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CIS Survey

Students Give Their Opinions about Use of Technology in Courses

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Is it worth it? Do my students expect it? Will they use it? Will they get anything out of it? These are questions that a lot of instructors ask when they consider incorporating technology components into their courses. Adding technology to your teaching can take a great deal of effort and time. While many instructors (and students) will attest to the fact that technology can often enrich a courses in many ways, it is important and worthwhile to stop and ask these questions before you invest a great deal of time and effort.

The Survey

In order to try to answer some of these questions, CIS conducted a survey of students during final exam week this past spring semester (May, 2000). We sought to obtain a sample of student opinion on how various kinds of technology are used in courses. The survey was posted on the web for ten days, with the URL for accessing the survey taped to monitors of all of the computers in the public clusters. As an incentive, we offered a gift certificate to one lucky respondent, who was chosen randomly when the survey period was finished. The survey questions focused on student computer proficiency, course web sites, communication tools, "wish lists", and training opportunities for students. We were pleased with the number of responses, as a total of 265 students participated in the survey.

Some Preliminary Results

Since we had posted the survey in the student computer clusters, we recognized that we were targeting a certain group of students that was currently using technology, at least for writing papers, surfing the web, or sending and receiving e-mail. Approximately 88% of the

respondents had taken at least one course during the 1999-2000 academic year that used one of the following: course web site, course newsgroup, PowerPoint presentations by the faculty, or course-specific software.

We asked the students if they agreed or disagreed with statements (included in the data below) about the use of technology in courses. The results are interesting:

1. There were no technical difficulties using the technology **55%**
2. All the technology was clearly explained by the professor **40%**
3. If I had questions, I knew where to get the answers **61%**
4. The technology was easy to learn **78%**
5. Technology enhanced my understanding of the material **63%**
6. Technology enabled me to communicate more easily with my professor and my fellow classmates **72%**
7. Technology reinforced what I learned in class **61%**
8. Technology got in the way of my learning **9%**

When asked what kinds of technology they would like their professors to use in their courses, many students mentioned the posting of course materials (syllabi, handouts, lecture notes, etc.) on the web. One common theme, however, was that the students want the course web sites to be as up-to-date as possible. The value of a web site is not only apparent during a course, but also during the course shopping period. Approximately half of the respondents said that they had used course web sites to help them choose which courses to take.

Check the Web for More

The entire survey and a more comprehensive review of the results is available on the web off of the Instructional Support Services (ISS) web site at:

<http://www.brown.edu/Faculty/ISS/>

Also available on the ISS web site are resources and contact information to help you to incorporate technology into your courses. If you have any questions on how to get started, please do not hesitate to contact me at William_Dennen@brown.edu.