In Defense of the Traditional Classroom: An Argument Against The Move to Online Classes

Eliminating the traditional K-12 classroom in exchange for impersonal online classes would be the biggest possible mistake for students and teachers alike. Sure, it would be nice, in theory at least, to attend class in your pajamas, but this benefit of taking online classes is far outweighed by other losses students would face with such a shift. Aside from academics, one of the most important aspects of college life is the social interaction that comes with daily meetings of other students.

Considering that a large part of a student's life revolves around this personal contact, removing this valuable part of students' lives would be a loss that not only the students themselves would feel, but the faculty as well. Online classrooms lack the ability to be personalized and will have a negative impact on both the social and educational lives of their students.

While there are several more obvious drawbacks to the move towards online classrooms (lowered social interaction is the prime example) one often overlooked problem that would be created with such a shift would occur with teachers. Many instructors love their jobs not only because of the material they share with their students, but because many of them find it rewarding to be around young people. With the removal of the traditional classroom these teachers will lose the single biggest motivation they have to continue teaching—their students. Isn't it easy to imagine how the fun of teaching would easily seem sucked out of a teacher's job if they weren't around to answer spur-of-the-moment questions and engage in the lively debate that often goes on in the college classroom setting? It is quite easy to imagine how the teachers would be less inspired—less motivated to make a difference in the lives of their students if they were removed from them and placed, quite impersonally, in front of a computer instead.

Also of importance, students will lose the motivation necessary to actually complete the work necessary since there are no teachers "there" physically to ensure the student's success. "Motivating students can challenge instructors who have moved from traditional to online classrooms. Online student motivation can vary owing to difficulty with content, challenges with access to technology or technology itself, isolation, poor communication with instructors, English as a second language, and lack of connection between content and students' needs" (Beffa-Negrini, 2002). The points made here are certainly worth considering since they are far-reaching and don't just include teachers or students, but learners of different types. Aside from the lost social interaction mentioned above, this problem of motivation on both the parts of students and teachers alike would likely be an issue.

Another less potential (and less publicized) negative effect of the shift towards online classrooms would be the fact that it would be a massive experiment. There are still very few colleges in the United States that have made the drastic shift from completely traditional to completely electronic. Perhaps this is not the best time for universities to be experimenting with futures of its students. While this may be an option for the future, universities should wait until there is more evidence on the long-term impacts of an all-online course list. According to an article from the journal *Education, Communication, and Information* "although there has been extensive work to conceptualize and understand the social interactions and constructs entailed by online education, there has been little work that connects these concepts to subject-specific interactions and learning" (Raven, 2003). Event though the data is a little data, it still shows there is a long way to go in terms of research. Considering that universities want to

build their reputations , I think the way to do that is by pioneering and fostering great academic programs, rather than trying to "blaze the trail" for new ways of conducting courses.

Certainly, the potential benefits are apparent in terms of cost. Let me offer this refutation of my proposal to avoid all online courses: "The cost of building new classrooms, dorms, or even whole new campuses is unbelievably high (tens of billions of dollars, according to one source). By implementing a distance-learning program that incorporates the state's university and community college systems (already the world's largest educational institution!), the state might offset a large share of those costs for the taxpayer. It might also help save money for the students themselves. Distance learning does not involve residence tuition, a big part of higher education's cost" (*Searcher*, 1998). When you get right down to it, these ideas about cost cutting cannot be argued against. Going to all-online classes would certainly be the best thing to do for a financially troubled university, but then again, look at the benefits of college life the students and faculty would miss out on.

A number of scholars and researchers have argued in argumentative essays in journals on both sides, but what is important is the real world impacts such a move would have. Despite the above counter-argument about costs, I urge you to look beyond price tags and the fact that you can "go" to school in your pajamas. Instead, put those petty concerns aside and give serious consideration to all that you would be missing if you never had to attend classes. Aren't there people you've met and formed friendships with as a result of the interaction of a traditional university? Don't you think your favorite instructor is so because you've *met* them and interacted with them personally? These more "human" questions should enter this debate long before fiscal concerns ever enter into the picture. As a member of a university community, it is our job to remain just that—a*community*.