

Podcasting a new way to plant seeds of knowledge at UIS

A few instructors placing audio on Net

By DANIEL PIKE
STAFF WRITER

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University of Illinois at Springfield professor Michael Cheney's online course about the Beatles places the iconic band's music in a historical perspective.

 **WEB EXTRA:** [Hear a sample of a lecture](#)

But in order to weave certain material into the class, Cheney turned to podcasting, a contemporary medium that's gradually gaining traction in the academic world.

About four times a week, Cheney publishes his self-recorded, three-to-five minute mini-lectures on the Internet. Topics include the song "Helter Skelter's" connection to the Charles Manson family or perhaps urban legends about the rumored death of Paul McCartney.

Cheney's scripted podcasts, which are similar to short radio packages, are intended to diversify the ways in which students receive information.

"Every student brings a certain set of learning styles," said Cheney, who began distributing the podcasts this semester. "What I try to do in all the classes I've ever taught is to give the whole range of learning styles some attention."

Podcasting - the name comes from Apple Computer Inc.'s popular iPod MP3 player, though that gadget is not required to listen to the material - is a young but rapidly growing concept. That's particularly true in the broadcasting industry, which increasingly offers recorded versions of radio shows over the Web, often for free, so audiences can listen to them anytime at home or download them to MP3 players.

UIS is in the early stages of implementing its podcasting program - in fact, Cheney is one of only a very few UIS instructors known to use a version of the technology.

"It is never going to replace classroom instruction," said Munindra Khaund, multimedia education coordinator for UIS's educational technology

department. "It is just another medium. It is another possibility of engaging our students outside of the four walls of a classroom."

Khaund said Cheney's podcasts are available through Apple's iTunes, a cross-platform computer program that allows users to subscribe to Cheney's recordings. That way, the podcasts automatically are delivered to students, rather than forcing students to track them down several times a week.

Other UIS professors distribute similar files through their own online journals - Web logs, or blogs for short - but Khaund said this method doesn't provide the uniformity and ease of use of iTunes.

UIS also is exploring enhanced podcasting and vodcasting, which incorporate more advanced audio-visual and video components. By next year, Cheney said, he expects to offer some type of vodcasting content to students. Cheney does not, however, include copyrighted material in his podcasts.

If there's a drawback to educational podcasting, Cheney - who has a background in broadcasting - thinks it's the competition from media with higher production values, such as National Public Radio.

Meanwhile, some higher education institutions have been criticized for offering full-length lectures over the Internet. Opponents say such podcasts simply give students an excuse to ditch class.

Khaund said UIS continues to assess the podcasting initiative, but he suspects the school - which prides itself on its robust online and technological programs - will try to stay on the cutting edge.

"If we just record all the lectures and put it online, it may not be as attractive to me as a student," he said. "But if we can engage our students in such a way that they're having to come to class to talk about it, or they have to write up something ... that is the tricky part, to not put the technology (first), but to put the pedagogy (first)."

Daniel Pike can be reached at 788-1532 or daniel.pike@sj-r.com.

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