Study reveals disparity between students' and professors' perceptions of the digital classroom

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From email to Twitter, blogs to word processors, computer programs provide countless communications opportunities. While social applications have dominated the development of the participatory web for users and programmers alike, this era of Web 2.0 is applicable to more than just networking opportunities: it impacts education.

The integration of increasingly sophisticated information and communication tools (ICTs) is sweeping university classrooms. Understanding how learners and instructors perceive the effectiveness of these tools in the classroom is critical to the success or failure of their integration higher education settings. A new study led by Concordia University shows that when it comes to pedagogy, students prefer an engaging lecture rather than a targeted tweet.

Twelve universities across Quebec recently signed up to be a part of the first cross-provincial study of perceptions of ICT integration and course effectiveness on higher learning. This represented the first pan-provincial study to assess how professors are making the leap from lectures to LinkedIn – and whether students are up for the change to the traditional educational model.

At the forefront of this study was Concordia's own Vivek Venkatesh. As associate dean of academic programs and development within the School of Graduate Studies, he has a particular interest in how education is

evolving within post-secondary institutions. To conduct the study, Venkatesh partnered with Magda Fusaro from UQAM's Department of Management and Technology. Together, they conducted a pilot project at UQAM before rolling the project out to universities across the province.

"We hit the ground running and received an overwhelmingly positive response with 15,020 students and 2,640 instructors responding to our electronic questionnaires in February and March of 2011," recalls Venkatesh. The 120-item surveys gauged course structure preferences, perceptions of the usefulness of teaching methods, and the level of technology knowledge of both students and teachers.

The surprising results showed that students were more appreciative of the literally "old school" approach of lectures and were less enthusiastic than teachers about using ICTs in classes. Instructors were more fluent with the use of emails than with social media, while the opposite was true for students.

"Our analysis showed that teachers think that their students feel more positive about their classroom learning experience if there are more interactive, discussion-oriented activities. In reality, engaging and stimulating lectures, regardless of how technologies are used, are what really predict students' appreciation of a given university course," explains Fusaro.

The researchers hope these results will have a broad impact, especially in terms of curriculum design and professional development. For Venkatesh, "this project represents a true success story of collaboration across Québec universities that could definitely have an effect outside the province." Indeed, the large number of participants involved means this research is applicable to populations of learners across North America and Europe with similar educational and information

technology infrastructures. An electronic revolution could soon sweep post-secondary classrooms around the world, thanks to this brand new research from Quebec.

Provided by Concordia University

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