

## *The Faculty*

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# The Lectures Are Recorded, So Why Go to Class?

By JEFFREY R. YOUNG

When video recordings of Ravi Janardan's computer-science course at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities first went online, the students loved it. Instead of dragging themselves out of bed for the 8 a.m. lectures, many started skipping classes and watching the recordings instead.

"Personally I was not too happy about it," says Mr. Janardan, who complained to administrators. And he wasn't the only professor concerned. "There were a lot of howls of protest about it. People were not happy."

Professors and administrators eventually reached a compromise: The lectures would not be made available to students on the campus until 10 days after each class session. That way students could still use the videos for review at exam time, but they would feel the need to show up in person to keep up with assignments. Students taking the course through the university's distance-education program would be able to see the recordings immediately.

Recording lectures is becoming more and more common, and many colleges are buying new products that make it as easy as pushing a button.

But many professors worry that as soon as recordings are available, classroom seats will collect dust.

"It's by far the No. 1 fear," says Mark Jones, senior vice president and general manager of Echo360, a company that makes a course-capture system. He says he hears the concern at campus after campus as he makes his pitch to set up recording systems across entire departments or professional schools.

But proponents of the recordings say those concerns are overblown.

Many professors who make their lectures available online have added incentives to keep their classrooms filled.

And they say it actually improves learning and retention, especially in rigorous technical courses. At the same time, it is forcing professors to rethink how to use classroom time when basic information can easily be relayed online.

### **Cameras Roll Automatically**

Iowa State University's veterinary school has enthusiastically adopted the latest classroom-recording technologies. The three classrooms in which most of the program's courses are taught all have cameras in place, along with Echo360's system that automates the recording process. While recording a video image of the professor, the system also records whatever the professor is projecting on the screen at the front of the room.

"We routinely capture everything going on in all the classrooms," says Larry C. Booth, an associate professor leading the effort. He says the system cost about \$10,000.

Each professor decides whether his or her students are allowed to see the recordings. The system automatically starts rolling at the set start time and stops at the end of the hour — the professors don't even have to remember to push a button. Students who are granted access to the recordings get to them through the college's course-management system.

"There are some instructors that do not want it released," says Mr. Booth, and their primary fear, he says, is that students will stop coming to class. So far about one-third of the professors give their students full access to the recordings, and others allow some students to see recordings if they have valid reasons for missing a class session.

Mr. Booth says he encourages professors to try the system and to make their class sessions more interactive so that students won't want to skip. "What I tell them is, 'Well, if all you're going to do is lecture, then there's no need for students to come to class.'" They could watch the video of the session instead, he says.

Several students have benefited from the recordings, especially a student who had to miss class for health reasons but was able to keep up thanks to the videos, says Mr. Booth. "If you get behind in this curriculum, you're dead — there's no way to recover," he says.

### **Unexpected Results**

So far, some professors who have endorsed the recordings have not seen the mass exodus from the classroom that they had feared.

Christopher Brittan-Powell, an assistant professor of psychology at Coppin State University, says he was concerned about attendance when he started recording his lectures three years ago, so he started taking attendance and considering that in final grades.

"It's not a major part of their grade," he says, "but it's substantial enough that it does add up." He says he's seen no major change in attendance.

The professor says that recordings have led to fewer dropouts in his courses and that grades are up as well. "A lot of them are nontraditional-age students, and many of them are working full time," he says. "They're just not able to squeeze courses into their schedules, so they often miss classes."

One unexpected result of the recordings: Fewer students are showing up during office hours with questions about the material. "I either direct students to that part of the lecture online, or they can just go there themselves to get their questions answered," he says.

Edward J. Berger, an associate professor of mechanical and aerospace engineering at the University of Virginia who records his courses, says he cuts off the camera about 10 minutes before the end of each lecture — and that's often when he talks about what will be on the test. Students know that they have to show up in person to get that information.

"I haven't noticed any problems in attendance," he says. "It does allow students to tune out a little bit, knowing that it's recorded and they can watch it later," he adds.

### **Historical Precedent**

Christopher M. O'Neal, a senior consultant at the University of Michigan's Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, argues that professors are unnecessarily concerned that recordings will reduce attendance.

"People have been saying the same thing about PowerPoints for years now," he says, noting that many professors were initially reluctant to place copies of their lecture slides online. "People said, 'If the students have the PowerPoint slides, why do they need to go to lecture?'" But studies have shown that offering slides does not

reduce attendance, he says. "Students are getting something out of the face to face."

Mr. O'Neal predicts that the heaviest users of lecture recordings will be high-achieving students, who already look for extra resources, rather than struggling students who might gain the most from watching lectures a second time. "Is it creating a situation where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer?" he asks.

David M. Brommer, an assistant professor of geography at the University of Alabama, has been recording his lectures since last spring using software from Tegrity, and he gives short quizzes to keep students coming.

He says students do watch the lectures a second time, though they usually just review short sections they found difficult. He says the 200 students in his course have tuned in more than 3,000 times and watched more than 675 hours of the lecture recordings.

He says that makes for better classroom discussion. "A lot of the students who use it show up to class and are asking more engaged questions."

And the videos let him hold a mirror up to his own teaching. About once per semester, he sits down to watch a few of the recordings to see what worked and what didn't, which he says helps him hone his craft.

Professors do have one trump card if they see a sudden drop in attendance, says Al Ducharme, assistant dean of distance and distributed learning at the University of Central Florida.

Some professors at the university have told students, "if you stop coming to class or the attendance drops by 70 percent, I'm just not going to record anymore."

#### **HOW PROFESSORS WHO RECORD LECTURES KEEP STUDENTS IN CLASS**

- Make classes more interactive.
- Give regular in-class quizzes.
- Shut off the camera when talking about what will be on the test.
- Wait 10 days after each lecture to offer a replay.
- Stop offering recordings if class attendance drops.

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