

*Who Are Coastal Carolina University's
Distance Learners?*

Linda J. Palm, Sara A. Brallier,
and Robin M. Gilbert

Department of
Psychology and Sociology

Introduction

Accompanying the growing number of web-based course offerings is a discussion regarding the demographic, academic, and psychological characteristics of students enrolling in web-based courses. Some researchers have found that compared to students in lecture-based courses, students in web-based courses are more likely to be female, White, and over age 25 (Halsne & Gatta, 2002; MacGregor, 2002). However, other researchers have found that students in web-based courses do not differ from those enrolling in traditional courses in terms of gender, race, or age (Banerjee & Brinckerhoff, 2002; Leasure, Davis, & Thievon 2000; Roblyer, 1999; Wang & Newlin, 2002).

Merisotis and Phipps (1999) have hypothesized that students who take web-based courses may be superior academically to those in lecture-based courses. Additionally, it has been suggested that for students to be successful in web-based courses, they need higher levels of motivation, self-discipline, and independence than students in lecture-based courses (Sampson, 2003). However, there has been little empirical research demonstrating that successful students in web-based courses differ in their academic and psychological characteristics from students in lecture-based courses.

Research Questions

The present study was designed to describe the student audience for web-based versus lecture-based Introductory Sociology courses. Three research questions were evaluated:

- Do students in web-based and lecture-based courses differ in the demographic characteristics of age, gender, race, and class rank?
- Do students in web-based and lecture based courses differ in the academic characteristics of Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) Scores and grade point average (GPA)?
- Do students in web-based and lecture based courses differ in the psychological characteristics of locus of control and self-efficacy?

Method

Participants

- 54 students enrolled in Sociology 101
 - 19 students completed the web-based course
 - 35 students completed the lecture-based course

Procedure

- Dr. Sara Brallier taught a web-based and a lecture-based Sociology 101 class in Fall 2005
- WebCT was the course management system for the web-based class

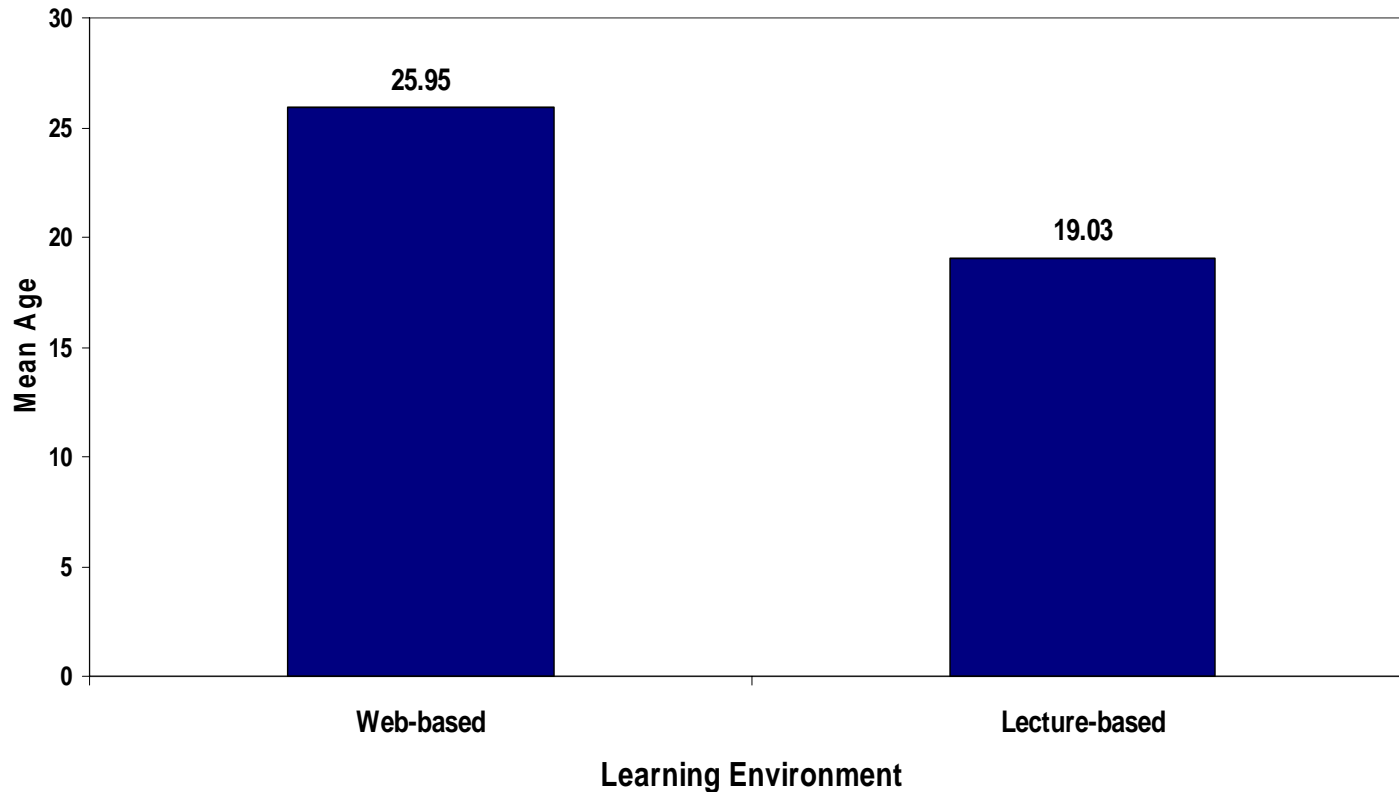
Method

Procedure (continued)

- Students in both learning environments used the same text (Henslin, 2005) and were given the same notes, assignments, & exams
- Students in both learning environments completed Rotter's Locus of Control Scale (1966) and Jerusalem and Schwarzer's General Self-Efficacy Scale (1995)
- The university's Department of Institutional Research and Assessment provided the demographic and academic data

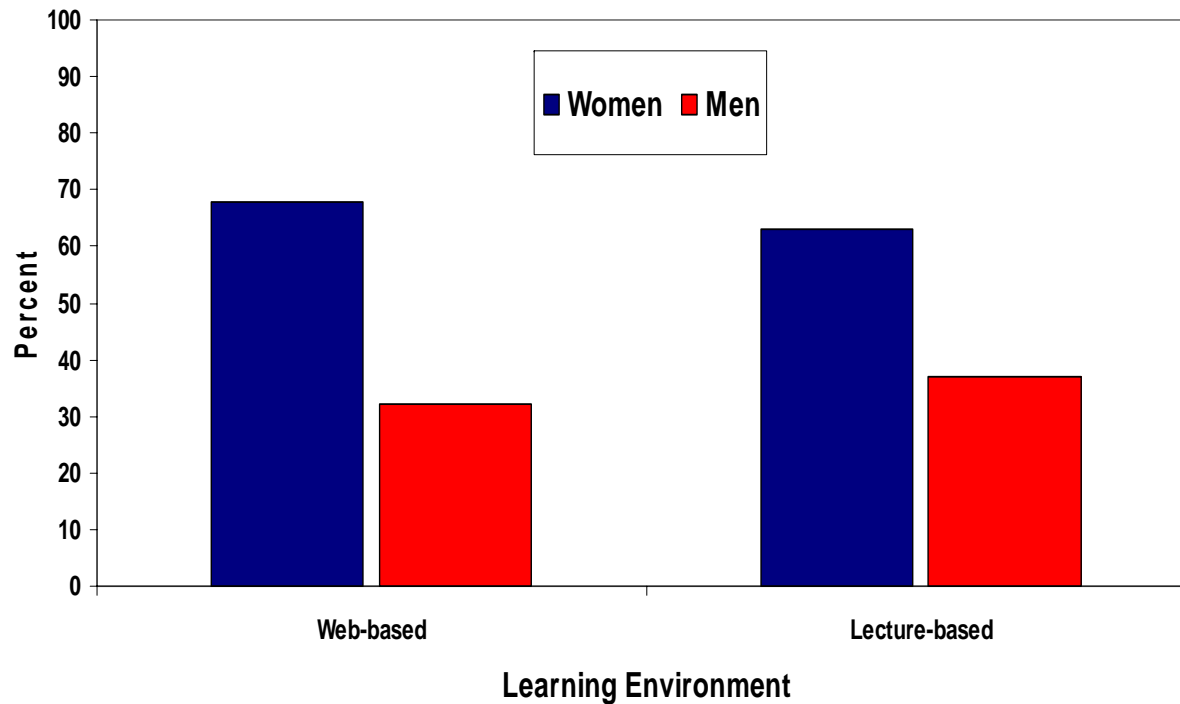
Results: Demographic Variables

AGE: Students in the web-based course were significantly older than students in the lecture-based course, $t(df = 52) = 3.21, p < .01$.



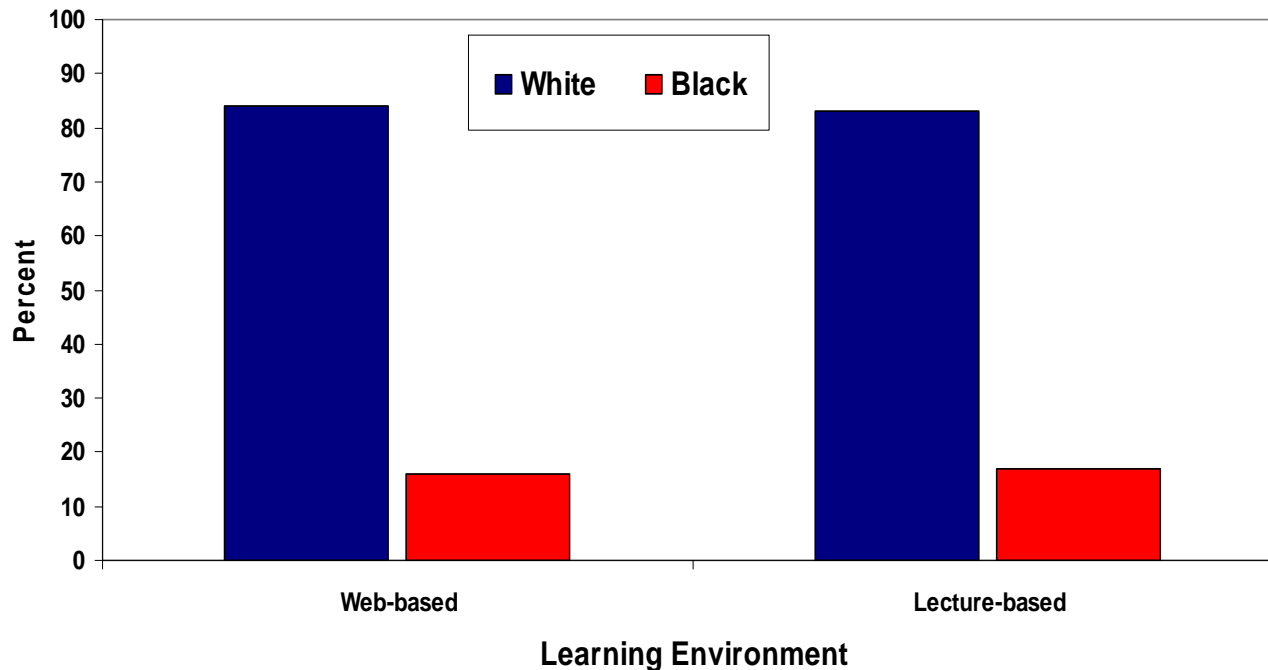
Results: Demographic Variables

GENDER: The gender distribution in the two learning environments was not significantly different, $\chi^2(1, n = 54) = .17, p > .05$.



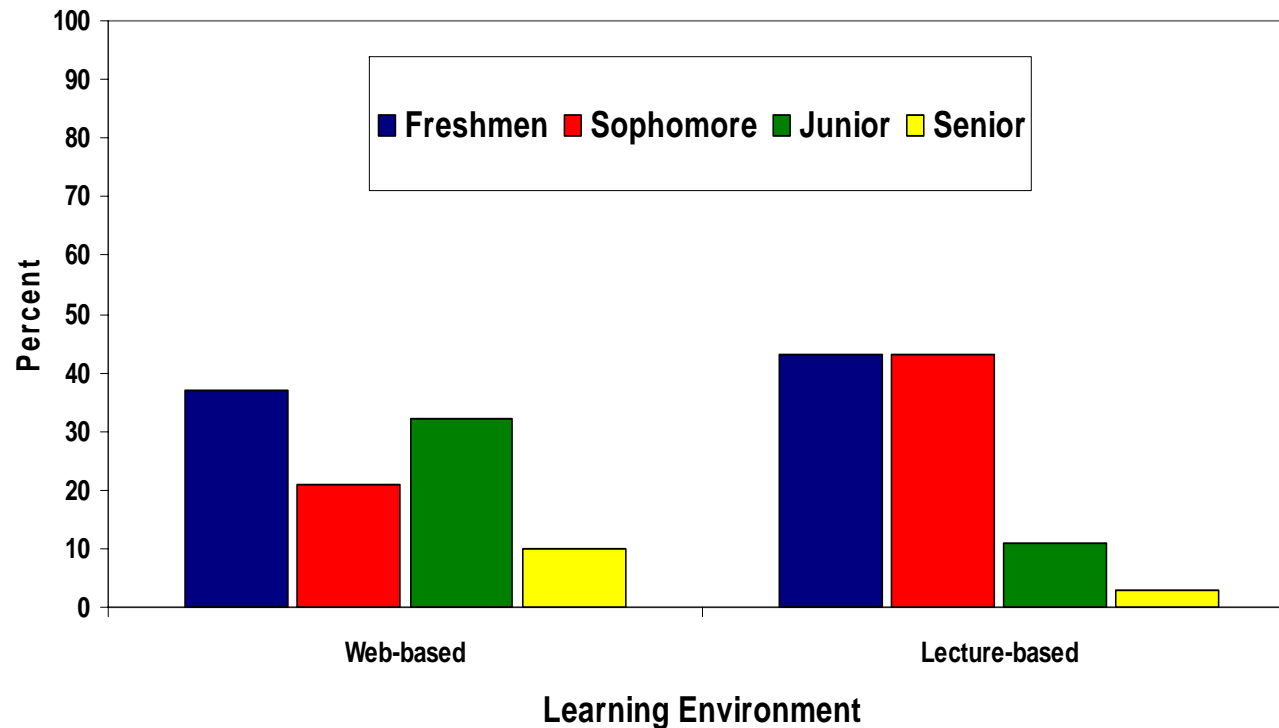
Results: Demographic Variables

RACE: The racial distribution in the two learning environments was not significantly different, $\chi^2(1, n = 54) = .02, p > .05$.



Results: Demographic Variables

CLASS RANK: The racial distribution in the two learning environments was not significantly different, $\chi^2(3, n = 54) = 5.78, p > 05$.



Results: Academic Variables

- **Verbal SAT Scores** did not differ between the two learning environments, $t(df = 36) = .18, p > .05$
 - Web-based: $M = 512.22, SD = 46.84, n = 9$
 - Lecture-based: $M = 507.93, SD = 64.39, n = 29$
- **Quantitative SAT Scores** did not differ between the two learning environments, $t(df = 36) = .81, p > .05$
 - Web-based: $M = 535.96, SD = 57.25, n = 9$
 - Lecture-based: $M = 516.55, SD = 62.92, n = 29$

Results: Academic Variables

- **High School GPA** did not differ between the two learning environments, $t(df = 44) = -.79, p > .05$
 - Web-based: $M = 2.68, SD = .44, n = 13$
 - Lecture-based: $M = 2.78, SD = .39, n = 33$
- **College GPA** did not differ between the two learning environments, $t(df = 30) = -.24, p > .05$
 - Web-based: $M = 3.20, SD = .52, n = 13$
 - Lecture-based: $M = 3.25, SD = .57, n = 19$

Results: Psychological Variables

- **Locus of Control Scores** did not differ between the two learning environments, $t(df = 44) = .01, p > .05$
 - Web-based: $M = 12.86, SD = 4.44, n = 14$
 - Lecture-based: $M = 12.84, SD = 4.32, n = 32$
- **Self-Efficacy Scores** were significantly higher in the web-based course than in the lecture-based course, $t(df = 42) = 2.27, p < .05$
 - Web-based: $M = 33.85, SD = 3.44, n = 13$
 - Lecture-based: $M = 31.00, SD = 3.93, n = 31$

Conclusions

- Students in the web-based and lecture-based courses were similar on
 - demographic variables of gender, race, and class rank
 - academic variables of SAT scores and GPA
 - psychological variable of locus of control
- Students in the web-based class were
 - significantly older
 - scored significantly higher on a measure of self-efficacy
 - Students who enroll in web-based courses may have more confidence in their ability to manage challenging situations than those who enroll in lecture-based courses

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