

2010 Student Technology Survey

Student Life Research & Assessment

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INTRODUCTION

The 2010 Student Technology Use Survey was conducted at The Ohio State University, Columbus Campus in March of 2010. This was the second Student Technology Use Survey administered in the past two years; the first was offered in November, 2008.

The intent of the 2010 survey was to follow up on the 2008 survey by asking students how they use some electronic technologies and their preferences, particularly as they relate to students' university experience. The questions were developed by the Student Life Information Technology department in consultation with the Research and Assessment department. Some questions remained the same, while new questions were developed to explore areas suggested by analysis of the 2008 results. The trends and opinions may help departments consider how – through which technologies – they will communicate with students. They also suggest areas of interest for future studies.

METHODOLOGY

In March, 2010, a stratified proportionate random sampling technique was used to select 5,015 students to invite to take the survey. The stratification was based on academic class (undergraduates, years 1-4; graduate students; and professional graduate students). The proportion for each class was based on the entire population; all Columbus-campus students enrolled in March of 2010 were considered. The survey was administered online; each potential respondent was sent a URL to the survey. The response rate was 18.5 %; 927 students responded.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Among the respondents, 70.2% were undergraduates, 23% graduate students, and 6.8% were graduate professional students. This differs somewhat from the Winter, 2010, Columbus campus student population, in which 75% were undergraduates, 18% were graduate students, and 6.1% were professional students. In regards to the age distribution among the respondents, 64% were 18-23, 26% were 24-29, and 10% were 30 years old or older.

Although the Columbus campus gender-distribution ratio during March, 2010, was 48.4% females to 51.6% males, the ratio of survey respondents was 55.6% females to 44.4% males. Ethnicity representation was very similar between the pool of respondents and the general campus population: 25.2% of respondents were non-White (25.5% in the campus population) and 74.8% were White (74.49% on campus).

FINDINGS

TECHNOLOGICAL EXPERTISE

The survey asked students to report their personal sense of their technological expertise. The choices were:

- Novice - I can barely turn my computer on and check my e-mail.
- Competent - I do what I need to get by, but I don't often know how it works.
- Advanced - I might not be a propeller head, but if it can be done using technology I can usually figure it out
- Expert - At family reunions everyone asks me computer questions.

The majority of students (56%) report that their expertise is advanced, with 30.1% report they are competent. Far fewer (13.5%) report that they are expert and very few (.2%) characterize themselves as

novice. These findings are similar to the 2008 survey, in which 53.2% reported as advanced, 34.9% as competent, 11.5% as expert, and .4% as novice.

These ratios hold when looking at ethnicity (White and Other) or by age ranges (18-23, 23-29, 30+).

These ratios do not, however, represent how men and women describe themselves. A much higher percentage of men than women self-report as "expert;" far more women than men report themselves as "competent."

Technical Proficiency by Gender

Self-Reported Expertise	Women	Men	Total
Expert	4.1%	25.3%	15.5%
Advanced	53.3%	59.6%	56.1%
Competent	42.2%	15.1%	30.2%
Novice	0.4%	0.0%	0.2%

COMMUNICATIONS FROM THE UNIVERSITY

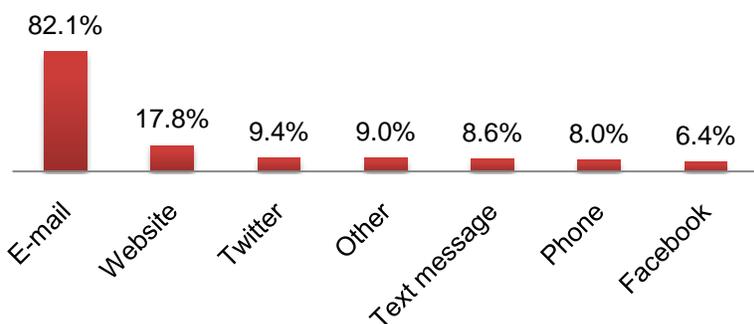
Given the rapid changes in technologies, there is interest among departments in how students prefer that the University contact them. Only one question asked about these communications in the 2008 survey; three questions addressed this issue in 2010 in order to see if students showed different preferences based on the type of information being sent out. The choices included the following:

- Information about a student's account, academic schedule (examples of messages about the business of attending the University)
- General updates about the University
- Information about events or activities

There were seven possibilities offered: e-mail, phone, text message, website, Facebook, Twitter, or other. Students were asked to rank their preferences from 1 (most important) to 7 (least); they were able to choose the same rank for more than one option.

Students chose e-mail and website consistently as their top two choices, with all other options ranging much lower. Students expressed important nuances, however, as shown in the answers to the three questions.

How would you like OSU to communicate with you for information about your *account, academic schedule, etc?**



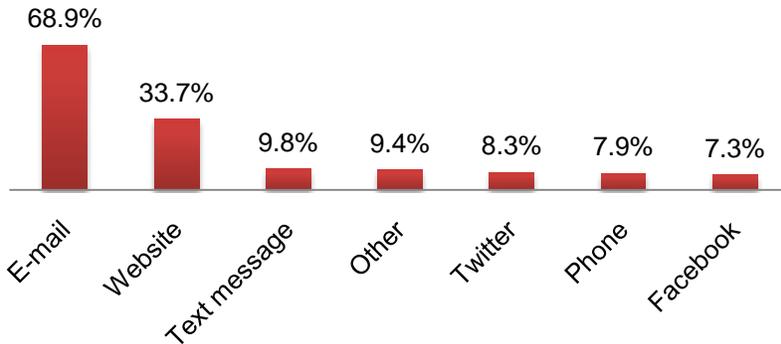
ACCOUNTS, ACADEMIC SCHEDULES

#1: Email 82%
#2: Website, 17.8%

Everything else, less than 10%

*Students could choose a rank for more than one option, so percentages do not add up to 100

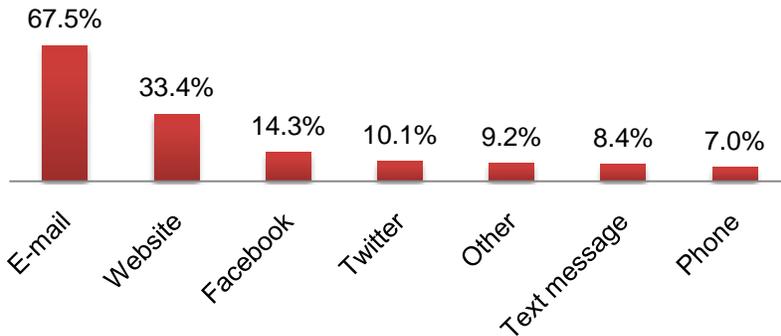
How would you like OSU to communicate with you for information about *general updates about the university*?*



GENERAL UPDATES
 #1: Email, 68.9%
 #2: Website, 33.7%
 Everything else, less than 10%

*Students could choose a rank for more than one option, so percentages do not add up to 100

How would you like OSU to communicate with you for information about *events and activities*?*



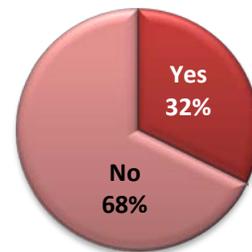
EVENTS & ACTIVITIES
 #1: Email, 67.5%
 #2: Website, 33.4%
 #3: Facebook, 14.3%
 Everything else, 10.1% or lower

*Students could choose a rank for more than one option, so percentages do not add up to 100

SMARTPHONES

There is interest in whether students use "smartphones" - phones that offer access to the Internet and that run small applications. If a substantial number of students use smartphones, departments may decide to create websites that display well on mobile phones as well as on computers. Departments may find there is a need for small applications, written for these phones, with content that serves students. The 2010 survey results show that nearly one-third of respondents own smartphones.

Do you own a smartphone (Blackberry, iPhone, etc.)



SOCIAL NETWORKING USE

Although students are clear that they strongly prefer the University to communicate with them through e-mail and websites, they report that they are very active on social networking websites. Students were asked how often they use several popular social media sites. Over 70% report that they visit Facebook at least once a day.

Please indicate how frequently you use the following technologies

	5 or more times/day	At least 1-4 times/day	At least once a week	At least once a month	Never
Use/visit Facebook	35.70%	37.40%	12.40%	6.90%	7.00%
Use/visit MySpace	0.60%	2.00%	4.20%	9.40%	83.10%
Use/visit Twitter	3.10%	3.50%	5.10%	7.90%	79.70%
Use/visit YouTube	8.20%	21.80%	42.40%	22.80%	3.90%

WEBSITE INFORMATION DISPLAY

Because students want to use websites for information, it is of interest to know what sorts of information-display techniques they prefer. When asked about the form in which content should be displayed, students indicated different choices, depending on the type of information at the site. In all cases, students could choose a rank for more than one option, so percentages do not add up to 100.

Rank the content you prefer on a university website that you might go to for *event or involvement information* (such as the Union or the Wexner Center websites)?

- | | |
|-------------|-------|
| 1. Text | 55.3% |
| 2. Images | 44.9% |
| 3. Video | 22.5% |
| 4. Podcasts | 11.2% |

EVENT INFORMATION
Students prefer text, with images a close second choice. There is some interest in video.

Rank the content you prefer on a university website that you might go to for *official business* (such as a college website, the Financial Aid Office, or the Student Health Center sites)

- | | |
|-------------|-------|
| 1. Text | 74.9% |
| 2. Images | 25.2% |
| 3. Podcasts | 9.4% |
| 4. Video | 8.7% |

OFFICIAL BUSINESS
Students strongly prefer text; images run a distant second.

IMPLICATIONS

GENDER AND TECHNOLOGICAL EXPERTISE

Students report that they are fairly technologically savvy, a trait that remains constant whether we look at the aggregate, at ethnicity, or at age breakdowns. With women reporting significantly less technical expertise than do men, questions arise about whether men and women have, in fact, similar expertise but for social reasons self-report differently. Related questions are whether women do, in fact, generally have less expertise, and if so, what some reasons might be – from different exposure and training to that of less interest.

COMMUNICATIONS WITH STUDENTS

Students are clear that e-mail is their preferred method of being contacted by the University for most communications, although for some forms of information they would also visit University websites. While students seem uninterested in departments using Facebook or other social media sites to convey information about accounts, classes, or general university information, students might look for events or activities information on Facebook.

SMARTPHONES

Although a minority of students report having smartphones, it is a substantial minority; nearly one-third of the survey respondents. A large study of undergraduates, published by the Educause Center for Applied Research¹, found in 2008 that 51.2% of respondents owned Internet-enabled devices - perhaps a more descriptive designation for such technology. These numbers suggest that departments might well consider how their websites display on mobile devices and also investigate the development of applications that provide information that students report that they want.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Students report being active on social media sites – particularly Facebook – with use of YouTube as a less frequent second choice. Despite the prevalence of graphics on these social media sites, students are clear that much of the information they seek from the University they prefer be delivered in a textual format - whether it is via e-mail or on a web site.

FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Qualitative research inquiries that focus on communication issues might reveal more information about why students are heavily involved in social networking sites but prefer that the University communicate with them through e-mail. A related exploration could shed light on how and when students use e-mail.

Other qualitative research could be done in relation to website format and content. Why is text preferred on University websites? Given the continuing development of mobile computing devices, how often do students use these technologies to access websites, and what sorts of options would they prefer?

Such research might also be a means of exploring the type of information content students would like to find on University websites and when students would most likely use a website or would appreciate information from Student Life departments.

¹ Smith, S.D.; Salaway, G., and Borreson Caruso, J. (2008). *The ECAR study of undergraduate students and information technology, 2009*. Boulder, Co.: Educause.