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Live Lecture Better Than Video Lecture?

Posted on June 28, 2010 by JimS

(<https://etcjournal.wordpress.com/2008/10/01/jim-shimabukuro/>)



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Yes, according to a study conducted by David N. Figlio, Mark Rush, and Lu Yin, "Is It Live or Is It Internet? Experimental Estimates of the Effects of Online Instruction on Student Learning" (<http://www.nber.org/papers/w16089>)" (National Bureau of Economic Research, June 2010). I'm tempted to say "of course," but for reasons other than those intended by the authors.

Subjects and Procedure: "Students in a large introductory microeconomics course at a major research university were randomly assigned to live lectures versus watching these same lectures in an internet setting, where all other factors (e.g., instruction, supplemental materials) were the same" (abstract).

Conclusion: "Our strongest findings in favor of live instruction are for the relatively low-achieving students, male students, and Hispanic students. These are precisely the students who are more likely to populate the less selective universities and community colleges. These students may well be disadvantaged by the movement to online education and, to the extent that it is the less selective institutions and community colleges that are most fully embracing online education, inadvertently they may be harming a significant portion of their student body" (21).

Unfortunately, based on this report, many will use this argument — in-person live lectures are superior because they are more effective with a wider range of students — to defend traditional live lectures against the encroachment of online learning.

But there are a number of flaws in this study that caution against such a logical leap, and perhaps the most glaring is the use of video recordings of the live lectures in the online treatment. This goes against the grain of conventional wisdom. The literature is saturated with admonitions against transferring F2F (face-to-face) pedagogy into the VLE (virtual learning environment). This imposition of methodology suitable for one medium into a completely different medium is high up on the list of worst practices.

If "low-achieving students, male students, and Hispanic students" don't take very well to video lectures, it doesn't necessarily mean that they won't do well in online courses that *don't* rely solely on recorded lectures. There are other ways to deliver the information contained in live lectures, and online instructors are aware of them. Text-only or audio-only versions of the lecture are options. The audio could be replayed via an iPod during a jog, on the bus, or while snacking. The text version could be read

anywhere, anytime via an iPad or netbook — in a fraction of the time it would take to view the video.

If the online treatment offered students choices, the affected subpopulation might have fared better. For example, the lecture could have been posted in three different formats: text, audio, and video. Given a choice, would low-achieving, male, Hispanic students choose the video? They might, and they might follow up with the text or audio version to ensure mastery. Or they might not and simply choose to read the text version or listen to the audio.

Despite this and other flaws, though, this study is worth reviewing as a resource for further research. The authors have taken the time to discuss the limitations of their investigation and implications for further studies.

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