

U of A profs tune in to iLectures

NATALIE CLIMENHAGA
Senior News Editor

Back when most current University of Alberta students were getting their first Hotmail accounts, Computing Science professor Duane Szafron was already experimenting with technology-based learning.

In 1999, Szafron piloted video recordings of all his lectures, but at the time found it problematic.

"Technologically, it just wasn't there. It was too hard to do the distribution," he explained. "Just watching ten seconds of video would be more memory than people had on their computers."

However, last fall Szafron was able to revisit his idea of archiving lectures—this time on iPods. He used an iPod to record all his lectures digitally. These would then be converted to MP3 format by a lab coordinator immediately after class ended, allowing students to access them on the web within an hour of the lecture being done.

According to Szafron, both an instruction support survey and his own informal class survey showed that response from students has been positive.

"The feedback from the survey is that there's a group of students that really find it helpful."

Computing Science student Slobodan Pejic, who was in Szafron's class, said that he found the podcasts to be particularly useful when it came time to review.

"I found it pretty helpful for studying at year-end for finals," Pejic said. "[It made it] much easier to remember what I was thinking way back when."

"I think a lot of people were using [the podcasts]," he added. "I know definitely all the people I talked to were using [them] at least for review."

Szafron also dismissed concerns that digitalizing lectures would encourage students not to show up for class, noting the same argument has been made about putting PowerPoint slides online. He stressed that there will always be an added benefit for being present in class, and noted that this could be an extra incentive for professors to deliver more in class.

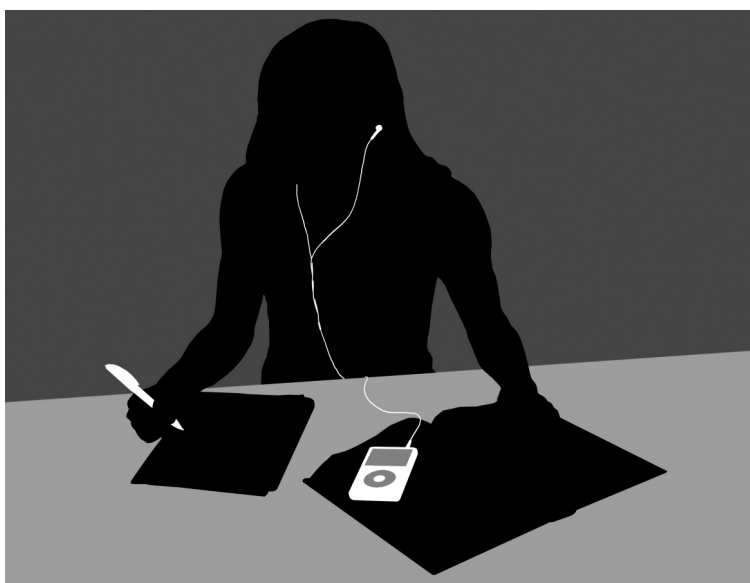


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION: MIKE KENDRICK

JERK IT OUT Now you can learn while listening to the Caesars on your iPod.

"I think it makes it harder for people who give fairly boring lectures. I think more students won't show up for those," he said. "And I guess my attitude [as a professor] is, if you can't deliver anything extra than what you would provide online or whatever, then what's the difference if people don't show up for class? Is that really bad if people don't show up?"

It seems Szafron's initiatives are catching on. Associate Computing Science Professor Paul Lu said he was approached by his department during the Winter 2007 term to see if he would be willing to have his CMPUT 201 lectures podcasted. He noted that he was surprised by the number of students who made use of the digitalized lectures.

"Just having a casual look over the department survey, it seemed like a significant portion of the class ... made substantial use of the podcasts," Lu said. "Even though not necessarily every student was using it, it was a significant subset that were."

Students' Union Vice-President (Academic) Bobby Samuel explained that under the University's 2007-11 Academic Plan, *Dare to Deliver*, there is a teaching and learning enhancement fund and a special projects initiative for piloted projects such as this.

He also noted that the idea of podcasting lectures may improve students' learning.

"I think digitalizing lectures is a great way for enhancing student engagement," Samuel said. "If used responsibly, it can be a great way to offer students another avenue to access their learning material."

However, Samuel stressed that it's important to maintain a central location where professors can lecture and teach.

"Digitalized lectures should not be used as a substitute for lectures," he said.

While putting audio files of lectures online isn't currently in high use across campus, Szafron suspects that, as technology makes the process easier and easier, other departments will end up making use of podcasts.

"Ten years ago, if I looked on the Internet, there were very few courses where the notes were online, and now if you look across campus, it's not just in science—it's in everything where the notes are online. And I really think that this is a very close analogue to that."

"Who knows whether this is going to be a long-term sort of phenomenon?" Lu added. "But I think it's important that everybody try out new ideas and see whether or not they work."

Bullies aren't intimidating to all kids

University of Alberta Educational Psychology researcher Shelagh Dunn wants to know why some kids choose to stand up to bullies while others do not

RYAN HEISE
Deputy News Editor

Altruistic youths that risk black eyes and bloody noses by standing up to bullies may be a rare find, but one University of Alberta researcher is searching them out to pick their brains and get their views on schoolyard violence.

Shelagh Dunn, a PhD candidate in Educational Psychology, is undertaking a study to look at what sets junior-high students who intervene in bullying apart from their picked-on peers.

"[I'm] interested in their experiences of how they were able to make that choice, what happened after, how they feel about the whole situation and whether they would do it again," Dunn explained.

Dunn's research is a qualitative study that involves interviewing students who have made the choice to get involved in bullying situations to try to stop it.

While research has been done on bullying in the past, it has been primarily focused on what makes

bullies do what they do as well as the affect on victims. Dunn's differs in that she is paying less attention to the school environment and trying to pinpoint the qualities of students that desire to put a stop to bullying.

"They don't just push [bullying] to the side; they take it very seriously, and that means that they're definitely having strong feelings about it."

**SHELAGH DUNN,
EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
PHD CANDIDATE**

"What I'm really interested in are those students that are witnessing [bullying] and the impact on them and the power that they have to be able to do something about it."

While Dunn said she's still looking for a few more participants before compiling and finalizing her research, the study's initial results have revealed some common characteristics among youths that intervene in bullying.

"I'm finding that these students are really actively engaged with the issue," Dunn said. "They don't just push [bullying] to the side; they take it very seriously, and that means that they're definitely having strong feelings about it."

She continued by stating that the students seem to show more empathy, feel like they have a sense of power, and are less influenced by what their peers think.

When concluded, Dunn hopes her research will be used to pass along the qualities that these students exemplify in an effort to greatly reduce bullying.

"I'm hoping that in some way I can write this up in some way that junior-high students will read it."