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To Ban or Not to Ban? The Effect of Permissive versus Restrictive Laptop Policies on Student Outcomes and Teaching Evaluations

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Key Words: teaching strategies; large lecture courses; laptop use; post-secondary education

Abstract: As technologies have become more portable, scholars have turned their attention to whether the use of electronic devices during lecture positively or negatively affects student performance in the class. In this study, I investigate the effects of banning laptops in the classroom through an experiment conducted over two semesters in an introductory American politics course at a large, public four-year university. Overall, I find that banning laptops is more likely to hinder student performance in the class than help. Although students find many elements of the course to be more helpful to their learning in the laptop-free sections, this does not translate to greater student achievement or lead to significantly different evaluations on the official university teaching evaluations. Overall, these findings suggest that although instructors are not penalized for banning laptops from their classrooms, they ought to carefully consider the extent to which such policies are helpful to student progress in large lecture classes.

Declaration of Interest: None

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