

## Educause Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology 2008\*<sup>i</sup>

### Executive Summary

January 21, 2008

“For today’s traditional-age undergraduates, information technology (IT) plays an integral role in their everyday lives. They actively use many different technologies for school, work, and recreation. They adopt new technologies when they perceive the benefits and costs are aligned. They report a wide range of preferences, uses, skills, and opinions about IT in the academic context. And many of these views and practices change quickly over time. “

#### Key Findings:

- Since mobile devices are rapidly converging in functionality and services they offer, the device is less meaningful so the survey focused on what activities students are engaged in using, regardless of physical delivery system.
- 98.5% own computers
  - 80.5% of student respondents own laptops, an increase from 65.9% in 2006
  - 51.2% own computers, a decrease from 71% in 2006
  - 71.1% of freshmen own a laptop less than one year old
  - 16.7% of respondents have a computer 4+ years old, more likely to encounter problems
- Internet-capable phones are owned by 66.1% of respondents. About 18% use the internet from their cell phones or PDAs weekly or more often. Usage is expected to increase.
- 80% report that they are very skilled or expert at using the Internet to effectively and efficiently search for information.
- Full time students at four-year institutions spent 19.2 hours per week online, up one hour from last year. Engineering was highest (24.8 hrs) followed by physical sciences/math (21.2 hrs)
- 98.1% use high-speed internet services (an increase from 88.1% in 2005) instead of ‘dial-up’
- Usage statistics
  - 93.4% use the university library website
  - 91.9% use presentation software such as PowerPoint
  - 85% use spreadsheets
  - 85.2% use Social Network Sites (SNS)
    - Sensitive to age. Almost all respondents 18 – 19 years old use SNSs (95.1%) while only 37% of respondents 30+ years do so.
    - Half of SNS users use these sites to communicate with classmates about course-related topics but only 5.5% use them to communicate with instructors about course-related topics.
    - Facebook is the most popular (89.3%) and MySpace is second (48.3%)
  - E-mail usage is universal
  - 83.6% use text messaging
  - 82.3% use Course management systems such as WebCT
  - 73.8% use graphics software such as Photoshop or Flash
  - 73.8% use instant messaging
  - 33% contribute content to wikis or blogs
  - 33% use video or audio creation software
  - 4.2% used podcasts during spring 2008 but were extremely positive about their value as a supplemental tool for courses
  - 8.8% use SecondLife, a virtual online world
  - Younger students are the heaviest users of social and communications technologies

- IT in Courses
  - Respondents emphasize that technology should not eclipse valued face-to-face interaction with instructors.
  - 44.4% report that most or almost all of their instructors use information technology effectively in courses
  - 2.8% were enrolled exclusively in online courses
  - 11.9% were enrolled in both online and face-to-face sources.
  - 65.6% feel that IT makes course activities more convenient
  - 46% agree that use of IT in courses improves learning
  - 62.3% do not skip classes when materials from course lectures are available online.
  - 50.8% like to learn through programs they can control such as video games or simulations. This is important in the context of discussions about digital game-based learning in higher education and whether the extent of learning justifies the resources required to implement a game.
  - Student quote: “I feel that IT is a wonderful tool when it is fully understood by both the course instructor and the students. Anything less than that and the tool suddenly becomes something that merely looks pretty, or in the worst case, is a clunky monster.”
- Online Courses
  - Part-time and older students were more likely to take online courses.
  - Positive comments point to convenience and the ability to take courses that would otherwise be unavailable to a student. The majority of comments were negative, with four common themes;
    - Lack of face-to-face interaction detracts from learning
    - Online courses facilitate cheating
    - Technical problems still exist
    - Online courses require student to ‘teach themselves’, making the courses more demanding
- Conclusion
  - Most of the 2008 survey students belong to the Net Generation.
  - Findings indicate that they value IT’s role in providing convenience and expect IT services to be available when they need them.
  - They actively use multiple modes of IT to communicate, socialize, and stay connected with others.
  - They perceive themselves as net-savvy.
  - They choose mobile technologies and use of visual media.
  - They take advantage of Web 2.0 technologies (interactive like Wikis & Blogs as well as SNSs) to express themselves on the internet in varied and creative ways.
  - To ensure student success, institutions will need to strengthen the reliability and availability of their technology services.
- Missing this year are comments about bringing laptops to campus or campus computing lab usage (unfortunate)

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<sup>i</sup> Results included 98 higher education institutions with 27,317 freshmen, senior, and community college respondents during a Spring 2008 survey.