Podcasting in the Classroom

In the fall of 2007, I was reading about how podcasting in the classroom was going to become the new technology that would enable my classroom to utilize the Internet and communicate with students more effectively. As the instructor of Web and Multimedia studies, I would try out the technology and see if it helped. After extensive research on other teachers who've tried the technology and published papers on the subject, it seemed that the overwhelming majority had positive things to say about their experiences. In fact, I was hard-pressed to find anyone saying anything bad.

So what is this technology and how can it help educators? It's nothing more than an audio recording of a class. I have a digital voice recorder that I pin to my shirt that records the entire lecture and student questions and all. This is the easy part; the more challenging side to podcasting is getting the recordings to the students. A typical podcast requires three things: a web site to hold all the recordings, the audio files that are the recording (usually in .MP3 format) and an RSS feed.

The first two items are pretty self-explanatory, so let me explain the last item. An RSS feed is like a grocery list, but instead of the dinner menu, it lists all the .MP3 files. Each .MP3 needs a title, a date, a quick note about what went on in class, and the exact address of the .MP3 file. There is a special syntax that RSS files need to have in order to work properly. I have tools that automate the process so I don't need to do much to create this file, but every time I add a new .MP3 from a class, my .RSS file gets a little longer.

The next step is the responsibility of the student. They need a podcatcher. This is a program that can read .RSS files and download and play .MP3 files. iTunes is the best example. This program is free and you don't need an iPod to make any of this work. iTunes just needs the location of my .RSS feed. Everytime the student opens iTunes, it goes out on the web and checks the .RSS feed and sees if there are any new .MP3 files in the list. If there are, they get downloaded. They can immediately play the file through their computer speakers or they can hook up their iPod and listen on the go.

Now what's the benefit? This may seem like a lot of work, and it was to get it set up, but now the entire process takes about 5 minutes out of my day. Now when a student misses a class, they don't ask me what went on. They listen to the entire class. If they need to review a concept, they can go back and hear the same conversation all over again.

Does it benefit everyone? No. Most students never use it. Some are still confused by the end of the semester and are terrified to try it. I've even had a student try to take the entire class via podcast. You may not like that idea, but imagine recording one class on Monday and having 100 students in the online version taking that class. This won't work for all classes, especially hands on ones, though this same technology can give access to video files if educators were willing to have their classes video recorded.

If your curiosity is piqued, you can check out all of my podcasts at http://webhead.hagerstowncc.edu/~seanm/?page_id=14.

Closing the Loop

An important aspect of outcomes assessment is utilizing the results collected from common assessment to improve student learning. We fondly refer to this stage as "closing the loop". This step of the process involves examining the data and determining whether the outcomes of the course have
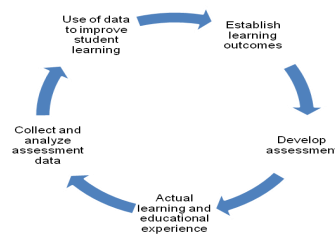
been achieved. The goal is to identify strengths and weaknesses of course design as it pertains to the established outcomes. This will likely be a collaborative effort of faculty members who are teaching the course. After identifying potentially weak areas in the curriculum, faculty can consider modifying teaching methods and techniques to better

achieve outcomes. This is an on-going process that is instrumental in improving teaching and learning and is the ultimate goal of the SLOA process.

HAGERSTOWN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Class Adds Hop to Kids Web

You don't have to be smarter than a fifth grader, but that grade range is the target for a project completed this fall by David Maruszewski's Simulation and Digital Entertainment class. The class teamed up with the Center for Continuing Education to create "Smarty Frog", a trivia based game that enhances the College for Kids website.

The annual series of summer classes designed for kids from elementary to high school has been using the web for the past two years to provide an appealing and informational resource for participants and parents. When Professor Maruszewski offered the services of his SDE 207 class, the College for Kids staff was looking for a concept that would complement the Flash-based videos on the website.

The goal was to not only attract potential participants but to increase the contact time with the site.

The solution to making the site more "sticky" was solved by SDE student Thomas Willoughby. Along with the CFK team, Thomas envisioned a Flash-based game that would include interactivity, sound effects, and a knowledge test. Building on the amphibian theme used on the website and in marketing materials, the new game was dubbed "Smarty Frog". The game includes five different categories with multiple choice questions. Kids interacting with the game receive immediate visual feedback on whether they answered correctly. The game also scores and rates the overall answers selected by the participants.

"Smarty Frog" has been integrated into the CFK website for the 2009 season.
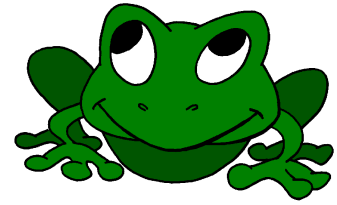
Visitors to the site will find a link on the landing page and a challenge to test their skills against the game. By mid-March the site will also host the new CFK schedule for summer 2009 that includes even more innovative and educational classes. The CFK site can be site at www.hagerstowncc.edu/kids. For more information on the Center for Continuing Education program, contact the CE registration line at 301-790-2800, ext. 236, or email earn@hagerstowncc.edu

Economics Faculty Profit from Common Assessment
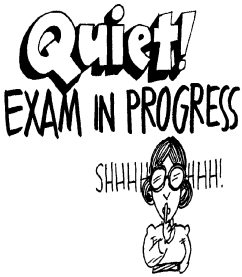
In our efforts to establish common assessments in Micro- and Macroeconomics, we first selected a group of questions from the National Council on Economics Education's Test of Understanding in College Economics (TUCE). While these questions assessed the concepts we wanted to measure, we decided that we did not like the wording of these questions. Even students who correctly answered other questions about a specific concept would not answer the TUCE questions correctly.

We decided to change our approach to common assessments in two ways. The first was to stop using the TUCE questions and instead develop our own test bank of questions we liked. This is what we're working on this semester. Once we have this test bank developed, we can upload it into Blackboard and use these questions in online assessments as well. This allows us the flexibility to change tests from one semester to the next while still ensuring common assessments. This also allows us to use these same common questions for face-to-face and online assessments.

The second change was to develop non-test common assessments. Like the test-bank, we are developing a set of writing assignments and case studies that we both like. After a few semesters, we expect to have enough assignments that we can rotate through them. This will allow us to keep common assessments without giving the same assignments every semester. Again, most of these assignments can be used in face-to-face or online courses. This also allows us to make changes to the course according to current events and still have common assessments.

By developing a test-bank and an assignment-bank together, we can each personalize our courses and still have common assessments.

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