

Current research

Faith and Technology: Implementing Spiritual Development Mobile Applications

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Abstract: Abilene Christian University achieved iPhone/iPod touch saturation throughout the student body in the 2009-2010 school year. As the spiritual and faith development of students is a priority at ACU, our goal is to find a way to use the mobile devices now in every student's hand to further enrich their spiritual development in ways that have not yet been investigated before. As a preliminary step to this study, we will conduct field-testing of several different applications to find the features that will be most beneficial and engaging to undergraduate university students. After application development, we will initiate an experimental study involving a control group of students who will attend the regular daily chapel programming offered by ACU and an experimental group who will attend, instead of regular Thursday chapel, a mobile chapel. This mobile chapel will likely take different forms, including podcasts from alumni who will discuss the intersection of faith and life as it relates to their particular disciplines, spiritual exercises to complete on mobile devices, and prayer requests from other members of the experimental group, among others. We will conduct pre- and post-measures of, among other things: attitude toward using mobile devices in spiritual development; doctrinal belief; behavior (quantity and quality of spiritual exercises); and opinions about the efficacy of the developed application. As this is a preliminary study, our goal is mainly to gain a first insight into the potential uses and effects of mobile devices on faith.

Key aspects:

- Development of new application designed specifically to aid in the spiritual development of undergraduate students.
- Groups of student volunteers from populations across the campus, e.g.:
 - Specific disciplines (e.g., theatre, biology)
 - Social clubs
 - Bible department classes
- Bifurcation into control and experimental groups:
 - Control: attend regular chapel programming.
 - Experimental: once a week, attend mobile chapel.
- Pre- and post-measures of:
 - Attitude toward mobile device use in chapel.
 - Effect on spiritual behavior.
 - Effect on spiritual beliefs.
 - Overall experience.