INTRODUCTION

Today a variety of technology tools are available to help professors enhance teaching techniques. However, faculty adoption and mastery of these tools varies leaving questions about the popularity and reaction among students when the tools are integrated into pedagogy. Although many students find the use of technology in the classroom helpful, others may be frustrated if the technology is used infrequently or improperly. This study seeks to examine student views of emerging and more well established teaching technology tools. In particular, student views on Microsoft PowerPoint, podcasting, and use of a variety of functions/features within a learning management system (LMS) are explored. For this study the most commonly used LMS, Blackboard, is examined.

MICROSOFT POWERPOINT

PowerPoint is a valuable tool for classroom presentations that was introduced in 1987 and became part of the Microsoft Office suite in 1990 (Gaskins 2007). This presentation software has the ability to improve class participation and make time spent studying out of class more valuable. If a professor posts or emails PowerPoint presentations before the class meets, students have the opportunity to
review the slides ahead of time, allowing them to formu-
late questions pertaining to reading material in advance
and come to class already having reviewed the content.
PowerPoint can also increase the professor’s preparedness
and can be a helpful tool for students as well. Although it
does not discourage attendance (Guertin 2010). Students
may hesitate when it comes to adding this new technol-
ogy can have an impact on participation and interest among
students to come to class (Green et al. 2006). A student may
feel the risk that the professor may not like the idea of hear-
ing him/herself recorded (Robson & Greensmith 2008).
Students may be resistant when it comes to incorporating
podcasts as well. Although this technology is growing in
popularity, students who have never listened to a podcast
may hesitate when it comes to adding this new technol-
ogy to class. In this study, it is found that the technology
is a newer technology that is becoming increasingly popu-
lar among busy students and professors. Defined as ‘‘audio,
video, text, and other media files that can be played on
the computer or downloaded to MP3 players’’ (Sprague &
Plexy 2008, p. 226), podcasts are also referred to as pod-
casts (video podcasts) or enhanced podcasts that include
text, audio, and video. Podcasts allow students to view or
listen to lecture content at any time or place, but also offer
a number of benefits to faculty. Inexpensive software pro-
grams such as Windows Media Player allow a professor to
record a podcast for free. In addition, once a podcast has
been recorded, it can be edited to remove and add audio
tracks and updated to include new information. Podcasts
also make it easier for a student to listen to the
podcast, both on and off campus, especially for students
who do not have access to a computer. Podcasting
also creates a place for students to submit papers online,
record, and download class documents. Blackboard even
provides a feature that can check the paper for evidence of plagiarism (Preidys & Sakalauskas 2010). The Blackboard
system presents students with many features beyond providing
the course documents and supplemental course material out
of class at their convenience (Bouhink & Marcus, 2006;
Linville & Fish, 2008). This technology also creates a space for stu-
dents to participate in the class discussion, to submit
questions and answers, to provide feedback, and to com-
ment on others’ contributions. This interaction between
students and the professor provide opportunities for
students to develop critical thinking skills and to
engage in discussions that are relevant to their lives.
METHOD
A paper-and-pencil survey was distributed to undergradu-
ate and graduate students at a private university in Texas.
Students were asked to complete a questionnaire describ-
ing their opinions and use of learning technologies such as
Microsoft PowerPoint, podcasts, and tools within Black-
board in an academic environment. Questions focused on
the use of these technologies in a university environment
overall, rather than use of the technology in a particular
others view of their students and how they use these tools to
make learning more accessible to students. This tech-
ology allows educators to transform the learning envi-
roneent for the students. Researcher from different dis-
ciplines (Cadwell 2007; Fries & Marshall 2006; Judson
& Sawada 2002; Simpson & Oliver 2007; and Stowell &
Nelson 2007) have concluded that CRS technology cre-
ates an interactive learning environment for the students.
This interaction between the student and the professor
provide opportunities for students to develop critical thinking skills and to
engage in discussions that are relevant to their lives.

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LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (LMS)

The Learning Management System is an online program
that serves as a learning and communication platform for
students. Blackboard, Canvas, e-College, Moodle, and
Sakai are examples of Learning Management Systems. Use
of a LMS can help make professors’ and students’ lives
more efficient and easier by creating an online class setting.
One of the best qualities of these systems is its ease of use for students and
professors (Green, et al., 2006). Blackboard, currently the
leading LMS provider, allows professors to record a podcast for
students to listen to prior to class. This tool can be helpful for students
students to participate in the class discussion, to submit
questions and answers, to provide feedback, and to com-
ment on others’ contributions. This interaction between
students and the professor provide opportunities for
students to develop critical thinking skills and to
engage in discussions that are relevant to their lives.

Fall 2014 (Volume 10 Issue 2)
Characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1. Of the 204 respondents, 53% were female. As expected, most students (80%) were in the 18-22 age range, representing a range of student classifications. Almost four out of ten (39%) used a LMS in four or more courses in the semester in which the data was gathered, and accessed the LMS 5 or more days per week (36%). Almost all (97%) reported having a computer and many (64%) reported being likely to download and watch a podcast lecture, though only 22% had previously done so.

Respondents were asked their opinions of the use of podcasts for learning and to rate statements about podcasts on a scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree." As shown in Table 2, students generally were positive about the use of podcasts, with the exception of "I would prefer to watch a podcast lecture than attend a lecture in class" which they rated 3.62 out of 7.

Respondents were also asked how much tools used within a LMS enhanced their learning on a scale from 1 = "not at all" to 7 = "very much." As shown in Table 3, students rated the syllabus, assignments, course materials, online tests/quizzes, email, announcements, the calendar, and learning modules highly; whereas chat/who's online and class roster were rated low in terms of enhancing learning. Male and female students' responses to these items were compared using t-test. Perhaps most surprising was the significant differences between the views of men and women, with women rating assignments, online tests/quizzes, email, and learning modules significantly higher on enhancing learning as compared to male students.

Students were also asked how frequently they used each LMS tool on a scale from 1 = "rarely use" to 7 = "frequently use." As shown in Table 4, the tools most frequently used were assignments, e-mail, course materials, the syllabus, announcements, online tests/quizzes, and the calendar. Tools used infrequently were podcasts and chat/who's online.

Lastly, students were asked their views of professors and their use of technology. Students rated statements on a scale from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 7 = "strongly agree." As shown in Table 5, students agreed that PowerPoint files should be posted prior to a class lecture (5.63), that professors respond to e-mails in a timely manner (5.13), professors are technology competent (4.60), professors post grades in a timely manner (4.35), and professors adequately use the LMS (4.29); however, they disagreed that professors rely on PowerPoint too much (3.72) and adequately use podcasts (2.17).
DISCUSSION

These preliminary results reveal that students hold positive views toward technology tools, use them frequently, and believe that they enhance learning. Females, more than males, seem to believe that some of these technologies such as online tests/spizzes have a positive impact on learning. Future research should explore differences based on other demographic characteristics such as age and ethnicity.

Of the tools explored in the study, podcasting is a newer technology and students appear to be familiar and receptive to its use. Professors are not perceived as adequately using the tool which suggests that training may be needed. This finding may also imply that students may be better able to discern technology competency related to podcasting due to their familiarity with it outside class. While publishers often provide instructional materials such as PowerPoint slides to accompany a book adoption, or an institution may create a campus-wide template for the LMS, or provide instructional designers to work with faculty in order to effectively set up a course within Blackboard, no such third party currently provides custom podcasts. So, there is perhaps a greater burden on faculty to master podcasting on their own if the technology is used. This may also present a market opportunity for textbook publishers to offer podcasts as perhaps one of the instructional materials that would accompany a textbook adoption.

While this study should be viewed as a preliminary examination of these topics, the findings do reveal significant differences based on gender and suggest that technology tools are widely embraced by students, perceived as useful, and faculty are evaluated on their ability to adequately use them. Future research focused on gender and other group differences is encouraged. Implications of these findings are important as it relates to providing teaching tools that enhance learning for all groups of students.

REFERENCES


