

Our Faculty in the News

Getting Their iLessons

In a nod to popular technology, some Fresno State instructors are recording lectures so students can listen to them later on computers or iPods.

**By Doug Hoagland / The Fresno Bee,
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In the low-tech '80s — when Apple was foremost a fruit and iPod just a jumble of letters — Scott Sailor cruised to college classes with a portable tape recorder playing on the seat of his classic white Mustang.

Over and over, he listened to minicassettes he had made of his chemistry professor's lectures. The course was hard, and Sailor needed to soak up the knowledge his recorder spit out.

Now a few professors at Fresno State — Sailor included — are recording their classroom lectures on digital devices and uploading them throughout the semester to a Web site that many universities use. The Web site gives professors a digital place to post course outlines, announcements and assignments for students.

From there, students can download the lectures and listen to them on their computers or on iPods and other mobile devices designed for music or entertainment videos. Either way — on a computer or an iPod from Apple Inc. — students can listen to the lectures.

In digital lingo, the lectures are being podcast.

"I'd like to be the most-played artist on their iPod," said Sailor, an assistant professor of kinesiology. "Then I know they're getting the material multiple times. I'd like to reach students right where they are."

Across the California State University system, a handful of professors at five of 23 campuses — Fresno, Sacramento, San Jose, Dominguez Hills and East Bay — are beginning to use podcasts. Said CSU spokesman Paul Browning, "We'll have to wait and see how popular it becomes with other professors."

At Fresno State, four instructors are known to be using podcasts during the spring semester that began in mid-January, said podcasting coordinator JoLynne Blake, who works for the university's technology training unit.



John Walker / The Fresno Bee

Scott Sailor, holding an iPod and video camera, is among a handful of Fresno State professors who podcast their lectures. Sailor is a professor of kinesiology.

Some professors question whether podcast lectures will hurt class attendance. Others have embraced the technology.

"Our students would like to have information anytime, anywhere — in a car, working out, at home," said Annie Burke-Doe, 45, an assistant professor of physical therapy. She began using audio and video podcasts last semester and will do it again in the spring semester.

Burke-Doe and others say podcasts meet the needs of different students: Those who learn best by hearing material. Students who play intercollegiate sports and miss class because of out-of-town games. Students whose first language is not English. Those forced to miss class because they have sick children or a job that keeps them away.

But, Burke-Doe said, she doesn't want to exaggerate the value of podcasts. They don't take the place of professors lecturing, students taking notes and classroom discussions gluing it all together, she said.

Some of her students felt otherwise.

They listened to podcasts rather than attend class even though in-class participation was part of their grade. "This is their business, and they have to demonstrate some self-directed learning," Burke-Doe said. "Who am I to say how to do that?"

Fresno State graduate student Rocky Cisneros regularly came to Burke-Doe's neurology class, but still found the podcasts helpful. The 26-year-old from Visalia listened again to lectures at home on his computer and in the university library on his iPod. Being able to review the lectures helped him do better in the class, he said:

"Times have changed. If a teacher is really willing to reach out to students and accommodate different learning styles, it's a great thing. Those students will have that much greater chance to learn."

Another graduate student, 25-year-old Colleen Carlson of San Diego, tapped into Burke-Doe's podcasts on a computer, but not for class lectures. She found the video podcasts helpful. Some of the videos showed students practicing physical therapy techniques on one another, allowing the students to critique how they did. Burke-Doe did not record her lectures on video.

Said Carlson, "I think it's incredible to use the technology we grew up with and have all around us."

Bruce Thornton, professor of classics and humanities, said he worries that podcasts are one more technological change pointing to a future where students are not in class with a professor.

"Learning is a human thing, and learning means humans getting together in the same place," he said. "It's looking at the face, getting the vibe from the inflection of the professor's voice, the gestures, the eyes, the live enthusiasm."

Sailor, who listened to his chemistry tapes as a student and thinks podcasts are a necessary evolution, said: "We need to take a step toward students and start speaking their language."

Last semester, Sailor used one-minute video podcasts that showed students demonstrating skills and techniques he had taught in class — a good way for students to review material before tests.

This semester, he will make available audio podcasts from a class on rehabilitation techniques, believing the podcasts are the future and not just a fad that professors use to show how in tune they are with current trends.

"Those of us who are adapting the technology are looking for ways to help students learn material and put class content right where they want it," Sailor said.

He paused, chuckled and then added: "I appreciate, though, being considered kind of hip. Not bad for a 40-year-old."

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