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Slept through the prof's lecture? Now you can download it

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It's a rainy Tuesday night at Seton Hall University and at least four students have failed to show up for professor Tony Loviscek's four-hour graduate business class.

But the professor isn't worried. After all, the students can always catch the video.

Loviscek's "Decision Making I" class is one of the courses at the South Orange university recorded under a new "lecture capture" system used on a growing number of campuses nationwide.

Multiple cameras mounted on the classroom walls automatically record the professor's lecture. A computer also captures everything he writes on the electronic tablet he uses instead of a blackboard.

After class, students can watch the video on demand on their computers, fast-forwarding through the boring bits and replaying things they don't understand.

"If I could, I'd do this for all the courses I teach," said Loviscek, a veteran professor and chairman of Seton Hall's department of finance and legal studies.

But the new lecture recording systems have been controversial on many campuses, where professors are worried students raised on YouTube and TiVo will quit coming to class.

Who's going to get out of bed for an 8 a.m. lecture when they can just watch it on their laptops?

"That's one of the more common questions we get," said Mark Jones, president of Echo360, the Virginia company that offers the lecture capture technology.

But independent studies on several campuses show offering class lectures online on demand doesn't cause dramatic drops in class attendance.

"It really doesn't have that much of an impact, which is surprising," Jones said.

Professors say the lecture recordings allow students to go home and review confusing concepts, especially in math and science courses. That may give students more confidence and inspire them to go to class.

Echo360, which has been around for three years, is currently installed in classrooms on 250 college campuses. In New Jersey, Rutgers, Bergen Community College, County College of Morris and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey are among the schools using the system.

Depending on their size, colleges pay between \$10,000 and several hundred thousand dollars a year for the licensing and equipment to record and post lectures, Jones said.

At County College of Morris, school officials installed the Echo360 system last semester on the Randolph campus. So far, about 30 courses have been recorded, including math, foreign language, microbiology and philosophy classes. Students can either watch them on their computers or download them as podcasts to their iPods.

The recorded lectures have been a big hit because they give students the flexibility to miss a class or two without falling behind, said Joan Cook, a psychology professor and director of the college's Center for Teaching Excellence.

"We are a community college. A lot of our students work, we have a lot of adult students," Cook said. "It can really make a difference."

Like many schools, County College of Morris experimented for years with videotaping and audiotaping classes. But the technology never seemed to work, either because it was difficult for students to access, the quality was poor or the recordings failed to show what the professor wrote on the blackboard.

The new generation of lecture capturing systems seems to have solved those problems, Cook said. Several students chose their courses for next semester based on which classes are being recorded.

At Seton Hall, graduate student Rahul Dang has changed his note-taking habits in his class that uses the new technology. While sitting in class, he breaks his notes into half-hour segments, jotting down the exact time the professor mentions key topics.

Then, Dang, 26, goes home and fast-forwards the online video to those times to review.

"It's really easy," said Dang, of Woodbridge. "You select from this list of lectures ... You can fast-forward it, rewind."

Jones, president of Echo360, said selling colleges on the benefits of lecture capturing has been easy. As the technology gets cheaper and easier to use, he expects more colleges and K-12 schools to install cameras.

"We clearly believe this will be in every classroom in 10 years," Jones said.

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