



Comparing Alternative Teaching Modes in a Master's Program - Student Preferences and Perceptions

Karl Nollenberger, Associate Professor
University of Wisconsin - Oshkosh

OSHKOSH



Introduction

- The increase in online and hybrid style courses in Masters of Public Administration Programs has been significant in the twenty-first century



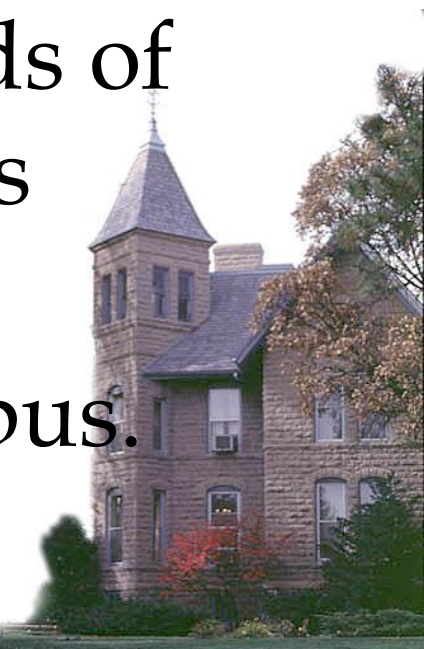
- Limited research on comparing the preferences and perceptions of learning outcomes for adult learners in the Masters of Public Administration programs



- Adult learners are typically over the age of 25
- Are nontraditional students pursuing a Master's degree
- Also working full or part time in a profession.



- Research explores preferences and perceptions of adult learners in a Master's program on learning outcomes and processes used for online, on-campus and hybrids of online and on-campus courses
- Hybrid programs offer some courses online/some on campus.



- The provision of three program modes by the same university
- Survey of alumni and students in the program to assess these preferences and perceptions of the three modes of course work



Research Questions - Distance to Traditional

- Why students choose learning formats?
- Are perceived outcomes different?
- What are students' perceptions of overall quality of learning?
- Does supplementing face-to-face instruction with online instruction enhance learning?
- What conditions influence the effectiveness?



- As stated by MIT President, L. Rafael Reif, (2013:54) “I am convinced that digital learning is the most important innovation in education since the printing press.”



Methodology

- Survey sent to a Midwest university alumni/students in 2013.
- The university offered online courses for last four years in the Masters of Public Policy and Administration Program.



Survey Instrument - 21 Questions

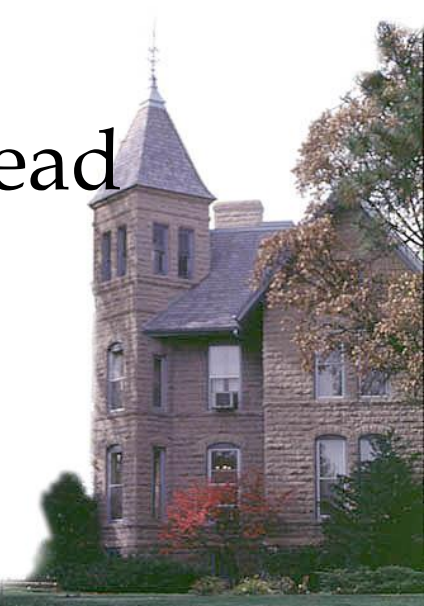
- 4 questions addressed the respondents' preferences for online or on-campus classes - being in a home atmosphere, travel time, style of learning, and flexibility of schedule.



- 8 questions - perceptions of the process of the online and on-campus classes - responsiveness to learning needs, clarity of questions, communications with fellow students, group collaboration, interaction with the professor, comfort with posting online or speaking up in class, desire for more interactive technology, and postings done on a timely basis



- 5 questions addressed the respondents' perceptions of the outcomes of the online and on-campus classes – quality of learning, time spent in total for class, need for a lecture on website by professor, communication on the expectations, and motivation to read and analyze materials



- 1 question - type of class preferred
- 3 questions on demographic information – gender, year of birth, and employment status
- 1 question - provide additional comments on their perspectives



- 79 Responses
- 38 responses from on-campus
- 41 responses from online students
- 10% response rate
- Reasons low response rate

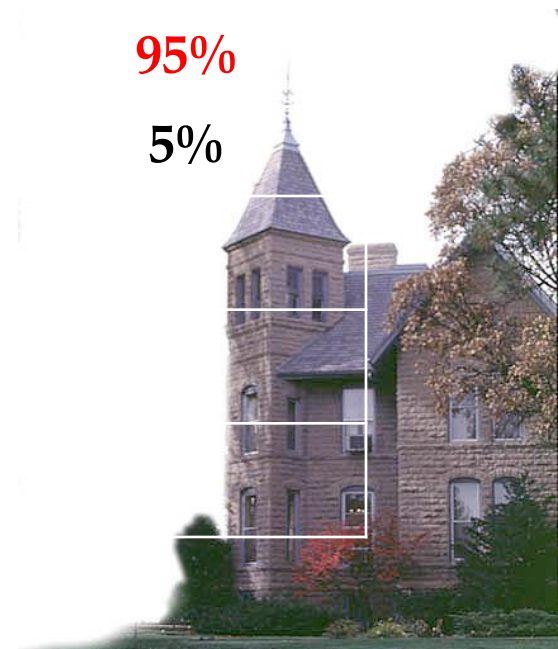
Alumni low incentive no longer involved in the program. Email sent MPPA list serve. Sent under the author's name



Results

Table 1 – Demographics of Students and Alumni

	Online	Hybrid	OnCampus
Gender - Male	45%	33%	33%
Gender - Female	55%	67%	67%
Age - Under 40	74%	100%	84%
Age - Over 40	26%	0%	16%
Employed FT	95%	100%	95%
Employed PT	5%	0%	5%



Results

Table 2 - Preferences for Online or On-Campus Classes

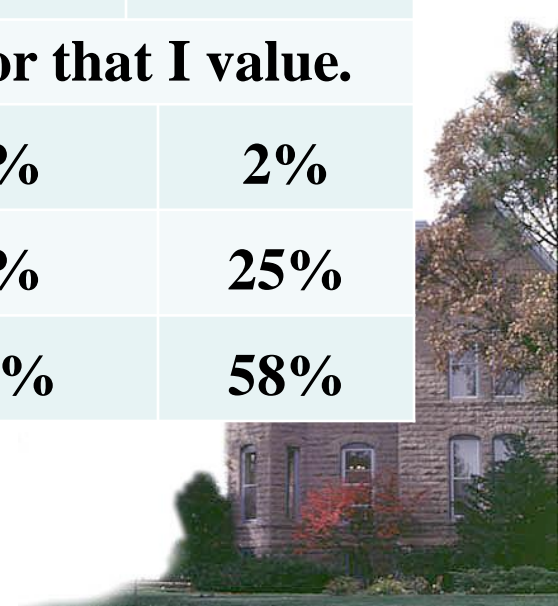
	#Surveys	Agree	Neither	Disagree
I would prefer to be in a home atmosphere (ability to listen to music and take breaks) rather than a classroom.				
Online Students	41	59%	15%	27%
Hybrid Students	12	33%	25%	42%
On Campus	26	0%	8%	93%
Travel time is a significant factor in my desire for Online classes.				
Online Students	41	65%	27%	7%
Hybrid Students	12	66%	8%	25%
On-Campus	26	27%	8%	69%



Results

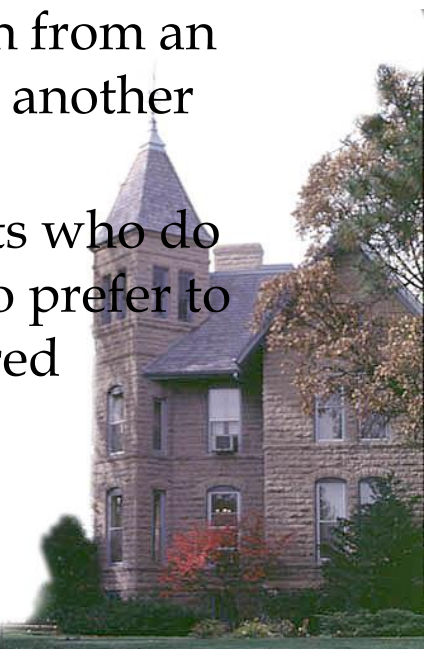
Table 2 - Preferences for Online or On-Campus Classes

	# Surveys	Agree	Neither	Disagree
The Online type of class fits my style of learning.				
Online Students	41	64%	24%	31%
Hybrid Students	11	27%	27%	45%
On-Campus	26	12%	19%	69%
The flexible schedule for Online classes is a factor that I value.				
Online Students	41	95%	2%	2%
Hybrid Students	12	75%	0%	25%
On-Campus	26	23%	19%	58%



Respondents Comments

- “I was very pleased with my experience in the MPPA program. It certainly serves the self-motivated student, who is able, in this setting, to set his/her own pace. In my case, that’s generally faster than a classroom setting where I feel limited and ultimately bored.”
- “I feel I would have learned more on campus, but the online courses fit my schedule better.”
- “Online classes allow me to get an excellent education from an excellent school while continuing to work full time in another state.”
- “The online course availability is amazing for students who do not have much free time to commute to class and who prefer to study at their own pace in the comfort of their preferred location.”



Results

Table 3 - Process for Online or On-Campus Classes

	# Surveys	Agree	Neither	Disagree
The class was responsive to my learning needs.				
Online Students	40	61%	15%	25%
Hybrid Students	10	50%	0%	50%
On-Campus	25	100%	0%	0%
The questions posted to respond to in the Online class were clear and understandable.				
Online Students	40	83%	5%	13%
Hybrid Students	10	70%	10%	20%



Results

Table 3 - Process for Online or On-Campus Classes

	# Surveys	Agree	Neither	Disagree
There was good communication with my fellow students on the materials addressed in the material readings in the class				
Online Students	40	75%	13%	13%
Hybrid Students	10	60%	0%	40%
On-Campus	25	92%	8%	0%
The class setting promoted group collaboration on the readings/case studies assigned for class.				
Online Students	40	65%	8%	27%
Hybrid Students	10	30%	0%	70%
On-Campus	25	92%	8%	0%



Results

Table 3 - Process for Online or On-Campus Classes

	# Surveys	Agree	Neither	Disagree
There was adequate interaction with the professor in discussions				
Online Students	40	58%	5%	38%
Hybrid Students	10	40%	10%	50%
On-Campus Students	25	100%	0%	0%
I feel more comfortable posting on the Online Discussion Board than speaking up in class.				
Online Students	40	33%	25%	43%
Hybrid Students	10	40%	10%	50%
I feel more comfortable speaking up in class than posting on the Online Discussion Boards				
On-Campus Students	25	76%	20%	4%



Results

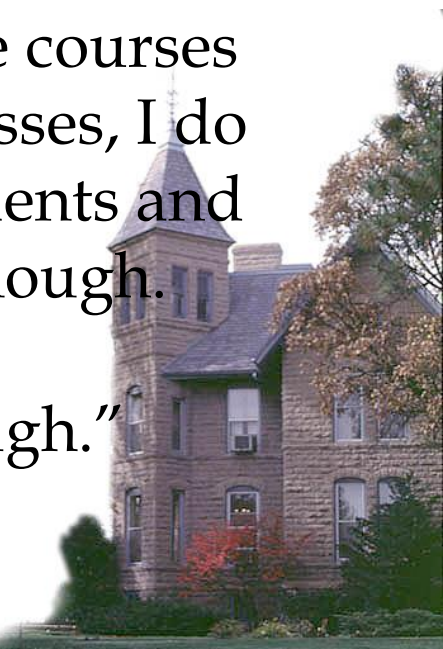
Table 3 - Process for Online or On-Campus Classes

	# Surveys	Agree	Neither	Disagree
I prefer more interactive technology for the Online class other than just postings on the BLACKBOARD web site.				
Online Students	40	75%	15%	11%
Hybrid Students	10	70%	10%	20%
The postings on the BLACKBOARD web site by students were done on a timely basis over the days that the discussion was available.				
Online Students	39	85%	0%	15%
Hybrid Students	10	90%	10%	0%



Student Comments

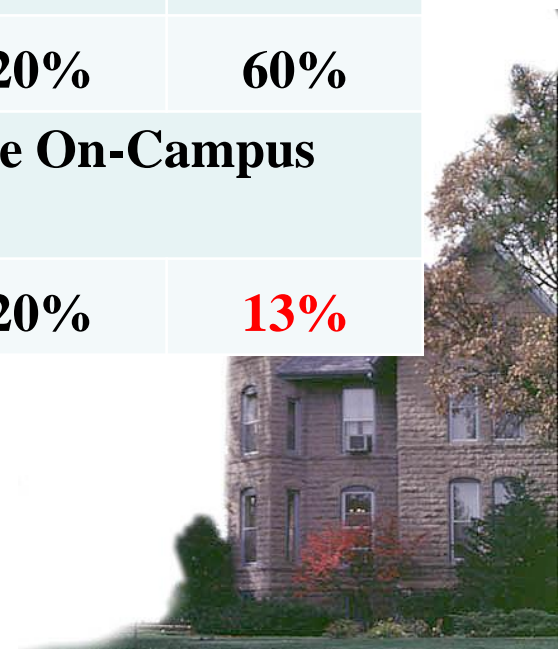
- “The center of learning is the interaction among engaged students, who form an autodidactic collective. Online courses need to do better at facilitating this engagement, because a lot of the usual social inducements are absent in distance learning.”
- “It’s my personal opinion that though online courses do offer a great alternative to on-campus classes, I do not believe that the interaction between students and between student and professor are robust enough. What I mean by robust, I don’t feel that the interaction is as dynamic/spontaneous enough.”



Results

Table 4 - Perceptions of Outcomes of Online and On-Campus Classes

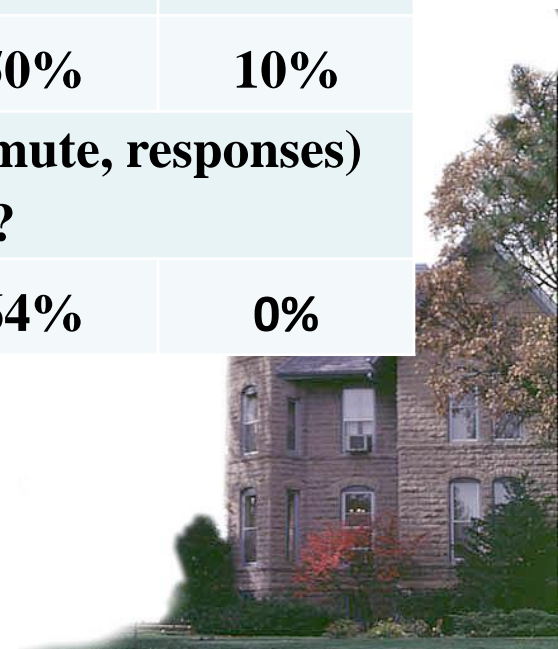
	# Surveys	More	Same	Less
How would you compare the quality of learning in the Online class compared to the traditional in class setting?				
Online Students	37	38%	24%	38%
Hybrid Students	10	20%	20%	60%
How would you compare the quality of learning in the On-Campus class compared to the new Online class setting?				
On-Campus Students	15	67%	20%	13%



Results

Table 4 - Perceptions of Outcomes of Online and On-Campus Classes

	# Surveys	More	Same	Less
Did you spend more/less time in total (readings, commute, responses) for the Online Class than an On-Campus alternative?				
Online Students	37	59%	24%	16%
Hybrid Students	10	40%	50%	10%
Did you spend more/less time in total (readings, commute, responses) for the On-Campus Class than an Online alternative?				
On-Campus Students	14	36%	64%	0%



Results

Table 4 – Perceptions of Outcomes of Online and On-Campus Classes

	# Surveys	Yes	Maybe	Unsure
Should the professor provide a lecture that is captured and posted on the BLACKBOARD web site for student observation?				
Online Students	38	71%	24%	5%
Hybrid Students	10	80%	20%	0%
	# Surveys	Clear	Not Clear	
Is the communication on the expectations of the class clear to the students?				
Online Students	68	93%	8%	
Hybrid Students	10	90%	10%	
On-Campus Students	17	100%	0%	



Results

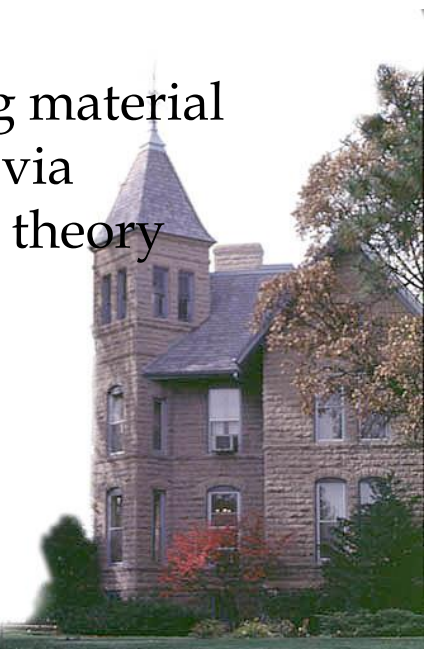
Table 4 – Perceptions of Outcomes of Online and On-Campus Classes

	# Surveys	Increase	Decrease	Neither
Does the class increase, decrease, or neither increase or decrease the motivation to read and analyze the materials assigned?				
Online Students	38	53%	16%	32%
Hybrid Students	10	30%	30%	40%
On-Campus Students	16	69%	0%	31%



Student Comments

- “I think for some (at least me) it allows for the auditory learner to grasp or contextualize the information a bit better.”
- “Some classes could really benefit from a lecture, such as Analytic Methods or Stats, where processes are standard and answers are the same for every student.” “
- Most of the professors are PhDs and have a great deal to offer the class. Their postings are informative and an occasional lecture would offer depth to the courses.”
- “The viewpoint of the professor translates the reading material into unique thought processes that aren’t conveyable via blackboard. I MISS not having my professor take that theory and apply it in a dynamic environment.”



Student Comments

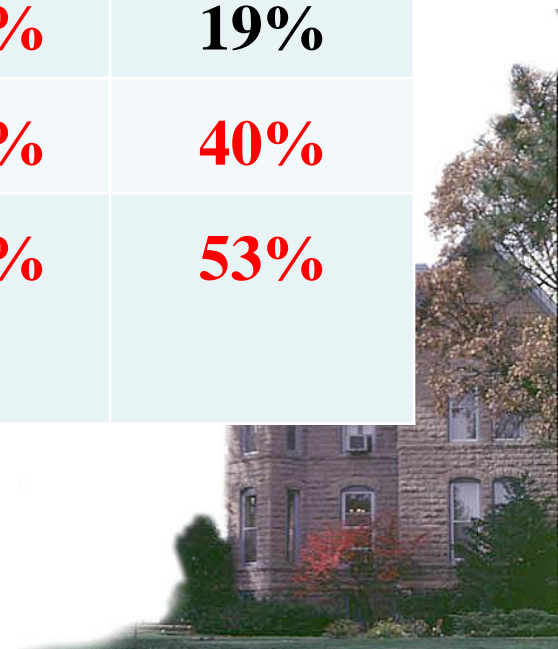
- “After two years in the online program, I feel I was misled when I applied. I thought there would actually be instruction and actual teaching from the teachers. The program has essentially turned out to be an independent study program.”
- “The motivation, reading, etc. isn’t necessarily more in either but the On Campus format encourages more reason to do the reading in order to adequately prepare for lecture, discussion, and any follow up assignments more. Online format prohibits the problem solving and communicative aspect of talking out and rationalizing things in great depth and context because things get lost in translation often.”



Results

Table 5 – Preference for Type of Courses

	# Surveys	All Online	Hybrid	All On- Campus
Which of the following do you favor?				
Online Students	37	46%	35%	19%
Hybrid Students	10	0%	60%	40%
On-Campus Students	17	0%	47%	53%



Student Comments

- , “I would love to be able to mix and match online and on-campus classes.”



Conclusions

- Flexible schedule importance
- Learning style influences the mode desired
- Need for interactive technology
- Blended learning formats most effective



Conclusions

- Full time students like flexibility of schedule and concern for travel time and costs.
- On campus setting still is important to many.
- Hybrid program is increasingly popular.
- Hybrid courses need more research

