



Media

Darden Shares Results of Kindle Experiment

05/11/2010



Darden's Kindle experiment is not quite over but the verdict is already in: Most Darden students prefer not to use the electronic reading devices in the B-school classroom.

Nonetheless, the trial was informative. "We were very excited to be part of the experiment," says Michael Koenig, Darden's director of MBA operations, who initially contacted Amazon about the pilot project. "We learned a lot and are much more prepared as a top tier business school to face the complex challenges of digital content distribution for all future Darden students."

The concern with the electronic reading devices is that they are too rigid for use in the fast-paced classrooms of the Darden School where the Socratic method and case-based pedagogy means students have to be nimble.

"You must be highly engaged in the classroom every day," says Koenig, and the Kindle is "not flexible enough. ... It could be clunky. You can't move between pages, documents, charts and graphs simply or easily enough compared to the paper alternatives."

Koenig learned of the dissatisfaction from a mid-term survey that concluded with two key questions: Would you recommend the Kindle DX to an incoming Darden MBA student? A total of 75 to 80 percent answered "no," says Koenig.

The other survey question asked Kindle-using students: Would you recommend the Kindle DX to an incoming MBA student as a personal reading device? A total of 90 to 95 percent said "yes," says Koenig.

"What that says to me is that Amazon created a very well-designed consumer device for purchasing and reading digital books, magazines and newspapers," says Koenig. "It's not yet ready for prime time in the highly engaged Darden business school classroom."

The Kindle DX was given to a randomly selected but representative group of 62 First Year students as an alternative to the traditional paper business cases, articles and textbooks. Darden was one of seven schools selected for the program and the first to launch last fall.

The project was initiated as part of the School's effort to give students the opportunity to test out a leading edge eBook Reader in the Darden environment, as an added convenience helping students prepare more easily for classes and to help the Darden School continue to track toward its aggressive environmental sustainability goals. (Students participating in the program, however, also had access to paper textbooks and business cases to ensure fairness.) "We're constantly piloting and assessing initiatives which provide our students the opportunity to go paperless," says Koenig.

Darden aims to be a zero waste, zero carbon enterprise by 2020 and a top 10 school for teaching and research on sustainability by 2013.

Koenig says a handful of "power users" used the Kindle almost exclusively to prepare for class and for use in the dynamic and demanding classroom itself. Many utilized the device in preparation and reading prior to class, but most, however, turned to traditional paper-based classroom material including notes and business cases upon entering the classroom.

Koenig says if Amazon decides to target the higher education market, the pilot and our survey results have helped to identify those few hardware and software upgrades necessary to begin competing against the traditional paper options available in this marketplace. "eBook readers like the Kindle DX already represent an early stage disruptive

technology in the higher education course materials acquisition and distribution arena," he said. "Through this pilot, Darden's strategy to address these impending changes to this marketplace and its impact on our students is well ahead of our peers."

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