

## ANTECEDENTS TO STUDENT PREFERENCE FOR WEB-BASED AND TRADITIONAL CLASSES

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### ABSTRACT

Web-based distance learning can generate a higher volume of students at a relatively lower cost in comparison to traditional classroom courses. After the initial start-up costs, Internet classes offer the potential for much larger class sizes and higher fees. It is important for educators to consider learning styles of students in order to facilitate success and encourage retention of students in both traditional classroom settings and web-based courses. Because online distance learning is a relatively new technology, research is lacking in the development of Internet courses that will enhance student performance and retention. This study provides insight for educators regarding learning styles and social orientation of students currently enrolled in web-based courses compared to those in traditional classes.

In this paper, we attempt to identify the type of person most likely to choose web-based classes over traditional classes in order to recommend segments to be targeted by universities offering distance education and in formulating strategies to attract new students. Matching teaching methods to students' learning styles and information processing is important for retaining web learners and enticing them to continue choosing web-based courses. In addition, psychographic profiles are needed to effectively target potential students when marketing these programs.

Surveys were administered to a total of 314 undergraduate students with written surveys given to students enrolled in traditional classroom courses and an online version to students enrolled in an exclusively web-based marketing course. The instrument included measures of five constructs – individual's attitudes towards web-based versus traditional classes, online shopping, time pressure versus time management (Lumpkin and Darden 1982), visual vs. verbal information processing (Childers et al. 1985), and group versus self orientation.

Significant findings from this study suggest students enrolled in web-based classes tend to be group-oriented which is contrary to the authors' hypothesis that students in traditional classes would be more group-oriented. This may be because web-based learning creates a social environment through online correspondence. There was significant evidence ( $\alpha = .05$ ) to suggest that persons enrolled in web-based classes are more visually oriented than their counterparts in traditional classrooms. Students with preference for, but not necessarily enrolled in, web-based classes tend to be pressured for time, which is consistent with our review of previous research. However, students actually enrolled in an online course tend to have a higher time management orientation, (i.e. they seem to be more organized). This orientation could be influenced by the time management skills and the discipline required by Internet courses that students are not aware of prior to enrolling in web-based classes. In conclusion, this study contributes to the development of psychographic profiles of current and potential web-based distance learners.