

# Student Use of Mobile Devices: Findings from the 2009 ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology

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## Overview

The *ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology* involves an annual survey that is sent to undergraduate students at over 100 institutions around the country.<sup>1</sup> Most of the questions are longitudinal, but each year there are questions on a focus topic; in 2009, the focus topic was the use of Internet-capable handheld devices. The UW is one of the participating institutions for this study. This summary sheet provides a brief description of key findings regarding mobile devices from the 2009 ECAR survey, including how UW respondents compare to students at other participating institutions.

Overall, 30,616 students from 103 four-year institutions and 12 two-year institutions responded to the survey. At the UW, the survey was sent to 2,000 students; 395 participated, for a response rate of 19.8%.

Summary of Findings	UW		Other four-year institutions	
	%	N	%	N
Students who own an Internet-capable handheld device	51.9%	205	50.8%	13,979
Students who own an Internet-capable handheld device AND use it to access the Internet	35.2%	139	32.5%	8,953

Among student respondents who own an Internet-capable handheld device AND use it to access the Internet . . .

- The top three reasons students use handheld devices to access the Internet are: **(1) to check information (news, weather, etc)** (81.3% UW, 77.3% four-year); **(2) for e-mail** (79.9% UW, 74.9% four-year); and **(3) for social networking** (72.7% UW, 63.6% four-year).
- Most students *seldom, very seldom, or never* use their handheld device when an Internet-capable computer is available (78.5% UW, 71.3% four-year).

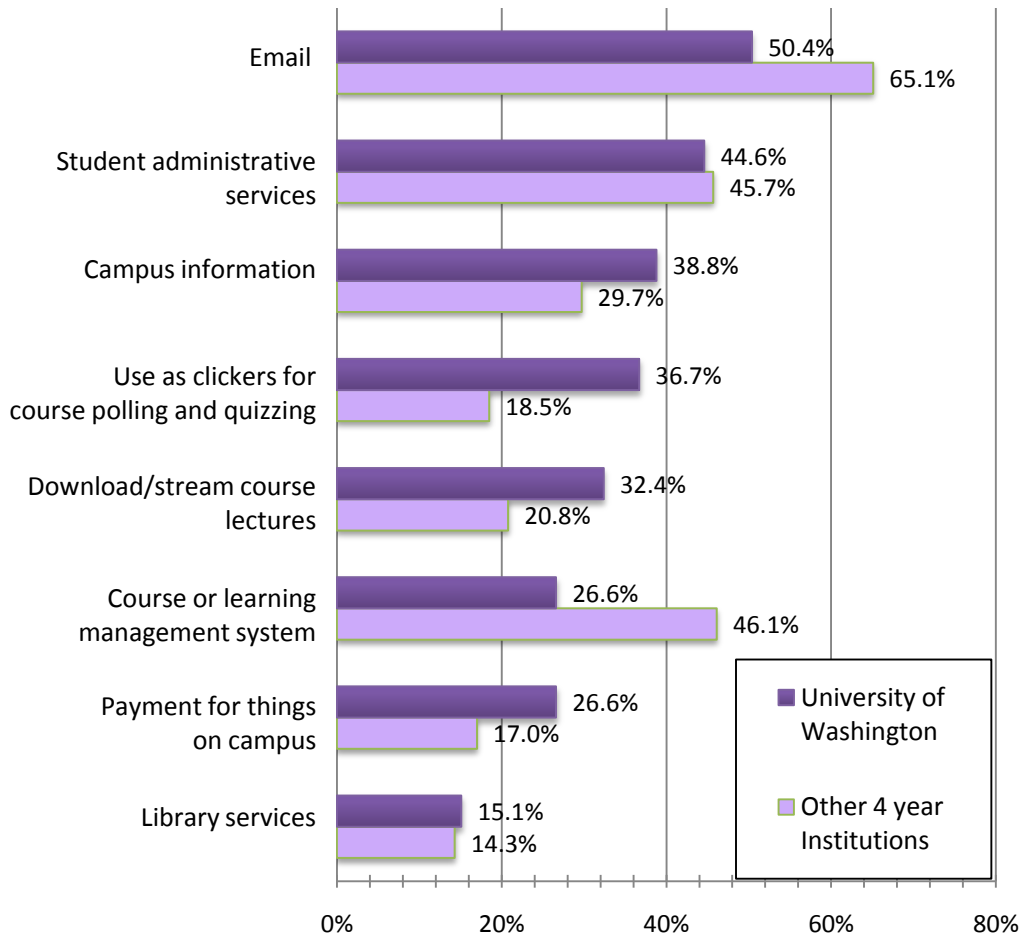
Among all students (including those who do not own an Internet-capable handheld device) . . .

- The main reasons given for not using the Internet from a handheld device, or not using it more often, were: **(1) plenty of other ways to access the Internet** (50.1% UW; 50.8% four-year); **(2) cost of data service** (49.1% UW, 46.8% four-year); and **(3) cost of handheld device** (35.4% UW, 37.3%, four-year).
- Students selected the three academic services they would be most likely to access from a handheld device if the services were available (see FIGURE 1). The top services selected by UW students were: **(1) e-mail** (50.4% UW, 65.1% four-year); **(2) student administrative services (official grades, registration, etc)** (44.6% UW, 45.7% four-year); and **(3) campus information** (38.8% UW, 29.7% four-year). Students at other four-year institutions rated **course or learning management system** in their top three services, but UW student did not select this item as frequently (26.6% UW, 46.1% four-year).

<sup>1</sup> Smith, Shannon, Gail Salaway, and Judith Borreson Caruso, with an Introduction by Richard N. Katz. The ECAR Study of Undergraduate Students and Information Technology, 2009 (Research Study, Vol. 6). Boulder, CO: EDUCAUSE Center for Applied Research, 2009, available from <http://www.educause.edu/ecar>.

**Figure 1.**

Which of your institution's IT services would you be most likely to use if they were available on your handheld Internet device?



## Conclusion

The data from the 2009 ECAR survey provide a general overview of UW students' use of Internet-capable handheld devices and how their use compares to their peers at other four-year institutions. The study also highlights potential academic services that students may be interested in accessing from their mobile devices in the future. These data represent a useful starting point for conversations at the UW about mobile applications. On their own, however, they do not paint a full picture of how students would like to be able to interact with UW services on their mobile devices. For instance, they do not provide enough information to determine the specific types of information in a learning management system students wish to access. Further exploration of students' specific needs is warranted as the UW considers academic uses for mobile devices. Building from these data, we are embarking on a more thorough investigation of UW students' current use of these devices and their future needs.