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Universities tap into iPods' potential as learning tool

By AIXA M. PASCUAL
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What's on your iPod?
Jazz? Hip-hop? Rock?



Calvin Cruce/Staff
(ENLARGE)

Holly Payne heads to her office between classes at North Georgia College and State University in Dahlonega, where she is an instructor. Payne is pursuing a master's in applied computer science at Kennesaw State, but has yet to set foot on the KSU campus. She views lectures on her laptop and iPod.

How about "01-25-07-CS8670" and "01-22-07-CS8411-Monday"?

For Holly Payne, computer science lectures are all the rage.

Payne, 29, is pursuing a master's degree at Kennesaw State University, but she has yet to set foot on campus. Her links to the classroom are her 30GB video iPod and her laptop.

"It's a perfect fit," says Payne, who lives in the North Georgia town of Cleveland and finds it difficult to drive to classes because of a neuromuscular disorder. "This offers everything that I was looking for in a program."

Universities across Georgia and the nation are betting that the ubiquitous iPod, essential equipment for many members of Generation Y, can serve as an effective learning tool. Many of these initiatives rely on iPods, but students use other handheld devices, too, such as PDAs and smart phones.

Georgia colleges have found myriad teaching applications for MP3 and video players, such as Apple's iPod.

At Mercer University's education school, students enrolled in a health nutrition class download digital video clips of their professor acting as an elementary school teacher to illustrate various teaching strategies. The class never meets as a group.

The Medical College of Georgia in Augusta offers 67 how-to videos, some as brief as seven seconds long, that show, for instance, how to set up an IV catheter or measure glucose levels.

A Georgia Tech professor has been running a mini experiment to test whether students who listen to the lecture before class on their iPods or laptops perform better on tests.

And at Kennesaw State, students working on a master's degree in applied computer science, such as Payne, have the choice of going to class or downloading lectures.

Apple Inc. launched the iPod in 2001 and has sold more than 90 million of the devices worldwide, according to the company. Because many students are familiar with the use of MP3 players, universities are seizing on the technology.

"We're definitely seeing its growth in education," said Stan Ng, senior director of iPod product marketing at Apple. "It just doesn't have to be music, shows and movies."

More than 100 universities use iTunes U, a free content distribution service hosted by Apple, and dozens of other colleges use their own servers to allow students to download content to their iPods, Ng said.

Duke University, which announced in 2004 that it would be giving free iPods to all incoming freshmen that year, has had a mostly positive experience.

"It generated a lot of very creative teaching and also very creative learning," said Lynne O'Brien, director of the Center for Instructional Technology at Duke.

Duke has since revised its iPod policy and is now making the device available for a discounted price of \$99 only to students taking courses that require it.

At Atlanta's Emory University, chemistry professor Justin Gallivan remembers noticing about two years ago that students in his biochemistry class brought tape recorders



Frank Niemeir/Staff
(ENLARGE)

"We're definitely seeing its growth in iPods to record lectures.

education," said Stan Ng, senior director of iPod product marketing at Apple. "It just doesn't have to be music, shows and movies."

So he bought an iPod and a \$39 microphone and started recording the class so students could download his lectures.

Later he added video recording so students can see what he writes in class.

Has attendance slacked?

Not at all, said Gallivan.

"There are still reasons to go to class. It's not a replacement, it's a supplement."

Georgia College & State University in Milledgeville has found many creative uses that go beyond lectures since it incorporated iPod use in 2002. History students watch videos about historical figures and make documentaries; music students podcast the music library; and journalism students create podcast series.

"It's not a passive device. Students are actually engaged in the activity," said Jim Wolfgang, director of the Georgia Digital Innovation Group, part of the University System of Georgia.

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But do students learn as much?

Last year, Jim Foley, a professor of computer science at Georgia Tech, decided to try to answer that question by testing two different learning techniques in an advanced computer science class.

One section was taught with in-class lectures; in the other section, students viewed the lectures before class on iPods or laptops.

The lecture content, homework and exams were the same for both groups.

Foley, who is repeating the experiment this semester, found that students using iPods or laptops scored grades about 10 percent better than the in-class lecture section.

He thinks it's because with the lecture out of the way, there is more time for meaningful discussion in the classroom.

The University of Georgia is trying to figure out how to make the best use of the technology.

"When you talk to faculty members [about] using an iPod in their class, it raises their hackles," said Scott Shamp, director of the New Media Institute at Georgia.

Interaction with diverse people is important in the learning experience, he said.

"We can't develop a technology that will take our students totally out of the classroom," he said.

For now, Shamp puts some of his lectures for his new media class online, but the audio is not always synchronized to the visual presentation that accompanies it.

"The challenge is finding the right way to use it in classrooms," Shamp said. "I'm still trying to figure that one out."

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