

## Podcasting gives University a tech 'tune' up

by Grace McMurtrie - Thursday, December 13, 2007

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Don't assume students darting around campus with the telltale earbuds are rockin' out to their favorite band — it might be a professor at the top of their playlist.

With the application of the podcasting initiative, facilitated through the Instructional Resource Center (IRC), University of Wisconsin Oshkosh students can review lectures while they exercise, watch demonstrations over coffee or brush up on exam material between classes.

Podcasting allows faculty to record lectures and easily upload the audio or video files to iTunes U. Students need only the internet to access the lectures and demonstrations anytime, anywhere.

“The more chances you have to hear something, the better chance you have of absorbing it,” said Sean Ruppert, presentations lab manager at the IRC.

And as a low-cost utility, podcasting is not only educational, but also economical.

“One of the nice things about iTunes is that we don't have to host it, so none of the storage requirements or costs gets passed to us,” Ruppert said.

Ruppert and Nick Dvoracek, director of media services, are the minds behind the podcasting initiative, which is financed through the UW System Curricular Redesign Grant. The program will provide up to 10 faculty members with the necessary technology and instruction to supplement their courses with podcasts. Pit classrooms also will be equipped with the technology.

Faculty proposals for the next semester are due Friday, Dec. 14.

### **Podcasts: supplements, not replacements**

“One of the biggest concerns to faculty is that their students will stop going to class,” Ruppert said. “Students don't stop coming to class and in some cases, class attendance actually increases.”

Some staff and faculty already have begun podcasting lectures and demonstrations. This semester, Elissa Ruppert agreed to be the test subject for the initiative, uploading audio recordings of each of her instructional technology classes onto iTunes U.

To investigate the concern, Elissa Ruppert gave students the option to listen to the podcasts and write a short summary as a substitute for attending class. Only one of her 60 students took advantage of that alternative.

“The point behind podcasting is for students to review the lectures and deepen their understanding,”

Dvoracek said. "There's no intention that this will replace the student attending the lecture — this is to supplement their attendance at a lecture."

Other staff and faculty members have also taken advantage of podcasting since last spring, when UW Oshkosh was admitted into the iTunes U program.

Henry Winterfeldt, an associate professor in the department of human services and professional leadership, began podcasting demonstrations for his instructional technology course.

"I demonstrated how to use specific programs so students could use the information at their leisure," Winterfeldt said. "Because I did the demonstration online, I could spend time in class sorting out problems the students might have."

Winterfeldt understands the importance of adapting education with changing technology. He has been teaching the same technology course since he arrived at the University in 1969.

"With any innovation, you just have to jump in," he said. "It makes it also more exciting when you are teaching a class over and over again, year after year."

Suzanne Marnocha, director of the traditional undergraduate nursing program, plans to continue the College of Nursing's string of technological updates by uploading lectures from her senior-level teaching course to iTunes U next semester.

She hopes the podcasts will offer a relief to students who tape-record each lecture, as Marnocha had done when she was a student.

"I want to allow students to easily listen to lectures again to reinforce knowledge because research is difficult — it's like a foreign language," Marnocha said.

To English associate professor Jordan Landry, another participant in the podcasting initiative, it's the technology that seems foreign.

"I'm technologically phobic, so I'm concerned about doing things in front of class that have to do with technology," Landry said. "I would like to teach myself the technology. I'm doing it in the way that they're suggesting, but I hope to branch out and use it in other ways too."

### **Student appeal**

Though the transition to the cutting-edge technology may seem daunting to some, students exhibit an overwhelmingly positive reaction to podcasting.

"My teachers put out a lot of information in my classes, and it would be really nice to go back and have something to listen to," said junior Kristine Grill, a political science major.

"I probably would download most of them at the end of the semester when I was studying for midterms or finals and go back through and see if there were holes in my notes," she said.

Though only a small number of courses are currently available on iTunes U, usage is steadily growing. Ruppert said he and Dvoracek are monitoring the results of the initiative and will continue to do so throughout the program.

The week of Nov. 19, about 300 podcasts were downloaded or previewed using streaming audio or video. Just two weeks later, those numbers jumped to 500 downloads or previews.

“It’s going to be huge,” Ruppert said.