

Internet Use in Class Tied to Lower Test Scores

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College students who surfed the internet in class had lower scores on the final exam than their peers who didn't go online in class, according to [findings](#) published in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the [Association for Psychological Science](#).

Michigan State University researchers studied laptop use in an introductory psychology course and found that the average time students spent browsing the web for non-class-related purposes was 37 minutes. Students spent the most time on social media, reading email, shopping for items such as clothes, and watching videos.

And their academic performance seemed to suffer as a result. Internet use was a significant predictor of students' final exam score even when their intelligence and motivation were taken into account, said researcher Susan Ravizza, associate professor of psychology and lead author of the study.

"The detrimental relationship associated with non-academic internet use," Ravizza said, "raises questions about the policy of encouraging students to bring their laptops to class when they are unnecessary for class use."

The research was conducted in a one-hour, 50-minute lecture course with 507 students taught by Kimberly Fenn, MSU associate professor of psychology and study co-author. In all, 127 students agreed to participate in the study, which involved logging onto a proxy server when the students went online.

Of those participants, 83 checked into the proxy server in more than half of the 15 course sessions during the semester and were included in the final analysis.

The researchers used students' scores on the ACT, a standardized test intended to assess college readiness, as a measure of intelligence. They measured motivation to succeed in class using an online survey sent to each participant when the semester was over.

Interestingly, using the internet for class purposes did not help students' test scores. But Ravizza said she wasn't surprised. "There were no internet-based assignments in this course, which means that most of the 'academic use' was downloading lecture slides in order to follow along or take notes."

Previous research, she added, has shown that taking notes on a laptop is not as beneficial for learning as writing notes by hand. "Once students crack their laptop open, it is probably tempting to do other sorts of internet-based tasks that are not class-relevant."

In her courses, Ravizza said she has stopped posting lecture slides before class. Instead, she waits until the week before the exam to upload them so there is no reason for students to bring a laptop to class.

"I now ask students to sit in the back if they want to bring their laptop to class so their internet use is not distracting other students," she said.

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