

Student life and technology

By Debra Mallin, a business student at Greyfort University

Last Saturday, as my grandfather drove me and my sister home from a dinner to celebrate his birthday, he got frustrated at not being able to remember the name of the singer of a song he'd just heard on the radio. Without a second thought, I grabbed my smartphone, searched for the song and found the name, Bob Dylan. For me and my friends, this is a completely natural course of action, but it totally astonished my grandfather, who didn't understand how I had checked the information so quickly. My sister and I laughed and explained, but afterwards, it made me think about how much I depend on technology.

The list of the ways I use technology is endless: writing, planning, socialising, communicating and shopping, to name a few. When I reflected on its impact on my education, I saw that, for my fellow students and I, technology has been significant in many ways. Returning to the story of my grandfather and the smartphone, he had asked me more about how I used it and about university life. He said he thought we had an easy life compared to previous generations. My sister caught my eye and we exchanged a smile. But whereas she was thinking our grandfather was just being a typical 65-year-old, I could see his point.

Not only are we lucky enough to have the same educational benefits as those of previous generations, we have so many more as well. We still have walk-in libraries available to us, and I can see why some students choose to find and use resources in these distraction-free locations. However, the only option for studying used to be sitting in these libraries with as many books from your reading list as you could find, yet now a single search for your chosen study topic online can immediately provide access to a huge range of resources. At universities, interaction between students and university staff is another area that has changed considerably with developments in technology. We can have face-to-face time with our



tutors when we need it, and also communicate using our electronic gadgets from the comfort of our homes, or on the bus. The most popular means of doing this is via instant messaging or social media – email is often considered too slow, and it has become unacceptable for messages to be unanswered for any length of time. While this puts an extra strain on the university's academic support team, who usually have to answer the queries as they come in, we students are greatly benefitted.

It's important that we remember to appreciate how much the advances in technology have given us. Electronic devices such as tablets, smartphones, and laptops are now standard equipment in most classrooms and lecture halls, and why shouldn't they be? The replacement of textbooks with tablets allows students the luxury of having up-to-date, interactive and even personalised learning materials, with the added benefit of them not costing the earth.

When we compare the student life of the past and that of the present day, it is tempting to focus on the obvious differences when it comes to technology. In actual fact, students are doing what they've always done: embracing the resources available and adapting them in ways which allow them to work more efficiently and to live more enjoyably. The pace of change in technology continuously gathers speed, so we have to value each innovation as it happens.

A. Multiple Choice Questions (Choose the correct answer)

1. Why was the grandfather frustrated during the car ride?

- a) He couldn't find his smartphone
- b) He couldn't remember the name of a singer
- c) He didn't like the music on the radio
- d) He didn't know how to use the GPS

2. What surprised the grandfather the most?

- a) How fast the narrator found the information
- b) That the narrator used social media
- c) That the radio stopped working
- d) That Bob Dylan was still famous

3. According to the writer, students today...

- a) Prefer studying only with books
- b) Avoid using libraries
- c) Have access to more resources than previous generations
- d) Study less than students in the past

4. What benefit does replacing textbooks with tablets provide?

- a) Students never need to take notes
- b) Students get updated, interactive materials
- c) Learning becomes more expensive
- d) Students don't need teachers anymore

B. True or False

- 1. The writer believes technology has greatly influenced her education. ()
- 2. The university's academic support staff answers student questions only by email. ()
- 3. The writer thinks that innovation happens slowly and rarely affects student life. ()

C. Matching

Match the technology-related item with how students use it:

Column A:

- 1. Smartphones
- 2. Instant messaging / social media
- 3. Tablets / laptops

Column B:

- a. Searching for academic or research materials immediately
- b. Quick communication with tutors or classmates
- c. Replacing textbooks with interactive, updated content

