

The Benefits and Barriers of Moving Classroom-Based Courses  
to Web-Based Courses: A Perspective From Three Wisconsin  
Institutions

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Western Wisconsin Technical College

Distance Education at WWTC  
Current State of Online Materials at WWTC  
The Faculty and Online Material  
Online Office Hours  
Benefits, Barriers, and Costs  
Other Issues  
Summary

University of Wisconsin - La Crosse

University of Wisconsin System and Online Courses  
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Summary

Table 1. Summary of Data

Figure 1. Summary of Data

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## **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

Higher education has the potential to undergo major changes as the internet transforms the world. For-profit companies have entered the higher education market in the form of online universities. No longer must one go off to college. Instead, one is now able to go off to a computer to take a course or to complete a degree. The impact from web-based courses is only beginning to be felt by the educational community. The potential is tremendous, but the hazards of moving from a classroom-based course to a web-based course must be realized and understood before proceeding.

### **Importance of the Study**

Colleges and universities that neglect to address the impact of the web, will be passing up not only a great opportunity, but a requirement to survive in the new world of education. In the 2000-01 school year, approximately 70% of two-year and four-year institutions in the United States offered some sort of online courses (De Leon, 2001). About two million students took online courses in 2001 and that is expected to increase to five million by 2006 (Symonds, 2001). In addition, it is estimated that by 2003, the higher education market in the United States will be worth \$7 billion (Rewick, 2001). The majority of the students who are beginning to attend web-based schools are part of “the fastest-growing segment of higher education: working adults, who find it difficult to juggle conventional classes with jobs and families” (Symonds, p. 80, 2001). Web-based education has not had a major effect in replacing the traditional college experience for the traditional aged college students, 18-to-24 year olds. The draw is older adults who find that a web-based education fits easier into their lives than classroom-based courses at a college campus. “Adults over 25 now represent nearly half of higher-ed students; most are employed and want more education to advance their careers” (Symonds, 2001, p. 80). Most colleges that are moving towards web-based courses are mostly geared for returning adult students who would normally take extension or night courses (Symonds, 2001).

Returning adult students are one of the fastest growing populations at today’s universities and colleges. As this segment begins to also look at web-based courses in filling their educational needs, institutions need to look at ways to fill this need. Otherwise, they will be missing out on this growing student population. This study will help determine and demonstrate some of the benefits and barriers facing colleges and universities in making this transition.

### **Uses of the Study**

Once one realizes both the benefits and barriers facing an institution in developing web-based courses, one is able to determine the possibility of starting or adding web-based courses. This study that was approved by the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects will demonstrate the technologic obstacles that an institution faces in creating web-based courses and the obstacles instructors face. In addition, this study will help institutions better understand the challenges that must be overcome, as well as, the benefits to moving to a web-based course. With this information in hand, universities and colleges will be better able to determine if the benefits outweigh the costs and how to proceed with web-based education.

### **Definition of Terms**

Bandwidth - the capacity of data that can be transferred at a given time.

CD - a compact disc containing data that can be read by a computer.

Discussion Board - a place where students and faculty can post comments, thoughts, and ideas.

The submissions are saved and can be retrieved by any member of the class.

Platform - a computer architecture that uses a particular operating system.

Real Time - interacting with someone instantaneously. There is no delay.

T1 Line - a data line that can transmit 1.544 million bits of data per second.

### Types of Courses - Definition

Classroom-Based Course - a course that is taught in the classroom

Web-Supplemented Course - a class that is taught in the classroom, but has material and resources available on the web or on an intranet

Web-Enhanced Course - a class that half the material is taught in the classroom and half is taught on the web. The learning is not complete without both segments of the course.

Web-Based Course - a course where the majority, if not all, of the course material is taught via the web.

### Limitations

1. This study was limited to only a few professionals who work daily in the education field. While their insights are valuable, it can not be assumed that they have experienced all the possible benefits and barriers. Therefore, there may be many additional benefits and barriers that are not mentioned in this study.
2. This study was limited to three Wisconsin schools. Some of the costs may be vastly different in studies conducted in other locations. For example, the cost of internet access can be dependant on a school's location.
3. This field is growing and changing very rapidly. While the literature review and study is current when written, it could become obsolete in just a few years.

### Summary

Web-based education is changing quickly. This method of delivering an education has the potential to change the traditional manner that education is presented, taught, and learned. It is important for schools, institutions, colleges, and universities to look at both the benefits and barriers to web-based courses. This will allow them to make an informed decision whether to proceed with developing these types of courses or not. This study will help institutions deciding to develop web-based courses prepare before proceeding and will help them set realistic goals. The benefits and barriers need to be studied and examined by every institution of higher education.