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Matt Smith: Beer vs. the iPod: Take your pick

In the classic college movie "Animal House," the plot pit the Deltas vs. the rules, and the rules lost.

But how would the Deltas do against the iPod?

That's my question after a poll of full-time college undergraduates revealed that the iPod music player, and not drinking, is the most "in" thing nowadays at college.

Nearly 73 percent of 1,200 undergrads told the Student Monitor survey in March that Apple's ubiquitous iPods were "in," up from 59 percent a year ago, according to an article by the Associated Press. The survey had drinking and Facebook.com — a popular networking site, sort of like MySpace.com — tied at No. 2 in popularity, with about 71 percent of the students.

The survey's margin of error was plus or minus 2.3 percentage points, the AP said — a slim margin of victory for the iPod, no question, owing to the fact that there is a lot to be said in praise of both beer and the iPod.

Like what? Well, consider the following.

Apple iPod: Iffy battery replacement program.

Beer: Tends to cause hangovers.

Edge: Apple iPod. Nobody has ever called in sick to work or missed church or family gatherings because his iPod lost its juice.

Beer: Due to phenomenon known as "beer goggles," drastically improves appearance of members of the opposite sex.

Apple iPod: Probably does not improve quality of gender-bending RuPaul's songs.

Edge: Push. Actually, neither is good.

Apple iPod: Listening to music too loud might lead to tinnitus.

Beer: Drinking too much might lead to a beer gut.

Edge: Beer. Hey, you can always do sit-ups and get rid of the beer gut, but you can't regain your hearing after you've lost it.

Apple iPod: Has tech support.

Beer: Has Betty Ford Clinic.

Edge: Beer. Besides, if you're calling Apple tech support and waiting on hold, sometimes you really do feel like you could use a drink.

Beer: Keg holds dozens of cups.

Apple iPod: Can hold thousands of songs.

Edge: Beer. Try tailgating with one iPod and a dozen headphones to pass out among your friends and see how little fun you have.

Beer: Invention sometimes erroneously credited to monks in Europe.

Apple iPod: Invention generally credited to geeks in California.

Edge: Push. What has either group done for me lately?

Beer: Iconic marketing figure is the Budweiser Clydesdales.

Apple iPod: Iconic marketing figure is the rock band U2.

Edge: Well, duh. Apple iPod. U2 already has the Edge.

Apple iPod: Handed out to the guest of honor at finer graduation parties.

Beer: Handed out to all guests at less reputable parties.

Edge: Apple iPod. Tell me the last time the police broke up a party and confiscated the iPod. It simply hasn't happened.

The verdict: Just like the undergrads in the Student Monitor survey, the iPod and beer are practically neck and neck in my book.

All I can say for sure is this: Somewhere, Bluto Blutarsky is crying in his beer. Maybe it's because it would take him another seven years of college just to fill up an iPod.

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