

iPADS IN THE CLASSROOM: THE FUTURE OF EDUCATION OR THE LATEST FAD?

Deborah Brown McCabe, Jan Jindra, and Raechelle Clemmons, Menlo College

As part of a college-wide initiative to evaluate the viability and value of furnishing iPads to all incoming freshmen, an exploratory study was conducted with students at a small, private college over the course of two semesters. Two methods of incorporating the iPad into the curriculum were tested. In the first, faculty would occasionally bring to class a mobile cart containing iPads and distribute the iPads to students for the duration of that class period. In the second, faculty checked out the iPads to students for their academic and personal use for the entire semester.

The college was interested in learning whether the use of iPads as part of the curriculum enhances student learning and/or student engagement, as well as whether learning and engagement differ depending on the delivery method. Prior to being introduced to the iPad in class, students were surveyed about the usefulness and perceived value of using an iPad, as well as their experience with tablet devices. They were surveyed on these topics again at the end of the term. A subset of the students also participated in a focus group regarding their experiences.

Findings indicated that, foremost, students liked the *idea* of using iPads. They were eager to try out the tablet and perceived themselves as special and the school forward-thinking for incorporating the tablets into the curriculum. Not surprisingly, the students who took ownership of an iPad for the entire semester had the most positive experience. When asked about the logistics of the iPad's use in the classroom, the results were mixed. The tablets were considered useful for simple class note taking but not for writing down more complex information, such as equations or diagrams. The tablets were convenient for reading articles but not for highlighting or taking notes on those articles. Students were frustrated with the process of saving their work. The iPad doesn't have an external drive or usb port, so students had to e-mail work to themselves or use Dropbox, both which were logistically problematic.

Such issues were viewed negatively in the situation where a cart was brought to class as the students felt they spent more time learning how to use the iPad than using the iPad; whereas the perception of ownership made the students who checked out an iPad for the term more willing to master its complexities and nuances. One finding that faculty members may consider a plus to the iPad's use is that, because of its design, students found it cumbersome to switch among applications and, therefore, couldn't easily surf the Internet during class.