Implementing a Laptop Program within a College of Pharmacy

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INTRODUCTION

There has been a lot of change within pharmacy education over the past 15 years as schools and colleges of pharmacy, either independently or collaboratively with their institution, have invested in the use of technology for the processes of teaching, learning and assessment. One of the changes brought with the evolving technology is the onset of laptop initiatives. These are programs in which students bring either a provided or pre-determined laptop to classes and the use of technology within the program is greatly enhanced. Implementing a laptop initiative is a long term process requiring planning, implementation and budgetary support. This article provides an overview of the different ways a laptop initiative can be implemented, the pros and cons of different methods, the reasons for starting a laptop initiative, and some general challenges.

BACKGROUND

According to a national study of college students regarding technology use “Students preferred a moderate use of information technology in their courses and expect faculty to use technology well.” (Kvavik & Caruso, 2005) This study also noted that “The primary benefit of technology in courses is convenience, followed by connectedness” and 41% of the students said they preferred their professors to use information technology moderately in class. Students in the survey most commonly said that convenience was the primary benefit of the use of technology in courses and that virtual connectivity was second. The same survey also found that students attending college brought along technology other than computers.

In a different study on student use of technology over 57% of respondents indicated that their colleges provide wireless access, a 15% increase from the previous year. (Hawkins, Rudy & Nicolich 2004) In addition, 34% of respondents indicated that their colleges had wireless access in classrooms. A recent study of colleges and schools of pharmacy found that 65.1% of respondents indicated that the primary place for course offerings was wireless, 34.1% had a laptop or learning technology requirement, and 66% had students bringing personal laptops to class (Robinson, 2007). Finally, a review of the pharmacy education literature finds a number of references to publications about the use of technology (hardware, software, etc.) within colleges and schools of pharmacy, but only a limited list of publications specific to laptop programs within colleges and schools of pharmacy (Munar, et al, 2006; Alsharif, et. al. 2006) Pharmacy is becoming more and more evidence-based and informatics driven, so student use of technology early and often is a strong reason to engage in a laptop program.

TYPES OF LAPTOP PROGRAMS AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

There are several different ways a laptop program can be implemented. What follows are the most common strategies for implementing a laptop program and the issues arising from each of the approaches.

Required Purchase Program

In the required purchase program the laptop is the property of the student unless there is some mechanism by which the laptop is purchased back. Given the speed with which technology evolves, the length of time a student owns the laptop can lead to the dating of the technology. The amount of time the student owns the laptop can also relate to the physical wear and tear as well as support, which can be more challenging the longer the laptop is in use.

Since the laptop is required it is necessary for the institution to have replacement laptops for temporary use in the event the student’s laptop does not work,
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