

Online higher education as a disruptive force: Bridges and barriers to further expansion

A study of experienced online faculty at 36 colleges

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Recent review of research

“The United States is at a remarkable moment in the history of higher education. Educators have at their disposal sets of tools in the form of the Internet and a science of learning and teaching that permits the alteration of the nature of instruction at the university level.”

Larreamendy-Joerns, J., & Leinhardt, G. (2006). Going the distance with online education. Review of Educational Research v 76 n 4, 567-605.

Potential Disruptions

The alteration might affect:

- *who is educated*
- *what they experience as education*
- *who educates*
- *and what the very practice of education itself means*

Disruption: Enrollment Growth Online

- **3.2 million students in at least one online course in US (Allen & Seaman, 2006)**
- **Online enrollments will increase 20-30% per year (Allen & Seaman, 2005; Pethokoukis, 2002) but...**
- **Online Higher Ed. grew 35% in 2005 (Allen & Seaman, 2006)**
- **Online growth now 15 times that projected by the NCES for classroom enrollments. (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005; Allen & Seaman 2006)**

Research Issues and Questions

- Why do faculty teach online?
- Do faculty motivations vary in discernable patterns and if so, how?
- What are the implications of these motivational variations for increased access and educational quality in online education?

Previous research

(Dziuban, Shea & Arbaugh, 2005)



Benefits - faculty report:

- **More and higher quality interaction with students (Hartman, Dziuban, Moskal, 2000; Kashy, Thoennesen, Albertelli, & Tsai, 2000; NEA, 2001; Shea, et. al 2000, Smith, 2001)**
- **Convenience and flexibility for their teaching and student learning (Arbaugh, 2000; Hartman & Trumann-davis, 2001, NEA, 2001)**
- **Increased access to higher education for students previously un-served (NEA, 2001)**
- **Better understanding of educational technology (Alvai & Gallupe, 2003; Rockwell, Schauer, Fritz, & Marx, 1999; Thompson, 2001).**
- **Enhanced opportunities for professional recognition and research (Hartman & Truman Davis, 2001; Hislop and Atwood, 2000; Smith, 2001)**
- **High levels of student learning (Hartman, Dziuban & Moskal, 2000; NEA, 2000; Shea et. al, 2000; Thompson, 2001)**

Current Research Components: Interviews and Surveys

- Conducted surveys of faculty in SUNY and NJIT (759 respondents)
- Collected structured (numeric) and unstructured (narrative) data
- Also conducted focus groups at both institutions (42 interviewees)

Top Motivators for Online Teaching: Quantitative Survey Results

- Flexibility (Stronger)
- Faculty learning
- Closing gaps in access to higher ed.
- Increased interaction *
- Professional advancement (Weaker)



De-motivators: Quantitative Results

- Compensation (Stronger)
- Time Constraints
- Technical Support
- Pedagogical Complexity (Weaker)



Differences

- Significant differences in what motivates and undermines motivation for online teaching
- Faculty type, age, gender, institution type etc
- Implications for policy, professional development, and quality of online programs generally.

Methods and Data

- Standardized adjusted residuals - observed minus expected value divided by estimate of its standard error.
- Value expressed in standard deviation units above or below group mean (an “effect size”)
- Significant motivational variations are reported (chi square results ($<.05$) and more than 1 standard deviation above or below the mean for an item)

Motivational Variations by

- Age
- “Voluntariness” (volunteered or “asked/required to teach online)
- Gender
- Full-time v. Part-time teaching status
- Computer skill levels
- Community College v. 4 year+ colleges

Motivational Variations: Age

More “mature” faculty more motivated than younger faculty by:

- opportunities to experiment with new pedagogy

Younger faculty more motivated by:

- opportunities to demonstrate competencies important for tenure or promotion
- material incentives
- online teaching might be a condition of employment

Implications

These motivational variations may have implications for:

- Design and promotion of faculty development
- Consideration of policies for tenure and promotion and online teaching
- Consideration of policies re. incentives for online teaching

If we want to engage both experienced and newer faculty in online education

Motive Variations: Voluntariness

Volunteers more motivated by opportunities to:

- reflect on their classroom teaching
- experiment with new kinds of pedagogy
- gain new kinds of knowledge
- renew interest in teaching

Non-Volunteers more motivated by fact that online teaching was

- a condition of employment
- possibility that additional material incentive might be offered for teaching online

Implications

Voluntariness has implications for:

- Reflective practice (volunteer=good)
- Intrinsic v. extrinsic motivation of participants (non-volunteer ≠ so good)

Will have an impact on instructional quality in online education

An important consideration for the design/development of online education initiatives

Motivational Variations: Gender

Women significantly more motivated than men to teach online because:

- online teaching accommodated other life needs (e.g. child care, transportation, other family needs)
- reduced commuting time or hassle

Replicates findings in other research such as “The Third Shift” Implications?

Motivational Variations: Full Time – Part Time

Part-time/Non-Traditional faculty (lecturers, instructors, and adjuncts) more motivated than traditional faculty by

- capacity of online teaching to accommodate other life needs
- more free time for other professional activities
- reduced commuting time or hassle
- opportunity to teach a new subject area
- possibility that online teaching could promote job security and be a condition of employment

Motivational Variations: Computer skill level

Faculty with higher computer skills more motivated by

- desire to teach new subject areas
- less motivated by new challenge online teaching might represent
- more motivated by opportunities to mentor others

De-motivators

Differences in factors that undermine motivation to teach online by:

- online teaching experience level
- volunteered or was asked to teach online
- age
- academic status
- computer skill level
- institution type (community colleges v. comprehensive colleges)

Variations in De-Motivators: Online Teaching Experience

Inexperienced online teachers de-motivated by:

- absence of face-to-face interaction
- unfamiliarity with effective online pedagogy
- lack of opportunity to observe online teaching before engaging in it
- lack of opportunity to experiment with the technologies of online teaching
- inadequate time to learn about online teaching
- compensation issues (for course development and teaching)
- more concerned that offering online education might reduce the reputation of their institution

Variations in De-Motivators

Faculty “required” to teach online were de-motivated by perceptions that:

- the technology was confusing
- absence of face-to-face interaction
- lack of opportunity to experiment with technology
- inadequate time to learn about online teaching
- inadequate time to develop online courses
- online teaching might not be recognized by campus administration
- perception that online courses might be of inferior quality to classroom-based courses

Variations in De-Motivators: Age

Younger faculty de-motivated by concerns about lack of recognition for online teaching in regards to:

- tenure decisions
- salary increases
- the possibility that online teaching may not be valued by campus administrators
- concerns that others might feel online courses were inferior to traditional courses

Variations in De-Motivators: Tenure Status and Compensation

While all respondents ranked under compensation issues as the most de-motivating aspect of online education, *non-tenure track and untenured faculty* were over represented in the group that reported that *inadequate compensation* for

- course development
- online teaching
- online course revision

decreased their desire to teach online

Variations in De-Motivators: Traditional/Non Traditional Faculty

Traditional faculty more de-motivated by the perception that

- online teaching was more time consuming

than were part-time or non traditional, defined as adjuncts, instructors and teaching assistants

Variations in De-Motivators

Faculty at four year institutions more de-motivated by:

- lack of recognition of online teaching with regards to tenure decisions
- the perception that online teaching can be confusing
- inadequate time to revise online courses

Variations in De-Motivators

Faculty who reported that they had higher computer skill levels de-motivated by:

- inadequate compensation
- lack of recognition from the campus administration

Conclusions

Variations in the reasons that faculty feel motivated or inhibited from teaching in online environments have logical implications for:

- Faculty development
- Tenure and promotion policies
- Policies about including/requiring faculty participation in online programs
- Likely persistence with online teaching
- Increased access (locally and globally)
- Educational quality of online environments

Conclusions

Variations in the reasons that faculty feel motivated or inhibited from teaching in online environments have logical implications for:

- *who is educated*
- *what they experience as education*
- *who educates*
- *and what the very practice of education itself means.*

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