



qp.unimelb: The QuickPoll tool for in-class polling

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Quickpoll (qp.unimelb.edu.au) is a web-based polling system designed to be exceptionally straightforward for staff at Melbourne to set up and manage and for students to use in class. In evaluation of the value and operation of tool, staff and students are enthusiastic about the simple way in which the tool adds engagement and useful feedback to learning and teaching in a range of class settings, but especially in large group lectures. Quickpoll was designed and set up to take advantage of the personal, portable, wireless internet capable devices that an increasing proportion of staff and students bring to class - currently over 50% of our students have iPhones or other smart phones, laptops or netbook computers, iPods or now, iPads with them each day. This project set out to explore ways in which these devices could be used to encourage and support active learning in class.

Keywords: mobile technology, active learning, online polling

Overview

The ways in which active polling tools, such as Turning Technologies® 'clickers', or dialup polls such as Votapedia®, can be used in learning and teaching are well established. QuickPoll is a tool that makes use of the internet capable devices that an increasing proportion of our students and staff carry with them daily to class. The objective of the QuickPoll project was to develop a simple tool that enabled staff to obtain and use class responses to questions as part of their teaching - and to engage their students in that process.

The question choices might be presented in a PowerPoint slide or a prepared handout in a lecture or class, or spontaneously as part of an active discussion in class because qp.unimelb itself does not require any question text. The question might be used to gauge students' background or opinion on a topic that is about to be developed, or in a short test or reflection on a topic just completed in class.

Data submitted to any QuickPoll is anonymous. The poll is a statistical picture of the class response. It can be used to guide further discussion in class. Using the document camera to display the staff member's phone screen or using the classroom computer and projector, the results are shared with the class so they can see their own choice as part of the class response. For many purposes, 100% coverage of the class is not essential. Asking students to discuss their responses and submit a vote each on a shared phone can be a useful technique to encourage discussion in class. Using the university's UniWireless network incurs no charge to students. If the 3G network is used, depending on the user's data plan, the amount of data per poll is a few kb, costing perhaps ~0.01 cents per poll.

Operation

Setting up a staff account

Setting up a Quickpoll staff account and preparing the system for use in classes simply requires the member of staff to use the browser on their phone or any computer to go to the qp.unimelb.edu.au site, login using their normal staff email username (staffusername) and password when prompted, click the 'Admin' tab on the opening screen and then click 'Start a new poll'. The account is ready to receive input.



Figure 1: The sequence of screens in setting up and activating a Quickpoll poll

Submitting responses to a poll

Students use their phone or laptop to go to <http://qp.unimelb.edu.au/staffusername>, select from the choices offered and submit their choice.

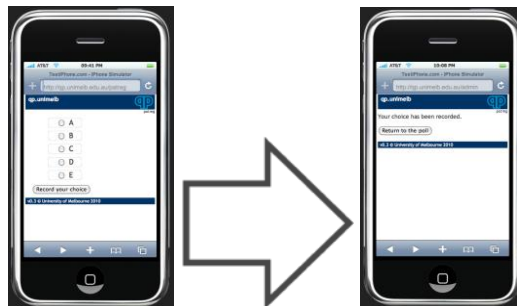


Figure 2: The sequence of screens in the student view when submitted a response to a poll

Viewing and reviewing a poll

The poll owner clicks 'update' to see the accumulating data in a currently running poll as a histogram. The poll is closed and a new poll opened by clicking 'Start a new poll'; this saves the data from the current poll, tags it with a time/date stamp, and then clears the histogram display data ready for the next poll. Data from previous polls can be reviewed using the 'Past polls' tab; that data can be deleted if it is no longer of interest, or it can be annotated in the comment field to identify it for later reference.



Figure 3: An iPhone view of a currently running poll and the sequence of screens to review a past poll

The response and reaction from staff and students in classes where Quickpoll has been used has been overwhelmingly positive. Over 95% of students in a preliminary evaluation survey ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement that “Using qp.unimelb in class is a very useful way for me to obtain immediate feedback about my own knowledge and understanding of a topic in the context of the whole class”.

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