Students’ Perceptions of the Laptop Program: What Factors Should be Considered Before Implementing the Program?

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ABSTRACT

Due to a rapid increase in the usage of information technology, several companies are demanding that graduates have more than just the basic computer skills when they graduate. This has prompted many universities to initiate a campus laptop program in order to increase their students’ computer experiences and skill sets. The success of a laptop program relies heavily on the extent to which the laptop environment is accepted and wholeheartedly implemented by students and faculty. Defining the conception factors necessary to successfully implement a laptop initiative becomes a critical issue to the success of the program. This study examines university students’ perceptions of a required laptop program to determine what factors that they think are crucial for the success of such a program. By understanding what factors encourage students to support a laptop initiative, such a program can be made more useful to students as well as more beneficial to universities.

Keywords: critical factors; laptop initiative; portable computing initiative; technology in higher education

INTRODUCTION

At an increasing number of universities, laptop computers have become a requirement for incoming students in preparation for their career success. The demand for technology-enhanced learning environments no doubt will grow substantially over the next decade, as society, the academic community, and students continue to expect the educational process to employ technology comparable to that found in the real world (Hall & Elliott, 2003). On campuses where all students are expected to have and use computers, laptops appear to be
the popular choice. The portability of laptops allows students to take them to classes, libraries, and on trips. It is also argued that their ubiquity makes computer-enhanced classroom instruction possible, decreases the need for labs, and consequently lowers the institution’s computer budget (Badamas, 2001).

Laptop computers provide unsurpassed flexibility and convenience for students in the modern academic environment (Bazillion & Braun, 2001; Vaughan & Burnes, 2002). For higher education, providing experiences with computer tools tends to be one of the prerequisites to professional success, because employers value extensive experiences with information technology (Brown, Burg, & Dominich, 1998; Rola, 2002; Tomek & Muldner, 1999). Previous researchers have shown that laptop computers in the classroom can lead to positive educational outcomes (Finn & Inman, 2004; Fouts & Stuen, 1997; Gottfried & McFeely, 1998; Varvel & Thurston, 2002), which provides another incentive for universities to examine a laptop program.

Students’ use of laptop computers is becoming more prevalent in today’s universities. This more ubiquitous use of technology has forced several universities to discover and manage new perceptual issues in addition to the more familiar issues stemming from the primary use of university labs. Thus, defining the conception factors necessary to successfully implement a laptop initiative becomes a critical issue to the success of the program.

This research was centered on the needs and attitudes of students. Typically, students are still skeptical when it actually comes to requiring them to purchase and to use a laptop in higher education. This study attempts to investigate what factors are important to students. It is important to understand what factors can influence students’ decisions on the laptop program. By understanding what factors encourage students to support a laptop initiative, such a program can be made more useful to students as well as more beneficial to universities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Laptop computers are used widely in many workplaces and schools and are currently the largest growth area within the personal computer market (Berkhout, Hendriksson-Larséna, & Bongers, 2004). The need to access information technology on a daily basis continues to grow, and the laptop computer’s advantages of being portable, lightweight, and space-saving, enabling users to work anywhere and anytime, have increased its popularity among personal computer users.

The decision to require student ownership of computers is not unusual among higher education institutions. Several universities are initiating laptop programs in which all students are required to purchase laptop computers. These universities also offer their students computing and networking facilities that enable them to use many kinds of Web-based resources, from the library catalog to complete graduate degree programs. Within an astonishingly short time, higher education has achieved a ubiquitous electronic presence.

The laptop initiative not only has given students a better education but also has made them more competent in using technology. Several issues comprise a students’ perceptual base regarding a laptop initiative. A study reported that key themes related to these issues include (1) academic and social use of laptops, (2) e-mail and
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