A PRELIMINARY EVALUATION OF AN EXPERIMENT USING AN
INTERNET MEDIA MODULE FOR TEACHING ADVERTISING

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ABSTRACT

Internet technology is becoming an increasingly important instructional tool for college and university professors. The paper briefly describes an innovative experiment in utilizing the Internet for instructional purposes. It describes the attempt by professors to develop a web-based teaching module for advertising students. The preliminary study focuses on similarities and differences in the reactions of two classes using the module. Since the sample sizes are small, the results are exploratory. A final evaluation of the experiment will occur during the 1999-2000 academic year and will include a comparison of opinions of students using the module with opinions of students covering the media information in the traditional lecture mode.

BACKGROUND

The development of new technology has led to the use of the Internet as an educational tool, particularly for distance learning. For example, The University of Phoenix on line campus is designed for working adults wishing to earn accredited degrees in a nontraditional fashion. Other examples of pioneers in on-line teaching include: the University of Massachusetts, the 1995 introduction of the Microsoft Online (MOLI) education program, Discovery Channel Online providing on-line courses, and the 1996 IBM Global Campus program. Currently, IBM is helping more than 30 colleges pilot the project in at least 11 countries (Technology Forecast 1997). Advantages of on-line courses for distance learners, including convenience, flexibility, and timesavings are well documented; an extensive review of the literature is beyond the scope of this paper.

Stanford University and California State University, Northridge, are further examples of early adopters of Internet technology for informational and teaching purposes. Humboldt State and Chico offer a master’s degree in social work through California State University, Long Beach. The Cyber Campus at the University of California, Los Angeles, is an attempt to revolutionize the university (Swanton 1998).

The impact of Internet access to degrees, courses, and teaching supplements on residential students is a controversial subject. One extreme is that it is the death knell for residential education. Other educators feel socialization and acculturation are important, especially for the 18 to 22 year old students (Kauffman and Bonner 1996). Arguments against on-line education can be summed up in a statement by Lawrence Kessler, professor of history at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, who states that some colleagues feel "... the virtual university is not the kind of educational experience we ought to be imparting."

Advocates of on-line education as a tool for residential students counter criticisms by stating that on-line learning removes the discrimination that can occur in face to face contacts and actually increases the amount of interaction between students and the student and professor (Ehrmann 1995). A survey of Stanford on-line instruction and learning have improved. (Technology in Teaching 1996). Moreover, students are consistently more prepared and participation in class discussions increases. Internet supplements to lectures provide the opportunity for more class time to be devoted to increasingly complex topics. See sources like Oblinger and Rush’s The Learning Revolution, Khan’s Web-Based Instruction, Holmberg’s Theory and Practice of Distance Education, and Lockwood’s Open and Distance Learning Today for further discussion.

On-line learning and the reduction of in-class seat time are here to stay. The issue seems to be one of the degree to which Internet is integrated into course delivery rather than whether or not to use the method.

THE INTERNET MEDIA MODULE

The authors decided to “start small for Internet course delivery by developing a course module only. The undergraduate
advertising was selected because advertising students must use the Internet to advertise and they need to access Internet materials as a resource. A media module was developed because media topics seemed more appropriate than the creative aspects of campaign planning. The module was designed to enhance familiarity with how to use the Internet and its resources and to evaluate the use of Internet technology as a teaching/learning tool. Because the course enrollments are small and the course is not often offered, the analysis of the evaluation of results is exploratory, at best.

The media module consists of a Power Point presentation outlining important media concepts and other information developed by the authors to be used in the traditional classroom setting. The module is designed to supplement the textbook coverage of the topic. A media assignment accompanies the module requiring students to select, schedule, budget, and evaluate the effectiveness of media. The Internet materials replace three formal classes. The professor is available to meet face-to-face with students, by phone, and by e-mail during the three class periods, regular office hours, and by appointment. The media assignment is due and is discussed during the class period following the completion of Internet media module. An evaluation form consisting of eight closed ended questions soliciting opinions regarding the Internet media module presentation is also administered to each student immediately after the completion of the media module. The Internet module was utilized in two advertising classes: Spring 1997, with 13 students; Winter 1998, with 19 students. The following results are presented as mean averages by class for each of the 8 questions.

FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS

Questions 1-5 of the Internet Evaluation Survey require the students to indicate their opinions by using the terms excellent (5), good (4), average (3), below average (2), and poor (1). In addition, they are provided with an “I don’t know” category (0). Thus, favorable responses result in higher mean averages. These questions are designed to evaluate the overall impressions by students of the Internet media module. Answer categories for questions 6-8 include: An excellent use of time (5), a good use of time (4), an average use of time (3), a below average use of time (2), a waste of time (1), and I don’t know (0). The three questions are to elicit student opinions about the value of their time spent on the Internet media module. In addition, the professors decided to test for consistency in the mean results between groups by applying the t-test, a statistical test designed to measure for similarities or differences of opinions between small samples. The significant differences are reported below at the 1 percent level of significance for a two-tailed test.

Question 1: Overall, I would rate the media presentation on the Internet . . .
Mean average results are:
- Spring 1997: 4.0
- Winter 1998: 3.05

The t-statistic is -4.553 indicating a significant difference of opinions between the 1997 and 1998 students with the Spring 1997 students assigning higher ratings to the module. Both groups rated the module as at least average.

Question 2: In terms of what I learned, I would rate the media information on the Internet . . .
Mean average results are:
- Spring 1997: 4.31
- Winter 1998: 3.10

The t-score of -3.69 shows there is a significant difference of opinions between students in the two classes; again the 1997 group assigned higher ratings although students in both classes described the media internet presentation as above average.

Question 3: In terms of interest, I would rate the media section on the Internet . . .
Mean average results are:
- Spring 1997: 4.23
- Winter 1998: 2.90

The t-statistic of -4.70 reveals a significant difference of opinions between the 1997 and 1998 students. The 1997 students viewed the media section more positively compared to the 1998 students who described it as slightly less than average.
in the way the materials are designed and presented, including the evaluation form. The less favorable results for the Winter 1998 were not unexpected. El Nino caused an on campus computer failure on the day the access to the Internet was explained. Furthermore, because of the weather, some students missed the class session.

The professors learned there was a difference in accessing the system from instructors' offices, classrooms with Internet connections, the computer lab used by students, and home. For the Fall 1998 class, the orientation was presented to cover all the above means of access.

The professors were pleased with the amount of e-mail generated by the Internet module. Student participation via e-mail was high and face-to-face office visits by students increased. Thus, the Internet stimulates, rather than hinders, student participation, according to the professors.

CONCLUSIONS

The preliminary results for evaluating the media module presentation for advertising students are mixed. The module appears to have fulfilled one of its objectives: getting students and faculty to familiarize themselves with accessing the Internet and understanding its functions. The module, as it is currently designed, seems appropriate as a supplement to the regular classroom experience. However, in terms of a stand-alone unit and use of the students' time, the module needs improvement. As the module is used more often, revisions will be made based upon the professors' experiences in applying Internet technology to their teaching techniques and student feedback. A final evaluation of the present method will occur during the 1999-2000 academic year when overall results of students using the module will be compared with results from students covering the media information in the traditional lecture mode. At that time, decisions will be made about the unit: to continue the module as revised, to discontinue the module, and/or to expand the module to include the entire course. If the module is discontinued, the professors will try developing another approach to Internet teaching.

REFERENCES


Holmberg, Borje, (1995), Theory and Practice of Distance Education, Routledge, 18-60.


