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THURSDAY – October 11, 2012

8:30 – 10:00 Labor Market & the Workplace	8:30 – 10:00 Leadership & Mentoring
A Comparison of the Views of College of Business Deans and Human Resource Managers on Workplace Qualities *Donald E. English, Edgar Manton, Erica Yu Pan, Stephania Schirru, and Devalina Bhownik, Texas A&M University – Commerce*	College Students' Moral Reasoning Inventory: Exploring Future School Sport Leaders' Values *David LaVetter, Arkansas State University* *Courtney Flowers, West Georgia State University*
Second Language Proficiency and Intercultural Awareness Linkage to the Global Market Business Enterprise during these Global Economic Crises *Graciela Helguero-Balcells, Florida Atlantic University* *Lucia Buttaro, Adlphi University*	Resilient Leadership Preparation *Clarinda Cole, Regent University*
Examining Bullying Behaviors in American and Canadian Workplaces *Lisa M. S. Barrow, Brock University*	Mentoring as a Professional Development and Retention Tool *Tiombe Jones, Rose Lanier, Faye Hall-Jackson, and Cassandra Thomas, Tuskegee University*

10:30 – 12:00 The Online Environment	10:30 – 12:00 Topics in Business & Economics I	10:30 – 12:00 Topics in Education I
Training Leaders Across the Generational Divides Through Online Learning *Linda Grooms, Regent University* *Tera Simmons, Butler County School System*	Using Recreational Sport Events' Economic Impact Data to Assess Orientation Strategy of Community Parks and Recreation *David LaVetter and Carl Behunin, Arkansas State University*	An Examination of the Preparation, Responsibilities, and Effectiveness of School Disciplinarians *Chandra Foote and Mary Ellen Bardsley, Niagara University*
Promising Cyber Resources for Teaching & Learning: A Closer Look at the Darker Side of Cyberbullying *Rayton Sianjina, Delaware State University*	Labor Market Discrimination and Product Market Competition *Najiba Benabess, Norwich University*	The Fading Presence of a Critical Role Model, the Black Educator and the Constant Regression of Black Males in Public Education: Is There a Relationship? *Rufus Ellis Jr, Edward Tolliver, and Mark Howse, Florida A&M University*
Online Student Assessments Using Media: Potential Types, Tools, and Pitfalls *Karen Smith-Gratto, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University*	Vertical Intra-Industry Trade between Spain and Morocco *E. M. Ekanayake, Bethune-Cookman University* *Carlos Moslares, Universitat Ramon Llull*	Exploring the Relationship Between K-12 Public School Teachers' Conceptions of Assessment and Their Classroom Assessment Confidence Levels *Naomi Ludwig, Regent University*

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THURSDAY – October 11, 2012

1:30 – 3:00 Business Schools	1:30 – 3:00 Economics & Finance	1:30 – 3:00 Technology & Education
A Comparison of Business Program Admissions Policies *Steven T. Breslawski, State University of New York College at Brockport*	Determinants of United States Outbound Foreign Direct Investment in Latin America and the Caribbean *E. M. Ekanayake, Mihalis Halkides, Bethune-Cookman University* *John R. Ledgerwood, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University*	E-Learning: Using Technology to Guide Teaching Practice *Judith J. Smith and H. Carol Greene, East Carolina University*
Does Participation in Computer-Based Learning Program in Introductory Financial Accounting Course Lead to Choosing Accounting as a Major? *Vincent Owhoso, Northern Kentucky University* *Charles A. Malgwi, Bentley University* *Margaret Akpomi, River State University of Technology*	Valuation, Downside Risk Measures and Asymmetric Information: A Portfolio Optimization Approach *Yoram Kroll, Ono Academic College and Ruppin Academic Center* *Moshe Ben-Horin, Ono Academic College*	To App or Not to App? Using Technology as an Instructional Tool *Shelly Bowden and Carolyn Corliss, Auburn University Montgomery*
Meta-Analysis Of Student Performance in Micro and Macro Economics: Online Vs. Face-To-Face Instruction *Kyongsei Sohn and Jane B. Romal, SUNY - College at Brockport*	A Comparison of Cash Flow Variables in Terms of the Strength of their Ability to Explain Stock Returns *Donald Kent, Ralph Trecartin, and James Cordeiro, The College at Brockport*	Utilizing Online Tools to Measure Effort: Does it Really Improve Student Outcome? *Sharmistha Self, Missouri State University*
3:30 – 5:00	3:30 – 5:00 INTERNET DIVISION	
GRANT WRITING WORKSHOP	IFRS in the Accounting Curriculum- Implications from Different Perspectives *Bea Chiang, The College of New Jersey* What Do You Want? A Market Survey of CPA Firms' Hiring Preferences *A. Bruce Caster, Utica College* *Wanda Causseaux, Siena College* *Courtney Droms, Butler University* Billings Frauds: A Look at Trends, Recent Court Cases and Red Flags *Robert E. Guinn and Suzanne K. Sevin, University of North Carolina at Charlotte*	

FRIDAY – October 12, 2012

8:30 – 10:00 **Topics in Higher Education**	8:30 – 10:00 **Topics in Education II**	
Business: The Missing Component In Education *Von Pouncey, Brenau University*	How Can Special Education Teachers Redeem their Time by Navigating the Documentation Quagmire? *Peggy Woodall, Henderson State University* *Sid Womack and Shellie Hanna, Arkansas Tech University*	
The Need for Personal Finance Education in Colleges and Universities *John Ledgerwood, Vishal Prabhakar, and Alexandru Milut, Embry Ridde Aeronautical University*	Perceptions and Practices: The Impact of Military Structure on the Academic Success of Students with Disabilities Attending a Military College *Tammy Graham, Stephenie Hewett, Jane Warner, and Charles Graham, The Citadel*	
The Influence of Social Information Sources on Students Choice of Academic Major *Aurore Kamssu, Tennessee State University*	From Boots on the Ground to Seats in the Classroom: An Assessment of Institutional Structure and Veteran Students *Dion Daly and Bonnie Fox Garrity, D'Youville College*	
10:30 – 12:00 **Topics in Education III**	10:30 – 12:00 **Topics in Business & Economics II**	10:30 – 12:00 **Topics in Education IV**
Practitioner Scholar Discovery: 21st Century Learning, Instruction, and Educating the WholeBrain *Daniel Eadens, University of Southern Mississippi* *Danielle Eadens, Saint Petersburg College* *Susan Ray and Katherine Shirer, Academie Da Vinci Charter School for the Arts*	Adding Markowitz and Sharpe to the Investments Project *Lynda S. Livingston, University of Puget Sound*	Teaching and Reaching Multi-Generations *Tiombe Jones and Faye Hall-Jackson, Tuskegee University*
The Correlation between Owning a Dog or Cat and an Adolescent's Self-Acceptance *Frank Rizza, The College of New Rochelle* *Christina Carrano,*	Trends in Legal Process Outsourcing *Paul Palugod, Insights Business Solutions* *Nora Palugod, The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey*	DLOPI (Different Levels of Parental Involvement): A Critical Key to Student Success *Rufus Ellis Jr., Florida A&M University* *Audrey Lewis, Gadsden County Schools* *Janet Sermon, Florida A&M University*
A Biofunctional Understanding Solution to First-Person Educational Relevance *Asghar Iran-Nejad, The University of Alabama*	Calendar Timing and Returns to Performance Chasing in Mutual Funds *Zekeriya Eser and Mary Holbrook, Eastern Kentucky University*	The Effects of Poverty in Schools: Implications for Classroom Teachers *Deanna Keith, Liberty University*

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1:30 – 3:00 Special Topics I	1:30 – 3:00 In the Classroom	1:30 – 3:00 Topics in Business & Economics III
The Relationship between Student Grade Point Average, Principal Internship Mentor's Assessment Scores and School Leaders Licensure Assessment Scores *Michael D. Kelly and Glenn L. Koonce, Regent University*	Determining the Number of the Sample Mode: A Pedagogical Note *WaiCheong Lam, Mississippi State University*	A Monte Carlo Weighting Scheme that Reduces Risk of Characteristic-sorted REIT Portfolios *Zekeriya Eser, Eastern Kentucky University* *Ozcan Sezer, University of Toledo* *Mark Case, Florida Gulf Coast University*
An Examination of the Impact of Freshman Transition Interventions on Ninth Grade Achievement *Deanna Keith, Liberty University*	Methodology for Class Instruction in Business Education *Theodore E. Davis, State University of New York College at Buffalo*	Offshoring and Outsourcing to India *Nora C. Palugod and Anton Sapundzhiev, The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey*
An Immigrant, Refugee and Exile Experience: A Sentimental and Emotional Discourse *Lucia Buttaro, Adlphi University*	Active Learning in the Business Law Class *Elizabeth Kent, Buffalo State College*	Note on an Approach to Preventing Rank Reversals in Analytic Hierarchy Process *Yong Shin, Francis Marion University* *Seungho Lee, Ulsan College*

3:30 – 5:00 Topics in Education V	3:30 – 5:00 Special Topics II	3:30 – 5:00 INTERNET DIVISION
Big Class Size Challenges: Teaching Reading in Primary Classes in Kampala, Uganda's Central Municipality *Samuel Kewaza, St. Mbaaga Kiwatule P/S Uganda* *Myrtle Welch, Buffalo State – State University of New York*	The Top Ten Rules of Not-at-Fault Accident and Ticket-Free Driving *WaiCheong Lam, Mississippi State University*	How to Measure Work Engagement A Case Study: SAIPA Cultural and Sport Company *Seyed Mehrdad Hashemi, SAIPA*
The Education of the Children of Immigrants: A Cross-Cultural Study Between New York and Rome *Lucia Buttaro, Adelphi University*	The Role of Perception of Organizational Climate on Decision to Adopt Information Technology *Cheon-Pyo Lee, Fairmont State University*	Toward a Re-evaluation of the Role of Leadership in Management *Darin Gerdes, Charleston Southern University*
A Close Look at Three Decades of School Reform Policies and Structural Practices Impacting the Education of Haitian Children in New York City Public Schools *Jean Plaisir, Borough of Manhattan Community College – The City University of New York*	Examining User Generated Content on the Internet: The Role of Personality Traits and Flow *Jeffrey Siekpe, Tennessee State University*	Modality of Online Course Delivery and Student Perceptions *Steve Bounds, Arkansas State University*
		Do the Clothes Make the Teacher? Teacher Appearance and the Teaching Profession *Elvira Katic, Ramapo College of New Jersey*

MODALITY OF ONLINE COURSE DELIVERY AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The primary challenges to developing a good online course have typically fallen into three categories: technology, instructor characteristics, and student characteristics. The technology challenge has been dramatically reduced in recent years with the advent of learning management systems (LMS) such as Blackboard, WebCT, Angel, Moodle and others. Recently, a university sought the assistance of a private company to provide an LMS and produce courses that had a uniform structure and appearance. The purpose of this study was to compare perceptions of course effectiveness for learning of students enrolled in a course produced by the private company with feedback of students enrolled in the same course but which was developed and produced by the instructor through the university's LMS. During the summer and fall 2010 terms a survey was administered to 1635 students enrolled in the classes. Analysis of the data revealed significant differences in opinions. Identification of factors that led to these differences could lead to the development of more effective online instruction.

In an effort to meet the demands of their students, universities are expanding their number of online offerings annually. According to Pace and Kelley (2006) during the 2001-2002 academic year, 56 percent of all 2- and 4-year colleges offered some form of distance education. That trend increased to nearly 90 percent just a few years later. This propensity to offer more courses online often resulted in courses being posted to a learning management system (LMS) such as Blackboard by faculty with little or no training in online pedagogy and without regard to uniformity across the college or university. Sometimes an online course would simply consist of the instructor's lecture notes, a syllabus, and/or PowerPoint slides being posted on the LMS for students to read and prepare for a periodic exam over the materials. Faculty who were resistant to teaching online often raised the question of course quality. The increase in online offerings has given rise to studies regarding best practices suggested for online education. Private companies, seeing a vacuum, have partnered with colleges and universities to produce online courses that reportedly incorporate these best practices. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of best practices suggested in the literature and to compare perceptions of course effectiveness of students enrolled in a course developed and hosted by a private company with feedback of students enrolled in the same course but which was developed by and hosted through the university's LMS.

The author, at the request of the department chair, after being employed by a mid-sized southern university and after researching the literature for best practices created the first online version of a required graduate-level introductory statistics class. The class was offered during the 14-week fall and spring semesters and during the two 5-week summer sessions and was hosted on the Blackboard 8 LMS platform through the university. Two years later as more classes were being offered online, the university offered a Master's degree completely online and entered into a contract with a private company to provide a new LMS, known as Epic, and develop courses based on instructor-provided materials that were uniform in structure, appearance and design. The university offered all classes in this new platform as five-week classes so students could, theoretically, complete the degree in less than 24 months. The accelerated program allowed students to take up to three classes during each of the fall and spring semesters and two classes during the summer session. Students were limited to taking one class at a time in order to permit them to concentrate solely on the one course. Students who chose to pursue the degree in this format were known as Academic Partnership (AP) students. Class size for the instructor in the AP format was capped at 1500; however, the class was divided into sections with an enrollment of 25-30 students. Each section had a teaching assistant assigned to it. The teaching assistants were required to have a minimum of a Master's degree and several had a doctorate. Each section of the class received the same instructional materials in a very structured format. The teaching assistants' roles were primarily grading assignments using the instructor-generated rubrics and addressing student questions. The assistants had a lead assistant who served as a channel for the group of assistants to submit questions to the instructor. Weekly meetings were held to review the course progress and to

ensure all sections were on schedule. Blackboard (Bb) course enrollment was capped at 25 and was taught solely by the instructor.

The instructor taught the introductory statistics course through the AP program using the Epic LMS and also taught the course to non-AP students using the university's Blackboard LMS. The courses were identical in content and only differed in the platform being used. The purpose of this study was to compare perceptions of course effectiveness of students enrolled in a course produced by a private company with feedback of students enrolled in the same course but which was developed and produced by the instructor through the university's LMS.

Review of Literature

Student learning is supported by effective course design (Eastmond, 2000). The organization of an online course is very important and usually requires a considerable amount of time to design and develop (Smith, Ferguson, & Caris, 2003; Li & Akins, 2005). Simply converting lecture notes to a format that can be posted on a LMS may not constitute an effective course design. Some of the best practices for designing an online course include "thorough planning, communication between faculty and students, student to student interactions, respect for student diversity with regard to learning styles, collegial and individual activities that ensure high levels of time on task, the importance of prompt feedback, and the maintenance of high expectations" (Kosak, et al, 2004).   Young (2006) identified seven items suggested by students that contributed to effective online teaching: adapting to student needs, providing meaningful examples, motivating students to do their best, facilitating the course effectively, delivering a valuable course, communicating effectively, and showing concern for student learning. Students in her study reported that the best courses were the ones in which instructors demanded high-quality work from the students.

Thorough planning is essential to effective course design. Course navigation is a concern expressed by students. Instructors sometimes place large quantities of information on the LMS in such a manner that it is difficult for students to navigate through the material. Expecting students to absorb too much information in a short period of time contributes to memory overload and course anxiety, which makes learning difficult. Most instructors realize that the typical attention span of an uninvolved listener is 15-20 minutes, therefore, it is recommended that the online instructor develop smaller modules or "chunks" to purposely limit the amount of information provided at one time (Johnson & Aragon, 2003; King, 2007). For example, instructors should break their lectures into ten- to fifteen-minute segments. This allows the student to concentrate and absorb the material in one sitting before moving on to the next segment.

The course should be organized so that students can move quickly to a desired location. It is easy for students to get lost on a site that has extensive layers of content distributed over

multiple locations. To avoid this pitfall it is recommended that materials be organized in a linear fashion with as few layers as possible. Students appreciated instructors whose course was well organized and carefully structured (Young, 2006). Courses do not have to be elaborate structures. In fact, simplicity is preferred. The "keep it simple" principle allows the instructor to stay focused on the core matters of the course without getting sidetracked by the inclusion of superficially appealing computer-enhanced graphics, animation, and the like (Little, Titarenko, & Bergelson, 2005).

Communication between faculty and students is essential for an effective online course. Students want instructors to clarify expectations for the course and to have the material arranged in an orderly, easily-navigated manner (Brescia, Miller, Ibrahima, & Murry, 2004). The course syllabus should be detailed and explain the importance of participation and the expected amount, quality, and frequency of participation. Because of the reliance on text-based communication in an online class, every aspect of the course should be laid out in meticulous detail. Directions for every assignment have to be spelled out in a logical way (Smith, Ferguson, & Caris, 2003). Students cannot be expected to "know" the expectations of the instructor unless they are clearly communicated (Lauron, 2008). Examples of good and bad work should be available to illustrate the expectations.

Perhaps the most important aspect of teaching an online course is for the instructor to establish an online presence by going online regularly. Quick response to student questions, timely evaluation of submitted work, and occasional contributions to student discussions help establish this presence. The goal is for the instructor to be perceived as a real person who is interested in teaching the student (Johnson & Aragon, 2003; Wallace, 2003). In an online environment, students have a tendency to expect the instructor to be available 24/7 to provide feedback (Hillstock, 2005). While 24/7 isn't practical, it is a good practice to establish "office hours" when the instructor will be available so students don't feel neglected if they don't receive a response within a certain period of time. For example, if the instructor does not plan to regularly check email or the LMS for submissions on weekends that should be noted in the syllabus.

Student to student interaction in online courses has been the topic of research recently. Students enrolled in online classes have the same social needs as students enrolled in traditional classes. They want to know the other students and become acquainted (Koontz, Li, & Compora, 2006). Students enrolled in a fully online class can suffer from alienation and isolation due to their physical separation. Careful course design that ensures student interaction is essential to counteract these negative influences (Thurston, 2005). If the course is not designed purposefully to involve social interaction the course can be painfully dull for the students (Li & Akins, 2005). Several researchers have found that the greater the interactivity in an online course, the more the students were satisfied and the more they learn (Little, Titarenko, & Bergelson, 2005). Ivankova and Stick (2005) reported that their study reinforced the belief that virtual classrooms provide greater opportunities for meaningful and extensive communication

among participants than has generally been found in a traditional classroom. Communication and interaction are among the keys to learning. When students work in relationships in which each individual depends upon others within the group, a number of benefits have been observed. They achieve more individually, they make a greater effort to achieve, they experience greater social support, and they report feelings of greater self-esteem than they do in competitive and individual settings (Lauron, 2008).

Methods

The author created an online version of a required graduate-level introductory statistics class in 2007. Based on a review of the literature a survey instrument was developed to assess student perceptions of the effectiveness of the online course. Responses were measured on a Likert-type scale ranging from one (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The survey was administered at the end of each course and students were provided a link to the instrument on Survey Monkey where they could voluntarily complete the instrument with the assurance of anonymity. Based on feedback from students and a further review of the literature the instrument was modified in 2010 and the number of survey items was reduced from 36 to 27.

The statistics class was hosted on the Blackboard 8 LMS platform through the university. Two years later, the university entered into a contract with a private company called Academic Partnerships (AP) to promote an online Master's degree program and develop course formats to be hosted on the company's LMS platform known as Epic. The Epic design was very structured and linear, much like the programmed learning modules of the 1960s and 70s. Students would complete an activity, click on an arrow, and be taken to the next activity in the sequence. The Blackboard design was highly structured but the student chose the next activity to complete instead of being taken there automatically. The courses were identical in content but differed in the platform being used, the course presentation design, and layout.

During the 2010 summer sessions the instructor taught three five-week statistics courses using Blackboard 8 and in which he was the sole instructor. During the 2010 fall semester he taught a five-week Epic (AP) course that had 1564 students divided into 53 sections supervised by teaching assistants. The research question was developed as follows: Were the perceptions of course effectiveness of students taught introductory statistics using Blackboard and using Epic different?

Descriptive statistics were used to identify the respondents' mean ratings for each of the 27 survey item statements. An independent samples t-test, two-tailed test of significance, was used to identify mean differences between the Blackboard students and the Epic (AP) students for each statement. Qualitative responses were analyzed through data reduction methods. Data was analyzed using PASW (formerly SPSS) 18.0 software.

Results

During the 5-week summer Blackboard (BB) course 100% of the students (n = 71) completed the survey compared to 51% of students (n = 1564) enrolled in the five-week fall Academic Partnership (AP) course. The number of responses to each survey item for the BB group ranged from 68 to 71 while the range for the AP group was 785 to 795.

Students using the Blackboard platform gave significantly higher mean ratings to 20 of the 27 survey items while students using the Academic Partnerships platform gave a significantly higher mean rating to only one of the 27 survey items. Table 1 presents the findings of the survey.

Table 1. Student Perceptions of Course Effectiveness using Blackboard (BB) and Epic (AP)

Survey item	LMS	N	M	SD	p
The course syllabus with expectations was laid out in meticulous detail	BB	71	3.55	.65	.000
	AP	791	3.12	.74	
The course layout was organized so that it was easy to navigate and find materials	BB	71	3.51	.63	.000
	AP	794	2.60	.91	
The required textbook was easy to read and explained the material well	BB	70	3.31	.71	.011
	AP	791	3.07	.77	
The supplemental reading material from other sources enhanced my understanding of the material	BB	70	3.14	.69	.001
	AP	794	2.84	.72	
The self-introduction by the instructor gives me a feeling of connection with a person	BB	71	3.54	.58	.001
	AP	795	3.24	.71	
Having students introduce themselves to the class on the discussion board was a worthwhile activity	BB	70	3.39	.62	.000
	AP	793	2.95	.86	
Seeing a photograph of the student in their introduction was helpful in identifying with the individual	BB	68	3.18	.73	.000
	AP	792	2.65	.85	
The course grading policy is clearly stated	BB	70	3.59	.55	.001
	AP	791	3.28	.72	
The tests related to the material presented in the lessons	BB	70	3.64	.54	.000
	AP	790	3.37	.63	
The tests were fair and not designed to trick me	BB	69	3.41	.67	.000
	AP	787	3.02	.80	
The instructional materials had sufficient breadth, depth, and currency for me to learn the subject	BB	70	3.47	.58	.000
	AP	790	3.12	.71	
Navigation throughout the online components of the course was logical, consistent, and efficient	BB	69	3.46	.63	.000
	AP	787	2.65	.91	

The course design takes full advantage of a variety of tools and media	BB	70	3.59	.50	.000
	AP	791	3.17	.63	
Instructions regarding how to access online resources, such as the library, were sufficient and easy to understand	BB	68	3.66	.51	.000
	AP	791	3.11	.71	
Course instructions answered basic questions related to research, writing, technology, etc., or linked to tutorials or other resources that provide the information	BB	69	3.52	.56	.000
	AP	783	3.10	.63	
The video lessons were legible and had good audio quality	BB	69	3.71	.46	.000
	AP	792	3.32	.69	
The video lessons were about the right length (not too long) to keep my attention	BB	69	3.55	.56	.000
	AP	791	3.05	.78	
The videos were helpful to my understanding of the topic being discussed	BB	70	3.70	.52	.009
	AP	791	3.50	.63	
Seeing the instructor in a video lesson is important to me	BB	69	2.68	.98	.006
	AP	791	2.38	.87	
I believe the discussion board forum where I can anonymously post and respond to questions without receiving a grade is a valuable component of the class	BB	70	3.59	.55	.000
	AP	788	2.88	.76	
I would prefer the instructor have set office hours when he would be available to respond immediately to questions rather than responding periodically throughout the week	BB	69	2.59	.90	.013
	AP	793	2.85	.82	
Etiquette expectations for online discussions, email, and other forms of communication are clearly stated	BB	70	3.36	.62	.054
	AP	794	3.20	.64	
I should be able to download the videos to another medium so I can view them offline	BB	69	3.29	.69	.070
	AP	793	3.12	.76	
I prefer video lessons be in smaller chunks of 10-15 minutes instead of long sessions	BB	69	3.25	.74	.571
	AP	790	3.30	.70	
I would like to have the lessons in a downloadable audio format such as mp3 or iPod so I can listen to them	BB	70	2.74	.85	.148
	AP	785	2.59	.83	
I would like the instructor to use relevant examples from newspapers, magazines, TV news reports, etc that help illustrate the concepts being learned	BB	69	2.86	.71	.935
	AP	789	2.86	.66	
I would like to have more discussion topics in the course to interact with other students in the class	BB	68	2.24	.74	.185
	AP	788	2.11	.75	

Discussion

Previous studies regarding effective online classes revealed that students wanted a class to be organized, easy to navigate, contain detailed instructions regarding assignments, provide meaningful examples of good work, involve student to student interactions, respect different learning styles of students, and provide prompt feedback (Young, 2006; Lauron, 2008). Responses in this study suggested that students valued the same characteristics in an effective class with two exceptions. Student to student interaction was not valued as much as in previous studies. Both groups, AP and BB, disagreed with the statement about wanting to have more discussion topics in the course to interact with other students. However, when asked about having a discussion board where they could anonymously post and respond to questions without receiving a grade the BB students agreed that it would be a valuable component of the class while the AP students mostly disagreed. The difference in the means was statistically significant (t(856) = 7.582, p = .000). This possibly suggests that students value the opportunity to interact with their classmates but not as an assignment or in a manner that results in a grade. Also, students were not interested in seeing relevant, real-life examples from newspapers, magazines, or television to illustrate the concepts being taught. This may have been a result of the nature of the course where numerous examples were presented throughout the lessons.

Students using the Blackboard platform gave significantly higher mean ratings to 20 of the 27 survey items than did the AP students. In most cases the two groups agreed with the survey item; however, the BB students did agree with four items to which the AP students disagreed. One area of disagreement pertained to the organization of the course layout. The BB students agreed that it was organized so that it was easy to navigate and find materials while the AP students disagreed. While both groups agreed that having students introduce themselves to the class on the discussion board was a worthwhile activity the BB students agreed that seeing a photo of their classmates was helpful in identifying with them but the AP students did not. The BB students agreed that the optional supplemental reading material from other sources enhanced their understanding of the material but the AP students disagreed. And, as noted previously, the BB students agreed that having a discussion board where you could post without receiving a grade would be a valuable component of the class but the AP students disagreed.

In only one case was the AP mean rating significantly higher than the BB mean rating and that was regarding office hours for the instructor. Neither group wanted the instructor to have set office hours when he would be available to respond immediately to questions. They both preferred that he respond periodically throughout the week. This is consistent with earlier findings that students have a tendency to expect the instructor to be available 24/7 to provide feedback (Hillstock, 2005). Students apparently want that connection with the instructor. Both groups agreed that the self-introduction by the instructor gave them a feeling of connection.

While the study was originally designed to gather student feedback about the effectiveness of the class certain patterns emerged while reviewing the responses. Students using the Blackboard platform gave higher mean ratings to 24 of the 27 survey items and 20 of the 24 were significantly higher. This study revealed there was differences between the perceptions of course effectiveness of students taught introductory statistics using Blackboard and using Academic Partnership's Epic but did not offer any insights into why the differences existed. Some possibilities might include the LMS platform, the sample size, the sample composition, the timing of the surveys, or the procedure of the course regarding access to the instructor.

It could be that students using the Blackboard platform were happier with the design and layout of the course. All of the Blackboard students (n=71) responded to the survey but only 51% of the 1564 AP students responded. Since the survey was voluntary it may be that the majority of disgruntled AP students responded to the survey causing the results to be skewed. The composition of the classes may have been a contributing factor. All students in the AP course were education majors and several had little experience with online classes whereas the Blackboard course was open to students from multiple disciplines. Most of the students were from the health services field and had extensive experience with online classes.

The timing of the surveys may have contributed to the differences. The AP class began in August at roughly the same time the public school teachers were beginning a new school year. The stress of starting a new school year and taking a five-week statistics class at the same time may have influenced the responses.

A fundamental difference existed regarding access to the instructor in the two platforms. Blackboard students had direct access to the instructor via discussion board posts and email but the AP students had a teaching assistant who responded to discussion posts and to whom the students submitted email questions. Questions which the assistant could not answer were submitted by the assistant to the instructor for a response. Often, there was a considerable time delay before a student received a response from the instructor. The author speculates that this connection, or lack thereof, to the instructor may have contributed to the differences in student responses. Future studies should attempt to identify why significant differences exist. Identification of the factors could lead to the development of more effective online instruction.

References

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