An Early e-Scholar’s Reflections on the Program’s Impact

Essay by Katie Tripan ’06

Orientation week in August 2002, my first year at UW-Stout, was a busy time for freshmen. There were the usual meetings with roommates and floor mates, unpacking, finding the dining hall, and memorizing names and locations of all the buildings on campus.

But that year, in addition to all the other first-week activities, students were issued laptops. Looking back over all the new experiences we went through that week, the most impressive event was acquiring our laptops.

I had been looking forward to having my own laptop since I learned about the program after applying to UW-Stout in September 2001. It meant I could take notes more quickly in class, do my homework from the comfort of my room and, much to the chagrin of my professors, instant message my dorm mates and friends back home.

As one of the black sheep who was issued an Apple iBook instead of a PC, I was a little apprehensive. I was not an art student designated to receive an Apple, but rather a technical communication student. As a technical communications student, I was in few classes with fellow iBook students, and that proved to be difficult. Professors who encouraged laptop use in their classrooms oftentimes only knew how
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During my four years at Stout, the issue of having different platforms never disappeared on campus. Although it was originally a hassle, the problem managed to transform itself into an important learning experience and invaluable career asset for me and other students. All students, even those taking major-specific courses (in which, hypothetically, students should have the same platform), had to learn how to deal with classmates operating on a different platform.

Specifically, in my technical communication courses, there were many upperclassmen who were not a part of the laptop program. Although many of them did purchase their own laptops, the majority chose PCs over the Apple platform. As a result, I learned to be conscious when working on group projects to ensure shared information is accessible in a cross-platform environment.

Many people enter the work force with experience in only one platform. When they are required to work in an unfamiliar platform, they often require additional training, which costs their company time and money. The ability of students who graduate from Stout in the laptop program to work with both PCs and Macs is impressive to employers. For instance, when confronted with a situation in which they have a presentation prepared on a Mac, but all the presentation equipment and attendee computers are using the PC platform, Stout graduates will know how to deal with this. They have had experience presenting their information in such a way that people with both Macs and PCs can use it.

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