

FRESNO STATE'S TABLET PROGRAM

by Shirley Melikian Armbruster



Fresno State President Joseph I. Castro has championed the use of tablets in the classroom since Day 1 of his presidency.

His own iPad is always with him. He swipes, taps, pinches and maneuvers the sleek device with ease. He wants everyone else at Fresno State to become equally comfortable using a tablet. And from that desire was born the tablet program, called DISCOVERe at Fresno State.

The tablet program is at the core of Dr. Castro's bold vision to find new ways of teaching that will engage and challenge students to improve their success in the classroom and the university's graduation numbers. It's an aggressive initiative to break down the digital divide and rethink how to educate tomorrow's leaders.

This isn't a "let's check Facebook and play solitaire" tablet initiative. Rather, it is a well-researched, carefully designed program to harness technology to make learning a rich, multimedia, interactive experience.

"Tablets are a teaching and learning tool that Fresno State will embrace to meet the needs of today's tech-savvy students – those already enrolled and future students from throughout the Valley and state who already are using tablets in K-12 schools," Castro says.

There's a buzz on campus as the first cohort of 40 faculty tablet fellows prepare a fall launch.

"I think using tablets will make class more interactive and exciting, which will enhance student learning and increase participation," says Communications professor Dr. Marnel Niles Goins (*below*). She will teach a small group communication course with the iPad in the fall. The course is a part of the First Year Experience Program, where all students in the cohort are first-generation college students.

"I plan to use a number of new platforms and applications that are available on my tablet to engage students in the classroom and when they're doing assignments," Goins says.





Dr. The Nguyen, (*above*) who'll use his iPad in teaching engineering product design, agrees that tablets will increase student engagement.

"The apps will allow students to experiment with things described in the lectures immediately — for instance, some mechanisms of machines," he says.

"I would like to engage my students more by using current technology. I'd like my students to use tablets for browsing and collecting information, taking notes, doing homework, writing reports and interacting with each other (and professors) in and out of the classrooms."

Faculty fellows are using university-issued iPad Air tablets with a keyboard and protective case. The hardware cost is \$850 each with an option for a data plan.

Students who enroll in their classes may use their own tablets of any brand, or may lease or purchase tablets from the Kennel Bookstore on campus, which is working to offer several choices of affordable devices.

"We selected Apple iPads for the first faculty cohort, but we are building a platform that is agnostic — in other words, adaptable for use with any brand of tablet," says Associate Provost Lynnette Zelezny, chair of the task force that is working to implement the program.

As the faculty receive training this spring and summer on how to prepare classroom materials for iPad delivery, additional cohorts of student and staff tablet fellows will be added.

Plus, infrastructure upgrades will be made in the campus wireless network and in classrooms to support the use of tablets. Help center locations in the Madden Library and elsewhere are being scouted.

Mike Pronovost, a senior business administration major and member of the Tablet Program Committee, says students already have ideas about how they can leverage the devices for better interaction in the classroom and with each other.

"When students have the tablets in their hands, the real creativity will come out," he says.

An assessment component built into the program will provide a clear analysis of the impact of tablets. Four assessments are included: faculty learning, student learning, program measures during the first year and a final assessment at the end of the first year.

Funding for the tablet program is from blended sources of the state general fund, Fresno State Foundation and donor support. A \$1 million technology infrastructure upgrade was already planned.

Castro says it's money well spent. "We are investing in our people and in the education of our students."

— Shirley Melikian Armbruster is the associate vice president for University Communications and Integrated Marketing.

Student rep on tablet task force brings wealth of experience



Senior Mike Pronovost, 24,

a business administration major, lives and breathes technology. A passion since his teens, it's propelled him to start his own businesses, work alongside Fortune 500 companies and accept two invitations to the White House.

As a member of the Fresno State Tablet Program task force, he brings a seasoned student voice to the process, plus a decade of creative, hands-on experience.

He likes Fresno State's leap into the educational tablet world, which has some of the same entrepreneurial spirit that defines his own life.

"The tablet program and the changes we are making at Fresno State to reshape curriculum for tablets put us ahead of almost all universities," says Pronovost.

Pronovost's technology and entrepreneurial journey began at age 16 when he started his first business called Extreme PC Parts. At 17, he was hired in the corporate IT division of a local firm. At 18, he started Powerband Internet, a hybrid compression technology company, and within months was working alongside companies like Verizon, Citrix and Walmart.

In 2009, he launched Pronovost Technology Corp., and within three years employed 25 people worldwide, gave speeches across the U.S. on entrepreneurship and worked on projects to bring broadband to developing nations.

Pronovost was named the 2012 U.S. Chamber of Commerce Entrepreneur of the Year, and at age 22 became the youngest person to make the national Impact 100 list — the country's most successful entrepreneurs under the age of 30 selected by Business Week and the Wall Street Journal.

He has received two awards at the White House and gave a speech there on youth entrepreneurship. He has been invited back to meet regarding national technology, infrastructure and mobile devices.

Pronovost has become increasingly involved with the entrepreneurship program at Fresno State, and this past fall represented the Central Valley in the national Collegiate Entrepreneurs Organization competition.

Among his many current ventures is the Student Success Academy, which partners with Ivy League college students as mentors to at-risk high school students. The academy earned \$362,000 in gross revenue in its first two years and created 24 jobs nationally.

Also, Pronovost Technologies is spearheading a project to bring tablets, e-books and educational technology to schools and colleges across the United States.