

Multitasking: A Desired Skill for Students?

Mike Lovestowrite

Brock University

A-Z Learning Services Sample

Abstract

Student multi-tasking has increased with the increased use of handheld technology. Several recent studies were examined to determine the effects of this increase in multi-tasking on study efficiency, academic performance and personal safety. The results of this examination indicate a reduction in each category. Therefore, the development of programs to educate and equip students to manage these distractions should be considered.

Keywords: multitasking, academic performance, technology

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Multitasking: A Desired Skill for Students?

Start the introduction here and indent the first line of every paragraph that follows. Whether taking notes on a laptop, communicating with study partners via social networking sites or listening to a lecture on a podcast, there is no doubt that technology is playing an increasingly important role in education. While these technologies enable students to multitask, the outcome of student multitasking may not be as productive as many believe. Although research has shown that students benefit from multitasking by increasing the amount of tasks completed (Dunn, 2007; Getmo, 2001), the dangers of multitasking far outweigh these benefits. A recent study of Canadian university students found that 80 percent of those surveyed feel their time spent studying is negatively impacted by incoming text messages on their cellphones (Dee & Stract, 2010). An examination of recent statistics and case studies illustrates that student multitasking is driving students to a level of distraction that is having a negative impact on their study efficiency, academic performance and personal safety.

Multitasking

Task and Mann (2010), key researchers in the area of multitasking, define multitasking as the process of attempting to accomplish two or more tasks at one given time. They outline several common forms of multitasking including instant messaging, reading or studying, viewing or listening to media files, and playing video games. Although multitasking often involves performing tasks at the same time, switching from one task to another is also considered multitasking (Task & Mann, 2010). For example, receiving and responding to text messaging while trying to study is considered multitasking, or task switching, because a student temporarily stops studying to text message.

Impact of Multitasking

Cell phones and text messaging are having a significant impact on student study patterns. On average, “Canadian university students send and receive over 600 text messages per month”

(Ping, 2010, p. 8). Given that the average time taken to respond to incoming text messages is 90 seconds (Roaming, 2009), one can assume that many students are interrupting their studies to read and respond to these text messages. Task and Mann (2010) found that breaks in concentration driven by text messaging, a form of task switching, can have a negative impact on study efficiency through reduced student comprehension and recall.

In addition to reducing study efficiency, there is also a relationship between technological multitasking and poor academic performance. In a study comparing time spent on Facebook and end-of-term grades, researchers found that those who spent over 70 hours per month on Facebook were three times as likely to be on academic probation (Like, 2011). Another study found that students who used laptops to capture notes from a lecture often used the computer for other tasks and scored 30 percent lower on a comprehension quiz at the end of the lecture (Surf & Ing, 2010). Clearly, technology presents students with new options for distraction that can have a negative impact on their academic performance.

Perhaps most alarming, however, is the risk to student safety being driven by technological multitasking. In a 2010 report by the Canadian Campus Safety Coalition (CCSC), reports a 20 percent increase in student concussions as a result of collisions that have occurred because increasing numbers of students are texting while walking to class. Despite the fact that cell phone use while driving a vehicle is now against the law, a number of university campuses report that this continues to be an issue of concern (Ontario University Association, 2011).

Conclusion

While advancements in technology have the ability to make today's students more productive, they also creating distractions that can negatively affect study efficiency, academic performance and student safety. Despite the possible negative consequence of multitasking, current trends in technology and communication illustrate the need to prepare students for

multitasking. As university policies are developed, therefore, the use of technology in classes and the development of programs to educate students warrants further study and discussion.

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