Are students ready to declare THEIR independence FROM the printed text?
An explorative study of the use of E-texts
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Poster Description
A team of faculty, library, information technology, and bookstore staff collaborated on a study of electronic textbooks, using two class sections of an upper level business course to explore the satisfaction levels and correlates of students’ use of the course textbook in electronic format. The Fall 2010 pilot study, “Tracking Student Interest in e-Textbooks”, gathered both quantitative and qualitative data from students registered in online and physical sections of an upper level business course. Student participants received their course e-textbook free of charge. Most accessed the e-textbook with their personal laptops, but several reported using a Kindle, iPad, and even an iPhone.

Of particular interest to the researchers were the possible correlates of students’ successful use of the e-textbooks, e.g., their habits regarding the use of social network sites, electronic commerce, blogs, etc. Another purpose of the study was to discover the impact of assistive interventions offered students throughout the length of the study. These included: (1) e-textbook help sessions from both bookstore and IT staff; (2) e-textbook current event emails from a librarian with a reminder of help contacts, and (3) help consultations by phone, email, or in the Library.

At the beginning and end of the study, participants completed pre- and post-surveys measuring their experience with and attitudes toward computers, the Internet, e-textbooks and print textbooks. Students who elected not to use electronic textbooks also completed the surveys to help researchers identify these students’ concerns and reasons for not adopting an electronic text. Midway through the study period, focus group discussions were held.

Early research findings at the time of the poster proposal indicated: (1) 65% of the students were willing to read another e-textbook and (2) cost savings is the most compelling reason to read the e-textbook. Students encountered technical difficulties (page/highlighting freezes, printing problems, and slow network) that were frustrating enough that 10% of the participants switched to print textbooks. Students acknowledge the need to focus when reading their e-textbook. Many students voiced a preference to read their next e-textbook on an e-reader because first, the reader was a physical object reminding the student to read and second, offered no distractions such as the ability to simultaneously access social networking sites. 10% of the students actively sought assistance and/or responded to email messages from the librarians. In contrast to recent research indicating students continue to prefer print, our research suggests students will use the e-textbook format if the e-textbook is easy to access, use, and low in cost. A minority of the students also expressed a preference for an e-reader device such as the Kindle or iPad.

Research reported by other colleges and universities describes a small but growing population of students (25%-55%) are accepting—even preferring—the e-textbook (Rickman et al., 2009; Kolowich, 2010). E-textbooks have been improved to allow highlighting as well as high quality
colored tables and illustrations, which are features students requested in previous studies (Young, 2009). A review of recent literature indicates more needs to be learned about student digital reading comprehension, barriers to accepting e-textbooks, and the pedagogical implications for e-textbook use (as well as for online study).

Selected Bibliography


