

Channels

- Home
- News
- Business
- Entertainment
- Lifestyle
- Carguide
- Your Money
- Workology
- Travel
- Dream Homes
- Sports
- Tech
- Columnists
- Rewards

Read Today's Metro

- Toronto
- Vancouver
- Montreal
- Ottawa

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CFL
REPORT
 Click here



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Students find podcast lectures fit their schedules



courtesy york university

A York University student watches Prof. Diane Zorn deliver a lecture via podcast.

Poll

When do you start your holiday shopping?

1. I've already started
2. I wait until at least December
3. I'm a last minute shopper
4. I give money

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published november 21, 2006

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For Laurie Foley, a third-year York University Glendon College English-literature major, time is money. She has to work a demanding schedule in order to pay for her education, so she sings the praises of being able to listen to her lectures on her iPod wherever she goes, while viewing printed lecture notes.

"I've got an hour-and-a-half commute from Mississauga every day. Having lectures on iPod allows me to kill two birds with one stone by listening en route," she says.

"It adapts to my schedule and unlike traditional learning, I can learn at my own pace with rewind, pause, and fast forward all at my disposal." Her Modes of Reasoning course, instructed by York professor Diane Zorn, is one of approximately 30 courses offered annually by the Philosophy Program at Atkinson Faculty of Liberal and Professional Studies.

"Having lectures on iPod allows me to kill two birds with one stone by listening en route."

—laurie foley

Not only is it York's only fully online, rich-media version of podcast learning, but it's also said to be the second course in Canada to provide video podcast lectures.

"Students have the convenience of choice. They can connect via their PC or MAC, on a video iPod or Sony Playstation or MP3 players," says Zorn.

"It gives the students mobility, convenience and control over their learning. Having a course offered in a way that adapts to student learning is crucial for a course like Modes of Reasoning, where it is all about developing critical skills, analyzing text and applying learning to everyday life situations and discussions."

Foley agrees that the course content fits the medium well. "This course is about learning how to reason, not how to memorize course material or be racing to get every word down from the professor as in a traditional setting. It's important to review the material and to be able to absorb it in bite sized portions."

The online learning environments Zorn has been studying and creating for years are based within her own education theory she is currently developing called enactivism.

"Enactivism assumes that greater quality means greater individualization of learning experiences. This involves meeting the needs of diverse students when, where, and how they want to learn," explains Zorn.

There are, however, challenges to this type of learning. According to Zorn, offering podcast versions of lectures is definitely time consuming, considering all the preparation and the technology involved — as with all technology, mishaps are bound to happen when they're least desired.

"Course instructors would also need to be more comfortable with their lectures being videotaped and fully downloadable," says Zorn, who notes that some professors may have stage fright, or valid fears of misused intellectual property.

Online learning also requires a high level of self-discipline and is more self-directed than learning in the classroom. So while it has its benefits of convenience and mobility it's also crucial that any student who considers it evaluates their learning style and their ability to keep on schedule with assignments overall.

"Online learning does not take away the responsibility of having to adhere to deadlines, nor does it substitute for the expectation of student participation," says Zorn.

Zorn was nominated for the Council of Ontario Universities Teaching with Technology award for the course along with her colleague Kelly Parke, a multimedia designer at York.

Jill Andrew for Metro Toronto

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