



iPads for the Learning Environment at Texas A&M University at Qatar

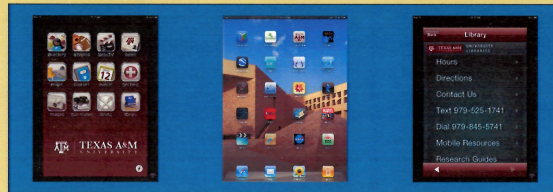
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BACKGROUND

Since 2003, Texas A&M University has offered bachelor of science degrees in chemical, electrical, mechanical and petroleum engineering at Qatar Foundation's Education City campus on the outskirts of Doha. In addition to engineering courses, Texas A&M University at Qatar (TAMUQ) provides instruction in science, mathematics, liberal arts and the humanities. The curricula offered at TAMUQ are materially identical to the ones offered at the main campus in College Station, Texas, and courses are taught in English in a coeducational setting.

From the beginning it was intended that the new library at the TAMUQ campus was to have a small number of printed books and journals with a strong emphasis on electronic information resources complemented by an efficient interlibrary loan service. One consequence of the predominantly electronic collection has been a desire to look for different ways of accessing information using new technologies.



METHOD

Beginning with testing in late 2007 the TAMUQ Library has built an eReader lending programme that has proved popular. The first readers purchased were an Amazon Kindle, a Sony Digital Reader PRS 505 and an iReX iLiad. Users were surveyed for their preferences and over time the library settled on the Sony as the most appropriate tool for TAMUQ needs. The basic process was the purchase of the eReader, barcoding it and issuing it like a book. Where a library user had a request for a particular book the book was sourced either from Manybooks.net or the Sony Reader store and loaded on to the eReader.

From using an electronic device for reading it seemed a natural progression to introducing new tools for capturing and viewing video. Flipcams were introduced in 2008 for loan and proved very easy to use for users that had a need to capture video. In 2009 a streaming media service was put in place that allowed online streaming of video relating to classes. This proved to be an effective substitute to the multiple handling requirements of physical DVDs. In 2009 a new generation of Sony eReaders was introduced with touch screens and in 2010 the first iPads became available for library users to borrow. The iPads lent to borrowers were set up with relevant library and science and technology applications. Upon return any personalization was wiped and iPad returned to a "default" state. From March 2011 testing will be done on the use of iPads as a streaming media viewer using an online movie service.

User comments:

"It's useless for students... It's good for watching movies... it's nothing but a big iphone... for engineering life it will not add anything..."

"I thoroughly enjoyed perusing it. It frustrates me that there isn't a port for USB devices..."

"I was not aware of all the capabilities... so I only tried checking my emails and surfing internet, which was fine. I also used the iBook which was good."

CONCLUSIONS

An atmosphere of experimentation and a "can do" attitude at TAMUQ have helped get new technologies in front of the users at an early stage. User enthusiasm and willingness to participate have made this a relatively easy process. Overall the liberal introduction of new technologies at TAMUQ has been a success. Each technology has had its particular niche use with one piece of hardware not making another redundant. Just as the eReader has not eliminated the need for print materials the introduction of the multifunction iPad with an eReader capability has not lessened the popularity of the dedicated Sony eReaders. The next steps from here for TAMUQ are: (1) comparing Samsung Galaxy Android based tablets to the iPad AND (2) Testing of iPads as a replacement for laptops in the classroom. As for the future it is likely that the atmosphere of experimentation will continue as long as it proves beneficial to TAMUQ library users.

REFERENCES

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