Transitioning to a More Digitally Focused Course Experience

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Today's educational environment demands a holistic approach — one that fosters vital learning engagement that leads to more positive outcomes.

This report is part of Cengage Learning's broader goal of empowering instructors to promote better outcomes and elevate thinking through increased student engagement.

Students and educators are at the center of our content development process. User-driven product development, with content primarily written and edited by highly qualified educators—ensures only the best resources are introduced to the classroom.

Cengage Learning: engaged with you.

Abstract

Although many instructors and institutions have fully embraced a technology-based approach to teaching, many others may feel limited by their institution's limited resources or their own lack of tech savvy. And yet, many students expect their learning experience to utilize the interactive technologies they use on a regular basis, and report that this leads to a more engaged experience.

To gain perspective on the current state of teaching and technology, Cengage Learning surveyed over one thousand college students and instructors regarding the integration of technology into the classroom.

In this report, you will learn what this research has uncovered regarding instructors' current practices. You will also discover what students expect—and what they experience—when it comes to their instructors' use of technology. The report concludes with recommendations for bridging the gap between what students want and what you can deliver, and also presents a number of ideas that you can use to increase student engagement in your courses.

Survey Details

Cengage Learning's Digital in the Classroom survey was presented to students and college faculty of all institution types. Our polled student and faculty audience come from two- and four-year schools, career and vocational schools, as well as for-profit and not-for-profit institutions. Polled faculty audience roles may range from administrator, professor, associate professor, assistant professor, adjunct professor, lecturer, clinical professor, as well as program directors and many others. Participants were surveyed on their preferences, methods, and observed results regarding the integration of digital technology into the classroom.

What We Know (and What We Don't Know) About Online Learning Today

Institutions of higher learning are increasingly moving towards digital and online methods to extend their reach to potential college students of all backgrounds. To boost their students' engagement, some institutions enlist a number of technologies, from homework solutions to online discussion boards. As a result of this digital shift, the number of students enrolling in partially or fully online classes as well as distance programs or Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) is rising in schools around the United States as well as the world.

College students and college faculty approach online courses or programs considering slightly different sets of expectations as well as a number of "unknowns." Some may expect an online class to be easier, some may be up for an exciting challenge, and others may already be overwhelmed by the idea of learning a new set of technologies in addition to the content covered in each class.

Though it's easy enough to pick up some information by simply reading a website or watching a video, people are embracing more formal settings for online learning in greater and greater numbers. Whether they're enrolling in a MOOC simply to satisfy their curiosity on a topic or they're enrolled in an online degree program at a traditional university, we can see that individuals around the world recognize the power and opportunity afforded by the synergistic relationship between technology and education.

"Variety is the spice to life and I feel that different subjects would stand out more when different techniques are used for different subjects, whether it be a variety of visual aids or activities in class. This would make me remember things for a longer period of time and make things more interesting."

Bethany Bissell
Student, University of Buffalo

Quick Tips for the Transition to Teaching Online

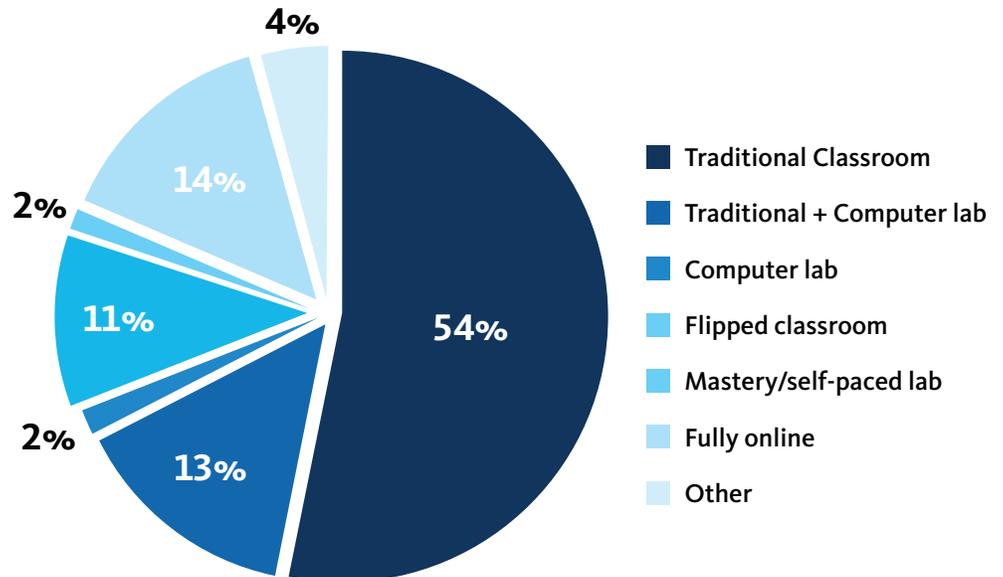If you are making the transition to teaching online, here are some tips:

- Devote time to getting to know and planning your online "classroom"

- Provide your students with well-written instructions for navigating the learning management system (LMS)

- Deliver clearly stated goals and expectations

- Encourage frequent and timely communication

- Utilize dynamic and interactive learning tools

- Be consistent in the rules for grading and submissions

For more tips that can enhance the way you teach online, visit blog.cengage.com.

A Look at the Online Learning Landscape

Did you know that 14% of instructors are now teaching their courses entirely online?

Instructors' primary teaching methods

4%
14%
2%
11%
2%
13%
54%

Legend:
- Traditional Classroom
- Traditional + Computer lab
- Computer lab
- Flipped classroom
- Mastery/self-paced lab
- Fully online
- Other

Instructors' primary delivery methods vary among schools:

- 54% of instructors use the traditional classroom format (lecture based with homework outside class)

- 13% split time between traditional classroom and computer lab

- 2% use a computer lab-based course with no separate lecture

- 11% use a "flipped classroom" (students doing background reading on their own and work on projects and papers in classroom)

- 2% have students work in a mastery or self-paced and computer-assisted lab environment with tutors and instructors used as needed

According to the survey, some instructors are even required by their institution or department to begin teaching online, whether it is their preference or not. If you are not yet part of that growing percentage moving course material online, will you be ready to lead a course online if and when your school should require it?

When it Comes to Learning with Technology, What do *Students* Say They Need and Want?

An unfortunate 22% of college students do not think that their school or department has all the equipment and technology that they need to get the most out of their education. Of the technology that students would like but do not yet have access to, top responses were discussion boards (at 24%), Assessment/Outcomes Reporting Tools (at 19%), and Classroom Response System/Clicker Content (at 17%).

As much as students recognize technology in the classroom and more digital tools as a benefit, they also identify it as a potential distraction. From surfing the Web to distractions from friends, 77% of college students feel that their classmates abuse technology in the classroom in some way. The number one reported offense is texting in the classroom, at an offender rate at 60% of students. Another 59% say students spend time on social media during class and 45% say classmates play games instead of paying attention their lecture or coursework. A surprising percent of college students, 25%, also revealed that classmates use their devices to search for cheating or plagiarism.

Top means of distraction and technology misuse in the classroom
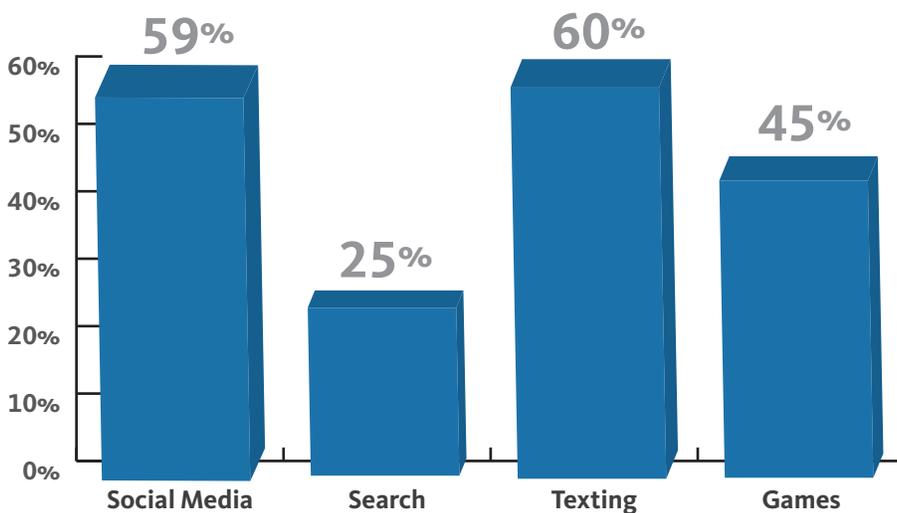
Forty-one percent of students say this misbehavior is primarily due to boredom, and thirty-one percent say it's because, in their opinion, the instructor is not engaging.

> "21st century technology is vital to learn while in the classroom when communicating with one another, and is crucial to know after graduation when pursuing your career."
>
> **Linda Flores**
> Student, Wayland Baptist University

What might instructors do to combat these distractions and increase the level of student engagement in their courses? Eighty percent of college students say that the move towards implementing digital technologies in the classroom has increased their academic performance and seventy-seven percent even say it has improved their engagement with their courses. Fewer than 1% reported it has decreased performance and engagement.

Students find the most effective uses of technology to be for their daily homework assignments (at 73% of students), for online research (at 44%), and for testing and examinations (at 37%). The least effective are viewed to be attempting to hold online class sessions and web-based projects.
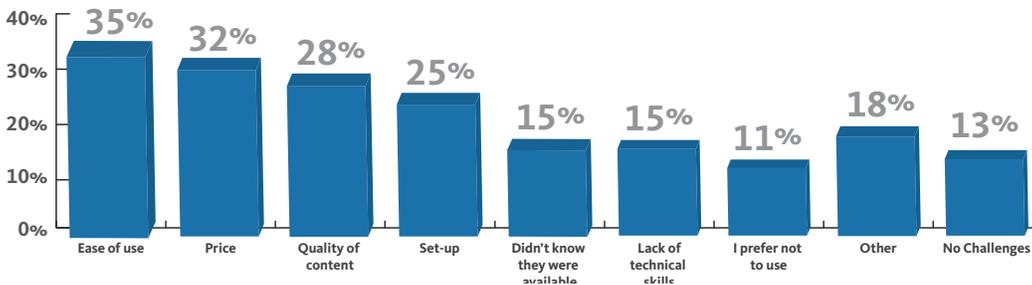
Ten percent of instructors report that they still do not use any form of digital technology in or outside of their classroom, and at 77%, the largest majority of instructors report that the technology they do use is PowerPoint®. Sounds surprising? Or does this sound familiar?

Just How Wide is the Gap Between Students' Expectations and Their Experiences with Technology in the Classroom?

In today's tech-saturated world, students have come to expect a dynamic and interactive experience that puts the power to learn, investigate, and communicate readily within their grasps; but given what we've observed in our data, they aren't encountering that same level of dynamism or interactivity in most of their classes.

The majority of students polled assume that their instructors' biggest barriers to implementing more engaging classroom techniques is lack of available time, while most instructors report that ease of use of digital content options is a top concern (35%) as well as simply the price of these techniques and tools (32%).

Biggest challenges preventing digital content adoption/assignment

While some students find that their school or department does not have all the equipment and technology that they need, 52% of instructors report that the online and digital content they do have access to thus far has improved student academic performance and 51% report that it has also improved student engagement. With these kind of numbers, it makes sense to investigate the opportunities that you do have to increase technology usage in your courses, and determine which learning solutions can help you empower your students to see increased engagement and success in your courses.

How Do You Bridge the Gap Between What Students Want and What You Can Deliver?

First, we might ask: what have other instructors identified as key factors in increasing student success? Instructors say that the most effective activities and resources in helping their students achieve better grades in their courses are writing assignments, access to a reliable research database, and peer review tools. If you're seeking a few ways to integrate more of these effective tools into your own courses, consider the following points:

- You may already recognize the value of writing assignments and the work they can do to strengthen students' critical thinking skills, but you may feel too busy to add yet another paper to your own stack of items to grade. If that's true for you, seek a learning solution (such as Cengage Learning's Write Experience) that offers individual attention and instant feedback, as well as multiple revision opportunities.

Digital tools: enabling a potential distraction in the classroom?

While digital tools in the classroom and as a part of the overall course experience do encourage students to be online and potentially distracted by other detractors, students report that their primary distraction is actually boredom, due to not being engaged (not the presence of technology or being online itself).

Addressing student engagement is a surefire way to combat students misusing technology, and students report that digital technologies in the classroom increases their engagement.

Why would you encourage your instructors to require less out-of-class work?

"That's why we go to school is to learn, not take stuff home to do when people are very busy."

Kassandra Rapp
Student, Glendale Community College

Why would you encourage your instructors to provide more instant feedback on your progress?

"Because it pushes you to do better sooner rather than finding out at the end of the semester when it may be too late."

Valarie Guerra
Student, Fullerton College

- Get your students into your campus library! In addition to offering online databases filled with reliable research materials, this invaluable institution may also offer information literacy sessions that teach and train students on such topics as employing proper search techniques, evaluating information, using specialized online databases, and more. You may be able to work with your campus library staff to develop a session that's tailored to the needs of your class. Students seeking more help with research? They could also benefit from a personal subscription to Questia, an online research library with over nine million books and articles--plus research tools, tutorials, and more.

- Students can conduct online peer reviews in a number of ways. The simplest: exchange documents via e-mail, and use the "track changes" feature in the word-processing program to insert notes, edits, and comments. If you teach online, they can also use your course's discussion board, a web-conferencing tool, or an instant messaging system to exchange thoughts and ideas. Many peer-review tools are also built into Cengage Learning's Enhanced InSite.

## Ways You Can Start Building Student Engagement Today

Over at the Engaging Minds blog, we polled our audience to discover what methods help increase student engagement in their classrooms.

- Over half of our 65 respondents use group projects (55%) and case studies (54%).

- Icebreaker activities and games for learning are implemented in 45% of our respondents' courses.

It seems as though the best solution is to combine a number of engaging activities in every classroom. Here's how our other results measured up in boosting engagement:

- Online discussion forums (32%)

- Simulations (20%)

- Podcast or video lectures (20%)

- Role-playing activities (17%)

- Polls and "clicker" activities (17%)

- Social media activities (12%)

Top student engagement methods
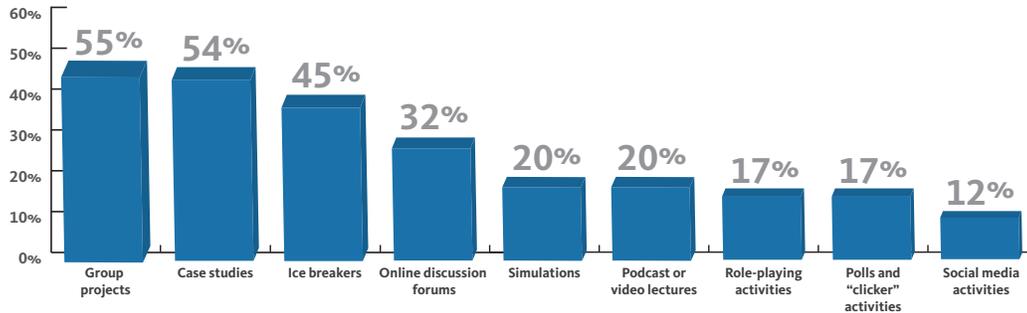
Meanwhile, in a survey that Cengage Learning recently distributed to students, we asked, "How do your professors get you engaged in your classes?" Here are just a few of their responses:

- "Class discussion is really the best way professors get students involved. It is unfortunate however that many professors merely lecture, which is not very engaging at all."

- "The way in which they communicate—if we have activities, making the work tangible."

- "By talking about things I relate to."

- "I had some teachers break the class into small groups to discuss and debate something we might be learning."

- "They ask questions, ask for volunteers for demonstrations and randomly call on you to answer a question, which keeps me alert and focused."

Both instructors and students regard communication as an essential part of what sparks and maintains engagement in a course. They also appreciate topics that are timely and relevant to their lives and interests.

Seeking a learning solution for your course?

Review the white papers, success stories, and case studies at Engaging Minds, Cengage Learning's blog.

You'll find numerous testimonials and research-backed studies describing the strength of Cengage Learning solutions, and you'll discover how they've helped numerous instructors increase learner engagement and foster improved outcomes.

Engagement fosters understanding

When you know what students respond to, and use those methods to reinforce what you are teaching, their subject mastery will grow organically.

And tools like homework aids, instant feedback, self-assessment and practice quizzes help learners advance at their own pace.

Understanding improves outcomes

When students are better prepared, learning outcomes increase and class retention improves. Our learning solutions demonstrate solid results in improving student performance while streamlining your workload.

Ready to Make the Transition? Cengage Learning Stands Ready to Engage With You

For those instructors searching for the latest methods of boosting engagement within their classroom and information on implementing a more digital focused course experience, Cengage Learning offers plenty of resources! We're set on delivering white-glove service that helps ensure that you and your students are successful in your courses.

Our Peer-to-Peer Faculty Development & Consulting team frequently offers interactive online presentations, where you can discover and develop new teaching strategies. You can also meet up with them at their collaborative conferences, which offer unique opportunities for you to network with colleagues and gather exciting teaching ideas that you can implement in your classroom. And, at their Professional Online Development Portal, you'll find a rich selection of self-paced modules, recorded workshops, and other resources designed to help you hone your ability to engage your students and foster their success.

If you're adopting a Cengage Learning solution, we're available to help you make the transition and get the most out of your experience with our products:

- Our Digital Solution Coordinators are a dedicated team of experts providing proactive, ongoing support that includes course set-up, usage statistics, and regular check-ins.

- Implementation & Training Specialists are also available to consult with you, as well as with your school's IT staff and LMS administrators, to determine the best Cengage Learning solution for your course--and then help you implement that solution to its fullest effect.

- Technology Power Users are a community of instructors who are well-versed in using a variety of Cengage Learning solutions in their courses. They offer peer-to-peer consultation and training and share their best practices for getting the most out of our technology resources.

We're with you every step of the way. Learn more about Cengage Learning's Engagement Services at www.cengage.com/services.

Now it's Your Turn: Engage With Us!
Share Your Ideas and Experiences

Each one of us at Cengage Learning wants to be engaged with you. We value your stories and want to know how you've successfully achieved your goals. We'd also love to hear the suggestions you may have for others who are seeking to implement technology solutions in their classrooms.

Do you teach online? What are some of the most common reasons your students were motivated to enroll in your course or program? What methods have you found for successful online learning (or teaching)? Send your answers to **thinktank@cengage.com,** or join the conversation at the Engaging Minds blog.

Join the conversation! Engage with our education community:

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