May 2012

It Just Clicks

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Available at: http://lib.dr.iastate.edu/ethos/vol2012/iss3/3

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The use of clickers in classrooms has become a controversial topic among students and faculty at Iowa State. While some favor their quick convenience, others find them unnecessary and just another preventable cost contributing to student debt.

Robinson says the quizzing system does have its downsides. “Clicker questions should be more about participation, not just getting it right.” Some professors use the clickers to quiz students over information from that day’s lecture, which doesn’t give students time to prepare.

Some Iowa State faculty disagree with the use of clickers and this type of technology altogether. Michael Bugeja, director of the Greenlee School of Journalism and Communication says he has never met a student that likes the additional requirement of buying clickers. However, he has seen one student advantage. “Students told me they like it because they don’t have to attend class. They can have a friend attend the large class with their clicker and log in [for them].”

At more than $37 a pop, the Iowa State University Bookstore rakes in thousands of dollars every year on sales of new Turning Point RF Clickers. In fall 2011, the bookstore sold 5,200 clickers and 1,350 in the spring of 2012. Though some of these are used clickers sold for $27.90, the sales do add up to a significant chunk of change out of the pockets of students.
“Yes, [clickers] may save time but what is it actually replacing? It’s replacing people raising their hands,” Bugeja says. “Clickers were a marketing tool to help text make the transition to the digital age ... To me it’s a symbol of yet another expense that adds to student debt.”

Amy Delashmutt, marketing manager at the Iowa State University Bookstore, says she sees the system as a growing trend that will continue to be pushed on our tech-savvy campus. During the 2010-2011 school year, 5,700 clickers were sold at the University Bookstore. In only one year, sales increased by 850 clickers and are expected to continue to grow, following rises in the student body and increasing class sizes.

Delashmutt also reports sales for use in faculty meetings, Greek chapters and other groups for anonymous polling and voting. “It’s a unique piece of technology, and we will continue to find more value in the purchase,” she says.

While one of the main reasons in choosing to use the TurningPoint system was having a unified polling system, Delashmutt says she has no doubt that there are students who have figured out how to get around having to buy an official clicker. “We have a very inventive and entrepreneurial campus,” she says. Delashmutt says she suspects students have made or bought apps on smartphones and computers to make devices into a clicker.

In fact, Turning Technologies does offer systems for students to turn an iPhone, iPod Touch, Blackberry, Android, Windows Mobile or computer into response devices that can even be used outside the classroom for distance learning, potentially saving students money.

Time will tell where Iowa State decides to go with the clickers. Until an alternative arises, hang onto your clicker. Delashmutt says she encourages students not to sell back their clickers throughout college to avoid having to buy another down the road.