

iTunes U: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS AND A HERALD OF CHANGE

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Abstract

This paper outlines 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. It also highlights several institutional issues uncovered during the course of the iTunes U project. These issues are independent of iTunes U and will likely arise for any educational organization looking to incorporate extensive use of rich media in their online presence.

What is iTunes U?

“Learn anything, anytime, anywhere.” Apple Inc. has made this mantra for mobile education 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 make the content available only 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 we 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.

Swinburne University of Technology was one of the first universities outside of the US to launch its iTunes U site. *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.

iTunes U as an Opportunity for Students

As an initiative of the 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, 2010a). This model aims to ensure that graduates are professionally oriented and equipped with skills that are 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 our creative arts courses. In particular, it 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. This type of real world learning has proven popular with students (Scott, 2005), as it is easier for students to draw direct parallels between the task and activities they will be performing once they join the workforce.

Another feature of iTunes U is its high visibility and international profile. Recent work — particularly in the area of blogging — has suggested that student motivation and engagement is increased if they are creating work for an audience, not just their lecturer (Ellison & Wu, 2008). Many invest more time and effort into the task, as they know their peers and potential employers will have the opportunity to see their work.

In this section, we present three approaches Swinburne has trialed for embedding the creation of content for iTunes U into existing courses.

Approach 1: Utilizing Existing Curricula and Student Outputs

In the initial discussions about the types of content Swinburne wanted to feature in iTunes U, it was agreed that student work was 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 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 by 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 (Cth 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.

What we will do 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 that the convener/lecturer feels comfortable with.

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 site. This allows the coordinator to directly control the flow of information to students about iTunes U and 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 point out to students how they might use the opportunity presented through iTunes U to promote themselves.

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 aims of these podcasts were to remind current students and staff of the support available to them and 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 in which students produce short documentaries or interviews as part of their assessment. Our vision was for the iTunes U project to become an external “client” for the students and that the students 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 produce two audio interviews with outside experts (e.g. local politicians, sports personalities, band members) about whatever topic they wished. In the modified version of this assessment task, students only interviewed one outside expert. For their second interview, they chose one of the many services offered by Swinburne. 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 may 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 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.

What we will do differently next time. The modified assessment task allowed for the iTunes U project to integrate with the Professional Learning Model by contributing to a real world 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, their client. This could again be achieved through either Option 1 or Option 2 (dependent 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.

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 on the lookout 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 there were more than one student interested, there would be more than one podcast produced. The manager of Swinburne Careers and Employment agreed to trial the idea and allocated one of the members of staff to the project.

Before pitching to 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 pitch, 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.

We have run this opportunity over the last 2 semesters and four students have undertaken the assignment. The small uptake numbers thus far has allowed the project to be easily incorporated into the workload of the Careers and Employment representative, who has indicated that the coordination of the podcasts is working 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 has also been 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, we hope to extend this real world work experience opportunity to students studying other courses 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 to work with. 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.

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, it 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.

Opportunities for iTunes U Outside of Creative Arts Courses

The decision to initially integrate the iTunes U project 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). Alternatively, 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.

More generally still, and valid for any course, rather than mandating that students submit a written essay or project for assessment, allow them to submit their assessment in whatever style they choose — be that written, an audio presentation or a video presentation. This allows students to show their understanding of the material in the way they believe best suits the outcomes, and audio and video submissions may be suitable for upload to iTunes U.

These are just a few examples of how creation of content for iTunes U can be integrated into non-creative arts courses — you are really limited only by your imagination. They may require more significant changes to curricula and assessment processes, but they are all possible as the software and technology required to produce the podcasts is not expensive or difficult to use. Although we have focused on creative arts courses initially, it is possible for all students, no matter what their discipline area, to produce work suitable for iTunes U.

iTunes U as an Instigator of Institutional Change

Many of the challenges we faced in integrating the iTunes U project with Swinburne's Professional Learning Model were process challenges that we believe will be easily overcome within a few iterations of the initiative. However, Swinburne's iTunes U project also unearthed three much larger issues that need to be addressed at an institutional level — copyright awareness, digital media management and inter-departmental barriers. We believe these challenges are relevant to all universities, regardless of whether or not they embark specifically on an iTunes U project, as they will

be critical to the success of our students and the institution in a future rich in online digital media.

Copyright Awareness

For copyright material within an Australian educational institution, Part VB of the Copyright Act (Cth, 1968) makes additional provision (the education statutory license) for use. Individuals also have the benefit of further exceptions in using material in their studies. This is a huge boon for academics and students who can make extensive use of copyright material in their courses and their assignments without repercussions, but presents a real challenge when the student work, lecture series or research seminar is selected for highlight through a public channel such as iTunes U.

Although all lecturers and students have some awareness of copyright law, it has become apparent through the course of the iTunes U project at Swinburne that this understanding is patchy at best. We have already highlighted the challenge we faced with students submitting assignments with 3rd party copyright issues in our discussion of Approach 1 to embedding iTunes U into the Professional Learning Model. Even when students did complete the copyright log for submission with their assignment, many of them cited “fair use” as their copyright clearance — a concept that is not part of Australian copyright law (Australian Copyright Council, 2006). Others had clearly not made the distinction that even though the original content was freely available via the web (in a blog, for example), it did not mean the content could be used without permission from the copyright owner.

Although aspects of copyright law are taught within all of the creative arts courses at Swinburne, it appears that what is taught needs to be revisited. Some of the confusion no doubt stems from the fact that copyright law has struggled to keep up with modern use of audio and video, and many potential copyright issues fall into “grey” areas that need to be assessed on individual bases. Our challenge is to determine the best way to wade through these grey areas and equip our students and staff with the ability to judge copyright issues for themselves. For students, this is a critical skill they will need upon entry into the workforce, or whenever they contribute content to the open web. For staff, the ability to make judgment calls about content is becoming more important as universities look to increase the amount of rich media publicly available online through their website. We are currently discussing with the Swinburne Copyright Office how best to ensure our staff and students have a sufficient grounding in copyright law to prepare for a media-rich future.

Digital Media Management

iTunes U is a media-intensive project sourcing audio and video content from several areas across the university. Swinburne’s iTunes U site now features more than 500 pieces of content that are stored on a server dedicated to iTunes U and serviced by a database designed for the iTunes U project.

However, this is not the only database of digital media at Swinburne. Other examples include: recorded lectures, which are stored on a server and in a database dedicated to

Lectopia; Swinburne Library, which hosts both the Swinburne Image Bank — a repository for imagery associated with Swinburne (Swinburne, 2010b) and the Swinburne Research Bank — an open access digital collection of research by Swinburne researchers (Swinburne 2010c), and Corporate Marketing, which along with Swinburne Press manage the distribution of Swinburne's Logo and corporate templates. Each of these databases is managed independently and with different approaches to metadata. This creates search issues and potentially usage issues as well, depending on the metadata stored.

Swinburne is currently discussing the idea of having a single central storage area and database for all digital media. This would create a one-stop-shop for all digital media at Swinburne (facilitating searching) and would enable us to implement a consistent metadata system that includes copyright information for each piece of content (resolving usage issues).

Inter-departmental Barriers

A successful iTunes U project will source content from across the university and should therefore involve representatives from several different areas including: Higher Education, Corporate Marketing, Library Services and Information Technology Support. While this is easy to put down on paper, it is much harder to achieve in reality due to the siloed structure that most universities adopt. This causes problems not only in communicating between departments, but may also raise issues around ownership of projects and who is paying for them.

At Swinburne, our iTunes U project started out very small, with dedicated staff limited to an iTunes U content coordinator from Higher Education and an Information Technology Support coordinator to look after the technology. Between them, they performed all of the roles outlined above. The communication and collaboration between these two people was extremely effective and was the primary factor in Swinburne being ready to launch its site within a short timeframe.

As our iTunes U project has grown, we have attempted to move towards the ideal team by initiating collaborations with individuals on aspects relevant to their areas. However, we have found communications difficult and reluctance by other parties to become involved in what is seen as a Higher Education project.

Although Swinburne's experience is focused around our iTunes U project (our largest source of rich media online), we believe any university wishing to utilize rich media extensively as part of its online presence may encounter these inter-departmental communications and ownership challenges. The key is to address them right from the beginning. Swinburne is currently looking to restructure its iTunes U project to establish the priority within each of the relevant departments — a process we hope will improve communication and collaboration.

Recommendations

There are several challenges, large and small, associated with establishing an extensive rich media presence online. This paper has focused on Swinburne's project to establish its iTunes U site, but similar issues will arise no matter which distribution platform is chosen (i.e. we would have encountered similar issues had we chosen YouTube or something else as our platform).

We have the following key recommendations to offer colleagues wishing to expand their online presence through different distribution platforms:

- Talk to other universities who have done it before you. We have shared our expertise in establishing an iTunes U site with many other universities in Australia and New Zealand.
- Establish your workflows and processes for managing digital media at the start of the project, before anything goes live. Future-proof by ensuring that whatever you develop supports multiple distribution platforms (we started with iTunes U but we are now also looking to make our content available through YouTube EDU).
- Ensure you have project "champions" from each area of the institution in your project team to break down the silos that limit communication.
- Embed the creation of content deeply within student assessment and make sure it provides a relevant and valid learning experience. Become a client for your students and establish a realistic client/service-provider relationship.
- Design and deliver copyright training for academic staff and students.

By heeding these recommendations and giving yourself sufficient planning and development time, projects such as establishing an iTunes U presence offer a fantastic opportunity for students through the provision of real world learning experiences. They also provide added incentive for students by establishing a highly visible, university-sanctioned platform through which students are able to promote their work to potential employers. Educational institutes should keep these benefits in mind as they look to expand their online profile into the age of rich media.

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