Chapter 18

Preferred Features of Course Management Systems in Post Secondary and Corporate Online Learning

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ABSTRACT

The instrument described in this chapter is designed for instructors of e-learning, for the purpose of giving faculty an opportunity to identify, express, and suggest features in a Course Management System (CMS) that they feel are pedagogically important. Appropriate for use in universities or corporations, this survey can provide instructors with a greater voice in the CMS decision making process, thereby giving pedagogy a greater influence on the practice of technology implementation in the learning environment. This chapter describes the construction of the survey, its psychometric properties, and preliminary data gathered at a private university in New York State. The findings differentiate among CMS’ features that faculty consider important, not important, or feel neutral about. Further, the results underscore the differences between previous users and non-users of CMSs in assigning importance to types of features. The author discusses the implications of using the survey in both educational and corporate settings with the purpose of helping institutions that utilize e-learning to meet the educational standard set by current best practices.

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POST SECONDARY AND CORPORATE ONLINE LEARNING: PREFERRED FEATURES OF COURSE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Definition of E-Learning

On-line, or e-learning, refers to learning that is “facilitated and supported through the use of information and communication technologies” (Clarke, Lewis, Cole, & Ringrose, 2004, p.33). Instructors in e-learning environment use computers to deliver content, and utilize instructional technology in their teaching (Rovai, 2004). Students within the e-learning environment engage in various learning activities that feature electronically-delivered content, and allow the participants (students and instructor) to communicate with each other via the internet (Zhang & Zhou, 2003). Such activities may be synchronous (simultaneous) or asynchronous (non-simultaneous), depending on the purpose of the activity and the software or computer-based application used to carry the activity out. Garrison, & Kanuka, (2004) point out that e-learning may be utilized either fully on-line or in a blended format (i.e., combining face-to-face learning experiences in the classroom with on-line and computer-based learning experiences).

E learning, as a method of education and training, has become prevalent in post-secondary institutions as well as in the corporate world. According to the National Center of Educational Statistics (2008), 65% of all degree-granting post-secondary institutions offer college-level credit granting online education courses. Within the corporate world, the use of e-learning for training purposes is increasing rapidly (Pack, 2002). Newton & Doonga (2007) who have investigated the perceptions of training managers regarding the experience of providing E training to corporate clients, state that a universal shift towards E training is evident across companies from all areas of industry and commerce.

Pros and Cons of E-Learning in Higher Education and Corporate Training

The advantages of e-learning in educational and corporate contexts have been studied rather extensively, and with mixed results. Within post-secondary education institutions, advantages of e-learning encompass two main factors: convenience, and pedagogical value. For example, Albrecht, (2006), reports that students appreciate the convenience of e-learning in that it cuts down on commuting to class time, and affords flexible study time that better accommodates a busy daily schedule.

Other studies focused on the potential for pedagogical value of e-learning in post-secondary institutions. Neville, Heavin, & Walsh, (2005), examined how utilization of e-learning technology might contribute to the learners’ experience, and to the relationship between the students and the instructor. Their findings indicate that, when e-learning environments utilize computer technology that is carefully designed to meet learning needs, such technology can provide structural flexibility that can increase learners’ motivation. Moreover, well-designed e-learning methods of instruction are learner’s-centered, rather than teacher’s-centered, and thus are advantageous in accommodating different learning styles. Morgan (2003) notes that teaching within an e-learning environment requires pre-planning and careful re-organization of the content material, and therefore is associated with a more thoughtful teaching, increased student engagement, and increased opportunities for student-student and student-instructor interaction.

Zhang and Zhou (2003) investigated learner-content interaction within an undergraduate e-learning environment. They found that students who received E training appreciated the self-paced learning, and the collaborative learning environment (Zhang and Zhou, 2003). Moreover, students who received training via the interactive e-learning environment outperformed students who received