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The Benefits of Podcasting

Karin M. Mika

Cleveland State University, k.mika@csuohio.edu

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The Benefits of Podcasting



*Karin Mika,
Cleveland-Marshall College of Law
karin.mika@law.csuohio.edu*

In 2005, I participated in CALI's inaugural podcasting project. Each participant was given a complimentary MP3 recorder, and our directive was to record our classes and then post them to a CALI website. The website could also include blogs, downloads, or other class guidance, but the most important objective was to record our classes and then have the students participate in surveys where they assessed the usefulness of the recordings. The evaluations were uniformly positive, and since that year I have used podcasts to enhance the learning experience.

There are numerous benefits to recording classes. First, students have the opportunity to review what was said to ensure that they understood the material. This has made for more "informed" questions after the class, rather than questioning that necessitated I re-explain something in its entirety. Second, students who missed class could hear what they missed without having to ask peers (who might give misinformation) or to ask me to repeat the material in its entirety. Third, I could point to the podcasts (during or after class) when I felt that the students weren't understanding portions of the material that were overly difficult, or when we had to move through some material quickly because of time. Fourth, I could use the podcasts as a way to re-affirm something I had said about a due date or a page limitation, especially when a student insisted that I had never made such an announcement.

Since I began recording classes, I have become much more sophisticated in strategic usage. Early on, I was informed by several students that many of their peers felt that they could skip class because it would be recorded. While attendance was not a major problem even though all of the classes were being recorded, attendance definitely dwindled when there were midterms or projects due for other classes. In response, I decided that I would record most, but not all, classes,

and that I would record only one session of material that was repeated twice in a week.

I also learned early on that a general announcement at the beginning of the year about the site was not sufficient to inform the students that the podcasts were available. I decided to consistently remind students about the podcasts and routinely send out the link to my class listserv. I especially emphasized that a review of the class might be in order when I knew we covered a particularly perplexing subject (like citation format) in class, or when I was aware (by either the blank looks or because of the questions I was getting) that there was confusion about some of the material.

Finally, because I have been recording classes for a while, I am now able to point students to podcasts from previous years as supplemental material, especially when we are unable to cover a topic not necessarily specific to a given year's assignment (such as administrative law sources) but important nonetheless. I have also been able to suggest that students listen to presentations made in previous years by practitioners or other guest lecturers.

Many more students each year tell me what a benefit the podcasts provide. From informal surveys, I have learned that about 25% of the students "sporadically" reviewed podcasts in 2006, while in 2008, about 65% "routinely" reviewed material in the podcasts. Although there are some potential problems with the podcasts (such as technological glitches, and some rare problems with accessibility), the benefits far outweigh the problems. The podcasts give the motivated students the ability to access information 24/7 and allow me to have a supplement to my classroom in the form of repetition that need not necessarily take place in the limited classroom time or in conferences. This in turn allows me to use the time I have more efficiently and not concentrate on repeating basic information before getting into more in-depth matters.