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Panel I. Instructional Technologies

Introductory Comments

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Technology is transforming the way faculty have traditionally represented themselves from providers or gate-keepers of information into facilitators of student interaction and learning. Technology is also changing the way students study, obtain information, and interact in their classes. Traditionally, many students often spent considerable time frantically writing down notes during class lectures or researching for information after class. Today, however, students have a wealth of information available to them at the stroke of a keyboard or by simply touching their laptops, iPhones, iPads, or tablets. In fact, students have the ability and opportunity to locate and browse through more information pertaining to a specific subject, within minutes, than any faculty could hope to cover in an entire semester.

Furthermore, due to the rapid growth of social media, emails, texting, tweets, and instant messaging, students spend more time interacting with their family, friends, and peers electronically than in person. In fact, it is not uncommon to see two students texting each other, while sitting only a few feet apart in a class room. In several ways many students are far more comfortable interacting with others through electronic means than in person. These types of social interactions also seem to be on the increase and are now considered to be the “norm” when communicating, especially by students.

In light of these social changes and trends, some faculty have endeavored to develop more as facilitators of learning and interactions within the classroom. To this end, some faculty have recently started using iPads or tablets in their classrooms, especially in large lecture classes (100+ students). Using applications like 2Screens or Keynote with these devices enables faculty to wirelessly control any slides being projected, write-over them, highlight or enlarge key words or main points, save any changes, and, more importantly, have the ability to move all around the classroom and away from the podium.

Moreover, by using devices like iPads and tablets during lectures, students who may be reluctant to raise their hands to ask questions or to openly engage in class discussions have the ability to text or tweet questions or discussion points directly to the instructor. Hence, the use of these devices is helping to engage those students that were previously disengaged or silent. Furthermore, when a student texts a question, the instructor can voice the student’s point or question or display it on a screen so that answers texted by other student may also be seen. Often times, the answers or examples fellow students provide are very thorough, correct, and phrased in a way that other students immediately comprehend.

Technology is changing the way students interact. Hence, the challenge for faculty is to address or incorporate these changes into the classroom and thereby continue to engage students via a medium they are often more comfortable or natural using. To what extent faculty employ mobile technology or social media to engage students will obviously vary depending upon the nature of the course, the material being covered, and other factors, but opportunities to use these or similar approaches, to some extent, exist in nearly all classes.