MARKETING STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF WEBCT: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ONLINE MARKETING EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

As more instructors embrace technology and more students experience and expect the flexibility and freedom from online instruction, numerous questions arise. What software is available to deliver online courses? Which online system does an institution of higher education utilize? How does one learn and implement the new online course software? How do instructors and students feel about those online course software tools? These and other questions are important ones to explore as more marketing educators design courses for hybrid and/or online marketing courses. In an effort to explore some of these questions from a student perspective, this paper investigates marketing student perceptions about the use of WebCT for online marketing courses at a large, public university.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The online learning environment provides opportunities to enhance students' learning by enabling the practice of a broad range of generic skills, student-instructor interaction beyond face to face interaction, more and varied learning experiences, and career development opportunities (Glass et. al, 1987; Eagley & Krantz, 1996; McLoughlin & Oliver, 2001). Biktimirov's and Klassen's (2008) found that access to homework solutions were significantly related to overall student performance while power point slides and exam solutions accessed did not show any effect on student grades. Most usage frequency findings show a direct relationship between Web utilization and learning performance or that frequent access to the Web-based course material correlated with higher grade course and assignment achievement (Cohen & Heffner, 2003; Newlin & Wand, 2000; McCollum, 1997). Petty and Rosen (1997) found students using WebCT needed time to get familiar with WebCT and Chen and Tsai (2007) stated that "Web-based learning consists of both asynchronous and synchronous communication." However, technology-based teaching contains both benefits and problems for learners (Eagle et. al, 2004).

METHODOLOGY

During the summer and fall 2008 quarters of 2008, a convenience sample of sixty-six (66) students enrolled in undergraduate and graduate marketing classes offering online enhanced instruction via WebCT were surveyed about their WebCT-related learning experiences. The collected data consisted of both qualitative and quantitative data. To analyze the data, SPSS was applied to both data types. Qualitative data were converted to a three-point scale with "3" standing for difficult, not useful or dislike; "2" for difficult but got better or ok; and "1" being easy, useful or like. This categorization allowed the qualitative data to be converted to quantitative responses for purposes of this study. Subsequent phases of the study will explore the qualitative data more extensively. Study responses were categorized into student perspectives about ease of use, online availability of course materials, submission of assignments online, and best and worst aspects of WebCT marketing courses. They were also separated into undergraduate and graduate responses.

STUDY RESULTS

The results of this exploratory study point to several issues regarding the design of online marketing courses using the WebCT format, as well as any other online teaching formats. First, and especially since this study has identified that WebCT is not user-friendly by design and students experience a sometimes extended learning curve when they initially use it, it is critical that instructors not only provide written and verbal instructions, but also use online tutorials or make them available to students to help them become familiar with its features and limitations.

Second, since students also experienced frustration in signing up for the WebCT marketing courses, it is highly recommended that campus technical support get involved in making this process transparent to enrolled students. Third, since the marketing students who participated in this study experienced

considerable frustration with submitting assignments online, marketing faculty should provide alternative means for submission such as course-specific electronic mail accounts.

CONCLUSIONS

As more marketing courses are offered in online or hybrid formats, it is critical that marketing educators understand the many related challenges and opportunities they present for improving and enhancing the marketing educational experience. Campus technical support and marketing faculty perspectives are important, but as this study indicates, the perspectives of our student "customers" are equally important in the design of such courses within the marketing curricula.

References Available on Request