



GATEWAY TO COLLEGE

STUDENT TECHNOLOGY SURVEY:

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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3507 SW Corbett Avenue
Portland, OR 97239

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Introduction

Gateway to College National Network (GtCNN) enables colleges, school districts, and states to build sustainable pathways for disconnected youth to earn a high school diploma and meaningful postsecondary credential. Through the Gateway to College (GtC) program, students are placed in a peer learning community, provided with holistic support from a dedicated resource specialist, and enrolled in dual-credit courses on the community college campus with flexible class times to fit the life circumstances of non-traditional students. Students graduate from the GtC program with a full high school diploma and significant college credit. The GtCNN currently extends into 41 communities in 21 states, annually serving around 5,000 students.

To inform the design and implementation of technology-supported applications into the GtC academic experience, GtCNN is interested in understanding GtC students' attitudes toward and experiences with technology-supported education. In particular, GtCNN is interested in three areas of inquiries:

1. How do under-served students ***access*** technology? (What technology skills do they have and what devices/platforms do they access?)
2. What implications does student access to technology have for technology-supported education and/or courses that rely on ***online curricula***? (Student attitudes and experience with use of technology for courses, campus environment/offering.)
3. What is the best way to ***communicate*** with students?

GtCNN contracted with Pacific Research & Evaluation to design and implement a student survey to explore student perspectives regarding these three guiding research questions.

Methodology

The survey was distributed to incoming and returning GtC students in the Fall 2014 term. In total,

- ❖ 508 surveys were completed by incoming students in the Fall 2014 term.
- ❖ 174 surveys were completed by students who had been previously enrolled in GtC programs.

In reviewing the survey findings, it is important to understand a few characteristics about the survey response population. The response rate for incoming students was 30%, with a much lower response rate of 7% for returning students. It is also important to note that the surveys were completed by students from 38 GtC programs across the country, with varied response rates by program. Further, demographic characteristics of survey respondents varied significantly by program. As such, survey responses represent the perspective of a wide range of individuals from across the country.

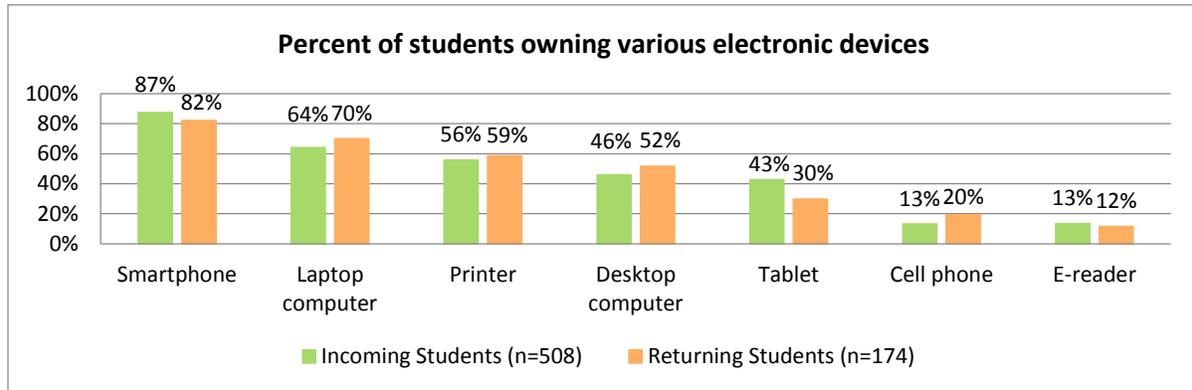
This executive summary provides a brief overview of some of the most interesting findings from the GtC technology survey results, as well as a few key implications by guiding question.

The [Gateway to College Student Technology Survey: Final Report](http://www.gatewaytocollege.org/research.html) is available on the GtC website at: www.gatewaytocollege.org/research.html.

Research Question #1: How do under-served students access technology?

Student access to technology is a crucial driver in determining the feasibility of technology-based curricula. Overall, most GtC students have access to one or multiple technology platforms.

- A large majority of GtC students have ready access to technology, including smartphones being owned by 87% of incoming and 82% of returning students. Additionally, 81% (incoming) and 84% (returning) of GtC survey respondents have either a desktop or a laptop computer.



- In terms of access to the internet, 94% of incoming students report accessing the internet at least several times a week on their smartphone.
- Although smartphones and laptops are not utilized frequently in class settings, returning survey respondents believe laptops, along with printers, desktop computers, and even smartphones are considered useful for academic purposes.
- Incoming students were more likely than returning students to have received training in utilizing software applications, using the internet, or computer maintenance.
- Incoming students responded positively to questions regarding social acceptance and sense of belonging on their campuses.

The surveys also explored for what purposes students used their devices.

- Word processing software was the most common application students had personal access to, with 71% owning at least one device with this capability. Overall, the majority of students indicate being in the middle of the skills spectrum and are less comfortable with specialized applications than they are with word processing and using the internet.
- Incoming GtC students tend to prefer using social media primarily for personal use, with 92% indicating they use it to stay in touch with friends, compared to 27% that use it for professional and networking purposes.

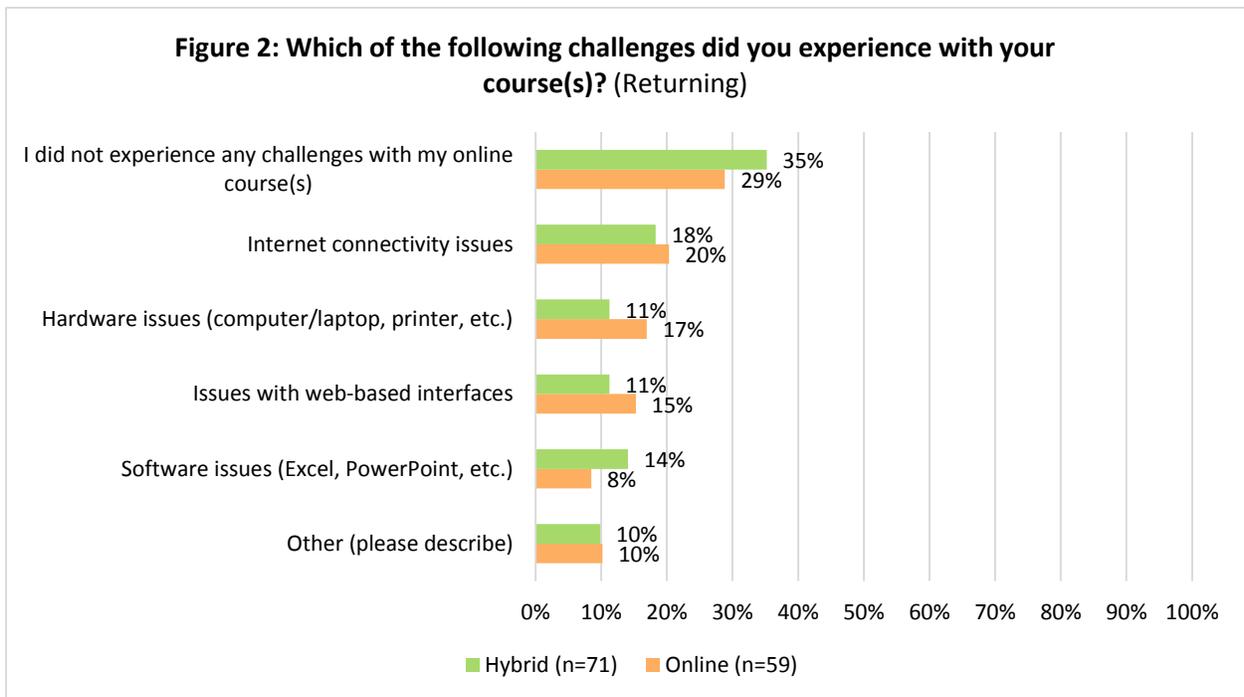
Implications

Students have access to technological devices and believe that these devices could be useful in an academic setting, but sometimes the lack of training and necessary skills to utilize these devices in an academic context.

Research Question #2: What implications does students' access to technology have for technology-supported education and/or courses that rely on online curricula?

GtC students expressed a spectrum of views regarding technology-supported education, including several noteworthy barriers to their use of and success in these curricula.

- Most returning students reported not having taken any online (73%) or hybrid (69%) courses since beginning GtC.
- For students who have not taken these courses, the most commonly cited reasons include difficulty with time management, believing that technology-assisted courses do not provide an equal educational value compared to traditional face-to-face courses, and desired courses not being offered.
- The following figure depicts responses from students who had taken hybrid or online courses.



- Returning students perceive that faculty are not always adequately skilled at integrating IT into their course work or providing training on the use of IT needed for classes.

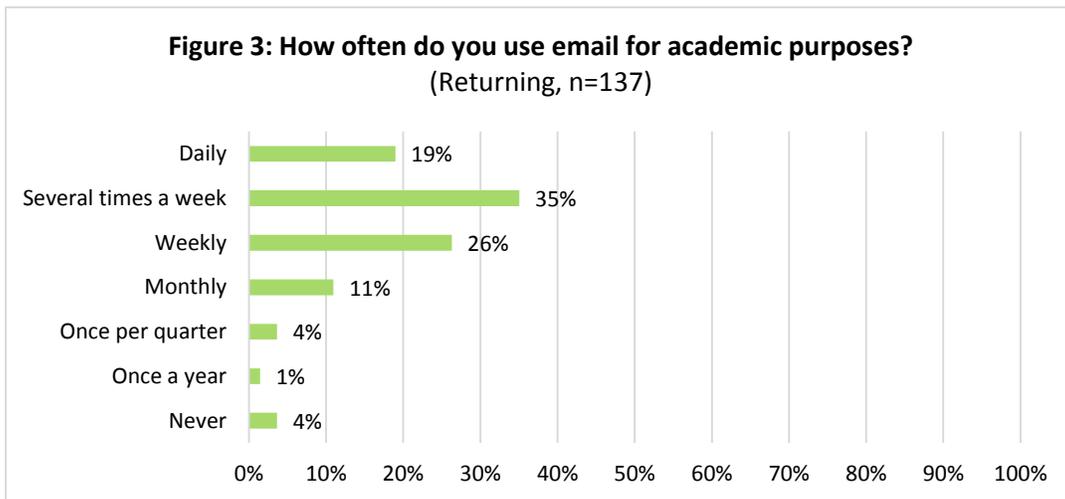
Implications

Most students believe they have the skills/hardware/software necessary to enroll in online and hybrid courses. However, they indicate a reluctance to take online courses because of concerns about the educational value of these types of courses, time management, and a number of other challenges that are described in the full report (see Figures 29, 32, 33, and 34). Addressing these challenges will encourage more participation in these types of learning opportunities. Additionally, there appears to be a need for further support of GtC faculty in how to integrate IT into coursework.

Research Question #3: What is the best way to communicate with students?

Understanding the most effective means of communication with students and determining what types of information should be communicated to students are both vital to the overall success of technology-supported classes.

- Regarding the use of email, 94% of students indicated this is the most useful method of communicating with faculty, with 77% reporting that email is useful for learning about what is happening in class. This is the preferred method, over and above communication via a course management system or social media.
- Only 54% of students reported checking their email more frequently than once per week.



- Texting is the most frequent method of communication, with 71% of the incoming survey respondents indicating that they text at least several times a week.
- More than half (56%) of returning students indicated that they prefer to keep their academic and social lives separate, compared with 11% reporting a preference to not do so.

Implications

Although email is the most preferred way to communicate with students, it may not be ideal for communication that needs to occur in a more timely manner. It could be beneficial to encourage students to check email more often. Texting may be another method of communication that is currently utilized outside the classroom, which could be incorporated into the academic environment. Given the varied preferences expressed by students regarding email and social media, communication of course-related material could be enhanced by the adoption of multiple methods of communication.