Teaching & Learning Faculty Publications

Teaching & Learning

2011

Using Poll Everywhere to Encourage Active Participation in a University Setting

Helen Crompton
crompton@odu.edu

Using Poll Everywhere to Encourage Active Participation in a University Setting

Helen Crompton is a PhD Student and lecturer in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill and can be contacted at Crompton@unc.edu

As a keen advocate for participatory learning I spent my first year at the university looking for ways in which I could encourage active participation from the 25-30 students that I taught. Even in small classes, it can be difficult to let all the students respond to questions due to time constraints, issues with overconfident talkers, and the non-speakers. For this reason I chose to use Poll Everywhere as one strategy to overcome this hurdle and was pleased at the results I found.

Poll Everywhere (www.polleverywhere.com/) is a web-based, audience/classroom response system, which is free to use in educational settings with classes of up to 32 students. This web-based program has packages for 50 to 20,000 people, but that does come with a charge. In the first edition of the IamLearn newsletter, Paul Hopkins discussed the use of Textwall in the university setting where he was teaching large classes (120-150). He described how Textwall allows students to send sms messages for display on a large projected screen, providing visibility for the entire class. Poll Everywhere has this same feature, and also a few additional features which I have found useful. Similar to Textwall, the second photograph shows how I was able to use Poll Everywhere to ask the class for teaching strategies to support English Language Learners (ELLs). Students were able to respond through the use of sms, but also through the use of the web, or Twitter.

One of the additional features I often used in Poll Everywhere is the use of multiple choice questions. To respond, students type in the number corresponding to his/her choice. Immediately, a bar chart is updated for the students to view. I often used Power Point during class and Poll Everywhere allows you to create Power Point slides with your questions embedded. These slides can then be insert into your presentation and will still update in real-time. Additional options allow you to stop the poll, or reset the poll at any time.

The university has a class set of iPod Touches available for checkout by instructors. The students in my class simply use the shortcut link on these devices to access the Poll Everywhere website to cast their votes or text comments during class. During the polls I am able to see how many unique participants responded to the questions, this enables me to ensure that every member of the class is responding to my questions. This avoids the students who sit quietly waiting for someone else to think of the answer.

Poll Everywhere is simple to use and it provides instructions to explain the process to students. If you choose to upgrade to the premium version you can also track responses, which can be used as a private, quick and easy method of assessment.

For more information, visit the Poll Everywhere website http://www.polleverywhere.com/sms-classroom-response-system (see Take a Tour and FAQ). Be sure to use the Higher Ed Free Plan Signup link when you register for an account to use your polls with up to 32 students per section (the default signup for business/non-profit is for 30 students).