

Podcast lectures make in-roads for higher education

UNB Professor takes a lead in new form of education

by Lauren Kennedy

Say goodbye to PowerPoint lectures and hello to a new wave of learning. Some professors choose to teach using a new form of lecture that can be downloaded directly to most handheld players and computers, called podcasts.

Bryan Crawford is an Assistant Professor in the Biology Department at the University of New Brunswick and finds that his students really like the podcast way of learning.

"Last year the podcasts were downloaded over 7,000 times during the semester and this year, I'm finding that I start getting e-mails from students asking 'where's today's podcast?' two hours after the lecture," he said. "It's quite easy and I think it provides a great deal of benefit for both me and the students."

He makes his podcasts on his laptop during class and it also contains the same images he is projecting on the screen, which coordinates with the audio portion of the lecture, so when

students are reviewing the lecture of the day, they are able to see exactly what slide he was talking about.

Last year, as Crawford explains, he participated in a UNB pilot test of various audio response systems (also known as clickers), where, as the professor, he was able to ask questions during his lecture and the students are able to answer with their remotes (clickers) and it is a way of instantly seeing how well a class understands. Crawford feels this is an excellent of determining those learning levels.

"In a small group it's reasonably easy to get students talking enough that you can tell if they are getting it but in a class in a lecture hall, that's not really possible, so the clickers offer a good way to generate some interactivity in a big class and a way to figure out if students are getting lost."

However, last year, when one of the brands of clickers conflicted with his own podcasting software, he had to ask his class which they would rather do without: the clickers or his podcasts. He had never seen hands go up so fast.

"I've never seen so many hands go up when asking a room full of students a question," he explains. "I don't think I could've got greater unanimity if I'd ask them if anyone would like some spare money I had lying around," he jokes.

Crawford offers several important features he feels that podcasts offers

as a learning tool.

Firstly, it saves time in writing things down frantically. This way, students can focus on understanding rather than writing. If the student does happen to miss something, it's as easy as pressing a button and rewinding and going over it as many times as they need to, to get all the information. Students all have busy lives, he points out, and having lectures on portable devices allows students to study while doing other things, this also works for students you are unable to make the class. If you're just not able to focus you can go over material when you are at your best.

"We're not all at our best at 8:30 in the morning, so if you think more clearly at another time, you can just go over it then," he said.

Finally Crawford makes clear that if a misunderstanding of material comes up, the recorded lectures keep a great record of what was exactly said so no one is able to make an argument out of the professor

explaining it wrong so it leaves room for no disagreement.

As a professor, these podcasts offer several advantages to him as well.

By being able to examine the sever records he is able to see which lectures were downloaded most frequently which allows him to see what topics the students had the most trouble with, while on the other hand he is able to go over lectures from previous years and improve on the presentation

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- BRYAN CRAWFORD



Internet

"I've been podcasting lectures since I first started teaching here last fall, so I don't know what the attendance would have been if I had not done it," he said. "I still have a room full of students very morning, so it certainly hasn't had a dramatic effect, but I think the more important question is why I should be worried about attendance."

He feels that as an instructor, his main concern should be whether the students are actually learning anything. While some students are able to learn without going to class he sees that as OK, but Crawford would much rather

have a few dozen engaged students than a lecture hall full of students who would rather be somewhere else.

Crawford point out that while the podcasts can obviously help students who are unable to make it to class, they are not a replacement for missing the class itself.

"Fundamentally, I also think that if students are genuinely able to get as much from an audio recording with slides as they are from actually coming to class, then I'm probably not doing a very good job as a professor," he said. "The podcasts offer features that the live lectures don't and visa versa."

Ruckuses at UNB

from *Campus* page 1

"We have had a few things like that where it's students who we believe to be off-campus students. To be honest, we're not even always sure whether they're students." She does note that "they're definitely not residents in that house."

Garnett is aware of one case in particular where unwanted guests broke into a residence house through a ground floor window. The persons were eventually caught.

"All of those students are in the process of being dealt with by security," she says.

To avoid future problems, Garnett

advises that students take necessary precautions for their homes' safety.

"We ask that everyone keep an eye out, know their neighbors, and make sure unwanted guests aren't floundering. As a community, stick together and take safety precautions. If you see someone that doesn't belong, ask them to leave. Call security. Keep windows shut and locked."

Reg Jerrett advises students to be responsible for their home as well.

"Be responsible citizens of the university and larger community. University students are an asset to the university and the larger community, and acts of misconduct by a few tarnishes the good works performed by the majority."

Third world experience

from *Africa* page 1

Initially, mushrooms were dried at the Mpongwe Development Company's coffee operation. When the MDC stopped growing coffee in the area, a dryer was donated to the co-op for mushroom processing. Unfortunately, efforts to get the dryer to function in 2006 proved fruitless.

Another local organization, the Organic Producers and Processors' Association of Zambia, partners with the co-op to provide certification, markets, connections to donors, and technological support. Scott was chosen for the latter. He took charge of the project management. This involved contacting a welder and electrician, sourcing parts, and supervising a team in an environment where he was just learning the language and "never fully understood what was going on."

He also provided computer training to employees, who had little knowledge of how to use the two computers donated to the co-op. Scott integrated data analysis into the training, showing members how they could use computer programs to analyze production on their own farms.

After spending the initial six weeks in a coworker's mud brick dwelling, he felt he was not getting an appropriate

perspective on what life was like for the farmers the co-op worked with. He moved to a farm seven kilometers from town to live with a member of the co-op. He slept in his own hut and biked to work every day.

Scott found himself becoming acclimated to daily life in his new culture. "If you really put yourself into it," he says, "it's no longer 'over there'." It quickly starts to become normal. It almost becomes embarrassing how unexciting it is sometimes," he said.

Back in Canada, he has returned to his old routine, although his view of the Third World has changed.

"Some people feel guilty when they come back because of all they have here, but I haven't internalized that mindset that much," he said. "I thought I had a positive, realistic image but found it doubled due to the sheer level of resourcefulness and capability of people I met. When I think about people in developing countries, they're not just statistics anymore. They're family, friends, people I really care about."

"I wanted to use my engineering skills overseas," DeRoche said. "This was the first step."

Applications for EWB Junior Fellowships are due on October 22. Anyone interested in applying is encouraged to visit www.ewb.ca for further information.

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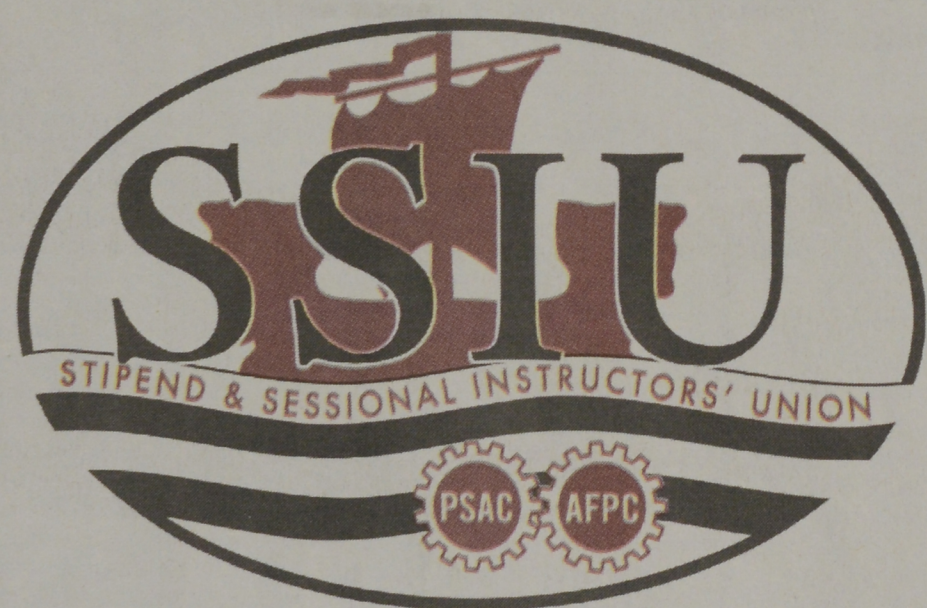
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The Stipend and Sessional Instructors' Union is a grassroots initiative by stipend and sessional instructors at UNB that is backed by the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC).

PSAC is a progressive national union of 165,000 members and is an active part of the national labour movement through affiliation with the Canadian Labour Congress. PSAC represents over 10,000 academic workers in the university sector and many more in federal government research institutions and provides professional negotiators, dedicated researchers, and training for the elected negotiating team.

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