USQ deploys new lecture recording software

Students studying at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ) were the first in Australia to experience the latest lecture recording technology, giving distance students and on campus students who cannot attend classes a near on campus experience. After joining the beta trial in 2008 and successful testing in the Faculty of Sciences in semester one in 2009, the University rolled out the lecture recording software, Camtasia Relay, to all lecture theatres and teaching rooms at the beginning of semester two, 2009.

The software captures any movement on the computer screen and verbal explanations of the lecturer in class making it available to students as a screencast in video format. This can then be played back on a computer, or downloaded to a portable device such as an iPhone or video iPod. An audio-only version of a lecture is also produced.

While Camtasia Studio, also by US software company Techsmith, is well known in Australian higher education circles and requires an individual license for each computer, Camtasia Relay is server based. The recorder may be installed on any computer that connects to the university network, making Relay a cheaper option for widespread lecture recording. USQ previously used the home-grown but ageing IPLOD (Internet PowerPoint Lectures On Demand) system before moving to Relay. Apart from cost, Relay’s advantages over other commercial lecture recording tools such as the more widely used Lectopia/Echo360 are that

- recordings are started and stopped by the lecturer – no booking required
- the recorder can be installed on any computer, i.e. the lecturer may bring their own laptop or tablet PC
- recordings outside lectures, e.g. in an office or from home, are possible
- with the portable recorder installed on a USB stick, recordings can be made on any computer from any location directly onto the stick, e.g. when visiting another university or when off line
- editing is possible with Camtasia Studio or any video editing suite
- the software runs on Mac and PC.

Output formats may be individually assigned by the Relay administrator as required and lecturers may check the status of their recording via the web interface.

While PowerPoint recordings with an audio component are appropriate for PowerPoint-only lectures where no whiteboard writing is required, screencasts are particularly useful in quantitative disciplines which in the past have not been engaged in recording lectures at the university. For example, using a tablet PC or graphics tablet, mathematics lectures can be recorded and made available to all students.

Student feedback to lecturers who have recorded their lectures and made them available via the university’s learning management system, Moodle, has been very positive. Many lecturers reported that students commented that the recordings suited their learning style as they could listen to or watch the recordings from anywhere, and repeat as necessary. On campus students benefit as well as they can view a lecture they may have missed, or revisit concepts they did not understand in the lecture. Some students said that they no longer write what the lecturer writes in class (on a tablet PC) because they can access this later, instead they take notes of the “soft” information that is mentioned by the lecturer but never written down.

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The Camtasia Relay recorder.