

## iPads at West Point

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An important shift in higher education is currently underway due to the expanding use of mobile devices, such as the iPad. Since mobile devices are now an integral part of our daily lives, teachers are seeking out ways to take advantage of the educational benefits offered by such devices. In the spring semester, a handful of USMA faculty members were given the opportunity to run a pilot study in their classrooms. The study was managed by the Dean's Center for Faculty Excellence (CFE) using iPads provided by the Department of the Army. The overall purpose of the CFE iPad Studies is to discover effective uses of iPads and iPad applications in the classroom for the enhancement of cadet learning and development. Since many cadets use mobile devices on a regular basis, the hope is that faculty members can leverage this familiarity and interest to improve student learning and motivation.

The iPad pilot study engaged 124 cadets and 16 faculty members from 8 academic departments, evenly distributed among humanities and MSE (math, science, and engineering) courses. Three faculty members in the Department of Physical Education were also equipped with iPads to use in teaching physical education courses.

In their courses, cadets used the iPads in a variety of ways. Cadets enrolled in MG380 (Marketing), for example, used their iPads to take notes and video record their presentations. The iPad application Evernote, according to course instructor MAJ Katie Matthew, "allowed them to focus more on what was said instead of how fast they could write."

Cadets in SS307 (International Relations) took advantage of the e-reader capabilities of the iPads and an annotation application to read and annotate their course texts. International Relations instructor MAJ Scott Handler found the iPad to be a very useful and efficient way of bringing current events into the classroom discussion: "It was much easier to access the news via the iPad from multiple sources through their apps than sitting with a hardcopy of the newspapers or even looking up news websites on my laptop."

The iPad seemed to be a perfect fit for PE117 (Military Movement), a course taught by faculty members in the Department of Physical Education. In this course, faculty members used the iPad to video capture cadets as they performed assigned tasks and then to provide immediate feedback. "This technique is used by most coaches in all sports," says Dr. Susan Tendy, "so there is no reason why it cannot be factored into the instructor-cadet contact time."

To assess the educational value of the iPad pilot studies, the participating faculty members collected data, mostly through student surveys and focus groups. Overall, instructors reported that cadets' views were generally positive about the educational value of the iPad; in some specific cases, however, the results were mixed. MAJ Maurice Wilson, in the Department of English and Philosophy, pointed out that cadets were polarized, saying they "either loved it or hated it". In his case, however, the majority of cadets fell into the former group. In MA104 (Calculus I), a large majority of cadets (75%) found the SpaceTime app to be preferable over the Mathematica software normally used with their laptops.

Based on the opinions of participating faculty, the iPad shows promise as an educational tool, though faculty point out that its use may be extremely beneficial in some courses, while only marginally helpful in others. The data collected also suggest that cadets might not be as knowledgeable about using iPads as one might expect. Overall, faculty members in this study believe there is great value on further exploring the use of the iPad as an educational tool. CFE director Dr. Mark Evans hopes that "this study paves the way for wider use of mobile devices by faculty and cadets in the Academy in the near future."

The CFE plans on continuing the iPad pilot studies in the fall semester. The CFE is actively accepting faculty requests to participate in the next round of studies. Interested faculty members should go to: <http://www.westpoint.edu/cfe/SitePages/iPads.aspx>.