

What They Do and What You Can Do: Taking Advantage Of Social-Science Students' Personal Mobile Technologies in Class

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Last fall we conducted focus groups at Dawson to gain a better understanding of how students' personal mobile technologies, such as smartphones laptops and tablets, can be used in class to help students learn. Below we provide some of the questions we asked and the most common responses. We asked student services professionals and social science professors and students questions such as: How do students use their personal mobile technologies in class to do academic work? What class activities can professors do to allow students to use their personal technologies in the classroom in appropriate ways?

Of course, students use their personal mobile devices, usually smartphones, for a variety of non-academic purposes, such as texting and checking Facebook. However, they certainly use mobile technologies for academic tasks as well. Here are examples:

- Completing Moodle quizzes in class and interacting with Smart Boards
- Consulting Google Translate, accessing dictionaries and looking up verb conjugations
- Following along on their device with the PowerPoint in class: this allows them to zoom in on the PowerPoint when they can't read the projected slides
- Recording lectures (e.g., Voice Memo app)
- Responding to professors' surveys
- Sending emails, as requested by their professor
- Taking notes on PowerPoints or another app
- Taking pictures of PowerPoint slides as well as diagrams drawn on the blackboard and whiteboard
- Using Google Docs for group work
- Using Google Search to look up concepts related to course material

Professors also take advantage of the availability of students' personal technologies. For example, some use the following:

Polling / Online Quizzes

- Online exams / quizzes that can be done on students' personal devices (e.g., Moodle)
- Polling apps (e.g., Kahoot, Poll Everywhere)

Group Work

- Ask students to access course websites to complete group work in class
- Have students work on group work projects (e.g., Google Docs)

Note-taking

- Do a voiceover of the lecture while presenting PowerPoint slides and upload these so students can listen anytime
- Record the audio of the lecture and post this online
- Upload PowerPoints before the class so students can follow along on their personal devices
- Use incomplete PowerPoint slides to encourage students to take notes during class

Class Activities

- Ask students to answer questions in class using their personal technology and to send their responses to the professor
- Ask students to upload questions in class
- Ask students to use their digital textbook in the classroom
- Give marks for sharing notes taken in class
- Have students check Omnivox in class
- Have students do research to answer questions in class using their mobile devices
- Have students write notes on their devices and flip these directly onto a SMART board
- Use smartphones' built-in geography tools (e.g., maps and compass)

TO CONCLUDE

We leave you with three final thoughts.

1. Our findings show that students use a variety of features and apps on their personal mobile devices to do academic work. Of course, there are a variety of inappropriate ways they use these in class as well, with texting and social media use being the most frequent.
2. Professors can integrate students' mobile devices into their teaching to help ensure that these are used for academic tasks. The most frequent strategies suggested are polling, group assignments and classroom activities that foster engagement.
3. Despite the potential distractions associated with mobile technologies in class, students and professors both understand that these can be used to facilitate academic work. However, once these technologies are introduced into teaching, professors must manage them in the classroom to minimize inappropriate use.