



Faculty Forum

From the Faculty Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning

WESTERN CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

CULLOWHEE, NORTH CAROLINA

Vol. 20. No. 5

February 1, 2008

WCU on iTunes U

You may not have noticed them at first. They were introduced just a few weeks after September 11, 2001. Only a few hundred thousand were sold that first year. But even now with monthly sales in the millions, you still have to look closely to find them—they are usually tucked away in a pocket. However, there is always the telltale sign: those little white earbuds. It's the iPod.

Apple's iPod wasn't the first portable music device; it wasn't even the first MP3 player. It was, however, the one that changed the music industry. And, today, it is poised to help change the face, or at least the ears, of education. How can those little white earbuds change education? With the help of a technology called podcasting.

In 2005 "Podcast" was named the word of the year by The New Oxford American Dictionary. The term podcast is a combination of iPod and broadcast. Podcasting is the process of delivering an audio or video file over the internet via a subscription model. You merely subscribe to the feed, and when a new podcast is available it is automatically downloaded to your computer. In June 2005 Apple began to list podcasts inside of the iTunes Music Store, and iTunes soon became one of the most popular tools for subscribing to podcasts. Podcast files can be audio, enhanced audio (which is audio with embedded graphics), chapters and web links, or video.

There are many ways you could use podcasting in your course. I will give you some examples and I hope that you will come up with some more on your own.

Record your lecture during class. This is the most basic use of podcasting for a college course. You just record your regular lecture and post it as a podcast for your students to download and review outside of class time. This gives your students the ability to go back and listen to what you said in class again, allowing them to focus on what you are saying, as opposed to trying to write everything down on the first try. Recording in the classroom also has the benefit of being able to capture any class discussion that might take place. Digital voice recorders are available for checkout from the Hunter Library Circulation Desk.

Record your lecture before class. Take the time to record your lecture in your office before class. Your students can download the podcast and listen to it before your class begins. During your face to face class time, you can have a more meaningful and insightful discussion about the lecture material because your students have had time to think about the content. Recording can be done on your office or home computer using a simple USB microphone.

Give a virtual tour. If you have been to museums lately, you may have taken an audio tour. You are given a device with pre-recorded audio. You walk around the exhibit in the museum and listen to the audio that accompanies the different displays. By using the enhanced podcast, you can record your audio and include pictures that are viewable on either a computer or an iPod. You don't need to limit your tour to an art exhibition or other museum display; you could just as easily give a tour of the human body for an anatomy class or a walkthrough of a construction site for an engineering course.

Digital Papers. Have your students create a video or enhanced podcast instead of writing an essay or paper. They will have to complete the same research and be able to tell an engaging story. They can then share the file with other students in the class and with their parents and friends.

Podcasting is being embraced at universities around the country using these and other scenarios. Students at the University of Michigan Dental School took it upon themselves, with the permission of the faculty, to record and then post the class lectures for further review. It is even beginning to catch on at WCU; there are faculty in every college creating podcasts for their students. How are we handling these podcasts? With a little more help from Apple.

In 2004 Apple began a pilot program with six universities to test a customized version of the popular iTunes Music Store geared towards the distribution of educational podcasts. This program grew into iTunes U and was made public in 2006. iTunes U is accessed using the popular iTunes software which works on both Windows and Macintosh. You can download podcasts for free from Universities such as Stanford, UC Berkley, MIT, Duke and many others by clicking on the iTunes U link inside the iTunes Music store. While you are there, be sure to check out all of the free content that is available in the Podcast section as well.

WCU applied for our own custom iTunes U site and we finished implementation during Spring of 2007. By the end of the Fall 2007 semester, there were over 620 podcast files in more than 60 courses available for download from WCU faculty. In fact, we had nearly 10,000 unique downloads during the Fall semester. Login to WCU on iTunes U by visiting <http://itunes.wcu.edu> and see what your colleagues are already creating.

If you would like to create a podcast for your course or would like a class setup in iTunes U, please contact me or Laura Chapman at the Coulter Faculty Center. We will create your accounts and help teach you the most effective methods for delivering your content to your students. I also invite you to join in a conversation on creating a Digital Campus, by visiting <http://wiki2.wcu.edu/groups/digitalcampus>.

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