

The Paperless Student: The impact of an intervention addressing digital study competencies

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Abstract

Over the last three years, a number of courses have moved away from the distribution of any printed learning materials in class and instead provide digital versions in advance of teaching sessions for students to download and bring to lectures or seminars in a form they wish. With the marked increase in students' ownership of mobile devices, in particular tablets (Chen & Denoyelles, 2013; Champagne, 2013), there is an implicit assumption that students are confident and competent in the use of digital devices and digital resources for academic activity.

Yet, there is a conflict between students' informal use of their digital devices and online spaces, and the formal, more complex processes that students undertake for their academic study. Study processes often require a more nuanced form of interaction with resources, for example note-taking, annotation, collaboration or cataloguing, in addition to consumption. We argue that students have never had supported opportunities to develop skills to operate in an academic digital domain, and so may be unaware of the benefits or capabilities of different devices and tools. These tools also include a number of assistive technologies, traditionally the domain of disabled students, but of equal usefulness to all users of digital technologies to help with the focusing of attention or conversion of content to different forms, such as text-to-speech. Our solution, borne out of student feedback on the difficulties of reading digitally, was the creation of a support website <http://readingonscreen.com> which links to useful resources and, importantly, allows users to comment on different approaches.

This presentation looks at the impact that the Reading On Screen website has had, not just within our institution but more widely, drawing upon small-scale survey data, site comments, web logs and referral statistics. We will show how our data indicate a continuing need for such support and

question whether institutions should be doing more to integrate digital study skills such as digital annotation and file management within their curriculum.

The intended audience for this presentation is any programme leader or member of learning support staff who, through contact with their students, has recognised the shift from paper-based resources to the digital domain and the effects this may have on students' abilities to engage with learning resources and activities. Delegates will come away with an appreciation of the current demand for support in digital study techniques, an awareness of the resources the authors have compiled, and approaches for how to detect digital skills gaps and address them.

References

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