

New Teaching Initiatives Create Buzz on Campus

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Professor Joe Velaidum spent most of last semester in bed with the flu.

For a two-month period, he would teach a lecture, go home and try to sleep off the sickness. It was while he was in bed and taking cold medication that he thought up a new way to teach his class.

"Why do I have to go to lectures live?" he asked himself and thought maybe the Internet could provide an answer.

He went to his Christian Ethics class seeking feedback on the idea, which would include recorded lectures students could access at any time and small group meetings to discuss the material.

"What would you guys think about that?" he asked the class. He received mostly positive feedback. They did say, however, they don't mind attending his lectures as they're presented so well.

This is Velaidum's most recent

idea that came from thinking outside the box when it comes to teaching.

In a class last semester, he introduced an oral testing component worth 50 per cent of the final exam, students meeting with him for half an hour while answering questions on the material they've learned.

It's been well received by students and helps develop oral skills, which will be useful after university when students are asked to make presentations, he said.

"If you can explain it to someone, you know it."

Jess Slayter, a fourth-year biology student, took his class last semester and said the oral testing was less stressful but it's not an excuse to slack off.

"You have to study and you have to know your stuff."

As for this semester's class, Myths of Hate and Evil, Velaidum is offering a series of lectures online through Moodle, including guest lectures from experts. He'll also organize optional group discussions throughout

the semester.

For the class, he has bought a Macintosh computer and has used Garage Band, a program that records audio files.

He said the new method has solved many problems for him, from getting students out of bed for an 8:30 a.m. class, to finding room to accommodate his overflowing classrooms. With 120 students enrolled in this semester's class, live lectures would have prevented students from having meaningful discussions.

"It's shocking that I'm the one doing this," he said. "Technology never solved anything for me in the classroom before."

While it helps students with tight schedules, it's been a time-consuming process for him as he's had to learn the technology and edit voice clips.

But it's also been a way for him to rethink the way he teaches.

If this method is as effective as live lectures it's worth a shot. It also allows students to learn at their own pace. "I want to inspire students to

get inside my head," he added.

Richard Kurial, the dean of arts, is one of the guest lecturers who will be featured this semester. He said the idea is innovating and exciting.

"It's designed to enhance and enrich what's already being offered."

Slayter, who's also enrolled in the class, likes the flexibility it provides.

"It's a good course to have this kind of setup," she said, adding it wouldn't work for every class.

Velaidum said for this method to work, professors must know their class well, as they need to be aware what students struggle with and when to slow down. And while it's not for everyone, it may be an alternative for some professors.

During the semester, he'll ask for feedback from students on whether it help students learn the material better.

"The students are going to decide if it's successful."

Next, Velaidum is exploring the possibility for a liberal arts program at UPEL.



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