Laptops, Cell Phones and Facebook-Distraction or Course Tool?

The point of this page is to provide some resources for addressing student use of mobile devices in class.

Introduction:

As the professor, you decide what is acceptable and unacceptable in the classroom. Have all rules about classroom conduct written in the syllabus and go over them with the class explaining how these rules benefit them and their classmates. If you want to be more democratic, which may make students feel even more invested in the rules, invite student input as you discuss the rules, and perhaps modify them if particular circumstances warrant.

Research suggests that the most effective way to increase likelihood of compliance with classroom rules is to write them in a way that explains how they benefit students (see Teaching Today's Students: http://unbts.ca/teachingtips/pdfs/sew/Teaching%20Todays%20StudentsTipsVersion.pdf).

For professors who want to keep their syllabus to 2 pages and therefore don’t want to provide lengthy written explanations, for fear that student won't read a lengthy syllabus, have a conversation with students about the issues. The disadvantage to this approach is that there is no written record to which to refer students who were absent the day of the conversation or to use to defend policies if challenged. As mentioned above, whether policies are written in the syllabus or not, they should be discussed with students to reach a "meeting of the minds."

Sample Syllabus Statements:

Below are numerous statements that range from "no technological devices" to "all technological devices" and that address devices separately as well as together. The goal is to provide enough statements that you will be able to find some close to what you need that you can copy and modify to fit your situation.

Email: I welcome your questions by whatever means--with a raised hand during class, in person after class, in person during my office hours (Tu Th 2-4pm), and by email. Due to email volume and my availability to view email, email questions will be responded to within 24 hours.

Mutual Respect: RESPECT is the only ground rule we have in this course. The professor will treat students with respect, and the students are expected to treat the professor and one another with respect. In discussing controversial issues it is important that students feel comfortable expressing their opinion, yet it is imperative that students refrain from using derogatory or offensive language.
**Conversation:** All conversation should be related to the discussion at hand and comments should not be directed toward specific individuals. Please refrain from private conversations or any other activities which might distract other learners. Participation marks may be deducted for conversation unrelated to the discussion at hand, or students may be asked to leave for the remainder of the class.

**Cell Phones:** All cell phones, pagers, etc., are to be OFF or SILENCED (not on “vibrate”) during class.

**Cell Phones:** Cell phone use is not permitted in this class. Your phone should be set to “off” or “silent.” Should your phone ring (or vibrate), you will be immediately dismissed and should leave class immediately. You will be considered absent for the day (see attendance policy). I am registered with the campus emergency texting system and will leave my phone on for such emergencies. If you are texting, surfing the Internet, etc., on your phone, you will be immediately dismissed. You will be considered absent for the day.

**Cell Phones:** Cell phones are permitted but must be off, on silent and out of sight. Phone conversations and texting are not permitted and will result in being asked to leave for the remainder of the class.

**Cell Phones:** Cell phones/smart phones are permitted for participation in class activities only, which include answering clicker questions and submitting comments and questions via the class Twitter site. All other uses are not permitted.

*[The continuum can exist everywhere from "no phones may be seen" all the way to "cell phones are permitted but must be off or on vibrate." It’s up to you as professor. You could also state that the reason for not allowing technological devices is that research on multitasking has shown that technological devices not used for instructional purposes decrease marks, and copy in the citations from Multitasking Research below, with or without the annotations.]*

**Laptops:** Research on multitasking in a computer environment during class shows that students engage only superficially with any given task. In order to keep attention focused on learning activities, laptop use is not permitted during class. Laptops must be closed and stored out of sight.

**Laptops:** Laptops may be used for note taking, accessing course components on Blackboard, and other activities as directed by the professor, such as searching for information or posting comments and questions to the class Twitter site.

**Laptops:** Laptops are permitted only for note taking or other specifically requested in-class activities such as searching for information at the request of the lecturer. All other uses are not permitted during class and offenders will have participation marks deducted and/or be asked to leave for the remainder of the class.
Laptops for Note Taking: Handwritten notes have proven effective for keeping a record of what was presented and discussed in class. Laptops may be used for note taking but keep this in mind: laptops tend to put note takers in "transcription mode," where they try unsuccessfully to type word-for-word what is said. This makes the note taker focus too much on typing and not enough on listening to what is being said. By contrast, the process of writing notes by hand is slower, so note takers tend to write only key words and phrases while listening to what is being said, so they remember more later. When reviewing the notes at a later date, the words and phrases are like "memory hooks" that help the note taker recall what was said. The same recall advantages could result if laptops are used to type key words and phrases only.

Phones/Pagers Laptops, and other Technological Devices: I want all students to be successful. Cell phones detract from the learning environment. For this reason, they should be turned off and put away out of view, upon entering the classroom. If you must carry a pager or phone to class for emergency purposes, please see me in advance. If you bring a laptop or other technological device to class, it should not be used for purposes other than taking class notes. Class participation marks will be deducted for unauthorized phone use, and/or offenders may be asked to leave for the remainder of the class.

Phones, Laptops, and other Mobile Devices: I want all students to be successful. I encourage you to use whatever technological device you have--laptop, smart phone, or other mobile device to participate in answering class questions, accessing online course materials, searching for information or online teaching activities, and posting comments or questions to the class blog, Twitter site, and Facebook page. However, the use of technological devices for non-class-related purposes detract from the learning environment and therefore are not permitted.

Recording: No recording of audio or video by any means is permitted without the express consent of the lecturer. Recording without permission is a violation of intellectual property rights and will be subject to sanction by the university.

Additional Resource:

In-Class Laptop Use and Its Effects on Student Learning (http://unbtl.ca/teachingtips/pdfs/sew/Laptop_Use_In_Class.pdf)

Multitasking Research

Resources to cite when discussing mobile technology's potential for distraction in the classroom.
Research conducted by Dr. Ellen Rose of UNB’s Faculty of Education: "Continuous Partial Attention: Reconsidering the Role of Online Learning in the Age of Interruption." *Educational Technology* 50:4 (July/August 2010), pp. 41-46. Available on UNB’s Student Engagement Wiki at [http://unbtls.ca/teachingtips/pdfs/sew/Continuous_Partial_Attention.pdf](http://unbtls.ca/teachingtips/pdfs/sew/Continuous_Partial_Attention.pdf). “When paying continuous partial attention, people may place their brain in a heightened state of stress. They no longer have time to reflect, contemplate, or make thoughtful decisions. Instead they exist in a sense of constant crisis—on alert for a new contact or a bit of exciting news or information at any moment.” “Studies in the area of cognitive neuroscience consistently show that there is a ‘switch cost’ in the ‘mental “gear changing”’ from one task to another (Monsell, 2003, p. 135); research in human perception similarly reveals the existence of an ‘attentional blink’ (Raymond, Shapiro, & Arnell, 1992) during which people presented with rapid sequences of visual stimuli are unable to process new items; and other psychological research supports the conclusion that ‘people have surprisingly severe limitations’ on their ability to simultaneously carry out two relatively simple tasks” (Pashler, 1994, p. 241).

“In [one] study, Hembrooke and Gay (2003) tested two groups of upper-level Communications students for recall immediately following a lecture, and found that those who used their laptops to browse the internet or communicate with others during the lecture significantly underperformed those who kept their laptops closed—even if the online activity was directly related to the lecture content. ... Levine, Waite, and Bowman (2007) found a significant relationship between the amount of time college students spend instant messaging and their distractibility for traditional modes of learning, particularly academic reading. Apart from the fact that students may be distracted by instant messaging while carrying out academic tasks, they posit that repeated use of instant messaging may help to create ‘a cognitive style of short and shifting attention.’”

A 2012 study at Bridgewater State University, Massachusetts, shows that the majority of students engage in classroom multitasking, which is significantly related to lower GPA and an increase in risk behaviours: [Multitasking in the University Classroom](http://vc.bridgew.edu/mahpls_fac/74/)

A study at Ohio State University that showed a correlation between Facebook users and lower grades (this is about students who spent large amounts of time on Facebook outside of class): [http://thechoice.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/21/fbook-grades/?_r=0](http://thechoice.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/10/21/fbook-grades/?_r=0)

Dr Christy Price’s (Professor of Psychology at Dalton State College, Georgia, and UNB Effective Teaching Institute presenter in 2010) Research on multitasking, available on the UNB Student Engagement Wiki at [http://unbtls.ca/teachingtips/pdfs/sew/MultitaskingResearch.pdf](http://unbtls.ca/teachingtips/pdfs/sew/MultitaskingResearch.pdf).

"Although "multitasking" has become fashionable among ... Millennials, it is in reality a euphemism for not paying attention. Studies in cognitive psychology suggest we really cannot focus on two things at once. We aren't really processing simultaneously at all, but instead, toggling or task switching."
“Although we must shift toward more learner-centred teaching strategies, the Generation Y learner must also become aware of the educational risks associated with the short or easily diverted attention span they have developed in our culture.”

UCLA study that shows multitasking adversely affects learning: 
http://www.eurekalert.org/pub_releases/2006-07/uoc--maa072506.php# “Tasks that require more attention, such as learning calculus or reading Shakespeare, will be particularly adversely affected by multi-tasking.”