

Do students get the same quality of education in an online environment?

UW-Madison instructors say....

Kristen Eschenfelder, Professor, School of Library and Information Studies

I was initially quite skeptical both from a student teaching quality perspective. Would teaching online really be as good quality as teaching face-to-face? And also I was quite skeptical about the increased workload on me. How hard would teaching online be? I had heard it was very, very difficult and so I was greatly concerned about that. I started off initially quite skeptically and really it was the revenue generation, the challenge and a rule that we created that all tenured faculty should teach at least one course online that really got me going. I have to say I became a convert to a certain extent despite my initial skepticism.

I think the most interesting thing I've seen in terms of student learning is students taking advantage of my ability to customize the course for them and I was able to do this. I would say on starting on maybe my third or fourth time through after I had gotten a handle on everything.

It can be a little more remedial focus or it can be more advanced focus depending on their own particular desires for the course and the pace at which they are moving through it and then I have to say over the six years that I've been doing the course the exam grades have gone up overall and I think it's because I've been able to kind of bring up the bottom of the class by building these remedial optional tutorials into the course so I think in terms of overall student learning the flexibility allowed within the course increases student learning overall.

Julie Thurlow, Faculty Associate, Department of Nutritional Sciences

I do believe in the magic of students interacting with each other and that what occurs in the classroom only begins the discussion. When learning is occurring in its best form, the students are talking to each other. They're talking to the instructor. They're looking up different things. I thought that it would be very difficult to accomplish that in an online format, so that was my major skepticism. It goes back to my idea of what the magic is in education. I have to confess to you I've been proven wrong.

There is magic happening, and it has to do with the students interacting with each other on the discussion, the students being open enough to interact with me via email, online, the discussion board, however we need to do it. It's happening. Is it happening better or worse? I'm not sure yet, but I know that it's happening and I'm satisfied with what I've seen. I really am. I don't think that this course is a second-rate way of doing it, which was a major concern to me. I don't want to do a disservice to the students. I don't think this is.