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Classroom Instruction: Rural Georgia school displays iPod ingenuity

**From eSchool News staff and wire service reports
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Thanks in part to an enterprising group of faculty who call themselves the iDreamers, Georgia College & State University (GSCU) is quickly becoming a leader in using Apple Computer's near-ubiquitous iPod to enhance education--and school officials say their efforts are helping to retain more students.

More than a third of the rural Georgia school's 300 staff members reportedly use the digital music and video players as an education or research tool. Rather than simply making class lectures available for downloading to iPods--a practice now routine at many colleges and even a few high schools--the school's educators are pushing to find more strategic uses of the device.

History professor Deborah Vess asks students to download 39 films to their devices so she doesn't have to spend class time screening the movies. Psychology professor Noland White has found a new-age answer to office hours: a podcast of the week's most frequently-asked questions.

And the campus has organized a group of innovative staff and faculty to conjure up other uses for the technology. Called the iDreamers, the team bats around ideas that could turn the devices into portable yearbooks and replace campus brochures with podcasts.

"The more you free up your classroom for discussion, the more efficient you are," said Dorothy Leland, the school's president.

Campuses throughout the nation have transformed iPods into education tools, a trend Apple hopes to capitalize on with "iTunes U," a nationwide service that makes lectures and other materials available online (see story: <http://www.eschoolnews.com/news/showStory.cfm?>

ArticleID=6153). And GCSU isn't the only school that wants the music players to be more than just a tool for catching up on missed lectures.

At North Carolina's Duke University, where incoming freshmen have been handed the devices as welcoming gifts, foreign-language students use iPods to immerse themselves in coursework.

Administrators with Pennsylvania's Mansfield University want to use podcasts--broadcast messages that can be downloaded to iPods and other digital music players--to recruit high schoolers to the 3,000-student campus. The school also used a podcast to address student and faculty concerns after a New York man who had contracted anthrax visited campus with a dance troupe.

Yet few campuses have embraced the new technology as doggedly as GCSU, which was rewarded for its iPod ingenuity by hosting Apple's Digital Campus Leadership Institute in November.

The school has been a leader in "integrating the iPod into the curriculum to enhance teaching and learning in creative ways, going all the way back to the original iPod," said Greg Joswiak, Apple's vice president of iPod product marketing.

After Leland and Jim Wolfgang, the school's chief information officer, began seeing iPods around campus in 2002, they decided to explore educational applications for the devices. They started by farming out 50 donated iPods to faculty who offered the best proposals.

Soon Wolfgang's office was flooded with applications from educators suggesting new uses. Now, some 400 college-owned iPods are floating around campus--some loaned to students in certain classes, others available for checkout at libraries.

Hank Edmondson, a government professor known around campus as "The Podfather," was among the first to use iPods to supplement his course lectures. Edmondson makes lectures, language study programs, indigenous music, and thumbnail art sketches available for download to the iPods of students in a three-week, study-abroad program he

leads.

During a recent visit to the Prado in Madrid, he recorded a 20-minute lecture on the museum's artwork. Downloading that in advance will let students spend their visit to the museum exploring, not listening to Edmondson talk.

Vess said having her history students screen films on their iPods allows her to dedicate class time to discussion and analysis; likewise for the weekly graduate course she teaches on historical methods.

Although iPods can be useful tools for reviewing coursework, some critics argue donning a pair of earphones is not the same as actively engaging with material in a classroom setting. But GCSU officials say the school makes sure its iPod lessons supplement classroom work--not replace it.

"We don't have any project that repeats what's going on in the classroom," Wolfgang said. "All this is value-added."

Link: GCSU's iPod use <http://ipod.gcsu.edu>

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