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Podcasting in Education

What Is Podcasting?

Podcasting is a method of publishing audio files (usually MP3s) to the Web, which are then made available through subscription and automatically downloaded to a personal computer or portable MP3 player. Podcasts are not meant to be listened to live, but whenever and wherever is most convenient for the listener. While the word is a contraction of “iPod” and “broadcast,” an iPod is not needed to subscribe and listen to podcasts. Currently podcasts mainly are created in audio only, but video—or “vodcasting”—is rumored to be in development.

Podcasting in Education

One obvious use of podcasting in an educational context is to create an archive of class lectures that students can listen to at their convenience. However, given the distinctive features of podcasting, its potential goes far beyond reproducing course materials and making them available for review. As podcasting is relatively new, educators everywhere are still exploring the possibilities. Therefore, this section includes a partial list of potential uses for podcasting. As with any use of technology in the classroom, you should take into consideration whether you have chosen the best tool for the job.

Potential Uses

Podcasting could be used for:

- news/updates;
- guest lectures;
- student presentations;
- student-produced podcasts;
- interviews with guest experts;
- tours/fieldwork;
- internships/residencies;
- feedback/evaluation of student work;
- supplementary material such as speeches, music, or other audio recordings; and
- short language lessons, or other lessons that help students develop listening and speaking skills.

Issues

Podcasting involves a shift from e-learning to m-learning. E-learning, or electronic learning, refers to any computer-based learning that enables students to access and make use of course materials at a distance and at their convenience. M-learning, or mobile learning, capitalizes on the increasing ubiquity of wireless networks and

devices such as laptops, PDAs, wireless phones, MP3 players, and of course, iPods. While podcasting does not *require* an iPod or other MP3 player, podcasts are usually listened to on devices that are easily portable.

Podcasting is a time-shifting technology. Learners can download an audio file to a portable device and listen to it at their convenience. For some students, this might mean they would listen to a podcast in the quiet of the library or at home, while others might take advantage of downtime while commuting, walking across campus, or waiting in line.

The mobility and time shifting afforded by podcasting enables learners and instructors to expand the boundaries of the classroom and bring together course content and the world outside the campus. One of the current trends in podcasting is “sound seeing,” in which people record narrations of their travels. In an educational context, instructors might create guided audio tours for field trips, or perhaps commentary or instructions for an internship or residency. Conversely, students can create podcasts to report their observations or conduct interviews.

“Push” technology is an essential feature. In other words, podcasting does not only make audio files available to students; it makes audio files available *automatically* via subscription. In that sense podcasting is like a magazine subscription or TiVo. The “push” feature suggests potential uses such as news updates from departments or course updates from the instructor. A question to consider is whether automated distribution of course content is advantageous or necessary. An alternative might be to simply post files on a Web site to make them available for download.

Podcasting involves mainly audio files. While “vodcasting” is not too far away, podcasting is predominantly an aural medium and there are technical issues to consider.

Production quality varies. While mainstream media outlets have recently begun to produce podcasts, many still consider podcasting as an alternative to mainstream media, and some consider a more casual approach to production quality to be part of its charm. Anyone with a microphone, a laptop, and some inexpensive software can produce a podcast; with more elaborate equipment and media production expertise one can produce a podcast of professional quality.

Decisions you make about production quality may be determined in part by the purpose of the podcast. Will the podcast be archived for multiple uses, or is it for one-time use? Is the speaking situation formal or casual? A guest lecture that can be used for many semesters to come and for different situations would require more careful attention to production quality than brief announcements about upcoming events, or feedback on an assignment.

Presentation quality matters. Even a casual announcement requires planning so that your presentation is clear, coherent, and easy to follow. Presenting your ideas effectively is particularly important if the listener does not have other forms of support—such as visual aids or a PowerPoint presentation. Before you record your podcast, take a few minutes to outline main points, an introduction, and a conclusion. Follow this adage of public speaking: “Tell them what you’re going to say, say it, and tell them what you said.”

Length matters. Determine the length of a particular podcast in part by its purpose (lecture vs. announcement). You also should consider the reasonable expectations of students and how they make use of their time. For example, *requiring* students to listen to recorded lectures too frequently may be more of a burden than help. Long recordings such as lectures may work better as a supplement students who want to refresh their knowledge of course content. Similarly, since podcasts are portable and facilitate mobile learning, you also might consider whether it is best to create shorter podcasts that can be listened to during moments of downtime, or a longer podcast that requires a longer time commitment and more focused concentration.

Podcasting raises copyright issues. As is the case with any instance of technology-based teaching and learning, the creation of content raises copyright issues that are often complex and can involve considerations of University policies, federal statutes, and consultations with experts. See <http://dmc.umn.edu/IP/> for help.

Resources

Campus

- The University Technology Training Center (<http://uttc.umn.edu/training/>) offers a Podcasting Orientation.
- UThink (<http://blog.lib.umn.edu>), the University Libraries free blogging service, can be used by students and faculty and staff members to create podcasts (see <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/archives/001261.html>).
- Digital Media Center consultation services (<http://dmc.umn.edu/consultations/>) are available to faculty members and their student and staff assistants who want to use technologies such as podcasting to enhance teaching and learning.
- Digital Media Center video production services (<http://dmc.umn.edu/video/>), offered for a fee, include audio and video digitizing and compressing.

Guides

- Todd Cochrane's *Podcasting: The Do-It-Yourself Guide* (Indianapolis: Wiley, 2005) was recently published.
- Wikipedia's podcasting entry (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcasting/>) provides a comprehensive overview of podcasting's history and a list of Web-based resources.

Higher Education

- EDUCAUSE (<http://www.educause.edu>), a nonprofit association that promotes the use of technology in higher education, maintains a searchable database of articles about technology-enhanced learning topics, including podcasting and mobile learning.
- Duke Digital Initiative (<http://www.duke.edu/ddi/>) at Duke University is an outgrowth of the widely publicized Duke iPod First Year Experience (<http://www.duke.edu/ddi/ipodfye.html>). Universities and colleges all over the country—and indeed, the world—are developing podcasts for educational, promotional, and informational purposes, but Duke University was an early adopter of iPods and podcasting for educational use, and therefore provides exceptionally comprehensive resources for educators.
- Archived Webcasts of the Duke University Podcasting Symposium, September 25-27, 2005 (<http://www.isis.duke.edu/events/podcasting/>), are available online.