Thoughts for the Direction of Edison State College Libraries e-Reader collections

In determining the future of the e-Readers collection in the Edison State College libraries, we have reviewed research from other academic institutions, internet reviews, and investigated public libraries’ e-Reader/e-Book programs. Given the information gathered from these sources our recommendation is that the Lee campus program should remain in its current state.

There are several factors driving this decision. First, there are major issues with determining compatibility. We currently lend Kindle e-readers as reserves materials on a three hour loan. These particular e-Readers are not compatible with the EBSCO platform for downloading e-Books. The EBSCO platform also poses several issues as we have experienced problems with EBSCO’s support and subscription rates in the past. If our goal is to allow students to download e-Books from our online e-Book collection, we would need to amend our EBSCO subscription to include this service and purchase a different brand of e-Reader such as Barnes and Noble’s Nook or one of the many models made by Sony.

Aside from the issues with EBSCO and compatibility, the general availability of platforms for the lending of academic e-Books seems lacking. OverDrive, a popular e-Book lending company, is geared toward the public library model mostly offering leisure reading materials. The company offers a package for Higher Education but a cursory look through the titles available leaves a lot to be desired in terms of both breadth and depth of subjects. Accessing the University of Pittsburgh’s OverDrive catalog (University of Pittsburgh 2011) and searching for “Philosophy” returned four titles: *The Republic* by Plato, *Tuesdays with Morie* by Mitch Albom, *Harry Potter and Philosophy: if Aristotle ran Hogwarts* by David Bagget and *Stephen Colbert: I am Philosophy (and so can you)* by Aaron Allan Schiller. These search results are analogous with searches for other subjects such as Art and Religion. The Higher Education package provided by OverDrive certainly seems to be geared more toward popular titles rather than scholarly research. Given a few years the collection may improve but in its current state it does not meet the needs of our student population.

3M Library Systems has recently released the Cloud Library, another e-Book lending platform. An attractive feature of the 3M system is the inclusion of a 3M brand e-Reader and a touch screen kiosk where patrons can browse through available titles and directly transfer titles to their e-Readers. However, there are two significant issues with the 3M Cloud Library: Kindles are not compatible and its catalog is composed of mainly popular titles.

The next issue that should be addressed in this recommendation is the student population’s overall interest in having an e-Reader program. As the study out of CUNY (Foasberg 2011) points out, there are major drawbacks to the current state of e-Readers and e-Books for students. These issues include the inability to take notes and poor navigation. Kindles do not have specific pagination. This is a major issue in both navigating the e-Book and in creating citations. Students already seem hesitant to use e-Books and these issues may only increase their reluctance. Another barrier to overcome in student interest is that the devices are single function. Unlike the iPad or other similar tablet computers, the model of Kindle that we own only works as an e-Reader.

Each campus will of course have different needs in regards to the e-Reader project. For example, as the collection at the Hendry/Glades center continues to grow in a limited space the implementation of an e-reader collection could help provide students with direct access to a larger collection. Purchasing e-Books directly for Hendry/Glades e-readers may be an important part of the overall Collection Development Plan for this library. Concerns regarding this system include lending privileges and lengths for the e-Readers, the titles available through Amazon or another platform for Hendry/Glades use, sharing titles among e-readers in our collection, cataloging and overall student interest.

A case study of the River Forest Public Library in River Forest, Illinois (Dierks 2011) discusses the library’s Kindle lending program. Beginning with 3 first generation Kindles in 2008, the library now circulates five Kindles and keeps one for in library use only. The Kindles at River Forest are loaned on a three week basis in a zippered pouch with a cased Kindle and charger. Librarians in the case study stated that the devices have held up very well under the stress of circulation.

In order to bypass the problem of cataloging each title available on the Kindles and to account for the fact that Kindles are not library equipment and do not allow for the sharing of titles across multiple devices, the librarians at River Forest decided to make each e-Reader genre specific. Pennsylvania State University also uses this model for their Sony e-Readers. Each of their five readers are loaded with genre specific popular literature. They keep a word document posted on their website that allows patrons to see which titles are available on each device. This model could prove useful for the Hendry Glades library. Lending a student working on a History paper a Kindle preloaded with titles pertaining to their class assignment would allow students access to more materials without taking up shelving space.

Given the issues with the Kindle outlined above we feel that going forward we should investigate the possibilities afforded by a tablet such as an iPad. The iPad would not only allow students to have access to an e-Reader that is compatible with EBSCO, it would also give them access to a word processor to take notes as well as internet access to allow for further research. On the librarian side of the equation, the iPad would allow us to create apps featuring things like the library’s catalog, and research guides. These apps would give our students access to Edison library resources with the touch of a finger. We could also purchase apps that allow for the annotation of e-Books giving students the opportunity to mark up the page as they would with their physical textbooks, as well as apps that would help supplement curriculum.

Apple has created a platform for high volume devices making it easy to share applications and other content across iPads. Apple also offers bulk educational pricing for their apps store making the purchase of multiple copies of apps more cost effective. Just as with the Kindle, there is the option to shut off app purchasing in order to safe guard the library’s iTunes account and control the content loaded on the devices. Additionally, it is a simple process to wipe the devices upon return and restore them to the condition in which they were loaned.

There are of course issues related to the iPad first of which is the cost. The cost of the iPad is around $500 for the basic WiFi only model. This poses not only budgetary concerns in purchasing the devices but it also increases worry over lending such expensive equipment to patrons. Several colleges have implemented circulating iPads by requiring a signed agreement with the cost of replacement and the hourly late fee charge made explicitly clear to the patron (Virginia Polytechnic and State University,2011) . The form is required each time a patron checks out a device. If the devices are adopted we could of course make them non-circulating items however it seems that option would limit the educational possibilities and capabilities that make the iPad such a desirable device.

Another concern raised in the literature concerning the iPad is eye strain. There are a couple of reasons that this is a common complaint with the device. The iPad does not use the same eye-friendly e-Ink that the Amazon Kindle does so there is a higher contrast on the screen. Also, the iPad has a backlit LCD screen that catches the light and makes it difficult to read in brightly lit areas or outdoors.

Content accessibility and the ability for patrons to download items to the iPad is another concern. In order to ensure that our iPads are loaned to patrons with our targeted apps would require that each iPad be wiped down and restored to its original settings each time it is returned. This would probably require a 24 hour turnaround time on each device. If we are vigilant about making sure that we are signed out of the library’s iTunes account, before loaning the iPad, the patron would only be able to add apps to the device using his/her own iTunes account. Once the iPad is returned and a library staff member wipes down the device and restores it our original settings, the content placed on the device by the patron would be deleted and the iPad would be ready for the next patron.

Understanding that the iPad is still relatively new technology and that the rest of the tablet market hasn’t been able to create real competition for Apple, we see the implementation of an iPad program as something to consider in the future once prices fall. As we have outlined in the above, the compatibility issues, availability of academic texts, and student interest in a single function device all point to waiting out the technology and seeing how the e-Book vendors and e-Reader manufacturers will respond to the demands of libraries and library patrons. Putting more money into the program at this time does not seem to be in the best interest of Edison State College libraries and the population it serves.

References

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