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STUDIO

An Education Dive Playbook

The Future of Education

How mobile drives student success



Technology in education is ubiquitous for today's learners, ever changing and evolving to adapt to students' needs. Higher education institutions need to understand how to employ the right technologies for students to be successful. Rather than students only learning and engaging in a classroom, present-day education has to be available in and out of the classroom, meeting students wherever they may learn.

And students today are everywhere.

In an increasingly mobile world, much of our minds are stored on smartphones, tablets and other ever-present mobile devices. A 2017 EDUCAUSE report notes that 53% for tablets, and 47% own a tablet. The same survey also found that more than three-quarters of students want to communicate with their peers and instructors about class-related matters outside of class as well as check grades via mobile. Students expect information and support to be available anywhere, at

any time, and with lightning-quick access that is easy to navigate.

“Mobile devices are a critical aspect of our lives. They provide us with information, they make our lives simpler and easier, and they guide our most critical activities,” says Brook Bock, vice president of mobile and student success for Blackboard. “There’s no reason that mobile can’t do those same things for education. And in fact, students today expect it.”

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Mobile technology is changing the face of higher education. It is increasing student engagement and driving student success toward ideal and intended outcomes. As it weaves into daily education, mobile technology still faces challenges, and the expectations for it continue to grow, all the while looking to the future to see what’s next.



The Challenge of Mobile

Technology is pervasive, and nowhere is it more so than in the ecosystem of education. As it evolves, students and faculty alike create space for new technology in the context of learning. Mobile technology is particularly effective and useful in education because, as Erin Myers, program director for Radiography at Community College Baltimore County, notes, “Today everybody has a phone. Not everybody has a laptop.”



And that means that higher education institutions are transitioning quickly to a mobile environment, because that’s where students want to be, says Taylor Burke, adjunct professor of health policy at George Washington University. “That’s not to say there will never be a time or place for sitting down at a desk and typing out an assignment — no one wants to write a long assignment on a mobile keyboard.” But submitting or reading assignments, checking due dates or streaming media are all moving to mobile, due to easy accessibility for students.

“Mobile is the primary device that institutions are using to connect with students,” Burke says. “You have to meet the students where they are if you want to keep them in school.”

Mobile education also provides institutions the opportunity to better engage with students and prospective students, and provide personalized experiences. Real-time interactions

can also help institutions to better understand their students, which can lead to improved retention and enrollment rates. With all its benefits, why then, isn’t mobile more prevalent in higher education classrooms?

As a still fairly new educational tool, says Bock, mobile is sometimes seen as a distraction in the classroom. However, she adds, “students are distracted when they’re not engaged. Mobile phones enable engagement, and mobile engagement can also provide faculty with insight into the needs of their students, so they can be more engaged.”

Myers notes that one of the biggest issues she encounters using mobile in the classroom is related to the institution. For one, Wi-Fi capability often isn’t up to par, as institutions haven’t figured out their needs. Traffic on their networks can be at least three to four devices per person. And another issue, she notes, is the mentality of the institution.



“They’re reluctant to change,” Myers says. “When I first started using mobile in the classroom in 2011, they thought it was just a toy.” But Myers was looking ahead, and saw the future of education with mobile devices. It’s been an uphill challenge, and some faculty are still reluctant to get on the mobile train until the institutional challenges, like improved Wi-Fi capacity, are resolved.

But the students love the immediacy of mobile education, and for Myers, the physicality of the classroom has also fostered her use of the technology despite the challenges.

“Our classroom has 30 seats, and it’s very crowded,” she explains. “Not everyone can see the projection screen, but when you put the information on an iPad, every single student can physically see it and touch it.” In a program like Myers’, the interactivity of mobile education technology is robust and more engaging.

“With mobile technology, we have the ability for students to have laboratory simulation, inside or outside of the classroom — the possibilities are endless,” Myers says. “It has totally revolutionized education, and we’re looking to see more and more people hop aboard and realize how much more their students can get out of it.”

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Driving Student Success

When institutions are able to engage students, they instantly create a more positive education experience that can result in better outcomes.

“Mobile allows for flexibility in the learning experience,” Bock notes. “And mobile solutions empower students to play a more active role in their educational journey by being engaged with the phone that is so easily accessible to them.” She adds that Blackboard’s research shows that students who engage with learning management systems have higher grades than those who do not. “The number of times a student accesses the LMS is a better predictor of success than their GPA,” Bock says.

Myers says that anecdotally she’s seen an increase in student success on tests since implementing mobile education — an important piece for the program she directs, which teaches to a large registry exam for licensure.

Mobile also aids in student success by reaching them before they get into a crisis situation. Identifying at-risk students is important to institutions, and being able to do that — as well as take the next critical step of conducting successful interventions — is something mobile can provide. Successful interventions rely on understanding the needs of students, and then having a channel to engage those students, Bock says. Mobile does both.

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“It’s difficult for advisers to meet the needs of students with their workload,” which can be 1-to-300 or more, Bock explains. Mobile provides the data they need to understand students at different places in their academic career, and fashions it in an easily digestible format that can better help them meet the needs of that student during critical moments.

Mobile apps can prompt students with questions to understand their current sentiment and analyze their engagement.

“And rather than starting from the very beginning, and asking the student basic questions, the adviser can start a dialogue already understanding the student’s sentiment, aspirations and goals, and they get to a deeper place much faster, and personalize needed interventions,” Bock says. “If you can’t help students when and how they need help, it’s really hard to change student behavior.”

Bock adds that mobile education is not just about the sharing of information,

but how and when students access resources that will lead to more personalized learning.

“A student is more likely to benefit from academic help when they’re engaged with active technology,” she says. “And that allows faculty and advisers to better understand what drives their students — where they’re struggling and what excites them. And it makes those interventions, conversations, and relationships more impactful.”



To the Classroom — and Beyond

Mobile technology usage in the classroom will undoubtedly increase as institutions better meet students where they are: on their phones, on the go, learning along the way.

The portability of mobile education is one of the biggest drivers of its success. Myers notes that every one of her lectures is recorded and made available for students, for accessibility 24/7.

“It’s really important for them to be able to access everything they could ever want in a class,” she notes. “With all the resources we’re giving them, I tell them they’re not allowed to fail. So the portability of mobile technology, to have that total library of knowledge, is very crucial.”

Students don’t see a separation between the activities that happen inside the classroom and those that happen outside of the classroom. They view all activities as part of their educational journey.

As a result, mobile tools shouldn’t be used only for academic engagement. Students need support across academics, finances and career planning. Facilitating communication and support between students and advisors on mobile devices enables a more successful journey.

But it is not just about having 24/7 access via a mobile device. “Delivering the right content at the right time presents a huge opportunity to help learners succeed, by keeping them informed, helping make their lives easier, and guiding them to complete critical activities,” says Bock.



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Conclusion

“Different types of learners are sitting in a classroom, and there’s something for everybody, every type of learner, with mobile education,” says Myers.

Mobile education provides students with access to learning in a format they want and that works for their lifestyle, and ultimately produces better outcomes. It is transforming education, and it’s just getting started.

“I think we’re just at the beginning,” says Burke. “And as technology progresses and grows, we’re going to be able to use adaptive learning that will take students even further.”

Mobile benefits also reach outside the classroom. By engaging students where they already are, mobile technology can support across their entire educational journey from enrollment to graduation.

Blackboard®

Learning has no limits when it's backed by mobile. Today, students of all ages crave instant access to their educational experience. Blackboard's innovative mobile solutions engage students daily to inform and simplify the most critical activities across their educational journey. Approachable by design, our mobile solutions help remove barriers between students and advisors, uncover new insights into student behaviors, and help staff drive more effective and proactive interventions.

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