

FINAL REPORT
STUDY AND DEVELOPMENT FELLOWSHIP FOR SESSIONAL LECTURERS
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SUBMITTED BY DR. NATALIE EVANS

Statement of Fellowship Goals:

My goals were:

- 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, along with suggestions for students on their own uses of laptops within lectures (best practices)
- 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.

I was able to achieve both goals, and the two courses I registered in at Athabasca University are still in progress.

In this report, I will summarize my research and findings on the use of laptops within lectures, and will provide suggestions for both Professors and students that can be used as guidelines for best practices. I will also provide an overview of the two courses I am still working on through Athabasca University, along with a summary of future plans for incorporating what I am learning into my teaching and research career.

Laptops in Lectures

Summary of Research on Harms and Benefits of Laptop Use During Lectures

Benefits of Using Laptops During Lectures

The use of laptops during lectures can be beneficial to students when professors use them as part of their teaching strategies, and when they are used for specific pedagogical purposes (Zhu et al., 2011). When used in this way, the use of laptops can increase levels of attentiveness, engagement, and learning (Zhu et al., 2011). For students with disabilities, the use of laptops for note taking can be beneficial for them, and can help to overcome disability-related challenges in class. The use of laptops can also allow students to follow along with lecture notes that have been released or posted prior to class, as they can add content to them during lectures (Kay & Lauricella, 2011). Laptops can also be used to access online

resources to clarify concepts and definitions etc., that the student doesn't want to ask about in class (Kay & Lauricella, 2011).

Harms of Using Laptops During Lectures

When laptops are used in appropriately during lectures, the harms can be quite detrimental to student learning. This is because when they are used for non-course tasks, such as playing games, watching entertainment media, communicating with others (chatting), it becomes a distraction to them and students around them (Zhu et al., 2011, Kay & Lauricella, 2011). This has a direct impact on students by lowering performance on tests and overall course averages, lower attention being paid to lectures, lack of understanding and clarity about lecture content and lower course performance overall (Fried, 2008; Carter et al., 2016; Zhu et al., 2011; Kay & Lauricella, 2011; Kraushaar & Novak, 2010). It has also been found that there is a correlation between distracting behaviours during lectures and high risk behaviours, such as alcohol and drug use, along with lower GPAs (Barak, 2012). One study found that students using their laptops during lectures spend about 42% of class time on non-course related activities, which resulted in lower scores on course work and overall course averages (Kraushaar & Novak, 2010).

In terms of the effectiveness of note-taking on laptops during lectures, it has been shown that taking notes longhand is more effective for learning as it results in students reframing information into their own words. Most students simply copy lecture materials verbatim when using laptops, which results in decreasing the ability to process information, resulting in lower performance on tests, on both factual and conceptual components (Mueller & Oppenheimer, 2014).

Basically, the unrestricted use of laptops in lectures results in ineffective multitasking, and poses serious distractions to both users and other students that result in less understanding of course materials, and lower overall course performance (Fried, 2008; Sana et al., 2013).

Suggestions for Professors

Some of the potential harms of laptop use in lectures can be reduce by professors, if they clearly communicate their own policy of laptop use from the course outset, by placing their policy in the course outline or course website (Sana et al., 2013). This can reduce the use of laptops in distracting ways for students and their peers. When professors explain to their students why they believe inappropriate laptop use in lectures to be distracting, disrespectful or potentially harmful for their learning, out of concern rather than out of anger, students will respond more positively to laptop policies. Professors can limit the use laptops in their classrooms by having specific times for their use incorporated into the lectures, or by designating laptop-free zones (such as the first few rows) to allow students taking handwritten notes to have a distraction-free area to do so (McCreary, 2009).

Suggestions for Students on Using Laptops During Lectures

Please see the end of this document for a draft handout for students, which could be modified and/or used by professors to communicate best practices to students wishing to use their laptops during lectures.

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MAIS courses through Athabasca University

One of my Fellowship objectives was to increase my own knowledge and expertise in the area of Media Studies. To achieve this, I enrolled in two Masters level University courses online through Athabasca University. Specifically, I enrolled in MAIS 621, Narrative Possibilities: The Transformative Power of Writing, Story, and Poetry in Personal and Professional Development, and MAIS 638, What I Tell You May Not Be True: Autobiography, Discourse Analysis, and Post-Colonialism. These courses are ongoing (to be completed by Jan. 2017) and have provided me with increased knowledge in the areas of writing for professional and individual development, and discourse analysis, which I teach in various media studies courses

at the University of Guelph-Humber. One way I plan to incorporate this knowledge into future offerings of Film Study, Mass Communications and Ethical Issues in the Media is to provide the opportunity for students to write handwritten journals and online blogs. From what I have learned, it benefits students to be able to reflect on their own learning from observing the differences in how they express themselves on paper versus online. The concept of self-censorship, in terms of how people express themselves online is an important one in media studies, and allowing students to identify the ways that writing is used for different purposes in various media formats supports the learning objectives in many of the courses I teach. It also allows students to improve their writing and communication skills.

These courses are also benefitting my own academic work and research, as I have been using discourse analysis to study the ways in which the media represents animals and affects our perceptions of them. I plan on applying for a continuation of my previous research in this area by applying for the Guelph-Humber Research Fund this year, and on incorporating this research into my second book on animals in the media.

What to Consider When Using Your Laptop During Lectures

Recent research into the use of laptops during lectures has shown that:

- Students are not able to multitask effectively, in terms of taking notes and also using their laptops for chatting online, playing games, or for other entertainment purposes
- Using laptops for non-course related activities results in lower test scores, decreased retention of factual and conceptual information provided in lectures, and lower overall course achievement, as well as a lower GPA
- Using laptops to take verbatim notes in class is not as effective as reframing the lecture content into your own words, as it does not increase your understanding of the course materials, and can reduce the clarity of the lecture content
- It is a serious distraction to students using laptops as well as their peers, and results in lower course achievement for both

Suggestions for Students Using Laptops During Lectures:

- Make sure you are familiar with your professor's policies on laptop use during their lectures, and if you can't find this information readily (course outline or course website) then ask!
- Evaluate your use of your laptop, and ask yourself:
- How much time am I spending on non-course related activities during class?
- How much of the lecture do I remember and understand?
- What online activities are most distracting to me during class?
- Would I take better and more effective notes without my laptop?
- Am I simply copying the professor's lecture notes, or am I putting them into my own words?
- How can I best reduce distractions to my learning during lectures?

Taking these suggestions into consideration when using your laptop during lectures can improve your academic achievement, as well as those of your peers.