

Standardizing on Interwrite™ PRS University of Delaware, Delaware A Case Study

With the goal of enhancing student engagement and having the ability to instantly measure student comprehension of course material, the University of Delaware faculty began looking for the perfect solution to address their needs. The challenge in lecture rooms with as many 200 students was gauging student understanding, encouraging student engagement, and providing useful feedback to students. “Instructors want to encourage active learning and to be able to know what their students are learning,” says Janet de Vry, Manager of Instructional Services within the IT User Services department at the university.



Several faculty members were using a variety of different student response (or “clicker”) systems and others were beginning to express interest in using them as well. Instead of having the IT User Services department support multiple clicker systems, the university decided to standardize on one solution. Standardization offered numerous benefits to the university including singular support and student familiarity.

At various times throughout the school year, three major book publishers visited the campus and each one promoted a different clicker. Therefore, depending on individual faculty adoption, some students would have been required to purchase more than one clicker.

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Standardized Criteria

After deciding to standardize, the university formed a task force consisting of IT support staff, faculty members, and an outcomes assessment analyst. They were clear from the beginning that they wanted a radio-frequency system. Overall, the committee thought that radio-frequency clickers were more robust, flexible, and provided the functionality the faculty was seeking. The IT User Services department, along with other key units on campus, also decided that assessment was a critical part of the adoption of the technology.

After meeting for four months and establishing product assessment criteria, the task force decided to invite four clicker vendors to campus for demonstrations and Q&A sessions. They were particularly interested in learning more about the functionality for the hardware and software and the respective business models of each company. The faculty also created a checklist for the sessions. They were seeking a publisher-neutral solution.

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University of Delaware Guidelines

How much do the clickers cost?
How much do the receivers cost?
Is this a one time purchase?
What's the registration fee per course?
Do we need to register on the Web to use?
How easy is it to use?
Is this a publisher neutral solution?
Do the clickers have LCD panels so students can see their own responses?
How much do the clickers weigh (including the batteries)?
What type of batteries does each clicker require, and how many?
Is it integrated with PowerPoint?
Does the vendor provide support for students?
How are the clickers updated?
Are these particular clickers already used on campus?
Are they radio-frequency powered?
If so, what's the operating distance?
How many simultaneous users do they support?
Are they Macintosh compatible?
Is vendor training available?
Can student rosters be integrated?
How many other higher education institutions have adopted this solution?

Final Two

The task force narrowed its selection pool to two vendors. They then obtained evaluation sets from both vendors. Jennifer Lambe, an Assistant Professor in the Communication department was already using the Interwrite™ PRS RF clickers with her students, while Fred Engst, a Statistics Instructor in the Department of Food & Resource Economics, volunteered to assess the other vendor with his students. After Lambe and Engst submitted their reports, the committee remained undecided. Next, the committee did a hands-on assessment and feature-by-feature comparison of the two products.



Results Are In

Functionality, ease of use, an LCD panel, and Mac support gave Interwrite™ PRS the edge over the competition. According to de Vry, "The Interwrite™ PRS clickers were the only devices that really provided the functionality our instructors were seeking. They stimulate classroom discussion and peer instruction, measure student attitudes, and make assessment much easier for educators."



The IT User Services department formally announced Interwrite™ PRS as the campus-wide standard and began implementation plans. Faculty members who had been using other clicker systems also adopted the new standard. As more instructors began to see the benefits of the Interwrite™ PRS clickers in the classroom, the adoption numbers grew exponentially. By the fall, the number of faculty using the clickers had tripled and by all measures the task force process, implementation, and adoption have been successful. For example, in courses that discuss sensitive or personal matters such as human sexuality or legal issues, some students are more comfortable answering anonymously, and therefore are more likely to honestly voice their opinions when using clickers. According to de Vry, “Both faculty and students greatly benefit from using Interwrite™ PRS RF clickers.”

The flexibility of Interwrite™ PRS has also provided the university with opportunities to use the system beyond the expected uses. The Resident Life department uses the clickers to gather data during residence hall training sessions and faculty members are looking at ways to use clickers as polling devices outside of the classroom.

In Support

One surprise for the university’s support staff was how much support the technology required for instructors to maximize the technology’s capabilities. To meet this challenge, “The User Services staff developed in-person training sessions...,” says de Vry. “The sessions ranged from learning the basics of the technology to understanding all of the advanced features. Online training provided by eInstruction™ has [also] proven to be another useful service.”

The university knew having great support and training was essential to implementing new technology. In addition to their internal support, the live web training and videos provided by eInstruction™ were, “extremely important,” says de Vry. “Although the clickers required more support than initially anticipated, the enthusiasm of both (the) faculty and students has made it a worthwhile venture.”

Final Conclusion

The Interwrite™ PRS adoption has been a wonderful success. “Instructors have increased understanding of their student’s comprehension of lecture content and students have a better understanding of their own comprehension as well. Faculty...have seen a marked increase in student engagement in lessons and have noticed improvement in class attendance, which seems to have a positive impact on course grades. We couldn’t be more pleased!”

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About eInstruction™

eInstruction™ is a premier global provider of interactive learning solutions for primary, secondary, and higher education markets. Interactive solutions, including the eInstruction™ Board, Pad and Panel all come with eInstruction™ Workspace, a next generation educational software application for creating, teaching, and assessing student performance using digital content. eInstruction™ assessment solutions include Interwrite™ Cricket and PRS clickers, members of a powerful student response system that combines interaction and assessment to enhance classroom productivity and improve student results. eInstruction™ has a rich 32-year history of delivering interactive solutions that are changing how the world learns.

