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THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Today's News

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Students Desire a Balance of Technological and Human Contact, Survey Suggests

By VINCENT KIERNAN

College students want faculty members to use information technology, but students nevertheless hunger for the human touch in courses as well, according to a new survey of 18,039 freshmen and seniors at 63 institutions.

Forty-one percent of the students said they preferred their professors to make moderate use of information technology. By comparison, 26 percent said they preferred only limited use, while 27 percent sought extensive use.

"They really want to see it balanced," said Robert B. Kvavik, an associate vice president of the University of Minnesota who worked on the survey. "They value the interaction among themselves and with faculty, and they don't want technology to get in the way of that."

"The students see technology right now as supplemental rather than transformative," said Mr. Kvavik.

Students in the survey most commonly said that convenience was the primary benefit of the use of technology in courses. They cited "connectedness" second.

Few students cited improved learning as a benefit of technology, but that doesn't mean that the technology didn't help them learn more, said Mr. Kvavik, who is also a professor of political science. "Convenience and connectedness contribute to learning," he said.

Virtually all the students in the survey said that they used their computers for writing documents, handling e-mail, and surfing the Web. Three-quarters said that they used a computer to download or listen to music, while 24 percent said that they used a computer to create and edit video or audio files.

Ninety-six percent of the respondents said that they owned at least one computer. Desktop computers lost out in popularity to laptops, which 56 percent of respondents said they owned. That is a nine-percentage-point increase in laptop ownership, compared with a similar survey last year.

Computers aren't the only form of technology common in students' lives. When asked whether they owned a desktop computer, laptop, personal digital assistant, smart phone, cellphone, music device, or wireless adapter, the students reported owning an average of 2.8 categories of the devices. Men, with an average of 3.1 devices, owned more than women, with 2.7. And engineering students owned more than students in other fields.

The survey was conducted by Educause, an association on academic information technology, through its Educause Center for Applied Research, where Mr. Kvavik is a senior fellow. The full text of a report on the study is available on the center's [Web site](#).

The survey results do not necessarily reflect all students' views, said Mr. Kvavik, because participants were not a random sample. But he said the results are consistent with experiences commonly described by administrators and faculty members.

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