Mobile learning
Get an education via your iPod or cell phone. BY SHERYLL ALEXANDER

Mobile learning, once considered highly futuristic in the world of education, is today promising to revolutionize the way we all learn. In fact, as more "Generation Y" or "Internet Revolution" students are quickly coming of age, higher education institutions are scrambling to reach this technologically-savvy student base.

Here in OC, UC Irvine Extension has long been recognized as an innovator in e-learning and is now pioneering the use of "mobile learning" via iPod, cell phone and other mobile technologies.

"UCI sees vast opportunities in the field of mobile computing," says Larry Cooperman, director of technology and design at UCI's Distance Learning Center.

Cooperman says much of the advances in mobile learning are because the latest web browsers for mobile devices intelligently reformat each page and provide rapid navigation tools. So, he says, "UCI's open course management system seems to work out of the box."

In fact, Cooperman says UCI is in the process of reformatting all multimedia presentations for mobile devices as well. "So, we hope to be fully mobile compliant later this year," he claims.

He also says broad technological changes in the coming years will make text and voice more easily "interoperable" (meaning capable of being used or operated reciprocally, according to dictionary.com).

In the real world, says Cooperman, this means students should be able to operate a website via both spoken and keyboard commands, resulting in text-based responses via spoken commands. "Already, there are companies that offer automated transcription of voice mail as a service, so the technology already exists," he says.

The resulting opportunities for online education are enormous, says Cooperman. One of these "opportunities," which is already being explored by UCI's Network and Academic Computing Services department, is making every classroom on campus "podcast-able," including both video and audio podcasts.

Cooperman says these audio and video podcasts will offer students more and more convenience and also "create assets that can be reused and recombinined in ways we can't even predict right now."

Podcasting, for example, may change the way students study for exams, says Cooperman. "A student is no longer tethered to a desk laden with text books," he says. "Instead, (the student) can fast forward to the part of the lecture he or she bookmarked for later review."

The goal at UCLA, says Cooperman, is to allow all online students to take any of their courses entirely from a mobile device such as ultra-small laptops and mobile phones with smartphone screens.

"Fortunately, some of the mobile phone web browsers have gotten very good at reformatting large screens for small devices on the fly," he explains.

UCI's Distance Learning Center, for example, has recently begun a project to convert multimedia-based online courses to small devices. To try this out, UCI has taken interactive Flash animations and redesigned them for a smaller screen. However, says Cooperman, only newer generation devices that use Flash Lite 2.0 can display the new design.

Since UCI's goal is to allow all online students to take courses entirely from a mobile device, Cooperman says this means extending and completely renovating the notion of anytime, anywhere convenience. "Because cell phones are ubiquitous in most parts of the world, this means that for the first time we have a device that can truly offer online education on a 24/7 basis," says Cooperman enthusiastically.

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