Relationship Between Use of Online Support Materials and Student Performance in an Introductory Finance Course

ERNEST N. BIKTIMIROV
KENNETH J. KLASSEN
BROCK UNIVERSITY
ONTARIO, CANADA

ABSTRACT. The authors examined the relationship between student online activity, including access to specific course materials, and performance in a traditional face-to-face introductory finance course that a class Web site supported. The authors used 6 measures: (a) total hits, (b) hit consistency, (c) number of unique files that the students accessed, (d) accesses to homework solutions, (e) accesses to PowerPoint slides, and (f) accesses to exam solutions. Results indicated that access to homework solutions and, to lesser extent, hit consistency, were both positively related to student performance. In addition, results showed that access to specific files, rather than access to online course materials in general, was associated with better student performance.

Keywords: course Web site, finance, hits, homework, student performance

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Technology has become an integral part of teaching and learning in many business courses. Researchers expect this trend to continue in the future, partly because of the high percentage of junior faculty members using more advanced classroom technology (Cudd, Tanner, & Lipscomb, 2004). Also, it is relatively straightforward now for instructors to place course materials online because of the ease of creating one’s own Web site or of using preestablished software (i.e., a course-management system such as WebCT [Version CE 6] or Blackboard [Version CE 6]).

The underlying assumption behind this rise in educational use of technology is that it benefits student learning. However, the empirical examination of this assumption in education research has been limited. Although more and more researchers have examined the effectiveness of completely online courses, there is a lack of research into the more common hybrid courses that use online materials to supplement traditional face-to-face teaching (Baugher, Varanelli, & Weisbord, 2003).

In this study, we extended the earlier research in three areas. First, we examined the value of online support materials in a hybrid course, rather than a completely online course. Second, we specifically analyzed hits to different course materials, such as solutions to homework problems, PowerPoint slides, and solutions to exams. Last, we used a more accurate measure of students’ total hits by measuring access to specific course materials rather than hits to the course home page.

Literature Review

Increasing use of technology in finance instruction has inspired a growing body of research in this area, covering various aspects. Van Ness, Van Ness, and Adkins (2000) examined student performance in an introductory finance course and found that students who took courses online more likely not to complete the course than were students who took courses in the traditional classroom setting. They also found that there was no difference in student grades between the two types of settings. In contrast, Anstine and Skidmore (2005) examined student performance in statistics and economics courses and found that the online environment produced inferior learning outcomes relative to the traditional environment.

Value of Course Web Sites

Course-management systems (e.g., WebCT, Blackboard) have become more common as means to supplement traditional course materials. Course-management systems permit faculty members to distribute course materials and provide communication between instructors and students.