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**Autobiographical Note**

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Bio: Lisa is the Academic Advisor for Educational Technologies at Swinburne University of Technology and is responsible for piloting and evaluating new technologies for learning and teaching. She was the content coordinator Swinburne’s iTunes U project during its first two years.
iTunes U: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS

1. Abstract

1.1. Purpose
The aim is to demonstrate that, with a bit of creative thinking, elements of certain university-wide projects (in this case study, establishing an iTunes U site) can be incorporated into student studies and assessment as real-world learning opportunities.

1.2. Design/Methodology/Approach
Describes three different approaches adopted by Swinburne University of Technology to provide real-world learning opportunities for its students through its project to establish an iTunes U presence. Highlights the problems encountered with these approaches and what Swinburne would do differently to overcome these issues.

1.3. Findings
iTunes U provides a real opportunity for showcasing student work and talent beyond the university. The key to success lies in embedding what you want the students to do deeply within assessment processes to ensure the work provides a relevant and valid learning experience. Part of this is establishing a realistic client-service-provider relationship with the students.

1.4. Research limitations/implications
This paper is based on the observations and anecdotal feedback given to the content coordinator for iTunes U at Swinburne. Future research should seek ethics clearance so that students and staff can be interviewed about their experiences in more depth.

1.5. Practical implications
This paper offers advice to other institutions looking to engage students in broader university projects through integration with coursework.

1.6. Originality/value
Hundreds of universities have iTunes U sites or are exploring the use of iTunes U and/or YouTube. Ideas for how to successfully involve students in these broader university initiatives will be of interest to all these institutes.

Keywords: iTunes U, YouTube, podcast, real-world learning, authentic learning

Classification: Case Study

2. What is iTunes U?
Apple, Inc. has made the mantra for mobile education of “learn anything, anytime, anywhere” manifest in the form of iTunes U – a section of the iTunes Store dedicated to the distribution of educational audio and video podcasts by universities and institutes from around the world. Launched in May 2007 for US colleges and universities (Apple Inc., 2007) and June 2008 for institutes in Australasia and Europe (Nagel, 2008), iTunes U is a free, highly visible and easy-to-use platform through which educational
organizations can reach out to their students, staff and lifelong learners within the general public.

The process is simple. Once approved by Apple Inc., institutes are given access to iTunes U and can develop their site in whatever way they wish. Some institutes opt to only make the content available to their staff and students (i.e. they create a private iTunes U site) while others utilize the broad reach of the platform to make their content available to the world through a public iTunes U site. Swinburne chose iTunes U rather than YouTube or another distribution platform partially because of the availability of the private site option (something Swinburne will look to explore further in the future). In addition, iTunes U supports simple audio files and PDF (not just video) and allows users to download content, not just view it online.

Located in Melbourne, Australia, Swinburne University of Technology was one of the first universities outside of the US to launch its iTunes U site. The University has ~35,000 students enrolled into both Higher Education and Vocational Learning, and offers a diverse range courses from the sciences, engineering, and information and communication technologies, through to design studies, business and entrepreneurship, health and the environment and sustainability. Swinburne on iTunes U is designed to inform students and staff currently at Swinburne, but also to attract and inform potential students and staff, alumni, industry partners and other life-long learners. To achieve these ends, Swinburne’s iTunes U site has initially been created as a public site, showcasing student work, teaching excellence, research highlights, and information about Swinburne and its courses.

3. iTunes U as an Opportunity for Students
As an initiative of the Swinburne Higher Education Office, the iTunes U project needed to integrate with a key element of curriculum renewal at the university: the Swinburne Professional Learning Model (Swinburne, 2010). This model aims to ensure that graduates are professionally oriented and equipped with skills matched to contemporary industry needs, and consists of four cornerstones: (1) real-world learning, (2) curriculum flexibility, (3) career preparation and (4) global perspectives.

It was decided to integrate the iTunes U project with the first of these cornerstones – real-world learning – in several of the creative arts courses. This decision provided the opportunity for students to produce specific content for the site according to creative briefs developed by the iTunes U content coordinator. In effect, the iTunes U project became the client for the students.

Here we present three approaches Swinburne has trialed for embedding the creation of content for iTunes U into existing courses. No additional budget was allocated for any of these projects as the aim was to incorporate the creation of content into existing teaching and learning practices.

3.1. Approach 1: Utilizing existing curricula and student outputs
Initial discussions about the types of content Swinburne wanted to feature in iTunes U established student work as a priority. The idea was to develop a student showcase area to be populated with the best pieces of work submitted for assessment from Swinburne’s creative arts courses. Each item in the showcase would be chosen by the relevant unit convener (academic staff member responsible for coordinating and overseeing the unit of study) and published with the student’s consent. This would allow Swinburne to demonstrate to potential students the type and quality of work they could expect to complete as part of their course. It would also allow those students selected for the showcase to promote themselves through this university-sanctioned, highly visible
platform. It was also hoped that alerting students to the opportunity of having their work published on iTunes U, would provide extra incentive for them to submit their best work.

The following process was established to ensure work submitted for assessment was also suitable for iTunes U:

1. iTunes U content coordinator to meet with the unit convener at the start of the semester to discuss the type of assessment product that would be produced. Highlight the potential advantages of iTunes U for students, the importance of complying with public 3rd party copyright laws as opposed to the more lenient copyright afforded to internal educational work (Commonwealth 1968), and outline step-by-step the process for informing students and delivering the final work to the iTunes U content coordinator.

2. Convener/lecturer to notify students in the first week of the unit about the opportunity to have their work considered for iTunes U, including why they might want to do so. The requirements, particularly in relation to 3rd party copyright, are explained.

3. Reinforcement through the semester – convener/lecturer to remind students about the iTunes U opportunity and the requirements their work must fulfill if they want it to be considered.

4. A few weeks before assessment is due, convener/lecturer to distribute the release form and copyright log for students to complete, sign, and hand in with their audio or video file.

5. The week before assessment, the convener/lecturer to remind students to hand in their release form and copyright log with their work.

The primary difficulty encountered in creating the student showcase was in ensuring this process was carried out. Although the conveners were always enthusiastic at the start of the semester, they seemed to struggle to maintain the process beyond the initial notification of the students, perhaps due to workload constraints. This resulted in the final audio and video files being sent to the iTunes U coordinator without any of the required paperwork, and several of the items containing 3rd party copyright issues (in particular, popular music used in the soundtrack).

3.1.1. What could be done differently next time

We believe that more direct involvement from the iTunes U content coordinator is required in order to ensure success in securing student assessment work. We see two options for enabling this, depending on the level of involvement by the iTunes U content coordinator with which the convener/lecturer feels comfortable.

Option 1: iTunes U content coordinator presents the idea of iTunes U to students (step 2 in the above), rather than the lecturer/convener. The iTunes U content coordinator also follows up by writing all the relevant emails for the remainder of the process for the convener/lecturer who then simply forwards them to the students.

Option 2: iTunes U content coordinator presents the idea of iTunes U to students and is invited as a guest in the unit’s BlackBoard (Learning Management System) site. This allows the content coordinator to directly control the flow of information to students about iTunes U and to take questions from the students about the process throughout the semester.

Both options allow the students to meet the iTunes U content coordinator and ask questions about iTunes U. They have almost no impact on the workload of the convener/lecturer and allow the iTunes U content coordinator to discuss with students how they might use the opportunity presented through iTunes U to promote themselves.
3.2 Approach 2: Modifying existing curricula and student outputs

Another way we tried to ensure greater success in obtaining content for our student showcase was by embedding the creation of content for iTunes U more deeply into the assessment process. Rather than the students and the lecturer focusing on submission of the assessment task with iTunes U an added extra, we devised a way in which iTunes U became the central focus.

Information about the services provided to students and staff was another of the key areas Swinburne wanted to highlight within iTunes U. The aim of these podcasts was to remind current students and staff of the support available to them and to alert potential students and staff to the services offered should they choose to come to Swinburne. Unfortunately, the audit of existing audio-visual material at Swinburne revealed very little content in this area. This meant that all the content would have to be custom recorded.

We decided to engage with the students in our creative arts courses in order to record these custom podcasts. Mindful that the creation of this content should align strongly with the curriculum, we sought out units that would allow students produce short documentaries or interviews as part of their assessment. The vision was for the iTunes U project to become an external “client” for these students and that the students would produce their documentary or interview in accordance with a brief provided by the iTunes U content coordinator. This meant that instead of producing work simply for assessment and for the eyes of the lecturer alone, the task now took on a new character. Students could easily identify it as a real-world learning opportunity with a valid purpose for the client.

The convener of the Graduate Diploma of Arts (Commercial Radio) was approached to discuss the potential to embed the creation of content about Swinburne services into one of the assessment tasks in the course. The convener was open to the idea and outlined the different assessment tasks the students would undertake during the year.

The assessment task selected for modification was one that required each student to record and to produce two audio interviews with outside experts (e.g. local politicians, sports personalities, band members) about whatever topic he or she wished. In the modified version of this assessment task, students interviewed only one outside expert. For their second interview, they chose one of the many services offered by Swinburne (e.g. counseling service, housing service, health service, sport and recreation at Swinburne, student radio, etc). The iTunes U content coordinator provided a brief explaining that the interviews would be used as online promotional pieces for Swinburne, and as such, their interview questions should revolve around the services offered and how students and staff could access them. During class, the lecturer explained the restrictions around 3rd party copyright for public broadcast and how they differ from the restrictions in an internal educational setting, and students were informed of the duration and delivery specifications of the final output. The release form and copyright log were made available through the Learning Management System (Blackboard) and students were instructed to hand these back with their final audio file.

We found that incorporating iTunes U as an integral part of an assessment task was much more successful than simply trying to collect assessment work from students. There were no 3rd party copyright issues and the release and copyright logs were submitted along with the audio files, ensuring the iTunes U content coordinator could upload the content without having to chase further information from the students or lecturer. The podcasts produced were used as examples of student work, and also created the much-needed content about services available at Swinburne.
3.2.1 What could be done differently next time
The modified assessment task allowed for the iTunes U project to integrate with the real-world learning aspect of Swinburne’s Professional Learning Model by contributing an authentic learning experience for the students as an external client. Although this assisted in strengthening the real-world nature of the existing learning experience, we believe that this could be further improved by involving the iTunes U content coordinator – the client – more closely with the students. In a real-world scenario, the content producer would meet, or at least have the opportunity to talk to and ask questions of, the client. This could again be achieved through either Option 1 or Option 2 (depending on the wishes of the convener/lecturer) as outlined in Approach 1. We would also carry out an investigation as to how the students react to the experience of working with an external client and having the resulting outputs showcased on a public platform.

3.3 Approach 3: Provision of work experience opportunities
A third method by which the creation of content for iTunes U could be embedded into an existing course at Swinburne was discovered in conversations with the convener of the Bachelor of Arts (Media and Communication). One of the media units requires students to undertake either a self-directed project of their choosing or a work experience placement. The convener of this unit is always looking for new student work experience opportunities and invited the iTunes U content coordinator to ‘pitch’ an idea at the first and only lecture in this unit.

In an effort to integrate with the Career Preparation cornerstone of the Swinburne Professional Learning Model, the iTunes U content coordinator approached Swinburne’s Careers and Employment service to discuss the idea of creating careers podcasts for iTunes U. The idea was that if any of the media students took up the work experience opportunity, they would work closely with the Careers and Employment service to produce a podcast focused on one aspect of careers advice. If more than one student were interested, more than one podcast would be produced. The manager of Swinburne Careers and Employment agreed to trial the idea and allocated a staff member to the project.

Before briefing the students, the representative from Careers and Employment and the iTunes U content coordinator agreed upon a division of tasks to ensure the project would be sustainable. During the briefing, several aspects of the work experience opportunity were highlighted:

- Students were encouraged to use their creativity to make the podcasts fun and interesting – something that they themselves would want to watch. Actors would be available if required.
- Students would be involved in every aspect of the production of the podcast. They would develop the script with the Careers and Employment representative, produce the storyboards, direct the actors (if required), and do all the post-production on the podcast to deliver the completed product to the iTunes U content coordinator.
- Students would have access to the TV studio at Swinburne and be able to call upon the technical expertise of the in-house audio-visual operators (if required).
- The finished product would be highlighted on Swinburne’s iTunes U site, complete with student contact details.
- Students would receive special consideration by the Careers and Employment service (e.g. they would be notified if an employment opportunity arose in the field in which they were interested).
- The work experience was completely voluntary. The students would not be paid.
This opportunity took place over two semesters in 2009/2010 and four students undertook the assignment. The small number of students thus far has allowed the project to be incorporated easily into the workload of the Careers and Employment representative who indicated that the coordination of the podcasts worked well and that most of the students have shown a great deal of motivation, initiative, and creativity in producing their podcast.

Feedback from the students was also very positive, identifying the opportunity to work with a real client and seeing their work on the public stage as highlights. They also indicated that the experience was well coordinated and that there was sufficient one-on-one contact with their client.

In the future, it is hoped to extend this real-world work experience opportunity to students across Swinburne’s Faculties. To limit the impact on an individual staff member’s workload and to ensure the project is sustainable, the idea is to bring in other service areas of the University (such as Swinburne Sport and Recreation) as alternative clients for the students. This may also increase the uptake by students as they may then have the opportunity to create a podcast in an area in which they have a particular interest (e.g. fitness).

The key challenge in expanding the project will be to engage other service areas of the University and have them incorporate it into the workload of an enthusiastic staff member. As for expanding the student base, the project could potentially be offered to any Swinburne student, not necessarily as part of their course, but as an opportunity to enhance their portfolio or pursue an interest in audio-visual production.

3.4 Opportunities for iTunes U outside of creative arts courses

The decision to integrate the iTunes U project initially with creative arts courses was simply due to the obvious links with existing curricula and student outputs. However, this does not limit the project from expanding to include students studying other disciplines in the future.

For example, language students could translate existing university podcasts and produce them in a second language (or provide subtitling). They could create podcasts for international marketing purposes by the University, or they could produce podcasts about a particular event that would interest an audience for who English is not the first language. This would allow for the creation of an iTunes U site in more than one language.

Students studying mathematics/physics/engineering could create podcasts that show step-by-step solutions to particular problems. These podcasts would not only demonstrate to the lecturer the thinking behind how the student is solving the problem, but could also be used as a resource for fellow students or perhaps upper level secondary school students if made available through a platform such as iTunes U.

These are just a few examples of how creation of content for iTunes U can be integrated into non-creative arts courses. They may require significant changes to curricula and assessment processes, but they are possible as the software and technology required to produce the podcasts is not expensive and is relatively easy to use. Although we have focused on creative arts courses initially, many students in various discipline areas could produce work suitable for iTunes U.

4. Recommendations

When undertaking a broader university initiative (such as developing an iTunes U site), consideration should be given as to involving students. In any project, will be elements that
may be suitable to implement as real-world learning opportunities, and consultation with relevant teaching staff will quickly identify those with real possibility.

Some recommendations from our experiences in involving students in the process of creating content for *Swinburne on iTunes U*:

1. Embed the creation of content (or whatever element of the project you are having the students work on) deeply within student assessment and make sure it provides a relevant and valid learning experience.
2. Act as a real client for the students and establish a realistic client-service-provider relationship.
3. Identify a motivated and enthusiastic project person to seek out opportunities, liaise with academic teaching staff and be involved with the students as the client.

These recommendations, with sufficient planning and development time, will allow broader university initiatives offering innovative opportunities for students through the provision of real-world learning experiences. In the case of establishing a publicly visible digital media site (such as iTunes U or YouTube or a website), it also provides added incentive for students by establishing a highly visible, university-sanctioned platform through which students are able to promote their work to potential employers.

5. References


