

Appropriate Use of Personal Technology Devices in the Communication Classroom

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Modern technologies provide an ever-increasing opportunity to connect with our friends and colleagues. Devices such as mobile phones and laptop computers can be of great benefit in the university environment but their misuse can also conflict with the educational objectives of technology users, classmates, and instructors. Although instructors in the Department of Communication have ultimate discretion for defining the appropriate use of these technologies on a class-by-class basis, the goal of this document is to describe policies and practices that may help to limit the potential for these devices to interfere with the classroom learning environment.

Course Policies and This Document

Because communication instructors are responsible for creating, facilitating, and maintaining a productive learning environment, they may extend or abbreviate the information presented in this document. Prior to using technologies in class, students should consult with their instructor and review the class syllabus for clarification. Should a syllabus refer to the document describing, "Appropriate use of Personal Technology Devices in the Communication Classroom" (this document), the policies and practices described below shall constitute an instructor's definition of appropriate technology use. All students enrolled in Communication courses should be aware that misuse of technologies may result the loss of participation points, assignment grade deductions, referral to appropriate campus-based disciplinary bodies, and other penalties as determined appropriate by an instructor.

Three basic guidelines define appropriate use of personal technology in the classroom:

1. Students are responsible for personal technology use and needs.
2. If allowed, any personal technologies must be used a manner that does not create a distraction for the user, classmates, or the instructor.
3. Students are encouraged to be active participants in the maintenance of an environment that is free from distraction due to the presence and/or misuse of personal technologies.

Student Responsibility for Personal Technology Use and Needs

Students who are required to bring technologies to the classroom, or choose to do so of their own accord, must take responsibility for their technology use and needs. In cases in which an instructor requires the use of a device (e.g., clickers, computers in an instructional lab, etc.), students should insure that all items are accessible, in proper working order, and used in a manner that is consistent with the goals of a class.

- In the case of technologies that are required for a course, students should purchase the necessary equipment, software, and/or accessories either before the start of the semester or shortly after being informed of these requirements.

- All necessary items should be tested, maintained, and stored so that they will be operate as required
- Any user names or passwords needed for accessing classroom computers should be acquired from the appropriate campus entities prior to the start of class
- To prevent loss or theft, personal technologies should not be left unattended for any period of time
- Individuals who require any form of assistive technology should secure an appropriate VISA from the Student Accessibility Center and make arrangements with the instructor at the start of the semester

Use That Does Not Create A Distraction

Personal technologies can contribute to a positive learning environment when used in an appropriate manner. When misused, they can interfere with learning objectives. Although individuals may feel that they should be able to use technology as they wish, they must also recognize that other individuals in the class and the instructor may be distracted by inappropriate use. When allowed by an instructor, individuals who bring personal technology to the classroom should use the devices accordingly.

Laptop Computers

- Laptop computers should be turned on prior to the start of class
- Unless required for class content, wireless network adapters should be disabled
- Applications that are not relevant to a class session should not be open. For example, do not browse the web, respond to email, use instant messaging, and so forth when these activities are not the focus of the class.
- Keyboards that produce audible sounds should not be brought to class
- Monitor brightness should be reduced to an appropriate level so that it is not distracting to others that may be seated nearby

Wireless Devices (telephones, text messaging, pagers, etc.)

- Any wireless devices should be set to silent or vibrate mode upon entering a classroom
- Under no circumstances should personal, non-emergency calls be placed or answered from within a classroom while a class is in session
- Under no circumstances should students view or send personal, non-emergency text messages
- Individuals who are aware that they may receive notice of an emergency during a class session should speak with the instructor before class. If such a notification is received, either quietly leave the class or wait until a break before responding

- In the event that an emergency notification is sent via UWM's S.A.F.E. Emergency Notification System, notify the instructor and follow instructions accordingly

Video and Audio Devices

- Unless required, personal audio or video devices (e.g., iPods, MP3 players, etc.) should not be used in class
- Individuals who require video or audio recording devices to satisfy a VISA from the Student Accessibility Center should consult with the instructor to make arrangements for the placement and operation of these devices
- Individuals who wish to use audio or video recording devices, but are not doing so to satisfy a VISA from the Student Accessibility Center, must receive approval from the instructor before utilizing the equipment
- Student speeches, presentations, and other performances should not be recorded without prior approval by the instructor and the student(s) delivering the performance

Active Participation in the Maintenance of a Distraction-Free Learning Environment

Although Communication instructors work to create and maintain a productive learning environment, it is often not possible for them to observe all events that take place in a classroom. There may be times when another person's technology use may interfere with the learning goals of others. When this happens, students should actively engage in efforts that will enhance the learning opportunity for themselves and those around them.

- If another individual is utilizing personal technology in a way that is distracting, either tactfully request that the activity be stopped, quietly move away from the distraction, or inform the instructor of the problem at an appropriate time
- Should instructional equipment not be operating properly (e.g., volume is too high or low, visual materials are unreadable, etc.), inform the instructor so that s/he is aware of the issue