

U. of Missouri hopes to teach some iJournalism

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In this photo taken Wednesday, May 13, 2009, Karen Ostergren, a senior at the University of Missouri School of Journalism, talks on her iPhone as she walks by the Donald. W, Reynolds Journalism Institute building on campus in Columbia, Mo. The University of Missouri school of Journalism will require incoming freshmen to purchase an iPhone or an iPod Touch, marking the first time an American university is requiring specific portable electronic devices. (AP Photo/L.G. Patterson)

(AP) -- Gadgets such as the Apple iPhone and the iPod Touch are

mainstays on college campuses - largely for the devices' ability to help students escape the pressures of the classroom.

Now the nation's oldest journalism school is asking students to buy those or similar devices. Not to listen to shoe-gazing indie rock, or watch clips from "The Daily Show," but to download classroom lectures or confirm facts on the Web while reporting from the scene of a plane crash or town council meeting.

The new rule for incoming freshmen at the University of Missouri School of Journalism appears to mark the first time an American university is requiring specific portable electronic devices. The policy has spurred a debate about the limits and possibilities of technology as well as corporate influence in academia.

Skeptics say the school is getting too cozy with Apple Inc., though administrators point out that they earn no financial benefit from the new policy. The university gets a 10 percent discount on Apple computers it buys, but other vendors such as Dell Inc. and Hewlett-Packard Co. offer the same deal.

"It's like asking an engineer to buy a calculator," said Brian Brooks, associate dean for undergraduate studies. "We are doing this requirement solely to benefit our students' learning."

A description about the program on the school's Web site notes that "at least 50 colleges and universities nationwide make use of iPods in their programs." But it's not clear that any of those schools make it mandatory - and at student expense. Private colleges such as Duke and Abilene Christian have given the devices out for free.

Brooks points out that an estimated 85 percent to 90 percent of the university's 30,200 undergraduates already own portable music players,

with 85 percent of those devices being iPods.

Even so, graduating senior Maureen Scarpelli - an admitted Apple disciple - questions the school's endorsement of a particular product.

After similar complaints, the school clarified that it is requiring any Web-enabled, audio-video player like the [iPhone](#) or the iPod Touch, which is like an iPhone without the phone. So portable devices such as a Microsoft Zune or smart phones such as BlackBerrys can be acceptable. Just not preferred.

"There are alternatives to the iPod Touch, but none that we consider equally capable," the online program description concludes.

Among the uses envisioned by Brooks and other professors: students listening to lectures while at the gym or walking to class; using wireless Internet access to verify information while reporting stories; and watching instructional videos that otherwise would take up valuable classroom time.

Clyde Bentley was one of nine journalism professors who voted against the new policy (with 40 in support) at a recent faculty meeting. His primary concern was saddling students with an additional expense. He also questioned whether students who rely on portable devices to listen to Vampire Weekend or watch "The Colbert Report" will embrace the journalism school's intended uses.

"I had a student say that he used his iPod to get away from me," Bentley said, recalling previous attempts to offer podcasts of his lectures.

Brooks pointed out that by requiring portable electronic devices, the university can include those costs in financial aid packages. And the \$229 student price of an iPod Touch is comparable to two or three

textbooks, he said.

Jeffrey Cole, director of the Center for the Digital Future at the University of Southern California, calls the new Missouri requirement "not only reasonable but admirable." He likened the debate to discussions several years ago over whether colleges should ask incoming students to buy PCs or laptop computers - by now a largely moot point.

"Schools are usually far behind their students in embracing new technology. And faculty are usually behind the schools," Cole said.

"It really shows how both journalism and education are changing in transformational ways," he added. "The biggest effect the Internet will have is not how we play or communicate, but how we learn."

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