iPads: A Panel Discussion with Three Honors College Students

iOS apps and tech-friendly instructors were some of the topics in a recent panel presentation by three Honors College students (Abagail Baumbach, Quinn Cahill and Clayton Brady) speaking about their experience using the iPad. Since the fall 2012 semester, the Honors College scholarship includes an iPad to be used for collaborative learning. The panel discussion was sponsored by the College’s iPad Users Group of the LITS MoTek Team for mobile technologies.

Abagail Baumbach is a second year Honors College student majoring in English Literature and Adolescent Education. Abby uses a bluetooth keyboard with her iPad, noting that "it took a while to get used to typing on the keyboard". Documents are stored in Dropbox, which Abby cleans out at the end of each semester. Her academic work is not entirely paperless, though she has switched from binders to folders to organize her reduced paper volume. Most of Abby’s required books are available in e-format and she prefers to read them with the Kindle app. Abby uses Evernote for notekeeping and paper outlines; she's been using Evernote since high school days. She turns to her laptop when writing full papers, but is "also known to use Google Drive". Twice a semester, Abby spends about a half-hour manually entering her course schedules and assignments into iStudiez Pro, a student planner app that also enables her to track grades.

First year Honors student Quinn Cahill is a math major who decided to be paper-free midway through the Fall 2013 semester. He accomplished this by developing a study method that uses Dropbox, GoodNotes, the Adonit Jot stylus, and ScannerPro. All of Quinn's e-textbooks are in PDF format. He stores them in Dropbox, which syncs any annotations he makes with the Dropbox software installed on his PC. Quinn captures screen shots of each math assignment and then pastes the screenshots into GoodNotes where he uses his stylus to write in the answers. When an assignment is on a handout, Quinn uses ScannerPro to capture an image for pasting into GoodNotes.

The iPad has proven to be very useful when Quinn tutors math students in the College Learning center. He uses EduCreations to create tutorials and Wolfram Alpha to calculate an equation and then show solution steps.

Clayton Brady is a first year Honors student biology major on a pre-med track. He's a "pen and paper guy who likes how apps put a technology twist on old school methods". Perhaps that is why Noteshelf's paperlike experience appeals to him. Clayton uses a stylus to enter notes in Noteshelf; the stylus and app enable smaller writing and it is easy to erase or move notes around. Pictures can be easily inserted into a note, and notes can be exported as PDFs or synced with Evernote and Dropbox. Often Clayton uses the TeamViewer app with full encryption to connect remotely to his laptop (as long as his laptop is turned on); sometimes he'll email files to himself from the laptop. Clayton stated that while he is still on a learning curve, he is becoming more fluent with the iPad and its companion Bluetooth keyboard. He still prefers paper.

Shortly after issuing the new iPads, Honors College Director Donna Kowal emailed the students a list of recommended apps. All three panelists found the list to be helpful, and appreciated having the option to decide which app best fit their own needs and preferences. The Honors
students commented that they learned from others in their learning community or while collaborating on assignments.

What do the students like/not like about using their iPads? Likes included the reduced weight and number of items to carry about as well as the convenience of access to homework and information. The steep learning curve was a frustration, as were instructors who did not allow students to use the iPad in class. Wireless printing and Office365 subscriptions enabling full functionality of the Microsoft Office mobile app were suggested College support services the students would appreciate having.

Did the iPad factor as a recruitment tool? Panelists admitted the offer of an iPad was a motivator that made them feel special--that the College really wanted them. Abby reported hearing of some students who didn't seem to care about the iPad and that one student even sold the iPad. But to most students, having an iPad made a difference. "I didn't realize how much it was going to change how I got things done," observed Quinn.