An expanded group of IPFW faculty members will start using iPads in their classroom this year as part of a project to understand how technology can enhance learning, collaboration and research.

IPFW officials gave iPads to 60 faculty members last semester, and on Friday, another group of 75 faculty members started using them.

Officials hope the initiative, called project #mobile-EDU, will help faculty members become familiar with the technology and inspire them to try different techniques in the classroom. So far, reports have been positive: Faculty members seem re-energized and excited by the technology and are collaborating with one another to learn about possible uses.

"I feel strongly about creating a situation in which our faculty can flourish," said William McKinney, vice chancellor for academic affairs, who is spearheading the project. "You get a lot of creative energy on this campus from our faculty."

The project is part of a larger effort called Re-imagining IPFW's Academic Future, a series of forums geared toward determining how IPFW should evolve if it wants to successfully educate 21st-century students.

McKinney started the effort after IPFW joined the Red Balloon Project, a national initiative that focuses on helping colleges and universities re-imagine undergraduate education.

To participate in #mobile-EDU, faculty members had to agree to take part in a number of seminars and larger and smaller meetings to discuss the technology. On Friday, the newest group to receive the tablets took part in a daylong seminar that featured representatives from Apple and Blackboard Mobile.

By next fall, faculty members will report back to the university on their experiences with the tablets.

Samantha Birk, associate director for instructional technologies at IPFW, holds an iPad during a news conference Friday. A third of the university's full-time faculty will be getting iPads as part of a project to integrate them into campus life.

"Technology has really become so pervasive in our society," she said. "We're really looking at the technology as being an effective agent for change."

dhaynie@jg.net