

EReaders and Academic Use

By Gail Strachan

There has been much discussion in the press about the use of eReaders in the college classroom. Some universities in the U.S. have adopted them en masse. Stanford, Duke, Chicago State and Northwest Missouri State, have all adopted eReaders to deliver electronic textbook content. After formal trials, Princeton and Arizona State have rejected eReaders as inadequate textbook replacements (Mims). An eReader is a device for content consumption that allows a user to download and read an electronic book or periodical. Amazon's Kindle, Sony Reader, and the Kobo are some of the currently available eReader products. Apple's iPad is a tablet computer that can also be used as an eReader. What are the current considerations for implementing eReaders in your classroom?

As a device for pleasure reading, the eReader is fast becoming undisputed. According to some booksellers electronic book sales have recently surpassed hardcover sales (Kennedy 15-17). Among fiction and nonfiction readers the portability, large storage capacity and ease of ordering books instantly have contributed to the eReader popularity. Those readers that use the eReader for leisure reading enjoy

Works Cited

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the convenience of the device, along with the ability to change the type size and the dictionary function. Among these readers the greatest drawback is the inability to share books.

Among Canadian college and university students the use of eReaders for academic use is still in its infancy. In early 2010 the University of Toronto Bookstore conducted a student survey that showed the majority of students wanted a print copy of a textbook, even if a digital copy was available (Anderson). One of the concerns of students with eTextbooks available on eReaders is navigating the content, even though there are search functions available that allow the user to search by word, name or phrase. Browsing the content of an eTextbook is cumbersome, as is flipping back and forth between sections. Another concern is note taking on the text. Making margin notes is a time honoured tradition that is possible on an eReader but it is not as visible when going back through the eTextbook. A student can highlight text, make notes and bookmark the page in an eReader, but the ability to see this is not as apparent as in a printed textbook. Some subjects are not as easy to view on an eReader. Accounting and finance subjects, where numbers, equations and tables of data are key, are often times more difficult to read on an eReader. Many textbooks are not yet available through eReader vendors, but that may soon change as more competitors are coming on board, most recently the Google Bookstore will compete with Amazon, Sony and Apple's iBooks. Students would like the ability to print or download a portion of the text and this is unavailable on an eReader. Citing material from an eBook is proving difficult as the page numbering is not the same as a print textbook. The Kindle device uses location ranges rather than page numbers. The longevity of battery on the eReader is generally very good so that is often not a concern. The ability to have a dictionary imbedded in the textbook can only be a good thing for a student as is the reduction in lugging around a great number of

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heavy textbooks. The price of an eTextbook versus a print textbook may be the determining factor in the success of eReaders in the college classroom.

EReaders are fast becoming popular in the leisure reading market where a reader navigates a book in a straightforward sequence but the specialized way a student uses a textbook has yet to translate into the eTextbook and eReader market. The increased interactivity that will more than likely evolve with eReaders may make their use by students in college and university more popular in the months and years to come.