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Can Clickers Enhance Student Learning?

By Mary Bart

Dr. Peter M. Saunders, director of Oregon State University's Center for Teaching and Learning, has heard the horror stories, and understands why faculty were hesitant to use clickers in the early years.

But clickers have come a long way since they were first introduced into the college classroom, says Saunders, while noting that today these student response systems are not only reliable and easy to use, but have become an effective instructional tool proven to improve attendance, grades, and student motivation.

For those who haven't seen a clicker in action. It basically works like this: The instructor poses a question (often multiple choice or true/false) which is projected in the classroom. Students select their answers by clicking the appropriate button on their wireless handheld device. Software on the instructor's computer collects the students' answers, tabulates the responses, and displays them on the screen.

In the recent online seminar *Using Clickers to Assess and Engage Student Learning*, Saunders explained how clickers can be used for formative assessment and provided examples of different types of assessment questions – from recall to application to opinion surveys. He also discussed research that has uncovered a number of student and instructor benefits to using clickers.

Using student response systems in the classroom can be a great way to motivate students and assess progress. Although large classes are the prime targets for clickers, any size class can benefit from effective clicker use. If you're ready to enhance classroom instruction one click at a time, you will want to order a copy of *Using Clickers to Assess and Engage Student Learning*. **Learn more »**

For students, clickers have shown to improve attendance, comprehension and learning; reduce attrition; provide variety and interactivity; increase the perception that the instructor cares about their success; and reduce the anxiety of in-class questions.

Meanwhile, instructors like clickers because they improve classroom management, uncover gaps in learning, support engagement and discussion, add variety and fun to the class, and help assess if pacing matches learning needs.

After hearing about all of these benefits, it's easy to get excited about using clickers in your class. Saunders recommends first observing a colleague who uses clickers and getting hands-on training. From there, you'll want to consider the following best practices:

- Limit the number of clicker questions to five per class

- Use PowerPoint to prepare, manage, and display questions

- Reserve questions for specific learning outcomes and goals (What do you want to stress? What cognitive skills do you want to develop? What do you want to reinforce?)

- Allot enough time and use an on-screen timer

- Check for ambiguity

- Create questions that support peer discussion and instruction

- Use a variety of assessment question types

- Bring index cards for students who forget their clickers

- Consider not just the answer, but the cognitive processes used

"I have no doubt you're going to have fun with this," Saunders concluded.