Research Proposal
Study and Development Fellowships for Sessional Lecturers
(CUPE 3913 Unit 2)

Studying the use of laptops in the classroom and during lectures: A comparison of harms and benefits with recommendations for classroom policies

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Introduction

I have been teaching University and College level courses for almost thirteen years now. During those years, I have developed a lecture style that is strongly based on student participation and class discussions. Many of my course evaluations show that students generally appreciate my lecture style, and learn from it. However, in more recent years, I have noticed a steady decline in both student participation and class attendance. When students are in class, they are most often occupied with their own laptops, rather than paying attention to the lecture or participating in class discussions. When it comes time to write midterms or tests, the students are often ill-prepared, despite the time spent in class discussing upcoming evaluations and reviewing course materials.

As such, I have begun to review research on the effects of laptop use in the classroom, and have discovered what can be referred to as the 'laptop debate'. It seems that there is indeed research to support those Professors who have banned laptops from their classrooms as a result of problems they cause for students in terms of attention and participation during lectures. Specifically, research is showing that students are not as capable at multitasking as they think they are during the lecture.

However, there are also views that support the use of limited or guided laptop use during lectures to increase their appropriate use as learning tools. I would like to examine the research on both sides of this debate further to not only reach some

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conclusions on the harms or benefits of laptop use in the classroom for students themselves, but also as a source of recommendations for other Professors to consider when determining laptop use policies in their own classrooms and lectures.

I would also like to further my own expertise in the area of Media Studies, in terms of having the time to immerse myself in current research and academic work in the subject area. This would strengthen my knowledge base and expertise as a scholar in this growing area of academic work, and would further my own contributions to the field through research and publication.

Goals and Objectives

Given the research cited above and below, along with my own experiences in the classroom as well as the experience of other Professors, I believe a more thorough examination and analysis of the issue of laptop use in the classroom is a worthwhile project. The use of electronic devices, including laptops, is required for students at University, but as with all technologies, they present both harms and benefits to the users. As someone who teaches in media studies, gaining more expertise in the subject areas that analyze media and its effects on society would also benefit both myself and the students I teach.

My goals are thus twofold:

- To gather, examine and analyze current research on laptop use in lectures to determine the harms and benefits of their use for students, and to provide a document that is useful for other professors in determining their own laptop policies
- To study and update my own knowledge in the area of media studies by taking one or two graduate level courses in the field through Athabasca University online (please see attached course outlines and descriptions)

Outcomes and Methods

The methods will involve library and online research for further sources on learning in the classroom, the use of electronic devices in the classroom and multitasking. I would also like to discuss the laptop policies that individual Professors have already established in order to compare them with other each other, and to gain insight into their own rationales for banning or keeping laptops in the classroom.

The outcome of this project will be a document that will summarize and analyze this research, with suggestions on the best policies to adopt within university classrooms. This document will show both the harms and the benefits of laptop use in classrooms and during lectures, and will strive towards an objective view on the
debate. I would be able to share this research with other professors at the University of Guelph-Humber through professional development events that are regularly held during the fall and winter terms.

In terms of obtaining greater expertise in the subject area of media studies, the method would be to take one or two online courses through Athabasca University at the graduate level. I have attached the two course outlines that I believe would be most beneficial for allowing me to gain knowledge on current issues and research in the field. The outcome of these courses will not only be my own greater expertise in the subject area, but will translate into the ability to update or change existing courses to be more current, as well as the possibility of new course development within the department of Media Studies at the University of Guelph-Humber, should the opportunity arise. It would also allow me to further my own research in the area (please see attached CV for current research), and to publish in related fields.

**Plan of Scholarly Activity**

Should I be awarded this Fellowship, I would begin the work in the Spring/Summer of 2016. Athabasca courses begin in May for one term, so they would be completed by that Fall term.

I would also aim to have a document on laptop use in the classroom completed by September 2016, so that it could be helpful for new and returning Professors to use starting in the Fall semester. This research could be shared and discussed with other Professors through professional development events held at the University of Guelph-Humber during the fall and winter terms.

**Sources**


