

Online Learning- Interest and Perception

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Abstract

Using both Qualitative and Quantitative content analysis approach, this study reviewed seven published studies and research on online learning since 2005, primarily focusing on how theories, best practices and projects apply to the online world. The purpose of this paper is to provide additional research and information for those planning on taking an online class or for those who has had experience with taking an online class.

Nonetheless, based on the findings, each author had a unique style of explaining the problem of Online Learning across the globe. Nguyen and Mahlangu for example, both looked at how the traditional “brick and mortar” classroom is starting to lose its monopoly. Students are gearing more into taking online classes as a more convenient way to achieve a degree. In doing this, our research sampled students from The State University of New York at Potsdam currently in the M.S Management program and looked at their perception and thoughts on online courses.

This was done through surveys and selective interviews from stakeholders and clients. Overall, the methods show that students are not in favor of taking online classes, while some have some interest or experience in taking online classes.

Keywords: online learning, face-to-face, blended learning, hybrid, distance learning, synchronous, asynchronous, brick and mortar

The purpose of this research is to explore the perception and views of College Students at the State University of New York at Potsdam surrounding online learning. Online Learning as referenced in the US Department of Education Office of Educational Technology “to instructional environments supported by the Internet and includes a wide variety of programs that use the Internet within and beyond classroom walls” (US Department of Education Office of Educational Technology, 2012). The research alone focuses on the perceptions of college students at SUNY Potsdam primarily in the M.S management program think about online learning.

From this standpoint, research questions in this included *What are the qualities of face-to-face MS Management courses that current student’s value? What are the qualities of online MS Management courses that current student’s value?* Distance learning in other words have had a positive toll on students around the globe. It has increased in rating based on the 2008 study by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES). Online learning is considered effective for students who have correspondents that hinders the to attend face-to-face classroom settings.

Distance learning-based programs could increase access for students to higher education, whereas open and distance-learning programs may be difficult to implement in the laboratory sciences, but they have real potential to maximize the use of technology (Mahlangu, V. P. (2018, April 4).

Literature review

Online learning provides access to instructional materials as well as interaction among teachers and students. Online learning can be fully online or blended with face-to-face (classroom-based) interactions (US Department of Education Office of Educational Technology, 2012). According to Kim, Liu, and Curtis J. Bonk (2015), Online MBA Programs have seen a rapid rise in student enrollments in recent years and Institutions of higher education are offering online programs to serve growing learner population. Not only are online programs more affordable than traditional institutions (Vosganian, 2019). Technology has played and continues to play an important role in the development and expansion of online education. Students are gearing more towards educational technology because it is more convenient and time managing.

In the past five years, the number of institutions offering online education has increased. As online degree education continues to grow, there is also an increasing concern that some students are disadvantaged because of various challenges such as computer Illiteracy, difficulty completing the assigned material on their own (Mahlangu, 2018).

The development of Distance learning does not happen overnight, The 2008 study by the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) found that the main factors influencing higher-education institutions to offer online courses included meeting students' demands for flexible schedules (68%), providing access to college for students who would otherwise not have access (67%), making more courses available (46%), and seeking to increase student enrollments (45%) (Parsad, Lewis, & Tice, 2008).

Nguyen and Mahlangu both looked at how the traditional “brick and mortar” classroom is starting to lose its monopoly. The place of learning and students are starting to transition to online courses as a simple form to enhance and improve their learning outcomes.

In relation to Graduate students at SUNY Potsdam, the purpose of this research is to gain insight into graduate students' perception regarding online learning. Specifically, the Master of Science in Management. Similarly, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported in 2011 a total of 754,229 students that have their master's degree and 903 of those students have a master's in management. There is also another aspect of online education is the faculty acceptance of online degree.

Contrary to all the benefits of online education, approximately 95% of the faculties believed that traditional face to face lectures are the most effective means to achieve student learning outcome (Stewart, Bachman & Johnson, 2010). Research suggests that the blended approach is likely to become a predominant model in online education (Teachers college Record, 2013).

Research Questions

1. What are the qualities of face- to-face MS Management courses that current student’s value?
2. What are the qualities of online MS Management courses that current student’s value?

Purpose of the Present Study

The purpose of this research was to identify the learning aspects graduate students find ideal to help their perception in this form of education. Determining if there was a relationship in a student's personal preference of learning (face-to-face, synchronous, asynchronous, online and hybrid) is the purpose of this study.

By addressing interest and perception in the existing program, at the conclusion of this study, “educator, SUNY Potsdam” will have a better understanding of the effects of Online

learning, interest and perception. Also, “educators, SUNY Potsdam” will know more about students’ preference relates to his or her ability to learn.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were defined:

Online learning refers to instructional environments supported by the Internet and includes a wide variety of programs that use the Internet within and beyond classroom walls. (U.S.

Department of Education, Office of Educational Technology, 2012)

blended learning refers combine face-to-face instruction with computer-mediated instruction (Graham, C. R., 2006).

Method

The current study uses both qualitative and quantitative analysis that has a student-centered approach and was conducted to ascertain student interest and perceptions regarding to online courses.

Participants

The sample for this study included Ms. Management and Educational technology graduate students who volunteered to participate in the study. An online request made to 28 students, and 26 students responded. SUNY Potsdam offers master’s programs in the areas of Arts and Sciences, Business Administration, 4. Education and Human Performance. The request for participation in the study was sent to students in School of Education & Professional Studies. Participants were not asked to specify race, age or gender.

Materials

Informed consent forms were used containing information about procedures, benefits and risks of participating, and an explanation how to acquire a copy of the information, voluntary participation, and contact information of the researchers. The purpose of the study was also on the consent form.

Additional materials included a survey (see appendix). Participants responded to all survey items using a 5-point Likert scale (from 1 = “Strongly disagree” to 5 = “Strongly agree”). This scale was used to reduce the frustration level of patient respondents and increase response rate and response quality (Sachdev, S. B., & Verma, H. V, 2004).

Procedure

The participants were emailed a consent form. After obtaining the consent, the researchers sent out an email including the survey link to the participants. After the surveys were completed, recorded their responses for later analysis. The participants were then asked if they had any questions and thanked for their cooperation.

A survey was then developed in order to gather accurate and raw information on students in SUNY Potsdam that were future participants in the research. Surveys are data collection methods used to obtain information from and about which people, how often, and when? (Fink, 2009). During the process of the survey, we first drafted a set of possible survey questions on a Microsoft Word document, after edits and revision, we imported the survey questions into an electronic format based system named Qualtrics – a database that is simple to use for web-based survey tool to conduct survey research, evaluations and other data collection analysis.

After participants responded the survey in Qualtrics, Microsoft Excel was used to analyze each survey response syntax and then decoded the data by attributing a set of variables to the responses that were common amongst interviewees. To further analyze results, we started the analyze process by duplicating the original exported excel survey responses and name it as Master

data. After we duplicated the original excel responses, we created each question a tab where we analyze individually. Once all the questions were singled out, we analyze all the questions considered as quantitative data. For example, all the questions that used like chart for responses, we used MS Excel function “COUNTIF (A21:A25, Strongly Agree)” to determine how many students strongly agree likewise how many strongly disagree. For questions with scales responses, the treatment for these questions we used frequency function “FREQUENCY (data_array, bins_array)” to determine how many students rated the same rate.

For qualitative data, we coded it by identifying themes, which is basically the most comment topic that students used in the responses. Once it was identified, we attribute a variable like “I” for interaction, “D” for discussion and “F” for feedback, which later we use an MS Excel function “COUNTIF (A21:A25, “I”)” to determine how many times students mentioned interaction or discussion in their responses.

Once codes calculated both quantitative data and qualitative, we generate pie chart, graphs and histograms to illustrate our findings.

Findings and Analysis

Overall, Students are more in favor of taking face to face courses or hybrid than fully online courses. This was mentioned first in Nguyen’s argument of face to face courses becoming a monopoly (2015). The first research question that guided this study dealt with qualities and values of face-to-face course.

The result of the study indicates that the majority of students pointed interaction as the most valuable aspect in face-to-face. This was presented through our graphs and comments by the respondents alone. figure 1 (Appendix) show that students indicated that the most valuable

aspect of face-to-face is Interaction, which represents 43% and the other half was even split into 29% selected discussion while the other 29% selected instant feedback. One student said, “*I enjoy having a professor there if any question needed*”.

Based on both figure 1 and the student’s response, one can say that students are more in favor of taking brick and mortar traditional courses rather than online courses. The students prefer instant feedback, and discussions. In figure 4, when students, were asked *on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the least desired and 10 being the most desired, how much do you want to take face-to-face graduate courses?* our findings show that overall students rated 8 as the highest in comparison to online graduate courses and hybrid courses, see figure 4, 5 and 6.

The second research question involves with qualities and values of online course. This appeared in Mahlangu’s argument of the challenges of distance learning in higher education (2018). In Many of the response identified in the figure 2 and 3 point that they enjoy and learn from live synchronous discussion in online environment. In figure 2, the data shows students who enjoy live synchronous discussion in online environment. 54 % of the respondents agreed on enjoying live discussions in online environment and 4% strongly disagreed on enjoying discussions online.

In figure 3, 64% of students agreed on learning from online discussions and 19% of students disagree on learning from online discussions. What this shows, is that most of the students learn better online than face to face. One can also infer that the same students who voted yes on enjoying live discussions also learn from them too.

Lastly, hybrid was the last theme discussed in both the research and in the articles. In Graham’s book titled *Blended learning systems. The handbook of blended learning 3-21* his argument explored hybrid courses as a way where students have the opportunity to take both online

and face to face courses in one. Figure 7 reflects on 80% of the students preferring future hybrid courses in the MS Management program and there was an even amount of 20% for both online and face to face.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to identify the learning aspects graduate students find ideal to help their perception in this form of education. Despite revealing findings useful in contributing to the current body of research on online learning, interest and perception, this study was limited to a relatively small population of graduate students in the School of Education & Professional Studies at SUNY Potsdam. Future studies utilizing a broader population and longer time period, as well as a wider scope of instructional focus are needed to compliment these findings that covered a limited area of contents in an online learning context.

To further expand the findings of this study, more empirical evidence such as pre-course evaluation and pos-course evaluation could be use in looking possible correlation between interest and student's perception.

In reflecting on this study, it is important to remember that, in general, the graduate students in the Management program at SUNY Potsdam are generally positive about their educational experience as reflected in the question 4 and 7 of the survey. In virtually every students' responses that were considered disagree found during the analysis, involved 12% to 23%. The majority of students in this program responded in agreement.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study investigated two research questions. The two research questions asked what aspects that students most value in face-to-face and online course can offer suggestions for instructors and students to facilitate improved the learning experiences. The findings conclude that students are more in favor of taking face to face courses online. But also, the findings revealed that students recommend more hybrid courses besides of face-to-face courses.

Limitations

To research this topic, sincere efforts have been put to collect relevant information. However, during the study certain problems were faced and those are very important to be highlighted.

Following are the limitations of the study:

1. Time constraint for completing the work: some technical problems appeared along the way that interfered ability to extract the collected data from the elected platform and delay the data analysis process. Furthermore, such interference, limited a second round to collect data.
2. Improper Response: In some cases, respondents gave incomplete information willingly or avoided to impart information.
3. Too specific of a group: In many cases, it is ideal to have a small group number for research. However, for this study, having more time to collect the perception of other students outside of the M.S management program would have benefited the research as well.

Suggestions for Future Research

The limitations of the research identified, calls for additional research. Finally, educational institutions, need to focus on research and development that fuels innovation and continuous improvement on students' perceptions. What are the qualities of face-to-face MS Management courses that current student's value? What are the qualities of online MS Management courses that current student's value? Answers to these questions may make it more likely that future investments in online learning will live up to their potential learning opportunities for all students.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form



CONSENT FORM

Online learning – Interest and Perception

You are invited to be in a research study of online learning. You were selected as a possible participant because you are graduate student at SUNY Potsdam School of Education & Professional Studies. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Nsundidi Jorge and Shelsy Blanco, from the department of Business Admissions at SUNY Potsdam, under the supervision of Dr. Karen Caldwell.

Key information about the Study

- **We are seeking your consent to participate in this study; participation is voluntary**
- **Purpose of this study:** to understand graduate level students' interest in online courses.
- **Expected duration of your participation in the study:** Each participant will conduct a survey that will last up to 10 minutes. The interviews will be approximately 30 to 45 minutes long.
- **Procedures:** If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things: Participants will not be audio recorded or video recorded. **Risks and Benefits of being in the Study:** There are no risks or benefits in being in this study.

Compensation

You will not receive compensation for your participation.

Confidentiality

The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only researchers will have access to the records. Data will be kept for no more than three (3) years in the Principal Investigator's Qualtrics account initially, as in an Excel spreadsheet in a SUNY Potsdam OneDrive folder shared will be password-protected and managed by the Principal investigator.

- Identifiers might be removed and the de-identified information used for future research without additional informed consent

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with SUNY Potsdam. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher(s) conducting this study are Nsundidi Jorge and Shelsy Blanco, supervised by Dr. Karen Caldwell. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact them at 315-297-3266, 917-435-1615, jorgenm203@potsdam.edu, blancos199@potsdam.edu. Supervising faculty Karen Caldwell, 613-803-3213, caldweke@potsdam.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact David Bugg, Chair of the SUNY Potsdam Institutional Review Board by mail (238 Satterlee Hall, 44 Pierrepont Avenue, Potsdam, NY, 13668), telephone (315-267-2688) or email (SUNYPotsdamIRB@potsdam.edu).

Approval by the Provost of SUNY Potsdam and the Institutional Review Board attests only that appropriate safeguards have been included in the research design to protect human participants. This approval does not imply that the College endorses the content of the research or the conclusions drawn from the results of the research.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature*: _____ Date: _____

* Electronic signatures are now allowed for documentation of consent. Participants may insert a scanned signature or use a program for inserting electronic signatures (for instance, Adobe, DocuSign, etc.) Typing the participant's name in the form will NOT serve as documentation of consent.

Signature of Investigator: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B: Email invitation

INVITATION EMAIL

Dear Graduate Students,

We are writing to invite you to participate in a study about perceptions of and interest in online learning. In order to better support grad student learning at SUNY Potsdam, we're conducting a survey about their preferences related to online and face-to-face learning. This survey is anonymous and on a volunteer basis and you have the option to participate fully, answer specific questions, or to not participate. You can leave the survey at any time if you choose to no longer participate. There is no identifying information being retrieved from this survey and no identifiable risk associated with participating.

The research is part of a graduate-level research methods course at SUNY Potsdam, and is being conducted by Shelsy Blanco and Nsundidi Jorge, graduate students, under the supervision of Dr. Karen Caldwell. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact Shelsy (blancos199@potdam.edu), Jorge (jorgenm203@potdam.edu) or Karen Caldwell (caldweke@potdam.edu).

Thank you for your time, and for your interest in this survey.

To participate in the survey, please [click on this link](#).

Best wishes,

Shelsy Blanco and Nsundidi Jorge

Survey instrument:

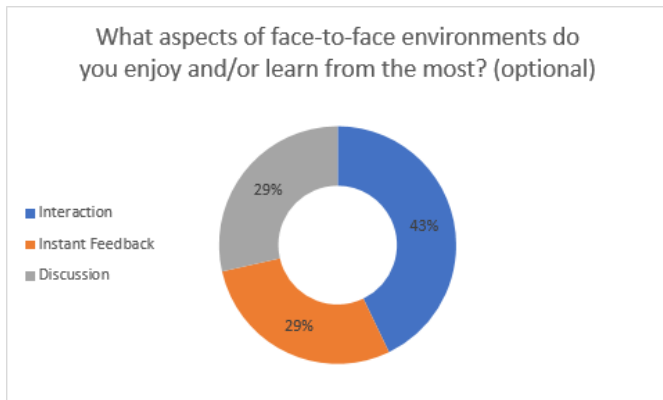


Figure 1. face-to-face

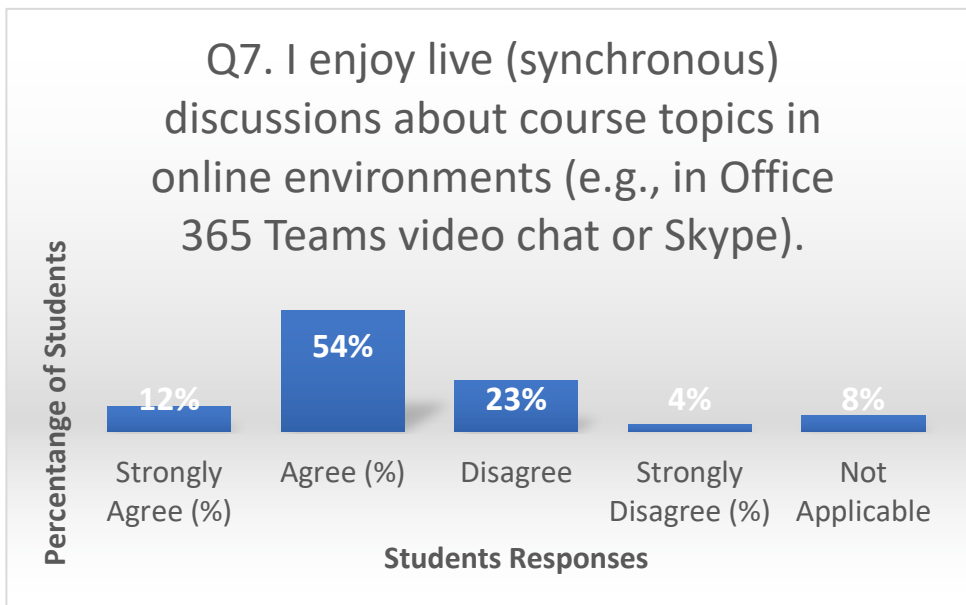


Figure 2.enjoy

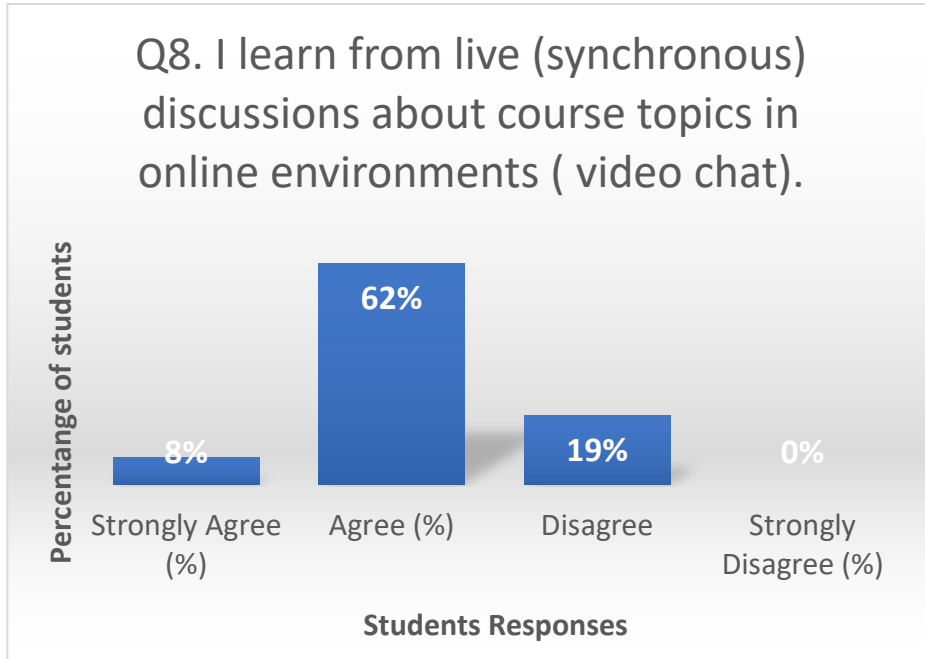


Figure 3. learn from live

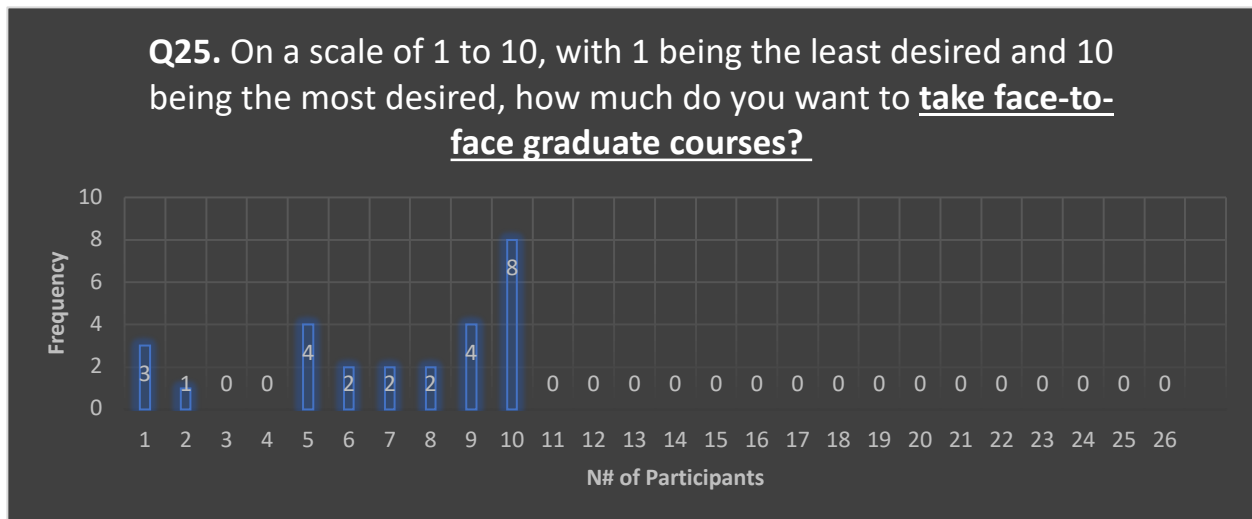


Figure 4.Face to Face graduate courses

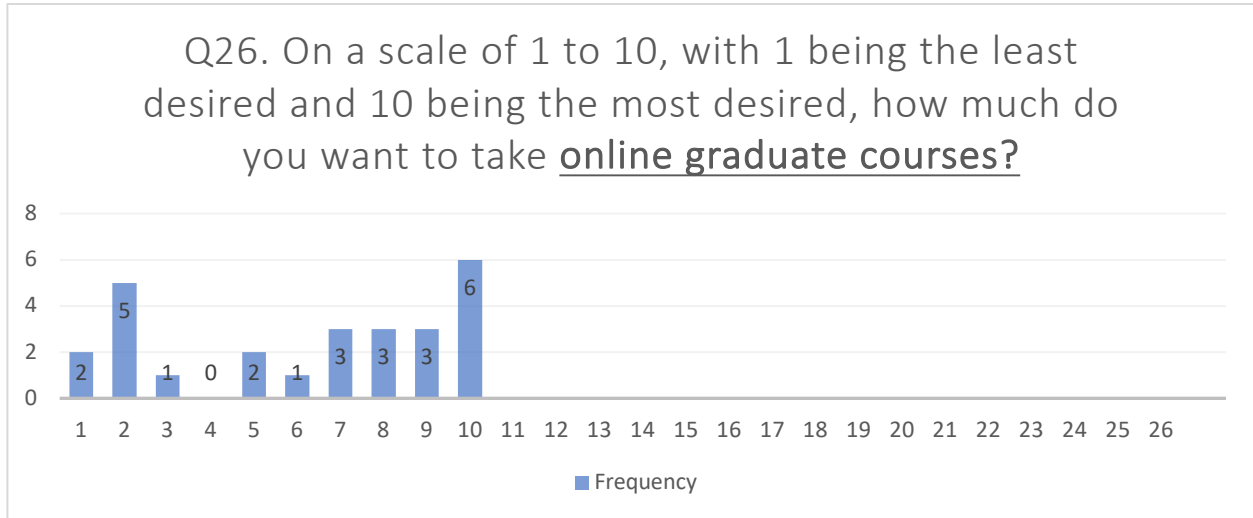


Figure 5.online

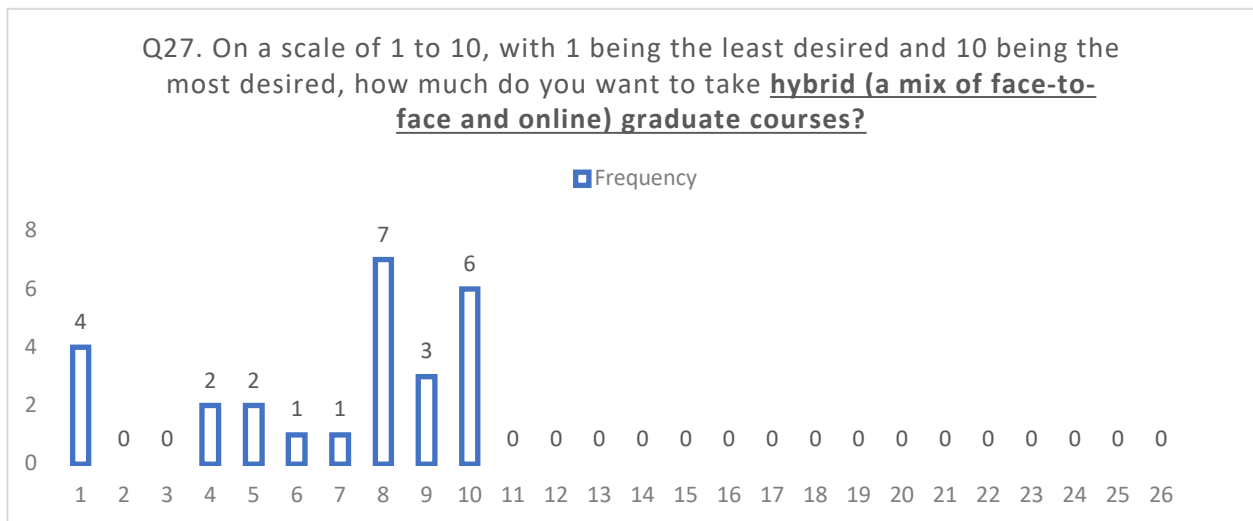


Figure 6. online graduate courses

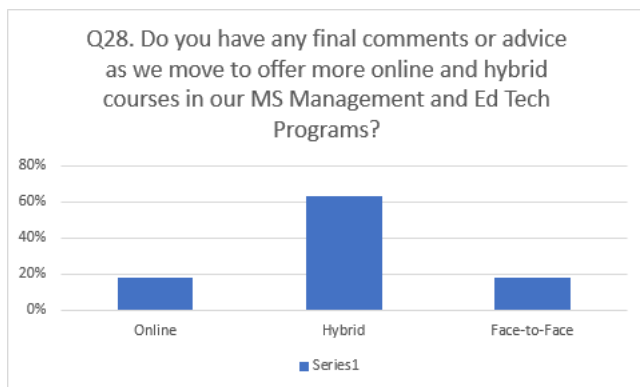


Figure 7. Final comments

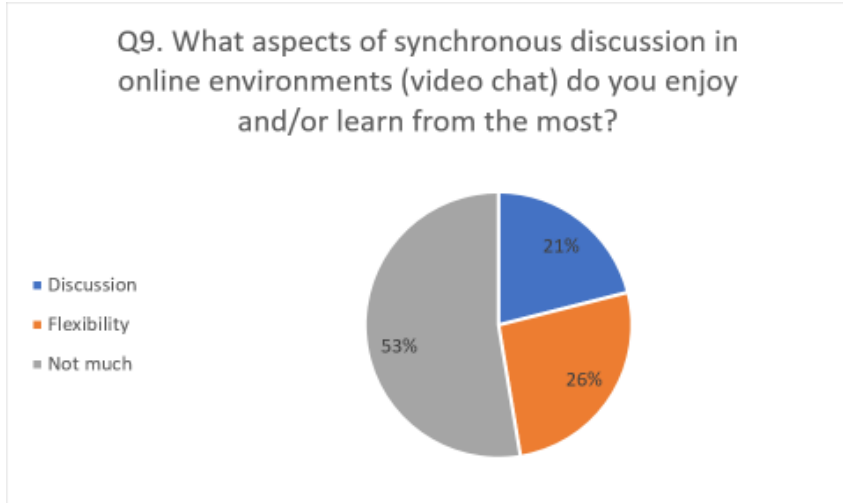


Figure 8. aspects of synchronous online

Figure 10. comments or advice

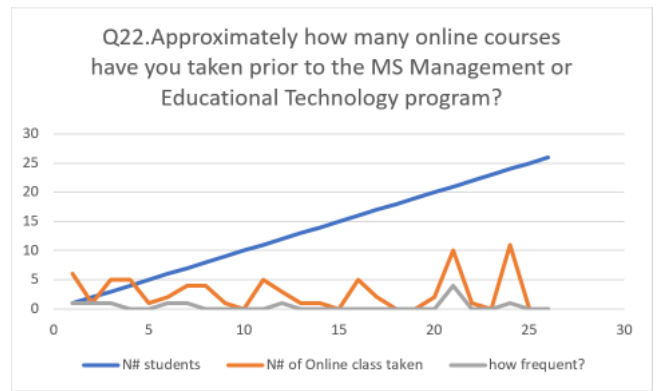


Figure 9. Taken online courses

Survey Questions

For the questions on this survey, rate your level of agreement with the following statements (strongly disagree to strongly agree). If you have no experience in any given area, please select "not applicable."

Q4 - I enjoy 'live' (synchronous) discussions about course topics in face-to-face environments.

Q5 - I learn from 'live' (synchronous) discussions about course topics in face-to-face environments.

Q6 - What aspects of face-to-face environments do you enjoy and/or learn from the most? (optional)

Q7 - I enjoy 'live' (synchronous) discussions about course topics in online environments (e.g., in Office 365 Teams video chat or Skype).

Q8 - I learn from 'live' (synchronous) discussions about course topics in online environments (e.g., in Office 365 Teams video chat or Skype).

Q9 - What aspects of synchronous discussion in online environments (Office 365 Teams video chat or Skype) do you enjoy and/or learn from the most? (optional)

Q10 - I enjoy asynchronous (usually written, not 'live') discussions about course topics (e.g., Moodle discussion forums, Office 365 Teams chat).

Q11 - I learn from asynchronous (usually written, not 'live') discussions about course topics (e.g., Moodle discussion forums, Office 365 Teams chat).

Q12 - What aspects of asynchronous discussions do you enjoy and/or learn from the most? (optional)

Q13 - Overall, the learning support I have received from my instructor in face-to-face environments has been valuable.

Q14 - Overall, the learning support I have received from my peers in face-to-face environments has been valuable.

Q15 - Overall, the learning support I have received from course materials in face-to-face environments has been valuable.

Q16 - Overall, the learning support I have received from my instructor in online environments has been valuable.

Q17 - Overall, the learning support I have received from my peers in online environments is valuable.

Q18 - Overall, the learning support I have received from course materials in online environments is valuable.

Q19 - Overall, the learning support I have received from the SUNY Potsdam Writing Center for face-to-face courses has been valuable.

Q20 - Overall, the learning support I have received from the SUNY Potsdam Writing Center for online courses has been valuable.

Q21 - Do you have any comments or advice regarding your support from the SUNY Potsdam Writing Center? (optional)

Q22 - Approximately how many online courses have you taken prior to the MS Management or Educational Technology program?

Q23 - Approximately how many online courses have you taken during the MS Management or Educational Technology program? (including those you are taking now)

Q24 - Approximately how many TOTAL online (for-credit) courses have you taken?

Q25 - On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the least desired and 10 being the most desired, how much do you want to take face-to-face graduate courses?

Q26 - On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the least desired and 10 being the most desired, how much do you want to take online graduate courses?

Q27 - On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being the least desired and 10 being the most desired, how much do you want to take hybrid (a mix of face-to-face and online) graduate courses?

Q28 - Do you have any final comments or advice as we move to offer more online and hybrid courses in our MS Management and Ed Tech Programs? (optional)