fully online courses than in partially online courses—ten percent of fully online courses experienced more than 50 percent attrition, whereas only 2 percent of those teaching in a blended mode (i.e., courses combining Web and classroom-based instruction) experienced that degree of attrition.

Internet Access

- Seventy-eight percent of the respondents had Internet or Web access in their current or most recent classroom.
- According to the respondents, nearly all students and instructors had access to an Internet-connected lab for class use (93 percent).
- Nearly all respondents had access to the Internet from home (97 percent).

Platform Choices and Preferences?

- Eighty-three percent of the respondents to this survey indicated that their institution provided a Web-based platform or courseware system for developing online courses or enhancing on-campus courses with online features.
- Of those institutions providing access to a Web-based courseware platform or online conferencing tool, 27 percent offered access to more than one platform or conferencing tool; 10 percent to three courseware systems or conferencing tools; and 5 percent to four or more systems or tools.
- Respondents indicated that they preferred online courseware that was easy to use, functional, consistent, reliable, customizable, flexible, comprehensive, professional in appearance, integrated, secure, learner-centered, and pedagogically useful. Many specific tool and support features were mentioned.

Future Online Teaching Situation**Online Teaching Load**

- Of those who expected to teach during the next decade, 27 percent of the respondents anticipated that more than a fourth of their teaching load would be allocated to online courses in the next year. Their predictions increased to 44 percent in two years, 64 percent in five years, and 73 percent in 10 years.

Freelance Instruction

- Only 16 percent of the respondents had been freelance or adjunct instructors on the Web in the past.
 - Nearly 75 percent, however, were interested in teaching as freelance or adjunct online instructors in the next five years. Demand as well as services for such instructors may explode during the coming decade.
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Institutional Motives and Decision Making

Primary Institutional Motives for Online Education

- Forty-one percent of the respondents agreed with the statement that a primary motive behind online education was profit, while 62 percent felt that a primary motive was learning. Nearly all (93 percent), however, also perceived that a primary motive was increasing access to education.
- In terms of their home institution, these percentages were slightly lower with 29 percent of the respondents agreeing that a primary motive was profit, 53 percent learning, and 81 percent access.

Reasons for University Investment

- According to these respondents, decisions by their home institutions to invest in Web-based teaching and learning included such important factors as access to external resources (67 percent), improved efficiency in teaching and research (63 percent), and providing distance education to a potentially unlimited audience (58 percent).
- Less important factors were cooperation and resource sharing within the higher education community (41 percent) and building partnerships with business and government (31 percent).

Web-Based Teaching Decision Making

- According to the faculty respondents, university administrators were key players in 63 percent of the decisions to use and support instructional technology for Web-based teaching. Faculty and departments had a role in such decision-making in 40 percent of the institutions surveyed. Campus technology support units or personnel make these decisions in 36 percent of the respondent institutions, while chief technology officers were responsible in 27 percent. Teaching and learning center directors were involved in these decisions roughly 20 percent of the time.
 - Decision-making varied by size of institution. At institutions with enrollments of under 3,000 students, faculty, campus technology support, and chief technology officers are more likely to make these decisions than at larger institutions. In contrast, teaching and learning center directors and departments are more influential in larger institutions. None of these differences, however, were statistically significant.
 - Differences in decision-making between public and private institutions were relatively minor as both typically relied on administrative level decision making. However, public institutions more often involved teaching and learning center directors, departments, and campus technical support people in their decision-making process, while private institutions more often involved faculty.
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Usefulness of Web-Based Tools for Teaching and Learning

Useful Online Class Tools

- Web tools for posting syllabi online were utilized by 85 percent of respondents and 72 percent deemed them highly useful.
- Tools for online cases, problems, or questions were valued and used by 70 of the respondents.
- Over 70 percent of the respondents used file uploading and downloading tools and 65 percent rated them as highly valuable.
- Online lecture notes were utilized by 69 percent of the respondents and 57 percent of them deemed such tools useful.
- Online self-test tools were used by 47 percent of the respondents and 52 percent of these faculty rated this feature as highly useful.
- Online tests and quizzes as well as tools for placing an entire course on the Web were valued and used by about 47 percent of the respondents.
- Used less and also viewed as less useful were online student course evaluations and databases.
- In general, the percent of respondents who viewed online collaboration and sharing tools as useful was higher than the percent that actually used them. Therefore, development of such tools should become a priority.

Useful Collaboration and Sharing Tools

- College instructors perceived a need for more collaborative tools. Tools with more than a 10 percent gap between actual use and perceived high usability included tools for instructors to form collaborations with other instructors, tools for students to share stories with other students, tools for interactive feedback and annotations on student work, tools for instructor test-making collaboration, tools for instructor task collaboration, and tools for online technology demonstrations. Large gaps between reported teaching practice and perceived usability indicates a need for additional collaborative tools in e-learning environments.
- Some types of collaborative tools are more likely to be used than others, including discussion forums (61 percent), tools for providing feedback and annotations on student work (46 percent), and tools for student teamwork or collaboration (46 percent).
- While many respondents utilized instructor profile tools (52 percent) and student profile tools (34 percent), few indicated that they were highly useful in their teaching.
- Real-time chat tools were only utilized by 32 percent of the respondents in their teaching.
- The respondents, in general, perceived online guestbooks as unimportant.

Useful Online Instructional Activities

- All online activities (e.g., online simulations, data analyses, laboratories, performances, and critical and creative thinking) were ranked as highly
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important by more than 40 percent of the respondents. In fact, fewer than 25 percent found these tools to be of low importance. However, actual use ranged from only 23 percent to 45 percent, thereby indicating another critical area for Web-based teaching tool development efforts. The most requested online instructional activities were those meant to foster student critical and creative thinking.

Useful Web Resources

- Search engines were used by 83 percent of the respondents for teaching purposes, and 70 percent viewed them as highly useful for teaching.
- Online article and journal links were used by 74 percent of the respondents in their teaching; 70 percent viewed them as highly useful for teaching.
- Sixty-one percent used discipline-specific online teaching and learning resources in their teaching, while 58 percent used more general online resources related to teaching and learning pedagogy. More than half of the respondents viewed each of these types of online resources—general and specific—as highly useful in their teaching.
- Web sites and resources from colleagues were used by 58 percent of the respondents. Fifty-four percent viewed these as highly useful.
- Online glossaries with examples on the Web were used by 57 percent of the respondents and a similar percentage found such tools highly useful.
- Tools for students to make Web link suggestions as well as tools for book recommendations were used by nearly half of the respondents in their teaching.
- Online newsgroups were used by only 18 percent of the respondents and few viewed them as potentially useful for their teaching.

Obstacles and Support Mechanisms

Obstacles to Web-Based Teaching

- According to 62 percent of the respondents, the main obstacle to using the Web in teaching was the preparation time required.
 - Forty percent of the respondents identified the lack of support for technical problems and course development as major obstacles to teaching online at their institution.
 - Other obstacles included time to learn to use the Web (37 percent), inability to display the Web in the classroom (29 percent), lack of training in how to use the Web (24 percent), inadequate hardware in one's office (18 percent), lack of software (15 percent), and other problems (17 percent).
 - Lack of interest in the Web for teaching was not an obstacle for these respondents.
 - Faculty from smaller institutions were significantly more likely to list technical and course development support as obstacles than those teaching
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in settings with over 10,000 student enrollments (51 percent versus 31 percent).

- Faculty members from public institutions were significantly more likely to list time to learn to use the Web as a barrier in their Web-based teaching efforts (40 percent) than faculty from private institutions (20 percent).
- Though not statistically significant different, female faculty appeared to face more barriers than males, including time to learn to use the Web, time for online course preparation, and a lack of support for their technical problems and courseware development efforts. In contrast, males noted a lack of software or out-of-date tools as obstacles to their Web-based teaching practices significantly more often than females.

Support for Web-Based Teaching and Research

- The main supports requested by these college instructors to utilize the Web in teaching, research, or administrative duties included release time (70 percent), instructional development grants and stipends (68 percent), recognition in tenure, salary, and promotion decisions (68 percent), technical support staff to assist with technical problems (68 percent), time to learn about and use the Web (60 percent), instructional design support (58 percent), and training on how to use the Web in teaching (45 percent).
 - Less popular support structures included greater access to computers for students (31 percent), online resources (31 percent), e-mail notification of technology changes (27 percent), and chat room Web help (13 percent). Such findings suggest that access to Web resources is no longer a significant barrier to effective online teaching and learning.
 - Faculty members in public institutions expected many more forms of support for their Web-based teaching efforts than those in private institutions, including a desire for more online resources, instructional development grants or stipends, release time, instructional design help, Web training, time to utilize the Web in teaching, greater student access to computers, recognition for their online efforts in salary and promotion decisions, and e-mail notification of changes in Web-based teaching resources.
 - Institutional size made a difference in terms of the supports instructors deemed necessary. Faculty members at smaller institutions pointed to the need for instructional design support. Those in medium-sized institutions wanted more time allocated to learn about and utilize the Web in their teaching. Finally, instructors at large institutions indicated that they needed recognition, development grants, and release time.
 - Gender differences here were minimal, though male instructors did request release time and opportunities for instructional development grants significantly more often than did female instructors.
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Online Communities, Services, and Resources Needed

Online Communities for Resource Sharing

- Eighty-two percent of respondents were interested in becoming part of a free community for the sharing of course resources and teaching ideas.
- The most popular features of such a community included the availability of pedagogical ideas (77 percent), answers to teaching problems (64 percent), expert advice (62 percent), classroom management tips (56 percent), and professional recognition (42 percent).
- Lower rated items included online newsletters (25 percent) and tools for online storytelling (19 percent).

Useful Web-Based Services, Resources, and Information

- There were numerous Web resources that respondents reported would be valuable. The key resources and services to which these college instructors wanted access included online course design and development help (73 percent), electronic papers, journals, and technical reports (71 percent), and online teaching help (70 percent).
- More than half of the respondents valued access to Web-based survey and evaluations tools (59 percent), online simulations and experiments (59 percent), downloadable shareware and freeware (59 percent), online library resources (54 percent), conference information (52 percent), online bookstores (51 percent), discounted hardware and software (51 percent), and online course listings (50 percent).
- A large percentage of respondents also asked for trial or demonstration software (49 percent), online workshops and institutes (48 percent), online mentoring and tutoring services (46 percent), freelance teaching opportunities (45 percent), and online university bookstores and merchandise (35 percent).
- Less important to these college instructors were access to online courseware company listings (21 percent) and discounted instructional resources (19 percent).

Recommendations Based on Findings

Based on these findings, seven key recommendations for college instructors, administrators, and institutions of higher education were generated. These recommendations relate to instructor training, recognition and support, and sharing of expertise, as well as online learning policy, research, tool development partnerships, and pedagogy.

1. **Instructor Training:** Colleges and universities need to consider how they are training their faculty for online teaching in an online world. For instance, instructional design support and guidelines should help instructors get acclimated to this new form of teaching. In addition,
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colleges and universities might offer institutes, courses, online mentoring, and instructional design help. Early Web adopters might be utilized as mentors for new faculty members in such training or professional development efforts. Time allocated to training also is a key consideration.

2. **Instructor Recognition and Support:** Colleges and universities need to consider how they recognize online teaching efforts in promotion and tenure. They also could provide release time, instructional development grants, stipends, and other forms of assistance to online instructors.
 3. **Instructor Sharing of Expertise and Resource Exchange:** Higher education institutions should create ways for faculty to electronically share services, expertise, and resources as well as mentor new faculty online. They might also develop tools for faculty sharing of activities and resources, including tools for sharing reusable knowledge objects or some type of knowledge exchange program.
 4. **Online Learning Policies:** Higher education institutions need to develop clear guidelines or policies regarding the ownership of online course materials and applicable royalties. They should have policies in place related to freelance online teaching at other institutions. They might also consider clearly articulating why certain courseware tools, policies, and expectations have been adopted related to Web-based instruction.
 5. **Online Learning Research:** Before adopting new policies, colleges and universities should review existing research. They might also provide internal mini-grants for faculty to research their own course and program development efforts. Similarly, internal research related to the perceived obstacles to online learning as well as case studies of successful faculty adoption may be helpful. Results of such research should be made available to all faculty of the institution.
 6. **Online Courseware Development Partnerships:** Rather than every large higher education institution attempting to spend money to develop its own courseware platform or shell, colleges and universities should seek partnerships with courseware and other e-learning companies wherein they serve as beta test sites for new tool development efforts. They might also seek to form tool development consortia with other institutions. Technology centers and research institutes within higher education settings could perform usability studies and help co-develop products in return for lower or nominal courseware fees.
 7. **Online Learning Pedagogy:** In conjunction with the last recommendation, higher education institutions need to demand and perhaps help develop and research different types of pedagogical tools for
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e-learning that foster student higher-order thinking and collaboration. Once developed, online tools that target critical and creative thinking as well as teamwork online should be showcased for faculty, students, and administrators.