**If you record it, will they watch it? And will it matter?**
**Exploring student perceptions of online video**

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## Introduction

Online courses are estimated to have attrition rates that are 10-20% higher than traditional face-to-face courses. Researchers report that one-reason students drop out of online courses is because of feelings of isolation and loneliness. The literature suggests that one way to help students persist is through establishing and maintaining social presence.

Short, Williams, and Christie (1976) originally developed the theory of social presence to explain the effect telecommunications media have on communication. They defined social presence as the degree of salience (i.e., quality or state of being there) between two communicators using a communication medium. They posited that communication media differ in their degree of social presence and that these differences play impact how people interact. They conceptualized social presence primarily as a quality of a communication medium. They argued that people perceive some media as having a higher degree of social presence (e.g., video) than other media (e.g., text) and that media with a high degree of social presence is seen as sociable, warm, and personal, whereas media with a low degree of social presence is seen as less personal.

With the rise of email, building on social presence theory, researchers concluded that computer-mediated communication (CMC)--the primary means of communicating in online courses--was inherently impersonal because the nonverbal and relational cues (common in face-to-face communication) are filtered out (Walther & Parks, 2002). Over time though, people began to notice that even though CMC lacks nonverbal and relational cues, it can still be very social and interpersonal (Gunawardena, 1995; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997) and even hyperpersonal (Walther, 1996). This led researchers to conclude that how one uses a communication medium matters more than any innate characteristics of a medium and that online learning has the potential to be a rich, personal, and social experience.

Further theory and research began to conceptualize social presence as being central to a meaningful learning experience (see Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000, 2001). Researchers have since shown a relationship between social presence and student satisfaction (Gunawardena, 1995; Gunawardena & Zittle, 1997; Hostetter & Busch, 2006; Richardson & Swan, 2003; So & Brush, 2008), social presence and the development of a community of learners (Rourke, Anderson, Garrison, & Archer, 2001), and social presence and perceived learning (Caspi & Blau, 2008; Richardson & Swan, 2003).

As online learning has grown alongside technological innovations, practitioners continue to explore with using "rich" media (e.g., video) in online courses--in a large part to establish and maintain social presence (and in part hopefully reduce student attrition). Unfortunately, there is very little research on students' perceptions of rich media--specifically video. Given this, in this mixed methods exploratory study, I set forth to investigate students' perceptions of the ways in which video is used in online courses (e.g., video announcements, instructional screencasts, and video feedback).

## Method

### Participants

The sample for this study includes students taking three different fully online graduate courses (i.e. Internet for Educators, Graphic Design for Learning, and Online Course Design) over the 2013-2014 academic year. The participant pool includes an estimated 250 students. A subset of students will be interviewed during the summer of 2014 to build upon the results of the survey, to triangulate the data, and to dig deeper into students' perceptions of online video.

Data is currently being collected. So far 77 students have completed the survey of which 59% of the participants are female and 41% male. The participants are experienced online learners with the average student having completed 9 online courses.

### Materials

At the end of each semester, students are emailed an online survey that seeks to collect their perceptions and attitudes about the instructional use of online video in their courses. The survey was constructed based on the literature and the overarching research goals of this study. The survey primarily consists of questions on a 5-point Likert scale as well as optional open-ended questions. The final interviews will be semi-structured based in part on the results of the online survey.

### Procedure

The quantitative results from the survey are downloaded after each semester and imported into SPSS. The qualitative data from any open-ended questions is downloaded and coded using a constant comparative method to identify themes. I will continue to administer the survey over the summer of 2014.

## Preliminary Results

The following are preliminary results. Final results should be collected and analyzed by August 2014. So far, students in this study report that they strongly agree that it is important to perceive their instructor as being "real" and being "there" ($M$=4.46). They also report that they think video is better than audio and text at establishing social presence and that they like it when their instructors use video in online courses.

### Perceptions of Video Announcements

Video announcements were used throughout these online courses. Students in this sample report that they tend to read all of their instructors announcements and that they watched all of the video announcements (see Table 1). But when asked about how they behave when given a transcript and a video, 45% reported that they would watch the video and not read the transcript while 31% reported that they would read the transcript and watch the video. Finally, when asked what reasons influence them to watch a video announcement, they reported things such as:

- "If I have time"
- "If there is instruction I watch. If it is simply an announcement I will not watch"
- "Internet connection speed"
- "I always watch the video announcements because they are critical to the success in class"

Table 1
*Student Perceptions' of Video Announcements*

| | |
|---|---|
| I read every announcement my instructor posts | Agree (*M*=4.18) |
| I watched all announcements | Agree (*M*=4.03) |
| When given a video announcement and a text transcription, which are you more likely to do: | Only read; don't watch (24%)<br>Read and watch video (31%)<br>Watch but don't read (45%) |

**Perceptions of Instructional Videos**

The courses in this sample use commercially available instructional videos (i.e., Lynda.com) as well as instructor created instructional videos. Students reported that they like it when their instructor uses instructional videos (*M*=4.53), that they think instructional videos are a good way to learn (*M*=4.49), and that they watched most of the videos (*M*=4.53). They prefer (though not overwhelmingly) when their instructor creates his/her own instructional videos but at the same time they also see value in videos created by others (see Table 2).

Table 2
*Student Perceptions' of Instructional Videos*

| | |
|---|---|
| Like it when my instructor uses instructional videos | Strongly agree (*M*=4.53) |
| Instructional videos are a good way to learn | Strongly agree (*M*=4.49) |
| I watched most of the instructional videos created by my instructor | Strongly agree (*M*=4.53) |
| Prefer instructors use videos they created | Agree (*M*=3.65) |
| Instructional videos created by others add value | Agree (*M*=3.96) |

**Perceptions of Video Feedback**

The instructor in these courses gives students video feedback on a couple of assignments throughout the semester. Students report that they like video feedback (*M*=3.98) and that they watched the video feedback (*M*=4.35)--sometimes more than once (see Table 3). Students seemed divided though when asked if they thought it was helpful to view the video feedback of others and whether or not they would watch the feedback instructors gave their peers.

Table 3
*Student Perceptions' of Video Feedback*

| | |
|---|---|
| I like video feedback | Agree (*M*=3.98) |
| I watched the video feedback | Agree (*M*=4.35) |
| I watched video feedback more than once | Yes (63%) |
| Helpful to view feedback others received | Agree (*M*=3.11) |
| I would watch video feedback instructors gave other students | Agree (*M*=2.92) |

**Perceptions of Different Uses of Video**

The last part of the survey focused on students' perceptions of different uses of media and specifically video. When asked, 87% of the students reported that they preferred asynchronous video over synchronous video. They also reported though that they prefer individualized or one-to-one video more

than group or general videos. In the courses in question, they specifically found the instructional videos the most valuable use of video followed next by video announcements.

Table 4
*General Perceptions of Online Video*

| | |
|---|---|
| Videos can establish instructor presence | Agree (*M*=4.29) |
| Video announcements can establish instructor presence | Agree (*M*=4.18) |
| Video feedback can establish instructor presence | Agree (*M*=4.10) |
| Instructional videos can establish instructor presence | Agree (*M*=4.22) |
| I know my instructor better as a result of his use of video | Agree (*M*=3.96) |
| Enjoyed the use of video in this course | Strongly agree (*M*=4.45) |

Finally, students were able to leave any additional comments. The following are three interesting comments:

- *"Video, audio, and text are all tools for distance communications. Other factors also contribute to the feeling of a real person. Most critical for me is timeliness of the communication. I'd rather have a more immediate text reply than suffer digital silence--even if the communication after the delay is in a high quality video format."*
- *"When videos are kept short and focused they can be a very effective tool for learning. Not all information needs to be presented in a video."*
- *"The courses where there was some element of video communication helped me to feel more connected to the instructor (or in the case of 502 not my instructor, but the video instructor). This semester, I do not feel connected to my instructors who have not used any form of video communication."*

## Conclusion

At this point in the study, it would be premature to draw any firm conclusions. However, a few things stand out in the preliminary results. First, one size does not fit all. In other words, while some students liked video announcements, other students found video feedback more helpful. These findings do suggest though that students prefer asynchronous video over synchronous video and that they prefer individualized one-on-one contact with their instructor more than more general or generic types of communication. While data is still being collected, more research is needed with different subjects, different levels of education, and different instructional approaches.

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## About the Presenter

**Patrick R. Lowenthal** is an assistant professor in the Department of Educational Technology at Boise State University where he teaches in a fully online graduate program. Prior to joining the faculty full-time, he spent two years as an instructional designer at Boise State. Before moving to Idaho, Patrick worked as an Academic Technology Coordinator at the University of Colorado Denver as well an assistant professor at Regis University. Patrick is interested in problems of practice with teaching and learning online. He researches how faculty and students communicate using emerging technologies and specifically how they establish presence and community online.

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