

**A Digital Divide at Oakton?**

As a follow up to December’s *In the Abstract*, in January we look at another area of interest from the Current Student Survey: proficiency in the use of both traditional technology and new technology. For many years, traditional technology—including the use of email, electronic files, library databases, presentation and word processing software, spreadsheeting, and search engines—has been incorporated into classroom instruction, and proficiency in traditional technology is a common part of classroom expectations

More recently, new forms of technology have been introduced into the classroom, particularly in the use of social networking and text messaging to maintain contact between students and faculty. Yet, extensive research has documented the presence of a digital divide that separates those who have regular, reliable access to technology from those who do not. Does a digital divide leave some Oakton students less technologically proficient than others? Table 1 provides a look at how students from different age groups rate their proficiency in traditional, new, and other forms of technology. We also explored whether there are differences in technology proficiency among different race/ethnicity groups.

**Table 1 – Percent of Students with Basic or Advanced Knowledge of Technology (Self-Rated) by Age Group (weighted results)\***

Form of technology...		Under 23	23 – 24	25 – 39	40 - 54	55 and Older	
<b>T R A D I T I O N A L</b>	Email with attachments	99%	98%	99%	97%	95%	
	File and folder management	98%	94%	98%	89%	83%	
	Installing freeware	87%	85%	85%	72%	74%	
	Presentation software	96%	97%	89%	75%	47%	
	Search engines	100%	100%	100%	97%	95%	
	Searching library databases for articles	92%	91%	91%	86%	65%	
	Spreadsheeting	86%	86%	82%	75%	59%	
	Word processing software	99%	100%	98%	94%	86%	
	<b>N E W</b>	Downloading media	90%	84%	82%	50%	30%
		Social networking	94%	88%	83%	35%	10%
Text messaging		97%	94%	89%	66%	27%	
<b>O T H E R</b>	Legal and ethical uses of technology	89%	82%	84%	81%	65%	

On average, knowledge of **traditional** technology is **17 percent lower** for students age 55 and older than for students under age 23. The difference is **71 percent** for **new** technology.

Older students rate themselves as less likely to know how to use all twelve forms of technology. This digital divide across age groups is particularly acute for new forms of technology: whereas 6 percent of students under age 23 do not use or know how to use social networking sites, 90 percent of students age 55 and older do not access these sites. The divide is similar for downloading media (10 percent versus 70 percent) and text messaging (3 percent versus 73 percent). As new forms of technology are generationally introduced, some forms of technology are more accessible than others. When new forms of technology are introduced in the classroom and proficiency in these forms of technology is expected, additional instruction and resources may be necessary so that all students may have the opportunity to meet classroom expectations.

We found no substantive differences in how students in different race/ethnicity groups rated their knowledge of technology.

The digital divide is not as pervasive for Oakton students of different races or ethnicities. Students across all races and ethnicities demonstrate comparable proficiency in both traditional and new forms of technology, with significant proficiency in all technology forms. The average proficiency for all racial/ethnic groups is between 89 percent and 91 percent. Overall, these findings suggest that we pay particular attention to the technology-related expectations that we have of older students, particularly when we incorporate new forms of technology into classroom instruction and student engagement.

\* Survey responses were weighted by number of courses taken so that students taking more courses did not dominate results.