

Deliberate Engagement of Laptops in Large Lecture Classes to Improve Attentiveness and Engagement



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ABSTRACT

The value of in-class Internet technologies to student attentiveness, engagement, and learning remains both controversial and filled with promising potential.

In this study, students were given the option to use LectureTools, an interactive suite of tools designed specifically for larger classes. The availability of these tools dramatically changed the mechanics of the course as more than 90 percent of students attending lecture voluntarily brought their laptops to class. On one hand, surveys over multiple semesters show that students believe the availability of a laptop is more likely to increase their time on tasks unrelated to the conduct of the course. On the other hand, the surveys also ascertained that students felt more attentive with the technology, significantly more engaged, and able to learn more with the technology than in similar classes without it. LectureTools also led to a dramatic increase in the

number of students posing questions during class time, with more than half posing at least one question during class over the course of a semester, a percentage far higher than achieved in semesters prior to the use of this technology. These results suggest that while having laptops in the classroom can be a distraction to students, students of today show confidence that they are capable of productive multitasking, showing that they not only can handle this technology when applied through “deliberate engagement” using tools like LectureTools, but thrive with it, as seen through improved attentiveness, learning, and overall engagement even in larger classes.