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Handy Apps for Learning

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Handy Apps for Learning: Don't Catch 'em all, but Some Apps Help

Just weeks after its launch, there is already considerable discussion around how *Pokémon Go*, the most downloaded mobile game ever, could be used in a higher education context. Indeed, the success of this augmented reality game may well signal a new direction and debate in social gaming and apps, and their role in a successful college experience.

Although it's unlikely that your lecturers will have you chasing around your campus searching for a Pokémon, there is huge benefit in using more mainstream apps for education purposes. It seems clear that the 'smart' experience enjoyed by many second-level students needs to be continued in the third-level learning environment. But many academics have been slow to view apps, and indeed the smartphone in general, as anything other than a distraction, with some banning them entirely from the lecture hall. It's understandable that academics would proceed with a certain amount of ambivalence. However, apps have gained a new legitimacy in a third-level learning environment. Evidence shows that they can help make the often difficult shift to more independent thinking, as well as improving your organizational skills, offering you learning on-the-go, and helping you stay engaged with a lecture.

At the pre-entry stage and early orientation to college, many universities and colleges have developed bespoke apps to communicate course content, guide students around campus, facilitate easy connections to internal and external resources, and provide quick access to the all-important timetable. DIT's *Get Smart!* and *Prep for DIT* apps are examples of such bespoke apps developed specifically for first-year undergraduates, foundation and international students.

The best experience of integrating apps and other technologies into your academic learning will come where your college or course works with you to provide guidance and some form of 'app toolkit', sorting through the clutter and offering suggestions for both in-class interaction and independent study/assessment preparation.

To maximize the value of apps, it's best to bear the following in mind:

1. ***Be clear about the purpose of the app.*** If your college/lecturer recommends a particular app, use it. Don't ignore apps developed for you, or learning platforms offered by your college in app form (e.g. Blackboard). And being caught on Facebook (and the like) in a lecture is still a no-no!
2. ***Organize yourself.*** Students often struggle to beat procrastination, especially in a more independent learning environment. Apps such as *GoogleKeep* and *Wunderlist* can help with cracking those scheduling difficulties. Tackling that individual assessment can also be guided by specific apps for various stages of planning e.g. *Easybib* for writing up that all-important list of references, *Cogi* and *Evernote* for note-taking.
3. ***Familiarize yourself*** with assistive technology apps. Whilst geared towards students who have learning difficulties, these apps are useful for the whole student population. *UrAbility.com* can point learners and educators to the best app resources for a range of learning styles.

4. ***Engage yourself.*** We've all drifted off in a lecture or talk to find that we missed the main points. Great interactive techniques are now available, among the most popular being apps to facilitate multiple-choice quizzes around the content just covered. *Socrative* is one of the best apps in this category, allowing students to test themselves in a fun and gently competitive environment, and offering a welcome break from listening to the lecturer!
5. ***Manage yourself and your group.*** Much continuous assessment is group-based at college, and group dynamics are probably the number one cause of frustration for students in preparing assessment work. *Trello* is a great app for project management, allowing team members to be added and progress tracked.

Perhaps not as electrifying as *Pokémon Go*, but these, and multiple other great apps can help ease your transition to college and your successful academic journey through your course. Best of all, most are free.

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