



Laptops in the Classroom: Promote Student Engagement

What is it?

Faculty facilitate student learning by encouraging collaboration, inquiry and research to master content oftentimes building on already existing knowledge. Promoting engagement allows students to play a more central role in the learning process. Student-centered teaching strategies encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. It is based on active learning and constructivist models where students are involved in decision-making, organization and often even assessment.

Why is it important?

The most effective way to learn new material is by engaging with it, talking and writing about it. Research shows that student-centered teaching leads to better retention, better knowledge transfer, increased motivation for future learning, and better problem solving abilities. The goal of this approach is to develop students' cognitive abilities. They have to work together, ask good questions, discuss possibilities and arrive at solutions on their own. Since Wentworth's hallmark is experiential learning based on inquiry and problem solving skills, using student-centered teaching strategies further embeds this theme into the curriculum, empowering students as autonomous learners.

Pros...

- Giving students an opportunity to build knowledge in an authentic way prepares them to make positive contributions in the workplace.
- Using collaborative tools, students are able to interact with each other in a constructive and organized way. Clearly outline goals, expectations, and etiquette for online interactions to prevent any misuse.

Cons...

- Trying something new can be uncomfortable so involve students in the process and incorporate their feedback when you use the activity again. Each time you do it, the process will get easier.
- Most web-based collaborative tools are free and sometimes the features are limited, if one doesn't do what you're looking for try utilizing a different one. For example, there are at least 5 good wiki tools, each with different features sets.

How to Start...

Many different tools are available to foster student-centered teaching; laptops become very effective aids in both bringing students together and in accessing resources as part of an integrated approach. Often times, even the smallest changes make a big difference:

- Instead of designing all the discussion questions yourself, task a small group of students to create, post, and moderate a discussion board each week.
- To engage students in the assessment process, offer bonus points for student-written exam questions that are used on the exam.
- Assign students as the weekly note taker, responsible for posting the notes for that week to Blackboard for the rest of the class to use.
- Encourage group dynamics that hold team mates accountable, peer grading could be a great way to get another perspective on how well students worked together.
- A small group of students may collaboratively work on a problem or design project and brainstorm, share documents, links, resources within a shared digital space to connect with one another.

Who does it...

Peter Rourke Student Lab Instructors

Robert Cowherd Course redesign for student engagement

For further reading...

Tomorrow's Professor Blog on using laptops in the classroom in ways that have genuine learning value for students. http://amps-tools.mit.edu/tomprofblog/archives/2006/05/727_enhancing_1.html

Implementing Learning Technologies discusses thoughtful implementation of technology. <http://www.wit.edu/lts/strategies/articles/implementingLT.html>

Learning Outcomes Providing Future Possibilities from Clemson University summarizes experiences with laptops in science and engineering classrooms. http://www.math.clemson.edu/%7Ebloss/uef_brief.pdf

Jerry Kane at BC uses wikis in his Information Systems courses, learn more at: <http://www.profkane.com/case-wikis-in-classroom.html>