Paper Mills, Pornography, and Pirating: College Students and the Internet

A survey at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania reveals that students use the Internet for sometimes unethical purposes

By **Tim Rumbough**

Most students have discovered the educational benefits of the Internet. However, many negative aspects of the Internet are now coming to light. The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which college students use the potentially controversial, and even illegal, aspects of the Internet.

Methodology

A total of 985 students at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, a public university with 7,500 students, used class time to complete a 55-item survey that determined how they use the Internet (World Wide Web, Internet Relay Chat, e-mail, and instant messaging) for a variety of controversial purposes. Respondents were enrolled in psychology, art, communication, geography, theater, and business courses. Topics surveyed include whether and how students use the Internet for academic cheating, fake e-mail, inappropriate e-mail, and improper use of copyrighted materials. In addition, subjects answered questions about their habits of accessing Web sites involving topics such as fake IDs, illegal drugs, illegal weapons, pornography, racism, and gambling.

Survey Results

More than 97 percent of the respondents reported that they have used the Internet for educational purposes.

However, other results indicate that

■ 17 percent used the Internet to cheat on class assignments (for example, copying and pasting Web sites to a term paper, e-mailing information about tests, and so on).

■ 3 percent used the Internet to pur-chase a paper from an online paper mill.

■ 15 percent have e-mailed a made-up excuse to a professor to have an absence excused.

■ 38 percent have accessed pornography Web sites.

- 9 percent have accessed sites involving illegal drugs.
- 5 percent have accessed Internet sites describing how to manufacture illegal weapons.
- 2 percent manufactured a fake ID based on information found on the Internet.
- 18 percent accessed someone else's e-mail account without the other person's knowledge.
- 9 percent sent a threatening e-mail message to someone.
- 62 percent have used Napster or similar programs to download music (MP3 files) from the Internet.
- 2 percent think that they may be addicted to online gambling.
- 4 percent have used the university's computers to download pirated software.

- 29 percent have used the university's computers to play computer games.
- 16 percent consider themselves to be addicted to the Internet.
- 15 percent support the idea of having universities limit students' access to controversial Web sites.

Conclusions

The results of this study should help administrators, faculty, and staff recognize that their campus networks are being used for nonacademic purposes. Currently, some institutions have formal policies outlining appropriate Internet usage, while other institutions take a hands-off approach. Opponents of limiting access or blocking controversial Web sites often cite academic freedom or freedom of speech for not interfering with how students use the Internet.

Clearly there are Internet controversies — not only about content, but also about how to handle the filtering or regulate the content. Results from this survey establish that many students regularly use the Internet in controversial ways. The results of this study can help us understand how our students use the Internet. The data has implications for administrators, educators, and society.

The complete article is available online at <http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/CSD1618.pdf>. *e*

Tim Rumbough (rumbough@bloomu.edu) is Associate Professor in the Department of Communication Studies & Theatre Arts at Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania in Bloomsburg.

Evaluating Distributed Learning at Metropolitan Universities

Researchers explore student and faculty issues in courses with varying degrees of Web presence, along with effective teaching and learning

By **Charles Dziuban** and **Patsy Moskal**

For the past six years, a team of investigators at the University of Central Florida's (UCF's) Research Initiative for Teaching Effectiveness (RITE) have examined student and faculty issues in the online environment, focusing on maintaining a sustainable and objective evaluation. Assessment results must be relevant to the initiative and provide useful information to faculty, students, and university administrators.

This article summarizes results from UCF's ongoing distributed learning impact evaluation, previously published in *Metropolitan Universities*.[1] Obtain additional information on RITE activities at UCF on the Web <http://pegasus.cc.ucf.edu/~ rite>.

The Research Protocol

We are exploring both student and faculty issues in courses that UCF offers with varying degrees of Web presence: fully online, Web-enhanced with reduced face-to-face class time, and Web-enhanced with no reduced seat time. Investigators compare student success and withdrawal rates in Web courses to their face-to-face counterparts. They also examine student cognitive style using measurement protocols developed and validated during more than 12 years of research at UCF. Finally, they examine and document changes in approaches to learning as students transition to the online environment.

As the distributed learning initiative evolves, researchers examine the impact of online teaching on faculty's academic role. This line of investigation includes examining perceived workload and class interaction in online courses compared with similar face-to-face sections. Faculty also discuss changes in their personal theories of teaching after they experience the online environment.

Both students and faculty provide input about their perceptions of Web course strengths and weaknesses, and determine if they would attempt this mode again. The evaluators also solicit success strategies and advice from students and faculty to use as resources for their new online peers.

Probably the most important research component at UCF involves individual faculty research on effective teaching