

A LEARNING COMMUNITY EXPLORES THE POTENTIAL OF MOBILE APPS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Faculty and staff are curious about the potential of applications for mobile devices and how they can be used to enhance learning, teaching, and productivity. However, the number of applications seems overwhelming and faculty and staff have limited time and money to consider possibilities. This poster outlines the results of a learning community formed to collaboratively learn more about possibilities and select their favorites to recommend to peers.

KEYWORDS

Mobile apps, teaching, learning, higher education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Faculty and staff at our university recognized the value of mobile devices for personal productivity and entertainment but wondered what resources were available to support academic endeavors like research, student services support, teaching, and learning. However, an investigation of the many applications available seemed overwhelming as an individual endeavor, especially with limited budgets.

We formed a learning community of faculty and staff to explore apps independently and come together to show and tell results.

2. METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

Faculty and staff were invited to join a learning community and participate in investigations of mobile applications that they found most useful or interesting.

All participants were offered a \$25 iTunes card to use with their own mobile device in exchange for sharing their findings with the group.

The first meeting was late in the Fall semester. iTunes cards were distributed after introductions and a description of the project.

Four follow-up meetings were scheduled after the semester break. Two or three participants volunteered to present their findings at each of the next four meetings.

To encourage participants in this “divide-and-conquer” approach to exploring the repository of applications, a friendly competition was begun to see who could find the best applications in four categories:

1. best free app
2. best app to support an academic discipline
3. best app to support the profession of teaching
4. best productivity app

Six weeks after the initial meeting, the group convened again to share the findings of the first pair of participants. The next three meetings were scheduled two weeks apart, with presenters sharing their findings informally. In each of the one-hour meetings, presenters answered questions and connected their mobile devices to a projector so presenters could illustrate some of the key features of the apps they discovered.

Over 100 applications and concepts were presented. Some concepts presented were methods for projecting the iPad display, stylus options, etc. All discoveries were sorted into four categories. Participants were surveyed to select their top three choices in each category. Top selections appear in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Top Selections of Mobile Applications by Category

Free	Supporting an Academic Discipline	Supporting Teaching	Productivity
TED Talks	Wolfram Alpha	Eyejot	Dropbox
Educreations	NASA Virtualization Explorer	Keynote	Evernote
Facetime	Stats of the Union	PDFNotes	FlightTrack
EasyBib	iTunesU Darwin Open Course	ReplayNote	NoteShelf
Google Maps	Congressional Record	SyncPad	WritePad

The participant that introduced the top selection in each category was awarded another \$25 iTunes card.

3. CONCLUSION

Participants appreciated the collegial atmosphere of the learning community and the diversity of the apps and other ideas that were identified. The consensus was that they would like to see regular continued meetings of an informal users group on campus to expand on the possibilities of integrating mobile applications to enhance learning, teaching, and productivity. The list of favorites was presented to peers at a campus-wide Institute for professional development.

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