A Proposal to Implement a Laptop Requirement at the School of Medicine

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Introduction: The Academic Technology Committee, a subcommittee of the Educational Policy Committee, has been discussing the need for a laptop requirement for the past two years. Technology continues to play a greater role in supporting the educational experiences of medical students, as does the number of students seeking advice about laptop purchases; however, without some consistency among student (and faculty) laptops, utilizing laptops to support medical student learning is challenging. Moreover, many medical schools, including most of our benchmarks, either have a laptop requirement or provide all students with a laptop. Three other UofL professional schools have laptop requirements: the Speed School of Engineering, the Law School, and the School of Public Health/Information Sciences, and In July 2010, the Educational Policy Committee endorsed the Academic Technology Committee's proposal to implement a laptop requirement for the class of 2015. Moreover, the University-wide Learning Spaces Initiative, currently being finalized, recommends that all teaching faculty be provided with a laptop when replacement computers are being purchases. As this recommendation is adopted, the laptop requirement will enable faculty to bring their laptops to the lecture hall, which will expand the ways in which technology could support medical student education. Funding for the proposed laptop requirement would be minimal and would be covered by the student technology fee. The remaining sections of this report provide details about how the new requirement would be implemented and managed.

Implementation Plan

Each newly admitted student would receive information about the laptop requirement and the web link to the laptop purchase website; this would enable students to plan their laptop purchase to align with the school's laptop requirement (and perhaps graduation presents). Students who purchase from the school's recommended list would then receive free hardware and software support, including free onsite warranty repair. The purchase of the laptop would be included in each student's financial aid plan/package. This laptop requirement would also send the message that our medical school is in line with our benchmark institutions in terms of using technology to support education, which would be well received by prospective students, all of whom are part of the information age.

Operationalizing the Laptop Requirement

- We propose AY 2011-2012 implementation of the laptop requirement, which would require that all students accepted going forward receive information about the new requirement once admitted (Class of 2015 and beyond). These newly admitted students would receive a list of "approved" laptops—offerings from HP, Dell, Lenovo and Apple. (NOTE: Both the University's I.T. Department & the SMOAT Office now fully support Apple products.) Students would order their laptop from a UofL branded website, which will be administered by iTech Express (UofL Central IT). Student purchases will be administered by iTech Express from the University's Central I.T. department.
- The SOM will purchase licenses for the Microsoft Campus Agreement for the Office Suite for all students. This will be administered by iTech Express from the University's Central I.T. department.
- We propose that the laptop requirement be a "soft" requirement. We will not do any formal check to ensure student compliance; rather, we anticipate that students will welcome the laptop requirement and the benefits it will provide, and that within a short time, we will have 100% compliance.
- The School of Medicine Academic Technology Office (SMOAT) will keep a small number of each type of laptop for check out by students as "loaners" should theirs need to be serviced.
- Students would receive the Microsoft Office Suite as part of this initiative, as well as any educational and clinical software used school-wide to support education. Their laptop would be pre-loaded with these applications (pre-imaged) and ready support would be available through SMOAT (School of Medicine Office of Academic Technology) or University IT.

Educational Benefits

- Students would experience a curriculum that is increasingly web-enhanced. Faculty would now be able to integrate more web-based instruction into their teaching, including powerful tools such as radiographs and virtual slides and clinical cases. In addition, faculty will be able to integrate other new applications currently being piloted by faculty, such as Softchalk, wikis, and blogs. With all students having a laptop, the concerns about access would be eliminated.
- All students will have the same technology to support their education. For example, new features in Tegrity, the University-endorsed lecture capturing system, will allow students to follow along with a lecture and "bookmark" sections that are unclear, post questions to the lecturer, and highlight key points, all of which will be recorded and available to the lecturer. This new feature will greatly enhance student review and faculty-student interactions, and could also increase student attendance at lectures.

Similarly, iClicker, our audience participation vendor, is releasing a new product called webClicker, which will allow students to use a laptop to respond to iClicker questions. Additionally, students on away rotation, or otherwise viewing the lecture via videoconferencing, will be able to respond, in real time, to iClicker questions from their laptops.

- The Block Exams will more closely resemble the NBME Step 1 exam, which is now administered electronically, and the NBME shelf exams, which will soon no longer be available in paper form. Moreover, with each student having a laptop, we will be able to utilize some of the more innovative test administration systems, including the NBME customized exams and software that provides students with a report of their areas of strength and weakness. Student laptops would be pre-loaded with a "lock down browser," which cannot be accomplished without a school-wide initiative.
- Students will be able to participate in video conferencing and retrieve video streams of classes live or recorded, reliably, while on AHEC rotations, or when unable to be on campus for other reasons.

Funding

- Funding for this project will be provided from the Student Technology fee. Support costs will decrease, as the SMOAT office already supports a laptop for every student, but without any clear recommendations on how it should be configured, or any hardware similarities. I.T. will provide hardware support on in warranty devices from all of the approved vendors for free, as they are reimbursed by the vendor. The few units purchased to support "loaners" for broken units or to faculty for development, will not unduly over burden the account.

Next Steps

To be ready for the class of 2015, we will need to approve the new laptop requirement by August 15, 2010, if possible. Because the new laptop requirement will not impose any punitive measures on students who do not purchase a laptop, the EPC urges immediate consideration and approval of the proposed laptop requirement.