Chapter 8
Learning Business Law Online vs. Onland:
Student Satisfaction and Performance

Louis B. Swartz
Robert Morris University, USA

Michele T. Cole
Robert Morris University, USA

Daniel J. Shelley
Robert Morris University, USA

ABSTRACT

This article reports on two follow-up studies to "A Comparative Analysis of Online and Traditional Undergraduate Business Law Classes" (Shelley, Swartz and Cole, 2007) designed to further examine two critical areas of e-learning, that is, student satisfaction with, and student learning in, an online environment as compared with an onland, or traditional classroom environment. While the initial study found no significant difference between the two, the second study did find statistically significant differences between the online and the onland course formats with regard to two elements of student satisfaction: (1) student satisfaction with the instructor, and (2) student satisfaction with the course structure. The second study went further to look at the effects, if any, of gender, age and nationality on student satisfaction. There was no significant difference found with age or nationality. There was a significant difference between males and females with regard to two of the research questions. The third study focused on student satisfaction and performance in two onland courses. In both areas, results indicated lower overall means for each of the four central research questions.

INTRODUCTION

Braun (2008) notes that more than ever before, increasing numbers of colleges and universities are embracing online degrees and courses. As more institutions of higher education offer more online courses – to remain competitive, to expand access to education, and to facilitate student learning- two questions have been raised: Are students learning as well online as they are onground? Has student satisfaction with onland instruction changed as insti-

tutions are turning to online platforms? Numerous authors have addressed those issues (Keegan, D., 1996; Russell, T., 1999; Schulman, A.H. and Sims, R.L., 1999; Harasim, L. 2000; Ryan, R.C. 2000; Allen, M., Bourhis, J., Burrell, N. and Mabray, E.; Rivera, J.C. and Rice, M.L., 2002; Bernard, R.M., et al, 2004; Frantz, P.L. and Wilson, A.H., 2004; Suanpang, P., Petocz, P. and Kalceff, W., 2004; Fjermestad, Hiltz, S. and Zhang, Y. 2005; Jang, K.S., Hwang, S.Y., Park, S.J., Kim, Y.M. and Kim, M.J., 2005; Tastle, W.J., White, B.A. and Shackleton, P., 2005; Weaver-Kaulis, A. and Crutsinger, C., 2006; Crawford, S.Z., Greenwell, C. and Andrew, D.; Mentzer, G.A., Cryan, J.R. and Teclehaimanot, B., 2007; Pillay, H., Irving, K. and Tones, M., 2007; Bassili, J.N. and Joordens, S., 2008; Braun, T., 2008).

In follow-up studies to "A Comparative Analysis of Online and Traditional Undergraduate Business Law Classes" (Shelley, Swartz and Cole, 2007), the authors found mixed results when examining two critical areas of e-learning: student satisfaction with, and student learning in, an online environment as compared with an onland, or traditional classroom environment. While the initial study found no significant difference between the two, the second study did find statistically significant differences between the online and the onland course formats with regard to two elements of student satisfaction: (1) student satisfaction with the instructor, and (2) student satisfaction with the course structure. The second study went further to look at the effects, if any, of gender, age and nationality on student satisfaction. There was no significant difference found with age or nationality. There was a significant difference between males and females with regard to two of the research questions (Shelley, Swartz and Cole, 2008).

In a third study of two onland sessions of the same undergraduate business law course completed in 2008, researchers found significantly less satisfaction with the instructor and with the structure of the course when compared with prior stud-

ies' onground classes (a mean of 4.2050 to 4.6375 and 4.6154, and a mean of 3.5275 to 3.7500 and 3.8846). Results were more consistent with prior years' studies with regard to student satisfaction with the course overall (mean of 4.02 compared with means of 4.1481 and 4.6154) and with regard to learning as measured by grades (mean of 2.4470 compared with means of 2.4500 and 2.7609). (It should be noted that in the 2008 study the grades were raised by 2 percentage points.)

In each of the three studies the primary focus was three measures of student satisfaction, with the course itself, with the instructor and with the structure of the course, and with one measure of learning, grades.

The course that was the subject of each study is an undergraduate business law class required for all business students at Robert Morris University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Legal Environment for Business (BLAW 1050) is designed to enable students to develop an understanding of the American legal system and to attain a working knowledge of ethics, contract law and consumer protection to a degree sufficient to be useful in business and consumer transactions. At the conclusion of the course, students have learned their legal rights and responsibilities and have gained the ability to apply legal principles to help solve business and consumer problems.

Since its first online offerings in 1999, Robert Morris University has added 246 new online and partially online course offerings. In academic year 2006-07, there were 145 totally online courses university–wide. Of these, fourteen were offered in the School of Business. In that year, there were an additional 136 courses partially online, forty-three of which were in the School of Business. As the University expands its offerings and more and more instructors and students become involved in online education, ensuring instructional quality and learning effectiveness assumes the central role in course planning. In academic year 2008-09, the University added two fully online

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