Usability News

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Usability News is a free web newsletter that is produced by the Software Usability Research Laboratory (SURL) at Wichita State University. The SURL team specializes in software/website user interface design, usability testing, and research in human-computer interaction.
Barbara S. Chaparro, Editor

Computer and World Wide Web Usage of WSU Undergraduates

By Barbara Chaparro, Michael Bernard, P. Moseley, & B. Bartelloni

Students entering college today are faced with many educational technology opportunities - "smart" classrooms, web-enhanced courses, and computerized testing. Web usage surveys to-date have primarily been done with experienced web users (GVU, 1999) and are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics summary of respondents to the GVU 10th WWW User Survey

GVU 10th WWW User Survey
Average age is 37.6 yrs old
33.6% female, 66.4% male
87.8% have some college experience; 59.3% have at least one degree
62.4% work in the private sector, 19.4% in the public sector; 8.3% in not-for-profit orgs.
87.2% Caucasian
37.1% have been using the Web for 4-6 yrs (largest %age group)
97.5% of respondents make purchases on-line

At Wichita State University (WSU), computers and the Internet continue to be incorporated into the course curriculum. We have noticed there are a wide range of computer skills and web experience among the students enrolled in courses offered in the Dept. of Psychology. We were interested in surveying our undergraduate students at Wichita State to determine just how much computer and web experience they actually have. To do this, we conducted a survey to 488 undergraduates (32% male and 68% female) enrolled in our Introductory Psychology course in the Fall of 1999. Fifty-one percent of the participants were freshmen with a mean age of 21.7 (range 16 to 54 yrs).

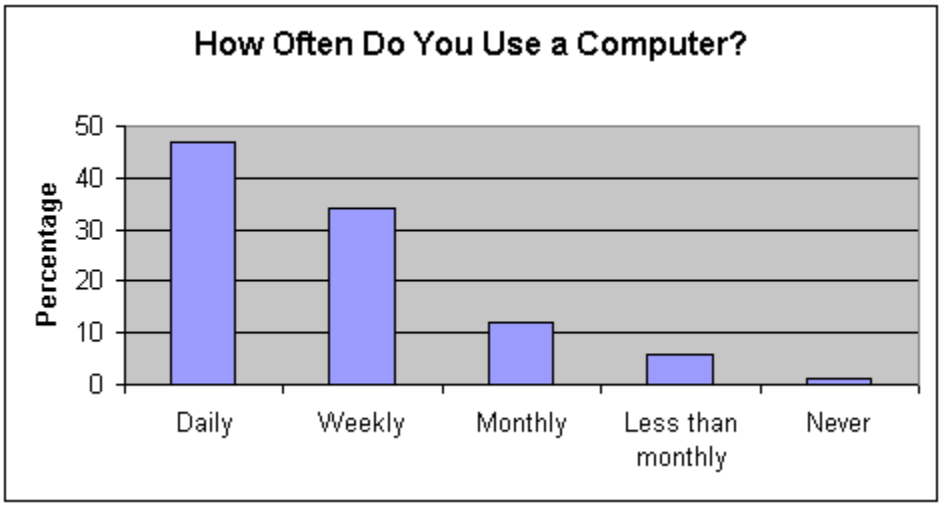
Wichita State University is an academic institution with over 14,000 students. It has a large non-traditional student body (approximately half of the students are age 25 or older and over 90% live off-campus). The average student age is 28 and many work in addition to attending school.

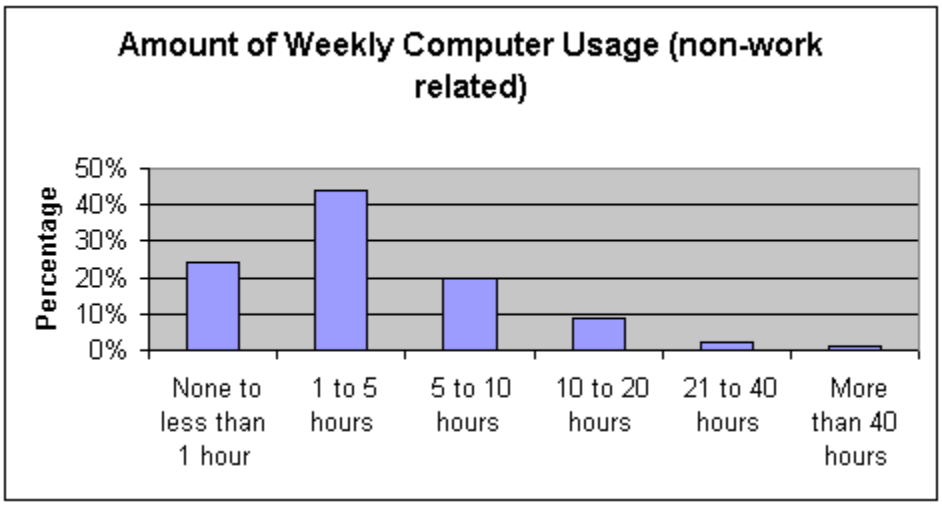
Results of our survey are shown in the graphs below. In general, our results indicate that the students are relatively low-end users of computers and the web. They are using the web, but for relatively short periods of time. The majority of the participants (88.1%) use a computer up to 10 hours per week for non-work or school related activities. Word processing, e-mail, and web browsing were identified as the primary activities. Overall, 92% percent of the participants indicated that they use the Web, although 82% of these participants said they used it only 6 hours or less in a week. Education, entertainment, gathering personal information, and simple browsing ("surfing") were identified as the primary web

activities. E-commerce did not appear to be very popular among the undergraduates - only 32% indicated that they ever bought anything on the web. Not finding information, download time, and encountering links that do not work were identified by most participants as the biggest frustrations with the web today.

These results have been helpful to us in determining the training necessary for students enrolled in web-based courses. We are currently expanding our survey population to include students in other disciplines so that we can better understand the level of experience and web usage among our entire student body at WSU. In addition, we are investigating the differences in usage and experience between males and females.

Computer Experience (N = 448)

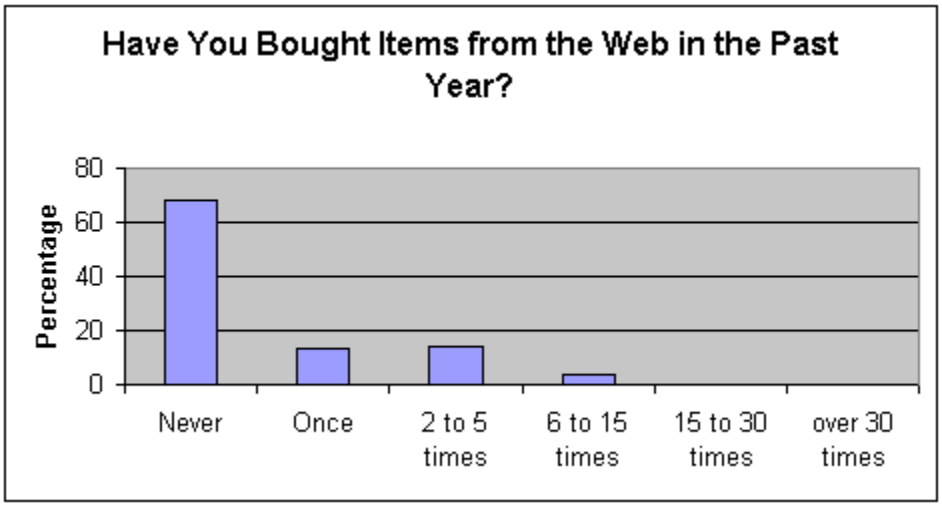


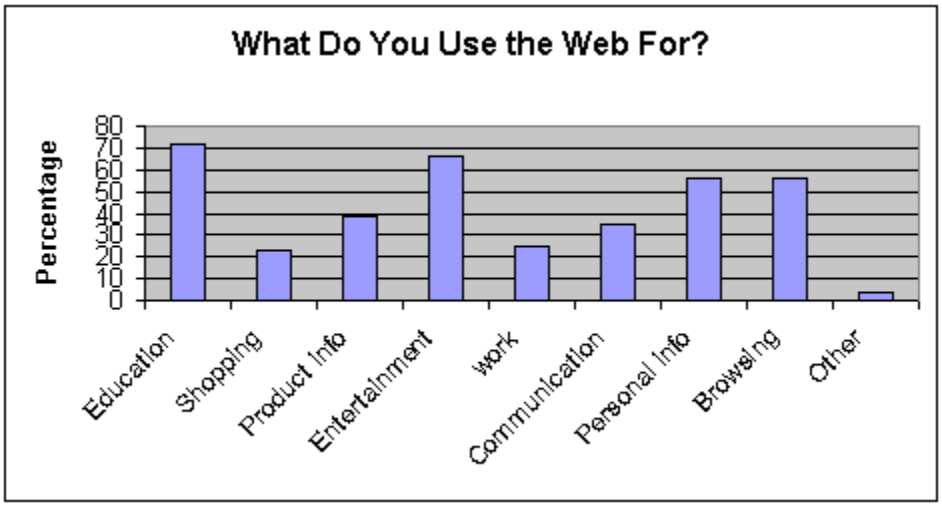


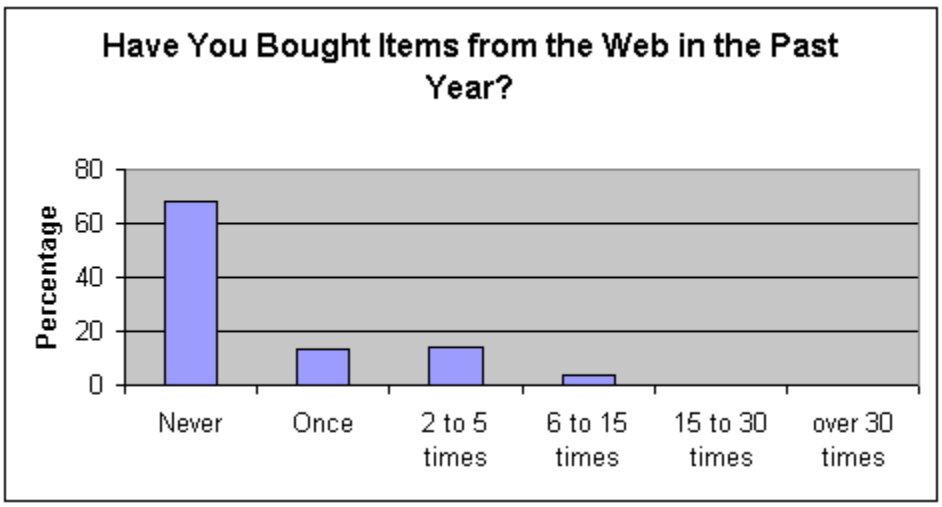
What are the reasons you use a computer?	
Entering data	45%
Word processing	**77%**
Game playing	55%
E-mail	**74%**
Web browsing/searching	**68%**
Web chat groups	28%
Finance management	18%

Other	19%

Web Experience (N = 447)







What do you find to be the biggest problems in using the Web in general?	
Not finding the information I am looking for	**63%**

Not being able to efficiently organize the info I gather	30%
Not being able to find a page I know is out there	45%
Not being able to return to a page I once visited	25%
Not being able to determine where I am	17%
Not being able to visualize where I have been and where I can go	16%
It takes too long to view / download pages	**58%**
It costs too much	13%
Encountering links that do not work	**54%**

REFERENCE

Georgia Tech Research Corporation (1999). GVU's 10th WWW User Survey [On-line] http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user_surveys/survey-1998-10/tenthreport.html

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