Online Lectures: handy-dandy tool or just for tools?

Online lectures are one step away from Skynet and terminators

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point

Apparently our undergraduate academic experience is in dire straits, which has caused a spotlight to be shone on technological innovations designed to enhance my learning ability.

In line with this, some professors have opted to make podcasts of their lectures available online for our listening pleasure. I guess that they're finally starting to accept that we all learn differently.

Some argue that this is a great idea, and that it will revolutionize learning and delivery methods; however, I question if this innovative technology is just distracting from the issue of accessible, progressive education.

Naturally, the instructors spearheading this project are enthused but have some well-thought out anxieties. There are some concerns that if lectures are made available online, absenteeism will increase.

I'm sorry to break it to the innovators, but if people don't already make an effort to go to class to listen to you talk, I'm going to logically deduce that they won't make the effort to actively listen to you on their iPods in their free time.

One student who used this resource and received an A was interviewed for comment by the *Edmonton Journal*; however, why weren't students who received a C+ or a B- asked for feedback on this revolutionary idea, when they are the ones who are in need of it.

These students are the ones who seriously need to use *innovative* resources in order to achieve higher grades—not those who already have them. If iPods are only benefiting that top-tenth percentile who are already receiving rewards and encouragement, then the students left behind are still being left behind.

I'm not suggesting that we hold the hands of individuals who aren't attempting to achieve scholastic success (whatever that means) for themselves, but if you're going to put time, money, and energy into sustaining resources, let's try to make sure that they benefit those who need them.

In addition, attempting to encourage all instructors to use technology in teaching puts some serious restraints on academic ingenuity. If technology is promoted as the one and only way, there will be a lack of freedom in the classroom.

This will force instructors to stick to a lecture-and-PowerPoint method—which I know we *all* love and find intellectually orgasmic. This advancement just doesn't seem to fit with accessible, innovative "Dare to Discover" learning.

I'd like to give these technology peddling hustlers the benefit of the doubt; however, when I look at other "advancements" intended to benefit me, I can't help but be a little cynical.

Beartracks is a brutal website—I never use it because Bearscat is infinitely better and more user-friendly. WebCT has broken down on me regularly since first-year, and after spending a half-hour attempting to log in, the frustration overwhelms my desire to learn.

Let's not deny it: there are no great tangible beneficial applications of this tool except for those with a sight impairment. Personally I think that the efforts to make lectures available on MP3 players and iPods aren't going to revolutionize our undergraduate educations as it just further perpetuates a learning hierarchy that keeps the top ten in the top ten, or at least those who can afford luxury items such as iPods in addition to tuition.

You should simply stop worrying and learn to love the podcast

CONAL PIERSE

counterpoint

I for one am highly in favour of making podcasts of lectures available online. Not only will this allow me to sleep in, but it will also greatly increase my academic freedom.

No longer will my learning be confined by stifling pants or my mid-lecture desires for pie go ignored. Finally, I will be able to listen to lectures the way God intended: as I rest my hands between songs while playing *Guitar Hero II*.

Having lectures in a to-go form means I can listen to them on my time, in my own way. Whether I'm running, commuting to a class that doesn't put lectures online, or even just taking a shit, I'll be able to keep up on my classes without ever having to actually attend them.

Besides, is there anything that could possibly psych you up more at the gym than pumping iron to a riveting lecture on art history? Not even "Danger Zone" can compete with 30 minutes on the difference between Rococo and Baroque. Well, maybe not, but you have to admit that it'd be a handy cure for insomnia.

Sure this might encourage some students to stay at home, but is that really a bad thing? If you've ever been forced to sit in the stairway of a lecture theatre due to a lack of seats, you'd welcome this with open arms (hell, spend a few lectures trying to sleep on those stairs, and you'll start to see an upside to the avian flu). Besides, the only people who are going to stop coming are the students who just sleep through the lectures anyways.

Like many other students, I long ago resigned myself to the middle of the curve because, personally, I can't be bothered to spend my nights studying. As such, It's wrong to disregard the benefits of online lectures simply because they don't help B- and C-students claw their way into the top ten—this assumes that a more helpful tool can somehow magically make you a good student.

Just as a laser-sighted super-hammer isn't going to help a shitty carpenter make a level table, neither can these podcasts make up for a student's inherent laziness.

Instead, we should focus on whether or not it will make the learning experience more enjoyable or easier. For instance, the ability to pause lectures gives you the time you need to copy down notes without getting friction burns on your arms.

Or, if at finals time you realize that your notes make absolutely no sense and tend to be full of drool spots or crudely scratched comments about the promiscuity of your mother, you can revisit those particular lectures that are giving you trouble.

You can also rewind the lecture if something is particularly unclear (or if you periodically zone out) without having to disrupt your peers by asking questions that clearly demonstrate you weren't paying attention. And really, who doesn't want to fast-forward through a professor's long-winded tangent on why they can no longer eat garlic bread?

When you think about it, there really isn't a downside to putting lectures online. The only real downside is that you might accidentally have a lecture on ants start playing while your iPod is set to shuffle.

And if, in the end, all you use these podcasts for is as an excuse to sleep in and play videogames all day while reassuring your mom that you are indeed studying, it will have been worth it.