# COMPONENTS OF A FACULTY WEB SITE

[Personalizing the Distance Learning Relationship:
Perceptions of the Relative Importance of Faculty Web Site Components]

By B. JEAN MANDERNACH, AMBER DAILEY AND EMILY DONNELLI
Park University

## ABSTRACT

*Instructors teaching in the online classroom are faced with the unique challenge of creating a personalized relationship in a virtual environment that lacks the traditional outlets for establishing an informal connection with students. While there are various means of facilitating the online student-teacher relationship, faculty Web pages are often used as a simple, low-cost means of sharing information about an instructor's personal life (including interests, hobbies, family, etc). The purpose of the current study was to examine students' perception of the relative importance of various types of information placed on a faculty Web page. It was hypothesized that online students would desire more personalized content on an instructor's Web page as these students would lack the face-to-face, informal interactions that typically reveal this type of information. Contrasting the hypothesis, this study found online students and face-to-face students placed little importance on the personalized components of a faculty Web site. Rather, regardless of educational delivery format, students placed high importance on basic contact and course-specific information, with very little importance on an instructor's personal information.*

Web-based learning has become an established topic in discussions of modern teaching and learning. In the emerging age of higher education, technology is rapidly transforming the manner in which information is stored, transmitted, and retrieved (Apps, 1994). As technology functions to enable student learning in ways not previously possible, "effective integration of technology is achieved when students are able to select technology tools to help them obtain information in a timely manner, analyze and synthesize the information, and present it professionally" (Kelly, 2000). Given this potential, traditional classrooms increasingly include technology to infuse and enhance learning with supplemental material and resources through online Web pages, and fully online courses and degree programs have become commonplace on the landscape of higher education. Learning communities now extend beyond the four walls of a classroom to embrace the virtual domain of cyberspace. Burgeoning faculty interest in creating Web sites calls for resources that not only support faculty in planning and creating sites but that also help them critically examine learner needs in relationship to Web site content. Although there is much literature on Web site/page design for educators, little research exists that represents the learner perspective, both face-to-face and online, leaving a void regarding student perceptions of faculty Web pages.

According to Dehoney and Reeves (2003), faculty Web page authors realize numerous pedagogical benefits: among others, greater engagement of students during lectures, improved use of class time, and increased student/instructor communication (2003). Cohn (n.d.) agrees, and reports accessibility to course material in the online environment facilitates student interconnectivity with classmates, the instructor, outside experts and Internet research materials. While these benefits of course Web pages suggest their pedagogical efficacy, often "faculty Web pages fall short of what faculty and students think should be on such sites" (Palmiter, 2003). As faculty support traditional classrooms with online supplemental materials, more information is needed to guide their

efforts and ensure effectiveness for their student audience. Likewise, online faculty must consider the perceptions of online students in order to ensure that their Web sites have the most resonance for that unique user group. The ultimate goal is to work toward establishing this technology as an integral component of how the classroom functions, as accessible and relevant to students as all other classroom tools (Kelly, 2000).

### Face-to-face Student Perceptions of Web Page Design: Discussion and Implications for Faculty

Little research has evaluated student perceptions of faculty Web pages and further analysis is needed to guide faculty in effectively using this technology to supplement the face-to-face classroom. According to a recent survey by Palmiter and Renjilian (2003), faculty and students agree the following elements should be included on faculty Web sites for a primary audience of face-to-face students:

- an email address,
- office hours,
- telephone number,
- course syllabi,
- a list of courses offered,
- a list of research interests,
- a description of educational background,
- links both within and outside of the institution,
- a description of professional experience,
- a list of publications,
- academic advising information,
- a list of professional memberships,
- and a picture of the faculty member (Palmiter Jr., 2003).

While faculty and students agree upon the common elements in the bulleted list above, perceptions vary regarding the inclusion of faculty rank and other information that could be considered ancillary to course content. In another study (McKenna, 1999) found lecture notes, however, to be the most frequently requested information for a professor to add to the course Web page along with "required information such as homework assignments or the schedule of readings". Both studies acknowledged "required information" as most useful for students, with what might be considered enrichment material having only a limited audience. This emphasis on required or curriculum-specific information over supplemental information (i.e. faculty rank and bio) reflects the assumption that community building between faculty and students happens in the face-to-face classroom.

Another source for guidance regarding learner-centered course Web page components is examining students' use of the Internet outside of a particular course. The online environment also provides a venue for students' recreational and educational purposes. The majority of students, more than 90% surveyed, use the Internet for recreational Web surfing and to research assignments for class (McKenna, 1999). This information reinforces the importance of faculty recognizing that students will only utilize links on the course Web page to start their research when those links are very explicitly tied to the assignment. Additional research by Rankin (2000) found faculty Web pages failed to provide links to departmental, institutional, or administrative Web resources and suggest providing such links to the course and course-related material. Therefore, from the face-to-face student perspective, it is recommended that faculty Web pages provide links that are explicitly related to assignments, research agendas, and in context of course-related material.

Many faculty struggle to determine whether a course Web page should be supplemental, or a required and fully integrated component of their face-to-face course. Following the survey results which found a higher student use rate if a course Web site was required for assignments and/or distribution of information McKenna (1999) concluded that effective course Web site are a required

component of course curriculum. That conclusion considered, potential student challenges in the area of access to and guidance concerning course Web pages must be addressed. McKenna (1999) recommends providing explicit instructions on the syllabus about using the course Web site and clearly identifying computer requirements for the course Web pages (to avoid excessive download time or lack of software to view specialized information formats). Creating and maintaining a course Web page is a "work in progress" and Leibowitz (1999) adds that learner feedback about Web sites should be sought constantly through means as simple as a link on the bottom of every screen asking, "Did you find what you were looking for on this page?" Student feedback can provide insight to help organize and present material in a meaningful manner to the intended audience.

### Online Student Perceptions of Web Page Design: Discussion and Implications for Faculty

As indicated above, there is limited research on the role, function and value of faculty Web pages. Even more limited is available information gleaned exclusively from students who take courses online. In the traditional classroom environment, students have personalized contact with an instructor and utilize the faculty Web page as a supplement to their "live" experience as indicated by the lack of emphasis placed on instructor-related (v. curriculum-related) components. In contrast, students in an online classroom have no direct, in-person contact with their instructors and must rely on alternate information sources in order to build community. As such, it can be assumed that online students have different desires and needs in relation to the information provided on a faculty Web page. Due to the limited direct contact with instructors, online students are assumed to utilize a faculty's Web page as a means of gaining familiarity and establishing a more personalized understanding of their instructor.

Research supports the reality that students are more motivated to attend class if they find the instructor or course material interesting (Gump, 2004). Faculty can encourage student interest by conveying: 1) *competence* through content expertise, affect for students, and verbal fluency; 2) *character* through immediacy, flexibility, promotion of understanding, and trustworthiness; and 3) *caring* through responsiveness, accommodation, and accessibility (Myers & Bryant, 2004). In the online environment, expressing such attributes may be more challenging. Research results (Hasler-Waters & Napier, 2002) reveal that getting acquainted in the online environment involves more information and disclosure than in traditional environments. According to Hasler-Waters and Napier (2002), establishing an online community "involves sharing cultural information which includes sharing personal beliefs, values, assumptions, and opinions; and personal information that includes sharing interests, hobbies, work life, family life, hours of availability."

The study presented below examines differences between traditional, face-to-face and online students in the relative importance of information available on a faculty Web page. It is hypothesized that online students will place more importance on the inclusion of personal information (such as instructor's photo, teaching philosophy, personal interests, family information, personal statement, and personal links) than will students in the face-to-face classroom.

## METHOD

### Participants

Eight hundred six participants from a hybrid university in the Midwest completed an online survey. The target hybrid university is composed of a traditional main campus,

numerous satellite campuses and an online learning program. Of the total survey responses, 86 responses were eliminated due to failure to provide necessary information concerning participants' education delivery format (online or face-to-face); an additional 40 responses were eliminated from final analysis due to majority of coursework being completed in an alternate delivery format (correspondence or independent study).

The remaining 680 participant responses were included for analysis in the study. Participants were divided into two groups (online and face-to-face) based upon the delivery format of the majority of the coursework for their current degree program; the resultant groups included 266 face-to-face students and 414 online students.

| | Face-to-Face | Online | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Age | 32.52 | 32.02 | 32.32 |
| GPA | 2.02 | 1.97 | 1.99 |
| Comfort with Internet | 8.75 | 9.44 | 9.17 |

Table 1: *Mean age, GPA, and computer comfort level by group.*

Table 1 shows the mean age, GPA, and computer comfort level by group. Regardless of the group, all students indicated a high level of comfort with computers (computer comfort level measured on a self-report scale of 1 to 10 with 10 indicating extreme comfort with computers).

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 259 |
| | Female | 422 |
| Ethnic Background | White | 473 |
| | Black | 99 |
| | Hispanic | 67 |
| | Asian | 13 |
| | Native American | 4 |
| | Other | 26 |
| Year in School | Freshman | 48 |
| | Sophomore | 103 |
| | Junior | 194 |
| | Senior | 266 |
| | Other | 71 |
| Academic Status | Nondegree-seeking undergraduate | 19 |
| | Nondegree-seeking graduate | 6 |
| | Seeking associates degree | 33 |
| | Seeking bachelors degree | 592 |
| | Seeking graduate degree | 30 |

Table 2: *Distribution of gender, ethnic background year in school, and academic status*

The distribution of gender, ethnic background, year in school, and academic status is represented in Table 2.

## Procedure

An email invitation to participate in a survey targeting student perceptions of faculty Web pages was sent to all students. Students electing to complete the survey were redirected to a secure Web site for survey completion. All individuals who completed the survey were entered into a random drawing for $100. In order to ensure anonymity, respondents' names were submitted to a separate file that was not linked to survey responses. The survey link remained active for one month. At the completion of the survey, the active link was disabled and an email debriefing was sent to all respondents.

## Materials

The online survey consisted of 14 demographic questions, two open-ended response items and 33 Likert-type items geared toward measuring the importance of various Web page components. The instructions to the Likert-type questions stated, "The following items may be found on an instructor's Web site. For each of the items, please indicate how important it would be for the item to appear on the Web site." Respondents rated each item from 1 (not important) to 5 (extremely important). The 33 items were based upon the research by Palmiter and Renjilian (2003); the items can be categorized according to the type of information provided: basic contact, instructor professional, instructor personal, course-specific, and general academic.

| Instructor Professional | Instructor Personal | Course-Specific | General Academic | Basic Contact | Miscellaneous |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ? instructor's academic rank<br>? instructor's educational background<br>? list of courses taught by this instructor<br>? list of publications<br>? office hours<br>? professional experience<br>? professional memberships<br>? research interests<br>? resume<br>? teaching experience | ? family information<br>? personal interests<br>? personal links<br>? personal statement or quote<br>? picture of the professor<br>? video or audio clips | ? course calendar<br>? lecture notes<br>? powerpoint presentations<br>? samples of student work<br>? syllabi | ? general academic advising<br>? links outside the institution<br>? links within the institution<br>? online articles or newsletters<br>? online research studies<br>? results of research<br>? student career information | ? email address<br>? instructor's name<br>? telephone number | ? bulletin board or discussion thread<br>? interesting graphics |

Table 3: *Web site component items grouped by information type*

Table 3 provides a complete list of Web site component items grouped by information type.

## RESULTS

Differences between online and face-to-face students' perceptions in the importance of faculty Web site components were analyzed via a series of one-way, between-group ANOVAs. Results indicated a general agreement in the importance of a core set of Web site components, regardless of education delivery format (see Table 4 for the means and standard deviations of each component by group).

| | Face-to-Face | | Online | | Total | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. | Mean | Std. Dev. |
| General academic advising information | 3.85 | 1.108 | 4.06 | 0.976 | 3.98 | 1.034 |
| Instructor's academic rank | 3.15 | 1.133 | 3.15 | 1.141 | 3.15 | 1.137 |
| Bulletin board or discussion thread | 4.17 | 0.934 | 4.34 | 0.935 | 4.28 | 0.938 |
| Course calendar | 4.52 | 0.701 | 4.58 | 0.716 | 4.56 | 0.710 |
| Instructor's educational background | 3.42 | 0.973 | 3.47 | 1.041 | 3.45 | 1.014 |
| Email address | 4.69 | 0.619 | 4.73 | 0.575 | 4.71 | 0.593 |
| Family information | 1.97 | 1.046 | 2.10 | 1.099 | 2.05 | 1.080 |
| Instructor's name | 4.65 | 0.724 | 4.70 | 0.608 | 4.68 | 0.656 |
| Interesting graphics | 2.71 | 1.097 | 2.79 | 1.208 | 2.76 | 1.165 |
| Lecture notes | 4.38 | 0.813 | 4.48 | 0.763 | 4.44 | 0.784 |
| Links outside the institution (ex - resources, organizations, etc) | 3.87 | 0.924 | 4.01 | 0.944 | 3.96 | 0.938 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Links within the institution (ex - department, other faculty, etc) | 3.84 | 0.920 | 3.96 | 0.955 | 3.91 | 0.943 |
| List of courses taught by this instructor | 3.48 | 1.112 | 3.52 | 1.168 | 3.51 | 1.146 |
| List of publications | 3.41 | 1.000 | 3.46 | 1.058 | 3.44 | 1.035 |
| Office hours | 3.72 | 1.193 | 3.70 | 1.203 | 3.71 | 1.198 |
| Online articles or newsletters | 3.54 | 0.980 | 3.57 | 1.043 | 3.56 | 1.018 |
| Online research studies | 3.77 | 0.928 | 3.71 | 1.046 | 3.73 | 1.001 |
| Personal interests | 2.37 | 1.106 | 2.49 | 1.109 | 2.44 | 1.109 |
| Personal links | 2.51 | 1.125 | 2.57 | 1.188 | 2.55 | 1.163 |
| Personal statement or quote | 2.62 | 1.074 | 2.75 | 1.150 | 2.70 | 1.122 |
| Pictures of the professor | 2.36 | 1.217 | 2.40 | 1.265 | 2.39 | 1.246 |
| PowerPoint presentations | 2.98 | 1.151 | 3.12 | 1.186 | 3.06 | 1.174 |
| Professional experience | 3.43 | 1.089 | 3.50 | 1.049 | 3.48 | 1.064 |
| Professional memberships | 2.73 | 1.158 | 2.73 | 1.156 | 2.73 | 1.156 |
| Research interests | 3.01 | 1.068 | 3.11 | 1.110 | 3.07 | 1.094 |
| Results of research | 3.03 | 1.054 | 3.14 | 1.121 | 3.10 | 1.096 |
| Resume | 2.68 | 1.234 | 2.72 | 1.215 | 2.70 | 1.222 |
| Samples of student work | 3.39 | 1.187 | 3.38 | 1.172 | 3.38 | 1.177 |
| Student career information | 3.39 | 1.239 | 3.48 | 1.216 | 3.45 | 1.225 |
| Syllabi | 4.71 | 0.566 | 4.70 | 0.595 | 4.70 | 0.584 |
| Teaching experience | 3.63 | 1.087 | 3.67 | 1.048 | 3.65 | 1.063 |
| Telephone number | 4.31 | 0.919 | 4.27 | 0.936 | 4.28 | 0.929 |
| Video or audio clips | 2.82 | 1.208 | 2.97 | 1.260 | 2.91 | 1.241 |

Table 4: *Means and standard deviations of each component by group*

Significant differences in perceived importance were found, however, for general academic advising information ($F(1, 673) = 6.664$, $p = .010$); bulletin board or discussion thread ($F(1, 677) = 5.699$, $p = .017$); and links outside the institution ($F(1, 671) = 3.836$, $p = .051$). For all three components, online students viewed the items as more important than face-to-face students. Table 5 provides complete ANOVA results.

| Web site Component | df | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|
| *General academic advising information* | 1, 673 | 6.664 | *0.010* |
| Instructor's academic rank | 1, 677 | 0.001 | 0.977 |
| *Bulletin board or discussion thread* | *1, 677* | *5.699* | *0.017* |
| Course calendar | 1, 676 | 0.936 | 0.334 |
| Instructor's educational background | 1, 676 | 0.512 | 0.474 |
| Email address | 1, 674 | 0.735 | 0.392 |
| Family information | 1, 677 | 2.512 | 0.113 |
| Instructor's name | 1, 667 | 0.801 | 0.371 |
| Interesting graphics | 1, 671 | 0.772 | 0.380 |
| Lecture notes | 1, 675 | 2.791 | 0.095 |
| *Links outside the institution (ex - resources, organizations, etc)* | *1, 671* | *3.836* | *0.051* |
| Links within the institution (ex - department, other faculty, etc) | 1, 673 | 2.696 | 0.101 |
| List of courses taught by this instructor | 1, 674 | 0.210 | 0.647 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| List of publications | 1, 672 | 0.298 | 0.586 |
| Office hours | 1, 673 | 0.041 | 0.839 |
| Online articles or newsletters | 1, 671 | 0.228 | 0.633 |
| Online research studies | 1, 668 | 0.518 | 0.472 |
| Personal interests | 1, 672 | 1.723 | 0.190 |
| Personal links | 1, 675 | 0.375 | 0.541 |
| Personal statement or quote | 1, 672 | 2.283 | 0.131 |
| Pictures of the professor | 1, 674 | 0.223 | 0.637 |
| PowerPoint presentations | 1, 674 | 2.367 | 0.124 |
| Professional experience | 1, 673 | 0.697 | 0.404 |
| Professional memberships | 1, 670 | 0.001 | 0.970 |
| Research interests | 1, 673 | 1.539 | 0.215 |
| Results of research | 1, 669 | 1.865 | 0.172 |
| Resume | 1, 676 | 0.171 | 0.680 |
| Samples of student work | 1, 677 | 0.009 | 0.926 |
| Student career information | 1, 675 | 0.979 | 0.323 |
| Syllabi | 1, 669 | 0.146 | 0.703 |
| Teaching experience | 1, 674 | 0.201 | 0.654 |
| Telephone number | 1, 671 | 0.257 | 0.612 |
| Video or audio clips | 1, 666 | 2.321 | 0.128 |

Table 5: *Complete ANOVA results*

As a follow-up analysis, Web site components were rank ordered based on perceived importance according to each of the education delivery format groups.

| Rank | Online Students | Face-to-Face Students |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Email address | Syllabi |
| 2 | Instructor's name | Email address |
| 3 | Syllabi | Instructor's name |
| 4 | Course calendar | Course calendar |
| 5 | Lecture notes | Lecture notes |
| 6 | Bulletin board or discussion thread | Telephone number |
| 7 | Telephone number | Bulletin board or discussion thread |
| 8 | General academic advising information | Links outside the institution (ex - resources, organizations, etc) |
| 9 | Links outside the institution (ex - resources, organizations, etc) | General academic advising information |
| 10 | Links within the institution (ex - department, other faculty, etc) | Links within the institution (ex - department, other faculty, etc) |
| 11 | Online research studies | Online research studies |
| 12 | Office hours | Office hours |
| 13 | Teaching experience | Teaching experience |
| 14 | Online articles or newsletters | Online articles or newsletters |
| 15 | List of courses taught | List of courses taught |
| 16 | Professional experience | Professional experience |
| 17 | Student career information | Instructor's educational background |
| 18 | Instructor's educational background | List of publications |
| 19 | List of publications | Student career information |
| 20 | Samples of student work | Samples of student work |
| 21 | Instructor's academic rank | Instructor's academic rank |
| 22 | Results of research | Results of research |
| 23 | PowerPoint presentations | Research interests |
| 24 | Research interests | PowerPoint presentations |
| 25 | Video or audio clips | Video or audio clips |
| 26 | Interesting graphics | Professional memberships |
| 27 | Personal statement or quote | Interesting graphics |
| 28 | Professional memberships | Resume |
| 29 | Resume | Personal statement or quote |
| 30 | Personal links | Personal links |
| 31 | Personal interests | Personal interests |
| 32 | Pictures of the professor | Pictures of the professor |
| 33 | Family information | Family information |

Table 6: *Comparative ranking of the importance of Web site components by group*

As indicated in Table 6, there were only minor differences in the relative importance of various faculty Web site components between the groups. Both online and face-to-face students agreed that basic contact information (instructor's name and instructor's email address) and course-specific information (syllabi, course calendar and lecture notes) were the most important items on a faculty Web page. In addition, both groups agreed that an instructor's personal information (family information, personal interests, pictures of the professor, and personal links) was least important.

## DISCUSSION

Contrasting the hypothesis, this study found online students and face-to-face students placed little importance on the personalized components of a faculty Web site. Rather, regardless of educational delivery format, students placed high importance on basic contact and course-specific information, with very little importance on an instructor's personal information.

While it is not surprising that both online and face-to-face students value basic contact and targeted, course-ted,

specific information, the lack of interest or appeal for an instructor's personal information was unexpected. Findings from this study contradict much of the literature of online course facilitation, which directs instructors in the online environment to personalize the information presented, to mimic the interpersonal nature of face-to-face interactions, in order to create a learning community. As stated in an interview by Keith Pratt, the co-author of the book Building learning communities in cyberspace: *Effective strategies for the online classroom,* (Center for Internet Technology in Education, 2000):

> ". . .I always like to tell them (students) about myself, informal things about myself. 'I have a cat that I love and she runs my family…' Those types of things establish a relationship with the students. I try to do this in a face-to-face class, but doing it with an online class starts that relationship on a very informal basis in order for you to make that connection with the student. In my experience, very few times has that not worked. Even putting a picture up, even with as bad as I look in pictures, if they don't know who I am or they have never seen me before, it helps that too. So they establish that connection. I try to tell them about my family what I like to do. . ."

The instructor-student connection in the online environment is largely promoted through the self-disclosure of personal information, yet the responses of the current study indicate that students do not find this type of personalized information on a faculty Web page necessary.

While no difference was evident between online students and face-to-face students regarding personalized information about an instructor, online students did place higher importance on the role of general academic information, links to outside resources and bulletin board/discussion boards. These items suggest that online students believe that they receive instructor-specific eir information within their virtual classroom (as such, these items are not necessary on a faculty Web page) adequate to establish a successful learning community. What the results suggest, however, is that another category of instructor information is desired by online students: instructor guidance and instructor-provided resources concerning general academic success and/or the pursuit of a specific career path. Moreover, the importance placed on bulletin boards/discussion boards indicates a need for online students to have a centralized location to discuss issues of relevance to their academic future that may not fall within the limited purview or focus of a single class.

While the desire for basic contact and course-specific information is consistent with preferences reported by Palmiter and Renjilian (2003) and McKenna (1999), the results of the current study do not lend support for the inclusion of many of the supplemental items endorsed by Palmiter and Renjilian (2003) that relate to an instructor's professional background and credentials. When examining an overall relative ranking, Web site components can be divided into three categories: high importance (ranking of 4.0 or higher), medium importance (3.0 to 3.99) and low importance (2.99 and below). As shown in Table 7, the high importance items target basic contact and course-specific information, the medium importance items center around an instructor's professional credentials and supplemental course information, and the low importance items include mainly personal information. With this in mind, to maximize the value, relevance, and functionality of a faculty Web site while minimizing the required investment and maintenance time, it may be most advantageous for an instructor to limit information to only those components deemed most important by the consumers of the provided information.

| High Importance | | Medium Importance | | Low Importance | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Component | Mean | Component | Mean | Component | Mean |
| Email address | 4.71 | General academic advising information | 3.98 | Video or audio clips | 2.91 |
| Syllabi | 4.70 | Links outside the institution (ex - resources, organizations, etc) | 3.96 | Interesting graphics | 2.76 |
| Instructor's name | 4.68 | Links within the institution (ex - department, other faculty, etc) | 3.91 | Professional memberships | 2.73 |
| Course calendar | 4.56 | Online research studies | 3.73 | Personal statement or quote | 2.70 |
| Lecture notes | 4.44 | Office hours | 3.71 | Resume | 2.70 |
| Bulletin board or discussion thread | 4.28 | Teaching experience | 3.65 | Personal links | 2.55 |
| Telephone number | 4.28 | Online articles or newsletters | 3.56 | Personal interests | 2.44 |
| | | List of courses taught by this instructor | 3.51 | Pictures of the professor | 2.39 |
| | | Professional experience | 3.48 | Family information | 2.05 |
| | | Instructor's educational background | 3.45 | | |
| | | Student career information | 3.45 | | |
| | | List of publications | 3.44 | | |
| | | Samples of student work | 3.38 | | |
| | | Instructor's academic rank | 3.15 | | |
| | | Results of research | 3.10 | | |
| | | Research interests | 3.07 | | |
| | | PowerPoint presentations | 3.06 | | |

Table 7: *Overall ranking of the importance of Web site components*

A content analysis of the free response items provides interesting insight into one of the key differences in the faculty Web pages designed for use by online versus face-to-face students. Of the 63% of the respondents who completed the free-response items, 84% indicated that faculty Web pages targeting online students need to be more specific and detailed in the information provided. As such, it appears that the components of the Web sites may be the same for online or face-to-face faculty, but the content contained within a component may be quite different. As explained by one respondent, "All instructors need to put their email and phone number. But if the instructor is online, he also needs to state what time zone he is located in and how long it takes him to respond to emails." These views were echoed by another student who stated, "online instructors often work from home, so I need to know when it is okay to call or if they prefer to be emailed." With these concerns in mind, more research needs to be done to address the unique demands and needs of the online student when it comes to the specificity of faculty Web page information.

### Assumptions and Limitations

It is important to note this study addressed students' perceptions of the importance of components of a

faculty Web site. As such, the reader should consider that a difference may exist in what students perceive to be necessary or important on a faculty Web page, and what students perceive to be supplemental or desired. Hence, it is entirely possible that online students do desire personalized information about an instructor, yet feel that a faculty Web site is not the appropriate outlet for such information. Thus, as face-to-face students form relationships with their instructor within the physical classroom, it is possible that online students develop personalized relationships with their online instructor through the interactions within the virtual environment.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

B. Jean Mandernach, Ph.D. has served as Associate Professor of Psychology and Online Learning at Park University since 2001. Her research focuses on enhancing student learning through assessment and innovative online instructional strategies. In addition, she has interests in examining the perception of online degrees and the development of effective faculty evaluation models. Jean received her B.S. in psychology from the University of Nebraska at Kearney, an M.S. in experimental psychology from Western Illinois University and Ph.D. in social psychology from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. Dr. Mandernach may be reached at Jean.Mandernach@park.edu