
It is (More) About the Students: Faculty Motivations and Concerns Regarding Teaching Online

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Abstract

There is increasing interest, if not demand, from universities and students for faculty to teach using online technologies. However, many faculty members are reluctant to teach online. In this paper, we examine data collected from a broad range of faculty (part-time, tenure track, new and more experienced, in education, business, and liberal arts) to explore the relationship between faculty attitudes, experiences, self-perceived preparedness, and concerns about teaching online courses. In particular, we examine whether faculty who have taught online courses, feel more prepared and more motivated to teach online and have more positive attitudes about online teaching than those who have not taught online. Our findings indicate that while there are a number of concerns about teaching online among the faculty we surveyed, concerns about students are among the most important. We end with some policy and procedural implications for why faculty may or may not use new technologies to teach.

Introduction

Online distance education and asynchronous learning networks are no longer avant-garde. For-profit colleges and dwindling state funds for higher education have made online teaching appealing to college and university administrators who see financial benefits to the likely efficiencies of online education. Instructors and students, especially non-traditional students, also have turned to online distance education as a possible way to increase opportunities for access and success in college (Shea, 2007). Still, some faculty (as well as students and administrators) have been hesitant to abandon the classroom for what some see as nirvana and others see as a chilling brave new world. With the adoption of asynchronous learning management systems such as Desire to Learn (D2L), Moodle, and Blackboard, the option (and perhaps even the push) to teach online has become more of a possibility as over 3.1 million U.S. students have reportedly enrolled in asynchronous internet-based courses (Allen & Seaman, 2005 as quoted in Shea, 2007). While some faculty members have taken full advantage of the new opportunities to teach online, others are reluctant or apprehensive about making the leap.

There is an ever-growing body of literature on faculty perceptions of the motivators and barriers to distance

education. Although this research is hardly new, it is a bit murky because of the often unrecognized overlap of research about distance learning, generally, and online teaching, specifically. The distance education of today is more likely to involve asynchronous online learning networks in which students access their courses at times convenient for them rather than the older methods of long distance education such as correspondence courses or the use of television or radio broadcasting. The present study focuses specifically on faculty perceptions of motivators and barriers to teaching online in the age of web-based asynchronous learning environments.

Motivators for and Concerns of Distance Education Adopters

Most previous studies indicate that intrinsic rewards (prestige and self-esteem), as opposed to extrinsic rewards (monetary), are primary motivators for faculty who teach distance courses (Maguire, 2005). Intrinsic rewards include self-gratification, fulfilling personal desire to teach, opportunity to develop new ideas, personal motivation to use technology, learning about pedagogy and technology, intellectual challenge, taking on a new challenge, and opportunity to improve teaching (Betts, 1998; Dillon & Walsh, 1992; Maguire, 2005; Rockwell, Schauer, Fritz, & Marx, 1999; Schifter, 2000; Shea, 2007). Extrinsic rewards include highly motivated students and flexible faculty work schedules with little specific mention of monetary rewards in most of the research. Notably, other motivators, and often the most highly ranked motivators mentioned in the literature, were tied to student need including teaching and learning: ability to reach underserved or place-bound students, meeting student needs, opportunities for applying new pedagogical techniques, providing innovative instruction, greater flexibility for students, access to new student populations, and opportunity to diversify program offerings (Betts 1998; Dillon & Walsh 1992; Hiltz, Shea, & Kim 2007; Maguire 2005; Rockwell, Schauer, Fritz, & Marx 1999; Schifter 2000; Shea 2007).

Instructors who teach in the online environment have also expressed a variety of concerns about online teaching, most associated with workload issues and connection to students (Hiltz, et al., 2007; Shea, 2007). Workload issues include concerns that administrators might not recognize the additional effort required to teach online courses, associated inadequate compensation, and inadequate evaluation procedures. Concerns for students include potential lack of access, medium problems (having to communicate in text only without emotional cues), and the inability to adapt to diverse student demographics and abilities. Shea (2007) noted that novice online teachers were more likely to report that the lack of face-to-face interaction with students was a concern for them than were instructors who taught online frequently. Novice online teachers also reported concerns about their limited training (e.g., opportunities to observe online teaching, unfamiliarity with effective online pedagogy).

Present Study

Faculty development professionals, administrators, and faculty, themselves, can best make decisions about online distance education when they understand the perceived benefits and challenges to teaching online from faculty who both have taught online and those who have not. In this paper, we examine faculty perceptions of motivators and concerns regarding online distance education at a time when asynchronous learning management systems are popular. Three research questions guided our study:

1. Do faculty who teach online report different motivations and concerns about online teaching than do those who have no experience teaching online?
2. Is interest in teaching online related to specific concerns and motivations?
3. Are there differences in motivations and concerns between different colleges, years of experience, and position?

Methods

An online questionnaire designed by the researchers to examine faculty concerns about and motivations for teaching online courses was distributed to all academic faculty members (including part-time) at Augusta State University. The questionnaire was disseminated via the university's Instructional Technology Services office. Data were collected from 121 respondents, for a response rate of approximately 27% of all full and part-time faculty members. The demographics of the final sample are presented in Table 1. The respondents represent all ranks and reflect the general composition of the faculty of the university. Analyses included t-tests, correlations, and analysis of variance and were computed using SPSS.

Table 1: Respondent Demographic Characteristics

Sex			Position			Willing to Teach Online		
	n	%		n	%		n	%
Male	44	46.81	Full Prof.	25	22.94	Yes	80	79.21
Female	50	53.19	Assoc. Prof.	26	23.85	No	21	20.79
Total	94	100.00	Asst. Prof.	25	22.94	Total	101	100.00
			FT Instr.	8	7.34	Experience Teaching a Course Completely Online		
			PT Instr.	17	15.6		n	%
			FT Lect.	7	6.42	Yes	30	24.79
			PT Lect.	1	0.92	No	91	75.21
			Total	109	100.01*	Total	121	100.00
Age			Teaching Experience			No Experience with Online Courses		
	n	%	Years	n	%		n	%
25-34	8	9.41	1	3	2.97	Yes	21	17.36
35-44	23	27.06	2-3	9	8.91	No	100	82.64
45-54	26	30.59	4-6	19	18.81	Total	121	100.00
55-64	20	23.53	7-10	15	14.85			
65+	8	9.41	11-15	12	11.88			
Total	85	100.00	16-20	15	14.85			
College			21-30	20	19.80			
	n	%	31+	8	7.92			
Education	24	22.43	Total	101	99.99*			
Business	9	8.41						
Arts and Sciences	71	66.36						
Other	3	2.80						
Total	107	100.00						

* due to rounding

Measures

Interest in teaching online was assessed by asking respondents to indicate how interested they were in: teaching an online course; teaching an online course if they had the needed skills; teaching an online course if they received released time; and teaching an online course if they received a financial stipend. These items were measured on a scale ranging from 0-10 (indicating no interest at all to very interested).

To determine experience with online teaching, respondents indicated whether they were currently teaching a course completely online or teaching a course with an online component. Respondents were also asked about their prior experience with online instruction including whether they taught had one course completely online, more than one course completely online, one course with an online component (e.g. course material posted online), more than one course with an online component (e.g. course material posted online), whether they had taken an academic or non-academic course online, and whether they had no experience, in any way, teaching online. Two variables were constructed from these questions. First, "experience teaching a course completely online" is a dichotomous variable in which faculty with experience teaching a course completely online (currently or previously) were coded as yes and those who had never taught a class completely online were coded as no. Second, we constructed a variable that is shown in our Table 1 as "No Experience with Online Courses." Faculty who reported no experience taking a class online or teaching online at all (including posting class components) were coded as yes and those who had any experience with online courses as an instructor or student were coded as no.

To measure the factors which motivate faculty to teach online, a series of potential motivators were presented to the respondents. Motivators included instructional items (flexibility in delivery and opportunity for innovation), personal interest or gain items (personal interest, financial stipend, and reassigned time), and student centered items (meet student interest, and meet student need). Respondents indicated the extent to which each of these items would personally motivate them to teach an online course using a scale ranging from

0-10 (indicating no motivation at all to very strong motivation).

Concerns about teaching online were grouped into four categories: Technology-related, Student-related, Pedagogy-related, and Institution-related. Technology-related concerns included measures of the lack of technological skills of themselves and students, the lack of availability of technology, the lack of technical support/training, and the lack of training, in general. Student-related concerns included measures of the lack of student interaction with faculty and other students, the inability to be responsive to students, and students with disabilities. Pedagogy-related concerns included the lack of flexibility, the lack of adaptability to making quick changes to the course, the lack of time to prepare and monitor the course, work overload, questionable course quality, and not meeting learning outcomes. Institution-related concerns included intellectual property ownership, and lack of institutional support/commitment. Respondents indicated the extent to which each of these items concerned them about teaching online using a scale ranging from 0-10 (indicating not at all to a very large degree of concern).

Summary of Results

We, first, report differences in the concerns and motivations between faculty who have experience teaching completely online and faculty who do not have any experience teaching online. Then, we present correlations between interest, motivations, and concerns, and conclude with results of analysis of variance to examine the relationships between colleges, years of experience, and faculty position and motivations and concerns.

Experience

Results from the t-tests, presented in Table 2, indicate that those who have experience teaching a course completely online are more motivated by flexibility in delivery, personal interest, financial stipend, reassigned time, opportunity for innovation, meeting student interest, and meeting student need than other faculty. Experienced faculty are less concerned with their own lack of technological skills, lack of student interaction with other students and with the instructor, not being able to be responsive to students, lack of adaptability to making quick changes to the course, lack of training, lack of time to monitor the course, work overload, questionable course quality, and not meeting the learning outcomes of the course than other faculty.

Faculty with no experience with online courses (not even an online component) are less motivated by a financial stipend, meeting student interest, and meeting student need than other faculty. These inexperienced faculty are more concerned with their own lack of technological skills, the lack of training, and not being able to be responsive to students than other faculty.

Table 2: Effects of Online Teaching Experience on Motivations and Concerns Regarding Teaching Online

	Experience Teaching a		t	No Experience		t
	Course Completely Online			with Online Courses		
	Means	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Motivations						
Flexibility of Delivery	8.33	6.01	3.39***	5.65	6.96	-1.60
Personal Interest	7.53	6.03	2.12*	5.55	6.70	-1.39
Financial Stipend	8.27	6.58	2.48*	6.00	7.34	-1.70
Reassigned Time	7.73	6.33	2.51*	6.05	7.04	-1.21
Opportunity for Innovation	7.73	6.38	2.00*	6.15	6.94	-1.00
Meeting Student Interests	8.27	6.43	2.84**	5.80	7.26	-1.92
Meeting Student Needs	8.57	6.40	3.39***	5.65	7.38	-2.29*
Concerns						
Technology-related						
Own Lack of Technological Skills	3.86	5.59	-2.22*	6.85	4.65	2.51*
Students' Lack of Technological Skills	5.28	5.31	-.05	4.75	5.44	-.87
Lack of Availability of Technology	5.14	5.07	.09	5.15	5.08	.09
Lack of Technical Support/Training	5.59	6.61	-1.37	7.25	6.08	1.39
Lack of Training	4.48	6.99	-3.24**	8.40	5.71	3.05**
Student-related						
Lack of Student Interaction with Each Other	5.45	8.29	-4.48***	8.15	7.28	1.11
Lack of Student Interaction with Instructor	6.00	9.14	-5.22***	9.05	8.03	1.34
Not Able to be Responsive to Students	4.90	7.48	-3.56***	8.35	6.33	2.38*
Students with Disabilities	5.69	5.49	.26	5.30	5.61	-.37
Pedagogy-related						
Lack of Flexibility	3.48	4.82	-1.95	4.50	4.41	.11
Lack of Adaptability to Making Quick Changes to My Course	3.55	5.51	-2.66**	5.70	4.75	1.11
Lack of Time to Prepare or Design My Course	7.03	7.97	-1.19	8.40	7.53	.98
Lack of Time to Monitor and Maintain My Course	5.17	7.54	-2.96**	8.15	6.53	1.75
Work Overload	6.21	7.94	-2.18*	7.45	7.43	.02
Questionable Course Quality	4.72	7.49	-3.61***	7.50	6.49	1.10
Course Would Not Meeting Learning Outcomes	3.52	6.11	-3.37***	5.75	5.26	.53
Institution-related						
Intellectual Property Ownership	4.61	5.52	-1.11	4.30	5.51	-1.31
Lack of Institutional Support/Commitment	5.83	6.49	-.86	6.15	6.34	-.21

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Relationships between Interest, Motivation, and Concerns

As can be seen in Table 3, among all respondents, all categories of interest are strongly and positively correlated with all categories of motivation. All categories of interest are negatively correlated with a concern over the lack of student interaction with each other and with the instructor, not being able to be responsive to students, questionable course quality, and not meeting learning outcomes. However, "interest with necessary skills" is positively correlated with a concern over the lack of own technological skills. Further, "interest with reassigned time" is positively correlated with a concern over the lack of students' technological skills. "General interest" and "interest with necessary skills" are positively correlated with concerns over the lack of availability of technology, and "interest with reassigned time" and "interest with a stipend" are positively correlated with concerns over intellectual property ownership. All three conditional categories of interest are positively correlated with a concern over the lack of training, the lack of time to prepare and design the course, and work overload. "Interest with reassigned time" is positively correlated with concern over a lack of time to monitor and maintain the course and a lack of institutional support/commitment.

Table 3: Correlations between Interest in Teaching Online and Motivations and Concerns

	General	Necessary Skills?	Reassigned Time?	Financial Stipend?
Types of Interest				
General				
Necessary Skills	.85***			
Reassigned Time	.68***	.82***		
Financial Stipend	.70***	.83***	.92***	
Motivations				
Flexibility in Delivery	.76***	.85***	.73***	.75***
Personal Interest	.78***	.82***	.69***	.71***
Financial Stipend	.58***	.72***	.74***	.81***
Reassigned Time	.54***	.68***	.76***	.75***
Opportunity for Innovation	.68***	.80***	.73***	.77***
Meet Student Interest	.71***	.75***	.67***	.74***
Meet Student Need	.69***	.75***	.66***	.71***
Concerns				
Technology-related				
Your Own Lack of Technological Skills	.06	.27**	.20	.17
Students' Lack of Technological Skills	.02	.12	.20*	.17
Lack of Availability of Technology	.21*	.30**	.19	.15
Lack of Technical Support/Training	.02	.17	.07	.04
Lack of Training	.10	.35***	.27**	.23*
Student-related				
Lack of Student Interaction with Each Other	-.45***	-.42***	-.31**	-.31**
Lack of Student Interaction with Instructor	-.42***	-.37***	-.29**	-.26**
Not Able to be Responsive to Students	-.31**	-.22*	-.31**	-.26*
Students with Disabilities	.11	.17	.13	.15
Pedagogy-related				
Lack of Flexibility	-.11	.04	.10	.09
Lack of Adaptability to Making Quick Changes to My Course	-.10	.08	.15	.10
Lack of Time to Prepare or Design My Course	.08	.30**	.34***	.27**
Lack of Time to Monitor and Maintain My Course	-.05	.18	.23*	.18
Work overload	.03	.24*	.30**	.24*
Questionable Course Quality	-.48***	-.51***	-.35***	-.39***
Course Would Not Meet Learning Outcomes	-.40***	-.44***	-.27**	-.31**
Institution-related				
Intellectual Property Ownership	.09	.17	.27**	.31**
Lack of Institutional Support/Commitment	.06	.17	.25*	.19

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Table 4: Relationship between College and Motivations and Concerns Regarding Teaching Online

	College			F
	Means			
	A&S [†]	Bus [†]	Ed [†]	
Motivations				
Flexibility of Delivery	8.17	7.00	6.06	3.68*
Personal Interest	7.30	7.67	5.86	2.40
Financial Stipend	8.00	7.00	6.65	1.50
Reassigned Time	7.65	7.67	6.47	1.44
Opportunity for Innovation	7.65	7.67	6.23	2.19
Meeting Student Interests	8.04	7.78	6.38	2.97
Meeting Student Needs	8.39	8.11	6.32	4.79*
Concerns				
Technology-related				
Your Own Lack of Technological Skills	6.05	4.33	5.08	0.90
Students' Lack of Technological Skills	5.64	4.89	5.38	0.18
Lack of Availability of Technology	6.00	5.11	4.71	1.22
Lack of Technical Support/Training	7.05	5.56	6.20	0.76
Lack of Training	6.82	4.11	6.38	1.84
Student-related				
Lack of Student Interaction with Each Other	6.82	6.00	8.02	2.54
Lack of Student Interaction with Instructor	7.64	6.89	8.78	2.42
Not Able to be Responsive to Students	6.50	5.56	7.11	0.89
Students with Disabilities	5.09	4.44	5.83	0.91
Pedagogy-related				
Lack of Flexibility	4.23	3.67	4.66	0.47
Lack of Adaptability to Making Quick Changes to My Course	5.14	4.44	4.98	0.13
Lack of Time to Prepare or Design My Course	7.82	6.67	7.91	0.47
Lack of Time to Monitor and Maintain My Course	7.05	5.11	7.09	1.10
Work overload	7.23	5.38	7.80	1.62
Questionable Course Quality	6.09	4.89	7.32	2.36
Course Would Not Meet Learning Outcomes	4.68	4.22	5.85	1.37
Institution-related				
Intellectual Property Ownership	5.33	5.11	8.37	0.02
Lack of Institutional Support/Commitment	6.32	5.78	6.29	0.09

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

[†]A&S - Arts and Sciences; Bus - Business; Ed - Education

Relationships between College, Experience, Position, and Motivation, and Concerns

As can be seen in Table 4, there is a significant difference between colleges with respect to being motivated by flexibility in delivery and meeting student needs. College of Education faculty members were less motivated by flexibility of delivery and meeting student need than faculty in the other colleges. There are no differences, however, between colleges in faculty concerns regarding teaching online course.

Teaching experience is related to being motivated by flexibility in delivery, financial stipend, reassigned time, meeting student interest, and meeting student need. As can be seen in Table 5, faculty with between 11 and 20

years of experience are motivated less by these factors than other faculty. Teaching experience is associated with being concerned by the lack of availability of technology with the most experienced faculty being more concerned.

Table 5: Relationship between Teaching Experience and Motivations and Concerns Regarding Teaching Online

	Years of Teaching Experience				F
	Means				
	1-3	4-10	11-20	21+	
Motivations					
Flexibility of Delivery	7.17	7.31	5.00	7.04	2.79*
Personal Interest	7.50	6.73	5.00	6.92	2.20
Financial Stipend	7.33	8.18	5.48	6.77	3.61*
Reassigned Time	5.83	8.06	5.61	6.50	3.35*
Opportunity for Innovation	7.00	7.30	5.48	7.00	1.73
Meeting Student Interests	7.50	7.61	5.39	7.19	2.80*
Meeting Student Needs	7.50	8.00	5.39	6.77	3.44*
Concerns					
Technology-related					
Your Own Lack of Technological Skills	4.73	4.75	5.00	5.54	0.25
Students' Lack of Technological Skills	4.91	5.88	5.00	4.69	0.84
Lack of Availability of Technology	5.55	3.78	4.65	6.15	2.73*
Lack of Technical Support/Training	7.27	5.25	6.13	6.58	1.36
Lack of Training	7.00	5.88	5.95	6.31	0.29
Student-related					
Lack of Student Interaction with Each Other	7.45	7.23	8.13	6.96	0.58
Lack of Student Interaction with Instructor	8.00	8.22	8.96	7.54	0.86
Not Able to be Responsive to Students	7.36	6.53	6.70	6.46	0.18
Students with Disabilities	7.91	5.28	5.61	4.73	2.51
Pedagogy-related					
Lack of Flexibility	3.45	4.84	4.04	4.92	0.86
Lack of A daptability to Making Quick Changes to My Course	4.64	5.19	4.65	4.85	0.14
Lack of Time to Prepare or Design My Course	6.73	8.16	7.35	7.65	0.51
Lack of Time to Monitor and Maintain My Course	5.73	7.38	6.30	6.77	0.68
Work overload	6.09	8.23	7.04	7.12	1.14
Questionable Course Quality	4.82	7.09	7.04	6.73	1.16
Course Would Not Meet Learning Outcomes	5.00	5.84	4.78	5.00	0.46
Institution-related					
Intellectual Property Ownership	6.00	5.31	5.30	4.42	0.57
Lack of Institutional Support/Commitment	6.64	5.69	6.74	5.96	0.51

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Motivation did not vary by faculty position; however, as can be seen in Table 6, being concerned about students with disabilities did vary by faculty position with full professors expressing less concern with students with disabilities.

Table 6: Relationship between Faculty Position and Motivations and Concerns Regarding Teaching Online

	Position					F
	Ȳ					
	FP ⁺	AcP ⁺	AtP ⁺	FII/L ⁺	PTII/L ⁺	
Motivations						
Flexibility of Delivery	6.17	6.32	7.13	7.60	6.59	0.60
Personal Interest	5.92	6.68	6.04	7.47	6.71	0.64
Financial Stipend	5.88	7.36	7.50	8.40	6.65	1.76
Reassigned Time	5.92	7.64	7.13	8.07	5.65	2.03
Opportunity for Innovation	6.04	6.68	7.38	7.50	6.53	0.75
Meeting Student Interests	6.67	6.41	7.00	8.13	7.06	0.77
Meeting Student Needs	6.58	6.36	7.29	8.33	7.06	1.10
Concerns						
Technology-related						
Your Own Lack of Technological Skills	5.67	4.77	5.13	5.43	4.31	0.40
Students' Lack of Technological Skills	3.83	6.23	6.04	5.57	4.88	2.33
Lack of Availability of Technology	5.17	5.55	4.83	4.86	4.94	0.16
Lack of Technical Support/Training	6.29	7.05	5.54	6.07	6.69	0.62
Lack of Training	6.39	7.00	5.17	6.21	6.69	0.81
Student-related						
Lack of Student Interaction with Each Other	7.08	7.32	8.00	6.93	7.88	0.43
Lack of Student Interaction with Instructor	7.38	8.59	8.79	8.07	8.31	0.75
Not Able to be Responsive to Students	5.83	6.95	6.92	7.29	7.00	0.54
Students with Disabilities	3.50	6.00	6.17	5.64	7.00	3.59**
Pedagogy-related						
Lack of Flexibility	4.17	5.59	4.38	3.79	3.88	1.06
Lack of Adaptability to Making Quick Changes to My Course	4.54	6.55	4.67	4.64	4.00	1.69
Lack of Time to Prepare or Design My Course	7.42	9.36	7.33	8.00	6.13	2.20
Lack of Time to Monitor and Maintain My Course	6.79	8.64	6.00	6.57	6.00	1.83
Work overload	7.00	9.14	7.79	6.79	5.88	2.22
Questionable Course Quality	6.88	8.32	6.33	5.79	5.50	1.83
Course Would Not Meet Learning Outcomes	5.13	6.77	4.83	5.21	4.69	1.11
Institution-related						
Intellectual Property Ownership	4.46	6.23	5.71	5.00	4.67	0.85
Lack of Institutional Support/Commitment	6.13	8.00	5.29	6.21	5.81	1.95

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

⁺FP - Full Professor; AcP - Associate Professor; AtP - Assistant Professor;
 FII/L - Full-time Instructor/Lecturer; PTII/L - Part-time Instructor/Lecturer

Discussion

These findings have several implications for policy and practice regarding online teaching. First, faculty members with experience teaching online report being more comfortable with the idea of teaching online and are less concerned with potential problems. Faculty with little or no experience with online teaching are not comfortable in that environment and have concerns with the very basic aspects of teaching online, namely technological skills, responsiveness to students, and training. This leads to a chicken/egg question. Which comes first, the comfort or the experience? How can the concerns of faculty with no experience teaching online be resolved unless they teach online? Does teaching online lead to more comfort or are they really more

comfortable with the idea of teaching online in the first place?

Second, what are the characteristics of faculty who teach online? Are they different types of people, or are they average faculty who had slightly different experiences that led them to online teaching? Or are they simply those who were cajoled or "forced" into online teaching.

Third, how can faculty with no experience teaching online be motivated to do so? The motivational measures in this study were reported to be mostly ineffective with the less-experienced faculty. Is coercion the last, remaining motivational factor to get faculty to teach online and what would be the quality of courses taught by coerced faculty?

Fourth, to reduce the barriers to teaching online, what specific technology, "classroom" management, and pedagogy skills would help faculty feel prepared to teach in an online environment?

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