This is one of twelve ‘digital learner stories’ collected and published by Jisc as part of its Digital Student project. You can read other stories and follow up the themes from Mauro’s story by visiting the Jisc Digital Student blog: https://digitalstudent.jiscinvolve.org/wp/

Mauro's video

http://bit.ly/2kgz1yl

About Mauro

Mauro is 21 and a first-year student at the University of Southampton studying Acoustical Engineering. He is an iChamp: one of a university-wide team that works to support other students' digital literacies in their academic departments and courses of study.

Mauro's digital learning

- Mauro is loyal to a small number of apps and devices that really work for him as a learner. They include:
  - a checklist, calendar and project management app that help him organise his time and tasks
  - a lightweight device that allows him to access recorded lectures and notes while he commutes from home to university
  - YouTube videos that enable him to extend his subject knowledge and explore his extracurricular interests

- Mauro takes advantage of the university's many digital systems and is grateful that he can access:
  - lecture capture recordings for missed sessions or for review and revision
  - drop-in help with his own technologies, conveniently located in the library
  - library spaces that support a variety of different styles of individual and group working
  - a VLE which teaching staff keep up to date with useful resources that he can access wherever and whenever he needs them.
Mauro's key message is that he doesn't want his life cluttered with digital tools but he is happy to have found the ones that really help him to be a better student.

Mauro's story

Mauro has been using computers for as long as he can remember and identifies himself as a problem-solver and "on the computer geek side." He is excited to have been selected as a member of Southampton’s iChamps team in a role that will have him supporting other students in the Acoustical Engineering department with their digital skills. As part of this role he has been given his own iPad.

Mauro went to an international school that – unlike many schools in his home country – was well equipped with new technologies. So he arrived at Southampton feeling comfortable with the use of digital tools in the classroom. But he admits he is "quite resistant to acquiring new tools. I don't want more clutter in my life. If there's something in particular that I need, I'll look for it." When he joined the iChamps team he already owned a Mac laptop and an Android phone, so he was surprised to find that within two days of receiving his new iPad he was "much more productive. For example, on the bus, I used to scroll through Facebook on my phone. Now I can review the last lecture we had on the day. Or I can use a sketching app. I have fallen in love with it!"

Mauro knows that he is a better student when he is well organised. With the iPad, having an integrated calendar really helped but: "the biggest thing was figuring out that I needed to use a 'to do' list. It is the satisfaction of ticking things off a list that drives my productivity." The iPad is now his ‘personal assistant’. Finding the right personal organiser app has also been a breakthrough. Trello allows him to de-clutter his screen and bring all his other ‘to do’ lists together. And since he is on a course where project work is important, the Slack app gives him a well-designed tool for collaboration, with dedicated channels for communicating about different project issues, and the ability to continue collaborating while project members are apart. For his many extracurricular activities, Mauro and his friends use WhatsApp for instant updates and fun, free messaging.

Mauro feels fortunate to be on a small course with only 17 people, where communication problems rarely arise. This small-group setting is "engaging: [it’s] where I learn the most", and he can always ask the lecturer for extra details or explanation. For some of his modules, however, he finds himself in lectures with up to 400 other students, and in these situations he finds the recorded lectures invaluable.

Students use Facebook Messenger to keep in touch between classes, and tutors are available through email or via Blackboard, the VLE. Mauro is not a fan of the VLE interface, but he does appreciates that tutors are rigorous about maintaining course information and keeping resources up to date, including lecture recordings. It’s reassuring to know that "everything I need is on Blackboard."

Mauro classifies himself as an independent learner. "YouTube is a big learning platform for me. I like to think of YouTube as proactive procrastination! Whenever I want to take some time off, I'll dig up some sort of interesting video, whatever it might be. I don't take notes... I just listen in." In fact Mauro has taken his informal learning a step further, completing a Python coding course through the website Code Academy. He says this is "the one time that I completed an online course and it was really useful." Less successful was a course on the Coursera platform which he "never really got into."
While he learns successfully in digital spaces, Mauro loves the university library. He appreciates the aesthetic environment of the building, which he feels motivates him and other students to study. He is eloquent in his praise for the flexible study areas, from bookable rooms for group work to quiet study pods. “I realised early on that if I was in the library, I could focus. If I'm home, there are reasons to procrastinate… It feels like Google's offices, and it's incredible just how much that drives people to study there. I know from my friends that there are some people who have never stepped into a library [before] and all of a sudden they are there all the time. It motivates you to study there. It's definitely my main workspace.” Although he has his own iPad and laptop, Mauro really appreciates that other students on his course have good access too: “Throughout the university you are bound to find a computer if you're looking for one”.

Mauro is a confident, highly motivated individual who takes full advantage of what the university offers both academically and beyond the classroom. He was inspired by an initiative called Future Worlds, which connects University students with local innovators and enterprises. With a group of friends he is now developing a website for a new start-up company. “Luckily the University has a very good support network, with mentors and mechanisms for funding and workspaces to help... I thought about doing this but thought it would be after university.” As a member of the iChamps programme he is also using his digital skills to support other members of his department, and he is equally happy to lend a hand to friends who may need help with Excel basics.

Mauro began his journey as a confident digital technology user, and has emerged as a digital champion and a 'problem solver' for other students. His ability to mix formal and informal learning is setting him up for many future routes to success, and he is now open to adding new tools to his tool set – when he can see how they will be of benefit.

Key issues

- **Inclusion**: Free web sites and apps allow anyone to get learning. Learners can choose the device they use and the style of delivery that suits them best (visual, sound, text, games, self-assessment, repetition).

- **Communication**: Digital tools allow learners to stay in touch with classmates and tutors, and to find other people with a common interest, e.g. on social media. Working on projects collaboratively online is easier and removes physical and time constraints.

- **Library love**: Students really appreciate having innovative, inspiring spaces to learn, and a variety of flexible spaces with plug-and-play facilities support good habits of individual and group learning.

- **Wrap-around ICT support**: Even if students have their own digital devices for learning they appreciate the availability of fixed computing or devices on loan so that their peers are equally well equipped. They also want excellent ICT support, available for their own devices, and on a drop-in basis.

- **Coding and making**: Digital pioneers need access to opportunities for coding and app development. They benefit from mentoring while they realise their designs, and advice on how to make the most of their digital skills and innovations.

- **Supporting others**: Students regularly help one another informally with their digital skills, but recognising this through formal mentoring, advocacy or help-desk roles makes digital experts feel valued and motivates them to develop further.
• **Independent learning**: Students will use alternative resources for learning anyway, especially if they find a digital medium (e.g. video) that suits them. Staff can help by supporting learners in their choices, ensuring they understand how to evaluate resources and apply academic standards of judgement, and affirming the value of independent learning with whatever digital resources are available.

• **Making time**: Online calendars and to-do lists not only help students to get organised but they give a sense of achievement and self-reliance.

Mauro uses the following technology, apps and websites

• **Twitter**: personal use
• **Instagram**: personal use
• **Blackboard VLE**: course resources and information
• **Facebook**: group messaging
• **WhatsApp**: group messaging
• **LinkedIn**: to build professional links
• **Google**: Now, Calendar, Drive: organisation and productivity support that synchronises across devices
• **YouTube**: a learning platform and a space for 'proactive procrastination'
• **Trello**: an organisational tool that has enhanced Mauro's skills
• **Slack**: project management tool for group communication and collaboration
• **Azure**: building web sites
• **iPad**: now proving to be a useful, go-anywhere digital tool
• **University lecture capture system**: recordings of lectures are useful to review and catch up on missed sessions