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Aspects of Online Courses That Are More Effective and Successful than Traditional, Face-to-Face Courses


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Researcher Background

- In Online Education since 1995
- Student Experience
 - 3+ online courses
 - 3 blended courses
- Design Experience
- Teaching Experience
- Faculty Development Instructor
- Some good experiences, and some not so good



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Growth in Distance Education

- College Technology Review, 2004-2005, 2 out of 3 institutions are offering distance learning programs
- 63% of institutions are offering accredited degrees in at least one subject
- Projections: by 2011, 75% teaching load will be online courses




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As Good or Better

No-significant Difference (MCS)


- Only considered delivery mechanisms
- Not instructional strategies
- The media (or medium) does not + or – impact learning
- So why do it?
- Why the growth in online education?



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Bernard, et al. Meta-analysis 2004


- Some aspects of DE outperform F2F, some perform more poorly
- Aspects of design (medium or method) optimal in either or both instructional contexts?
- Comparison studies without asking "why" and "under what conditions" is wasted time and effort



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Problem Statement


- Only anecdotal evidence
- Figuring out what works and what doesn't
- How is this demonstrated?
 - Student Satisfaction?
 - Student Outcomes?
 - Faculty Satisfaction?
- What is behind the stories?



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Purpose of Study


To determine which aspects of course design and/or instruction are more effective and successful online than traditional, face-to-face courses



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Research Questions


1. Which aspects of instruction are more effective and successful in the online learning environment than in the F2F classroom, and why according to faculty who have been recognized as exemplary online instructors?
2. How do these aspects impact student learning in online classes and how is this revealed?



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Methodology


- Qualitative Case Study (Yin, Merriam)
 - Most appropriate method for answering the research questions of why and how
- Protocol
 - Survey to lay foundation for interviews
 - Semi-structured Interviews
 - Observations (when possible)
 - Artifacts (when available)
 - Performed member checks with all participants



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Participants – Selection Criteria


- Nationally recognized exemplary online instructors from 1 of 4 programs:
 - Quality Matters
 - Sloan-C
 - USDLA
 - WebCT Exemplary Course Project
- Have taught both F2F and Online



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Participants


- 11 out of 20 accepted invitation to participate, 1 drop
- 5 females, 5 males
- Range from adjunct to full professor
- Teaching experience
 - F2F: 10 – 38 yrs
 - Online: 2 – 9 years
- 4 from 2-yr, 6 from 4-yr
- Cross section of disciplines



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Major Themes


- Better Online
- Unique to Online
- Better F2F
- Student Success
- Faculty Satisfaction
- Connected to the Sloan-C Pillars of Quality



WebCT IMPACT 2006 8th Annual WebCT User Conference **Seven Principles of Good Practice**

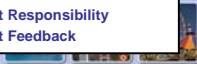
Can be tied into the 7 Principles of Good Practice (Chickering & Gamson, 1987)

1. encourages contact between students and faculty,
2. develops reciprocity and cooperation among students,
3. encourages active learning,
4. gives prompt feedback,
5. emphasizes time on task,
6. communicates high expectations, and
7. respects diverse talents and ways of learning.




WebCT IMPACT 2006 8th Annual WebCT User Conference **Sloan-C Pillars of Quality**

Learning Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment • Community of Learners • Content • Course Design • Interaction • Student Outcomes
Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexibility • Visibility of Students • Student Time
Faculty Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructor Role • Instructor Workload
Student Satisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation • Student Responsibility • Student Feedback



WebCT IMPACT 2006 8th Annual WebCT User Conference **Major Findings**

- Interaction and participation
- Access
- Instructor roles and workload
- Impact on student satisfaction and outcomes




WebCT IMPACT 2006 8th Annual WebCT User Conference **Interaction and Participation**

Aspect	7 Principles of Good Practice	Pillar
Visible interaction	1 st and 4 th	Learning Effectiveness
Formative evaluation of course	4 th	Learning Effectiveness
Safe environment, all participate	1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd , 4 th , & 7 th	Learning Effectiveness
More time on task	5 th	Learning Effectiveness
Permanent record of discussion	3 rd	Learning Effectiveness
Community of learners	2 nd	Learning Effectiveness, Student Satisfaction
Critical thinking visible	3 rd , 6 th , & 7 th	Learning Effectiveness


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- Access to courses, scheduling, flexibility:
 - Students at a distance
 - Students on campus
- Content presentation -
 - Better ways to present content
 - 24/7 access to content
- Sloan-C Pillars of Access and Student Satisfaction and 7th Principle



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- Less direct control
- Control through design
- Facilitate, mentor
- Active participation, reduces isolation
- Promote student-student interaction
- Time, though generally more than F2F, is time well-spent.
- Sloan-C Pillar of Faculty Satisfaction




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Student Satisfaction and Success

Improved:

- Participation
- Writing
- Critical thinking skills
- and in some cases test scores


Effective instructional strategies, as well as design



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What to Keep Online?


- Discussions
- Content presentation
- Varied opportunities and options for learning
- Open access



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Conclusions

- Course Design
- Instruction, Faculty Development and Support
- Blended Learning Environments




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Recommendations

Questions prompted by this study:

1. Do better students take online courses? Or do students who stay in online courses become better students?
2. Almost all participants' felt that the online learning environment is not better, and in a few cases, not as good as, the F2F environment. What is behind these perceptions?




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Recommendations

Questions prompted by this study:

3. What is the student story of what is more effective and successful in online courses than traditional, F2F courses?
4. Does having design and media development assistance promote higher quality in online course design and instruction?




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Recommendations

Questions prompted by this study:

5. Does developing and teaching a course online changed F2F instructional strategies?
6. Further investigation into the decision-making process of designing blended courses is needed



Questions? Comments?

Thank you!

