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## Faculty and Student-created Audio and Video Podcasts in an EFL Setting

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### Abstract

This report describes an ongoing project at a 4-year, private university in Japan that lays the groundwork for delivering EFL (English as a Foreign Language) content through audio and video podcasts. The accomplishments of the project to date include: the results of a university-wide survey (n=1248) concerning the use of electronic and online technology by students for language learning; the development of experimental podcasts created by teachers and students for individual classes and programs, including podcasts of extensive reading texts for vocabulary enrichment; and preliminary feedback from students on their role in some aspects of the project. The authors hope to encourage the use of podcasting as a tool that fosters interaction and opportunities for self-awareness rather than as a didactic instrument—a usage that has been, and continues to be, the norm.

**Keywords:** podcasting, constructivism, iPod, EFL, video blogging, Japan, MP3 players, YouTube

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## 1 Origins of the Project

In April of 2006, the four authors formed a research group to lay the groundwork for the development and delivery of EFL content for audio and video podcasting. More specifically, they set out (1) to investigate the role that podcasting might play in more effectively disseminating content to students, (2) to adapt the content in various language courses so that delivery can be made through podcasting as a supplement to classroom instruction, and (3) to experiment with having students themselves create podcasts as vehicles for self-expression and language development in projects and international exchanges. A two-year grant\* funded the initial research, the acquisition of podcast creation tools, and a preliminary evaluation—through a combination of online surveys and interviews—of how both faculty and students viewed and valued their participation in the project. This report summarizes the accomplishments of the project to date, which includes the results of a university-wide survey (n=1248) concerning the use of electronic and online technology by students for language learning; the development of an assortment of experimental podcasts created by teachers and students for individual classes and programs, including podcasts of extensive reading texts for vocabulary enrichment; and preliminary feedback from students on their role in some aspects of the project.

\* Acknowledgement: The project described in this article was made possible through a generous grant from Aoyama Gakuin University's Information Science Research Center.

## 2 Podcasting in education

Despite the fact that iPods have only been in popular use since 2001, they have made a major impact on popular culture (Stevens 2005). So endearing are they to their users that, in a personal piece in *The American Scholar*, Castle (2004) referred to her iPod as "my darling prothesis." So, it is not surprising that their influence has rapidly spread to every level of education. McCarty (2005: 67) notes that the first tertiary institution in the world to give iPods to all of its students was Osaka Jogakuin College in Japan, predating by several months Duke University's introduction of iPods pre-loaded with content relevant to incoming freshmen's foreign language, music, social sciences, humanities, and engineering courses. Other universities in the US and abroad followed the lead of Osaka Jogakuin and Duke, with many major universities in the States—including UC Berkeley, Yale, Stanford, and MIT—making course content available through Apple Corporation's iTunesU initiative.



This content is in the form of audio and video lectures or presentations, which can be played on the iTunes application or on MP3/4 players.

As noted by Gardner (2005), "Podcasting, by definition combines 'iPod' with 'broadcasting,'" although it does not require an iPod and broadcasting is a misleading metaphor since it implies one-way transmission. The inception of podcasting was heralded as a welcome extension of blogging, which had brought new opportunities for communication and self-expression that could be made more convenient and richer by the addition of sound and video played on the increasingly popular portable devices (Diem 2005:45-46). However, there was some doubt as to whether a device originally and primarily designed for recreational purposes (i.e., listening to music) could achieve substantial educational goals. Blaisdell (2006) notes that some schools consider iPods so much of a distraction that the devices, along with other MP3 players, are banned from campuses, while in other districts, such as in Orange County, California, the iPod is "coming to be regarded as a classroom essential." In some circles it is seen as a question between embracing a technology, already near and dear to students, for educational purposes or running the risk of being left behind in the rapidly escalating game of vying for their attention.

In her article reporting the results of a podcasting project in a graduate level course on historical interpretation, Vess (2006) felt the need to defend iPods from claims that they are merely toys and that podcasting is a fly-by-night fad, concluding that "When applications are based on solid learning theory and designed with appropriate outcomes in mind, they can transform the educational experience for students, build communities of learners, promote more active engagement of materials, and achieve the learning outcomes essential for the study of history."

Unfortunately, much of the podcast content available for educational purposes, and specifically for language learning purposes, on iTunesU and elsewhere, is didactic rather than interactive. French (2006) notes that the most popular use of iPods in education is for the dissemination of lectures, despite the fact that students these days are "competent multitaskers" who expect interaction. He, rightly, considers the idea that students will efficaciously acquire knowledge from recordings of "teacher talk" to be questionable and completely counter to constructivist theory. Partly due to such considerations, Duke University reconsidered its policy of distributing iPods to all of its incoming freshman and, from autumn of 2005, developed a more streamlined program in which only those students enrolled in courses that used iPods in their curriculum would be issued with the devices (Roach 2005:37). As the use of iPods became more integrated in courses, a more constructivist approach emerged; students felt comfortable enough with the devices to begin creatively experimenting, "using them for gathering field notes, conducting interviews, podcasting or audio

blogging, as well as for portable hard drives or as signal generators in an engineering class" (37).

Based on the lessons learned at Duke and other pioneering institutions we began our project with the conviction that we would prioritize integration of the devices in the curriculum and creative uses of the technology by students. We were encouraged by the conclusion of Windham (2007), who after interviewing students at several universities in North America about iPods and MP3 use, noted that an initial lack of familiarity with the equipment or available content was not a serious obstacle to the successful application of the technology. We heeded her caution, however, that the student perspective [should be sought] instead of blindly boarding the "podcasting bandwagon." We began by ascertaining how students were already using MP3/4 devices for personal and educational purposes.

### 3 The Survey

A survey was administered in Japanese to students from the university's Colleges of Literature, Economics, Business, and Science & Engineering in December 2006 and January 2007. The majority of the students were freshmen and sophomores in the College of Literature. We sought to determine the levels of ownership of MP3/4 players, the sorts of media that the players could accommodate, and information related to the students' patterns of usage. [Refer to Appendix 1 to view the items of the survey in English.] Of 1260 surveys distributed in intact classes, 1248 useable ones were returned. Before the survey, few instructors at the university had encouraged students to use podcasts, and classroom use had been confined to the occasional display of video content on monitors when teachers connected their iPods to the classrooms' AV consoles through the iPod AV cable accessory.

We determined that a preponderance of students, 55% (see Figure 1), possess some sort of MP3/4 player. This meant that many students could benefit from podcasts "on-the-go"—as opposed to needing to be moored to a PC to access them. The on-the-go factor was seen as a major advantage for students enduring commutes of up to three hours in the Tokyo metropolitan area, where the university's two campuses are located. As the overwhelming majority of students using the devices have had them for a year or less (see Figure 2), we can surmise that the use of these devices is spreading rapidly in this population; the minority without them shrinking steadily as they are made to feel behind the times by their white ear-budded classmates.

# Faculty and Student-created Audio and Video Podcasts in an EFL Setting

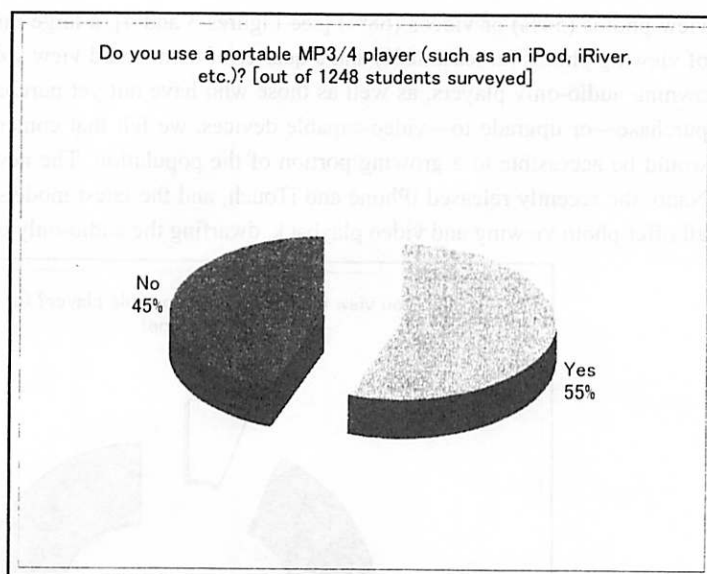


Figure 1

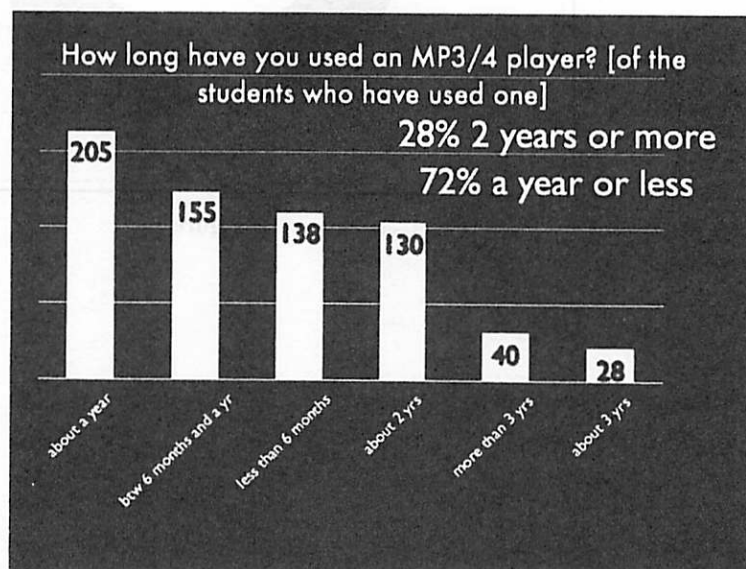


Figure 2

Although the survey found that the majority of students who possess portable players are unable to

view photos (54%) or videos (68%) [see Figures 3 and 4], a large minority of students were capable of viewing photos (at least 40%) and a quarter of them could view videos. As it is likely that students owning audio-only players, as well as those who have not yet purchased a digital media player, will purchase—or upgrade to—video-capable devices, we felt that content in visually-supported formats would be accessible to a growing portion of the population. The newest generation of Apple's iPod Nano, the recently released iPhone and iTouch, and the latest models that are simply called "iPods," all offer photo viewing and video playback, dwarfing the audio-only options.

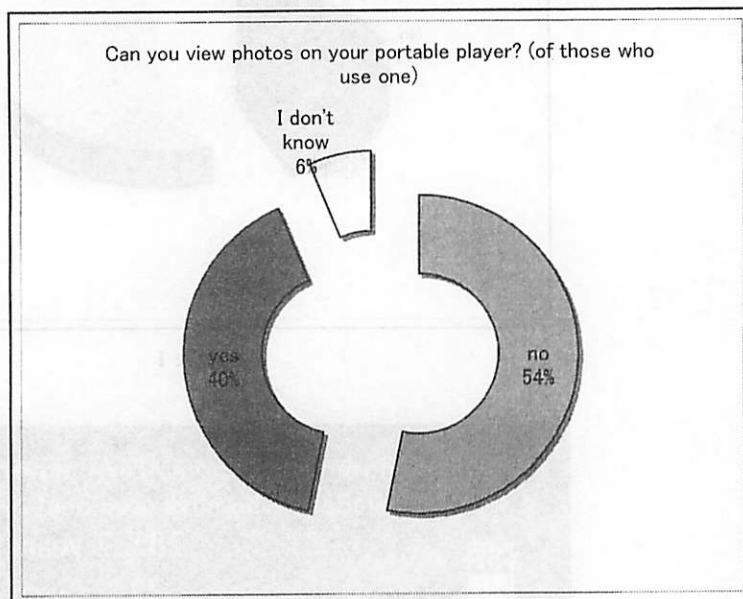


Figure 3



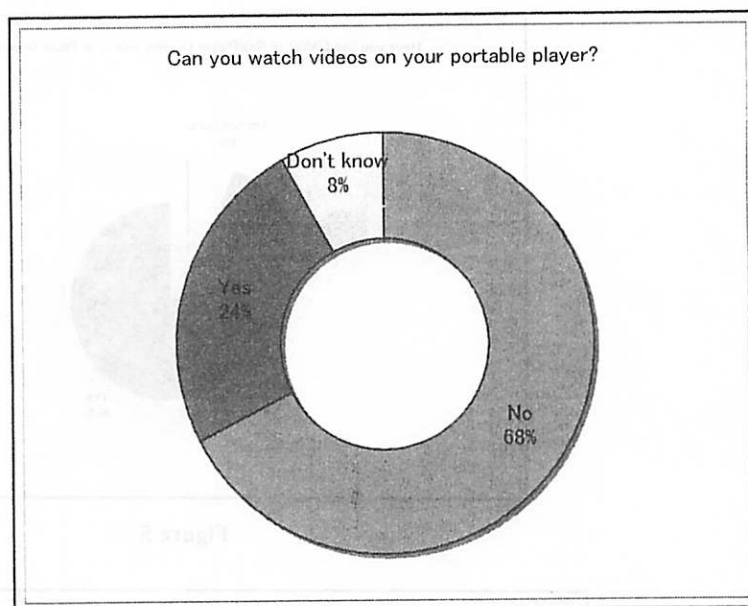


Figure 4

Of course, it is not necessary for students to possess an MP3/4 player in order to access content that can be played on these devices. Audio and visually-supported files can be played on a computer using iTunes or a number of other media players, including RealPlayer, Windows Media Player (WMP), and Quicktime. 80% of the students were already making use of WMP and RealPlayer (see Figure 5), and 41% of them were in the habit of using Apple's iTunes even if they did not own an iPod (see Figure 6). It should be noted that it is possible to make use of podcasts without having an iPod, or other MP3/4 player, as podcasts can be subscribed to, downloaded and played on iTunes or other aggregators (i.e., software which collects podcasts and makes subscription possible). Our results showed that content produced for students playable on portable digital media players could readily be accessed by students who did not have such devices but were familiar with computer-based media players. The minority who had not used their computers to access audiovisual content would need some training before they could do so comfortably. As our project would not involve the distribution of iPods to the entire student population, it was important to establish that alternate means of approaching the content was at hand.

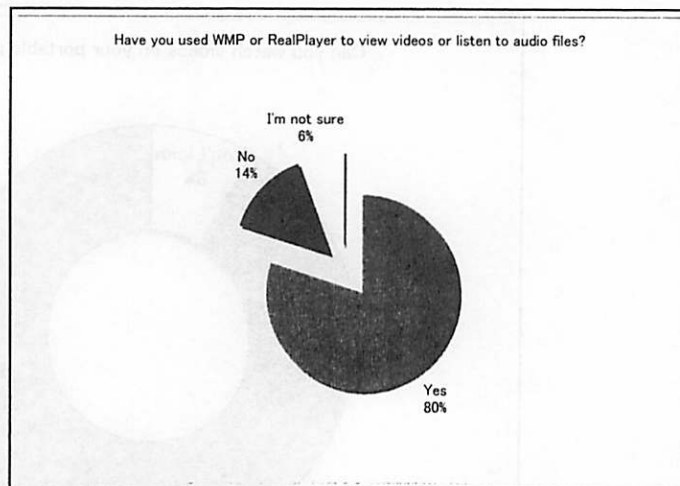


Figure 5

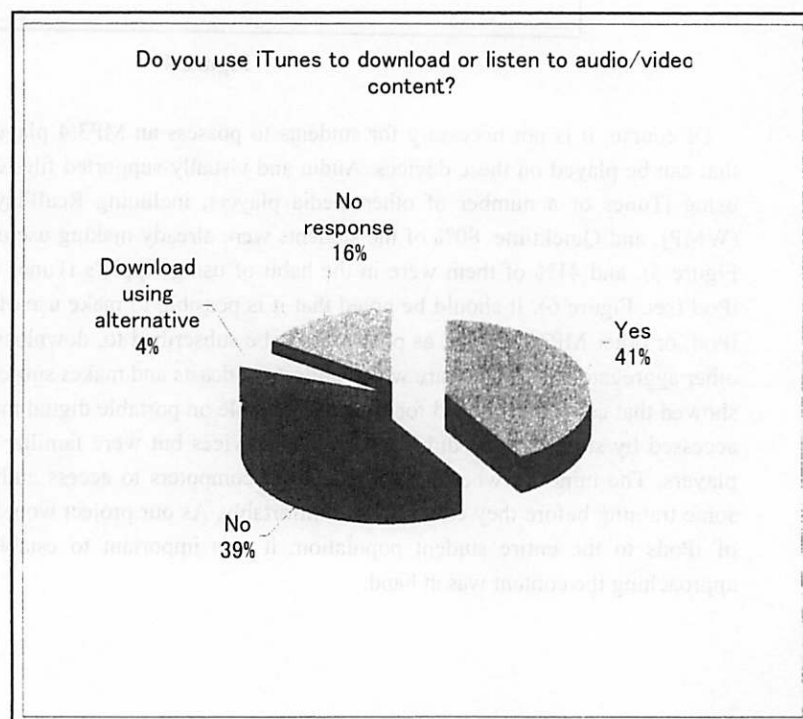


Figure 6

Despite the widespread familiarity with computer-based media players, and the fact that a significant minority (41%) reported that they use iTunes, 85% of respondents (see Figure 7) had not subscribed to any podcasts, and 57% of those did not know the purpose of podcasting (shown by "huh?" on the graph). Only 14% were subscribing to, at least, one podcast at the time the survey was administered. The general lack of awareness of podcasting indicated to us that teachers wishing to introduce podcasts for educational purposes would need to instruct students on how they could be accessed and emphasize that the possession of a portable digital media player was not a prerequisite to subscribing. This led us to prepare instructional materials dealing with the basics of podcasting that were distributed by the university's Media Library.

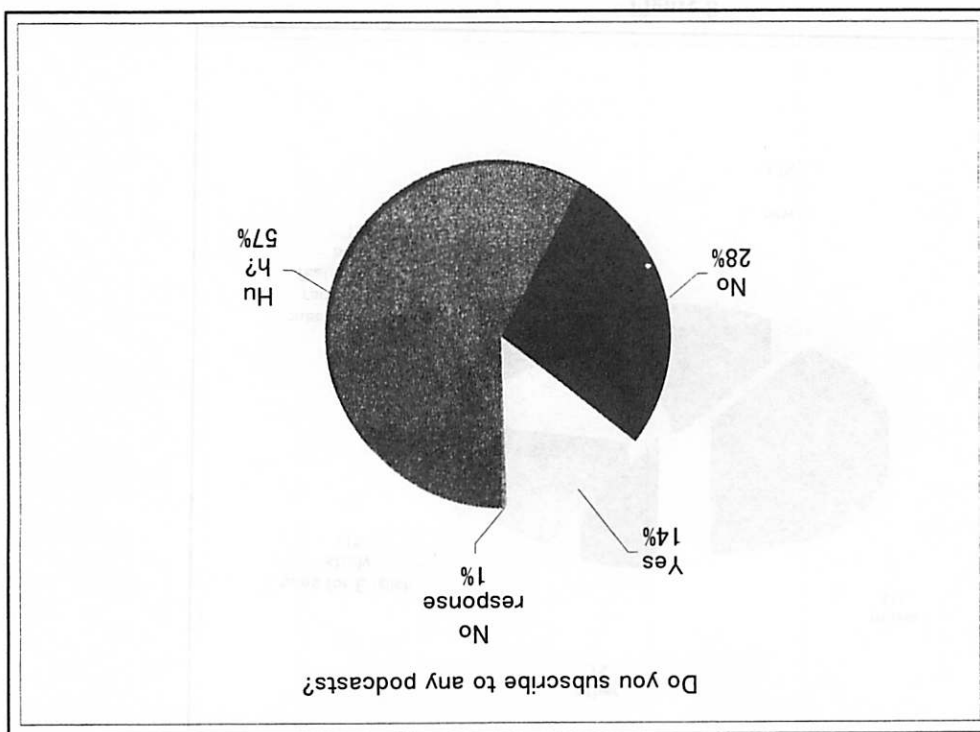


Figure 7

Of the small minority of students who were aware of the existence of podcasts and had subscribed to at least one, about one-fifth of them (see Figure 8) most frequently listened to podcasts intended for English study. Although that is only half the portion of students who most often listened to music for podcasts, it was surprising to us that so many had sought out podcasts specifically designed for

English study. As an almost equal percentage of students (18%), listened most often to podcasts that featured DJs bantering (in Japanese) about the latest music, it was thought that there might be considerable interest in podcasts intended for English study that used discussions of music as content. At 13%, news was the least popular category of podcast content. [The appeal of news may have been dampened by the fact that for it to be "fresh," frequent syncs with one's computer are necessary.]

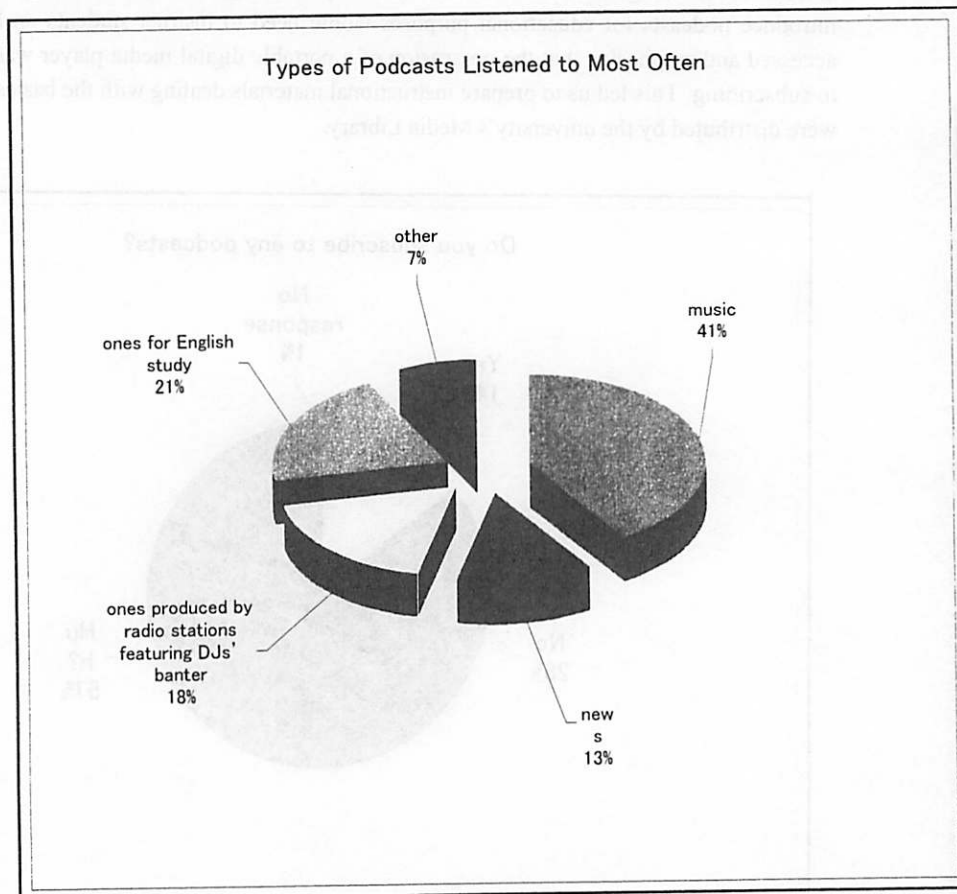


Figure 8

A sizable minority of the total sample, 31%, (see Figure 9), had used computer-based media players specifically to practice English listening comprehension. This meant that a large segment recognized media players as having uses beyond entertainment, leading us to conjecture that the portability and convenience of personal MP3/4 players, along with the fact that so many students were already favorably predisposed to using them, would make for a smooth introduction of the



devices for wider pedagogical uses in the curriculum. In fact, 22% (see Figure 10) reported that they would consider purchasing an MP3 player if they could use it to listen to course lectures, announcements, or other class-related content, bringing the portion of students who either possessed, or would purchase, such devices to nearly 70%.

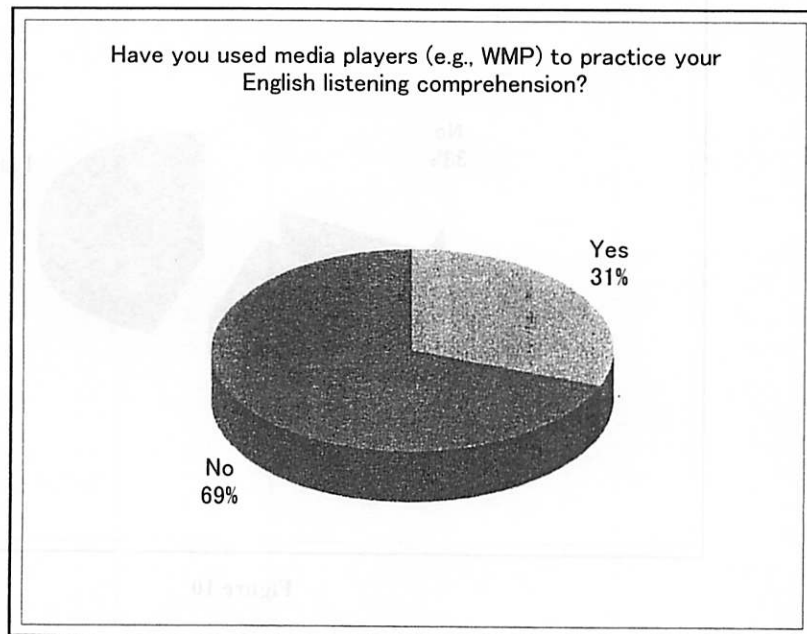


Figure 9

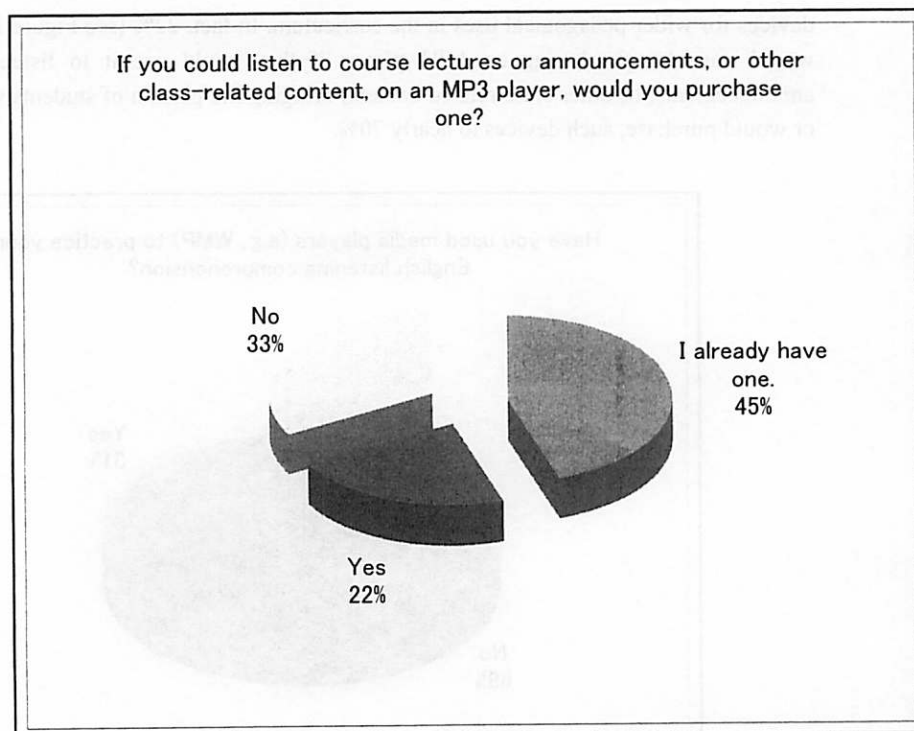


Figure 10

#### 4 Preparation for Podcasting

In addition to gathering information through the survey, the project team prepared for making use of podcasting in their courses and programs by 1) discussing among themselves existing podcasts they felt to be exemplary, 2) acquiring the necessary technical skills, and 3) purchasing a limited number of iPods for students and faculty to borrow, while making podcast creation software available to them. For video podcasts, we determined that the Media Library on the Sagami-hara Campus and the Foreign Language Library on the Shibuya Campus had an adequate number of video camcorders to lend to students. In addition, we found that many students have access to their own consumer-grade video cameras. Finally, cell phones frequently are equipped with a video capture function that is capable of capturing a good deal of light and detail, despite the low resolution of the video. Basic editing programs are often bundled with operating systems or available as freeware on the Internet, but we equipped several Macintoshes in the PC Support Lounge with the iLife suite of software, which includes the audio editing program Garageband™ and the video editing software iMovie™.

#### 4.1 Discussing podcasts remarkable in their content, format or delivery.

We created a form for writing podcast reviews (see Appendix 2) to make it easier for us to exchange information about inspirational podcasts, not confined to ones specifically intended for language teaching. In fact, we found that instructional and informational podcasts in areas other than language pedagogy provided better models in some respects. It was especially useful to look at podcasts that came up with creative solutions for conveying arcane information that was not inherently fascinating. For example, although none of us were aficionados of Excel, we were impressed with the effective, and even entertaining, way the creator of the "Learn Excel from Mr. Excel" video podcast (<http://www.mrexcel.com/podcast/learnexcelpodcast.html>) presented concise lessons, chatting to the viewer from the lower right-hand corner of a small, but legible, active excel spreadsheet while various procedures were demonstrated. In 3-4 minutes he manages to establish rapport with the viewer, present a problem, suggest one or more solutions, and, through his enthusiasm, make the audience feel that it's worth studying about Excel in one's leisure time? quite a feat.

The range of "successful" podcasts showed us that it was as impossible to create a formula for describing effective podcasts as it would be to produce one for effective language teaching. However, some common features of our most admired podcasts included: 1) brevity (a significant amount of content can be fit into a 3-5 minute podcast and the audience may not be able to spare much more uninterrupted time than that), 2) having a clear purpose or point to each podcast, 3) creating and maintaining rapport with the audience, and 4) establishing a format that is predictable without being monotonous. "How to" books such as Geoghegan and Klass' Podcast Solutions (2005) are useful for descriptions of pioneering podcasts and what they might teach would-be podcasters, whether they be teachers or students.

#### 4.2 Acquiring the technical skills necessary to produce podcasts

At the dawn of podcasting, creating them was complicated enough to be out of the reach of IT novices since it required, as Akcaoglu (2006:68) described it, in addition to a familiarity with HTML, "an XML file need[ed] to be created with a closure tag, an MP3 format sound file need[ed] to be recorded and uploaded to a specific server, and lastly the XML feed need[ed] to be fed into a Podcast 'catcher' program such as iTunes or Podcatcher." These days podcast hosting sites make the process as simple as uploading files or making "on-the-fly" podcasts that are recorded, previewed, and immediately uploaded to a podcast server and made available for subscription. Some of these hosting services (e.g., podOmatic.com) double as social networking sites and offer a limited amount of free disk space.

As all of the project members were Macintosh users, we chose to use software from Apple's iLife suite?Garageband, iMovie HD, and iWeb?to edit audio and video files, before importing them into a

video blog (created from one of iWeb's podcast templates), and uploading the blog to Apple's .Mac Web hosting service. The smooth integration of the software makes this solution easier than the process described by Akcaoglu (2006), but considerably more difficult than using free podcast hosting services. Control over our content in terms of who could access it and how the podcasts would appear, with supporting text and links, made our solution preferable to options that offered greater ease of use. However, it required a steep learning curve. We attended seminars on podcast creation provided by the Apple Store's (Shibuya, Tokyo) specialists in creative applications, and we purchased Apple ProCare accounts that entitled us to weekly consultations by appointment to deal with the few problems that came up, such as issues related to video compression.

#### 4.3 Made iPods and podcasting software available for student and teacher use

We had the iLife suite of software installed on Macintoshes for student use in a PC support lounge and for full and part-time faculty in shared teachers' offices. With the help of the university's Media Library, a "quick start" guide for preparing files to be podcasted was prepared. We also make a limited number of iPods available for loan to students and teachers so that they could familiarize themselves with the technology. The iPods were equipped with microphones that could transform them into digital recording devices and they were loaned out as a set to encourage students and teachers to think of them not only as tools for consuming media but also for creating it.

### 5 Creating podcasts

#### 5.1 Podcasts created for students

The first materials we developed were primarily intended for use in Listening sections of our English Department's IEP (Intensive English Program--<http://www.cl.aoyama.ac.jp/english/ie/>). A recent needs analysis showed that one of the principal motivators for our students' English study was foreign travel, with many interested in participating in international exchange programs. Therefore, it was decided that our first podcast would feature interviews with participants from one of the department's study abroad programs at Hertford College, Oxford University.

As one of authors accompanied students on the Summer 2006 study tour, he took the opportunity to organize interviews with students, residential advisors, teachers, course designers, and coordinators. These interviews were recorded on a 4th generation iPod equipped with a Belkin iTalk microphone. On return to Japan, the sound files were edited using Garageband and iMovie HD and synced to photos corresponding with the content, before being exported as podcasts to a video blog created with iWeb, and subsequently uploaded to the .mac hosting service so that they could be accessed over the Web. With the assistance of TAs, transcripts were prepared for the interviews and posted with the videos and slide shows as blog entries. Instructions were given to listening course instructors for how they could make use of the podcasts as part of a task-based activity (see Appendix 3). It should be



noted that the podcasts themselves were part of a collaborative effort in that most of the photos used in them were taken by students during the study tour.

These podcasts were multi-purpose in that they served as material for listening courses, provided information to students about a study tour in which they had an option to participate, and gave students who went on the tour a "souvenir" of their experience, which they could use themselves to improve their English listening comprehension. Although, more of a happy accident than something achieved through foresight, the multi-purpose aspect of the podcasts was consciously repeated in subsequent ones to maximize the use of material so time-consuming to produce. One such podcast introduced a performance of a theatrical production of "The Elephant Man," which we were preparing our students to attend through class-related assignments and activities. A podcast ([http://web.mac.com/joseph\\_dias/iWeb/aogakupod/Podcast/5AF90E17-242B-477D-AE49-72827940F455.html](http://web.mac.com/joseph_dias/iWeb/aogakupod/Podcast/5AF90E17-242B-477D-AE49-72827940F455.html)), featuring the director of the play?one of our English Department's instructors?was used to inform students of the play while serving as listening material that tasks were built around. These podcasts helped our teachers become more aware of the value of podcasting and how they too might get involved.

## 5.2 Podcasts created by students or featuring student presentations

Podcasts by?or featuring?students were created in the context of a seminar on research skills offered to students in the Integrated English Program of the university's English Department in the spring of 2007. A class of 24 students researched controversial issues of their choice using a variety of online and print sources, summarizing the content in blog entries and citing sources using the MLA style. In past years, students went on to publish Web sites where their summarized findings were evaluated, organized and linked to primary sources. This year, students were given the option to use research findings as part of the preparation required to create an NGO dealing with their controversial issues?which included global warming, abortion, eating disorders, animal rights, depleted uranium, and gay marriage. As part of the creation of their original NGO, students produced podcasts which promoted the NGO's proposed activities or dramatically illustrated the issue, as PSAs often do. Students were introduced to podcasts developed by existing NGOs for inspiration (e.g. GreenpeacePodcasts--<http://www.greenpeace.org/international/photosvideos/greenpeace-podcasts>).

Although given the option to produce either audio only or video podcasts, all groups chose video podcasts, despite the extra work involved in video editing. The "quick start" guides prepared with the help of the Media Library made it possible for students to produce podcast-ready files without major difficulties. Some groups even?on their own volition?uploaded their videos to YouTube for good measure. Here are descriptions of some of the podcasts taken from the video blog page ([http://web.mac.com/joseph\\_dias/iWeb/controversy/Podcast/Archive.html](http://web.mac.com/joseph_dias/iWeb/controversy/Podcast/Archive.html)):

**Animal Rights:** Joanna, Mayuko, and Yuki show us how we can prevent cruelty to animals and perform entertaining skits that highlight the shallowness of pop stars who use living

animals as accessories while wearing fur.

**Childhood Obesity:** Mika, Miho, and Megumi describe their cleverly named NGO (KFC?Kick Fat Community) and its activities.

**Smoking:** In this brief skit, Tatsuya must choose between his lovely girlfriend and his love for cigarettes. Which do you think will win out? Please take out your handkerchiefs because the ending might break your heart.

**Abortion:** Rina, Sayaka, and Kana talk about abortion in Japan and in the rest of the world before introducing their NGO: Safe Sex on the Beach.

**Eating Disorders:** RAM gives an innovative presentation in the format of a special lecture on eating disorders by a representative from a fictional community hospital dealing with eating disorders in Meguro.

## 6 Student reflections on their use of podcasting

As this podcasting project is still in its early days, we have not yet gathered extensive feedback from students or faculty, however, the students in the controversial issues seminar described in Section 5.2 were asked to respond to an online survey (using the professional mode of surveymonkey.com) concerning their podcast-making experiences. Participants in 8 of the 9 controversial issue groups responded; a total of 12 students. Questions related to YouTube were included in the survey since so many of the students embedded YouTube videos in their group blogs, and 3 groups uploaded their videos to YouTube even before they had been made into podcasts.

The amount of time it took individuals in groups to create the video for podcasting ranged from an hour or less (1) to 10-15 hours (2). The most common range was 4-5 hours (4), with the other groups taking 2-3 hours (2), 6-7 hours (1), and 8-9 hours (1). This range represented the fact that 8 of them had previous experience making videos<sup>7</sup> for class-related purposes<sup>7</sup> while 4 had none. Only half of the previous experiences with video making involved editing, showing the wisdom of providing "quick start" guides for podcasting that included the basics of audio and video editing.

The majority of students (7) had never watched podcasts on their own (that is, apart from ones that were shown in class) and 3 of the 5 who had played them, heard/viewed them on a computer using iTunes as opposed to using their iPod for the purpose, despite the fact that 10 out of the 11 students who responded owned an iPod or other MP3 player.

When asked, "For watching videos, which of these options do you prefer: YouTube, Podcasts, or Streaming video on a computer (other than YouTube)," YouTube proved to be the most popular, with 8 out of 11 selecting it. Streaming video was preferred by 3 students, and none of them opted for podcasts. Although only one of the students was subscribing to a podcast, all of them reported watching YouTube videos at varying degrees of frequency: daily (1), once or twice a week (5), once or twice a month (2), a few times a year (3). Students were effusive about their affection for YouTube and they characterized the relative virtues of YouTube vs. podcasting quite well in their open-ended responses. Reasons given for preferring YouTube included:

- Anyone can watch it whenever they want to.
- It's easier to guess from the pause screen what I'm about to see, while podcasts only place words of explanation about the video. Besides, YouTube not only shows you what you chose, but introduces videos that you might also like.
- You can see many different genres. Also, I can see the dramas that I missed seeing.
- There are lots of fun videos.
- You could easily search for videos you want to watch. There's no need to download the videos.

Students who recognized the strengths of podcasts, mentioned:

- You can carry it [i.e., an MP3 player] anywhere.
- You could watch or listen to [them] at your own pace. If you download [them], you don't have to wait for [them] to load from the start, especially when you have a slow Internet connection. You could also listen/watch [them] anytime as long as your iPod is with you.

Students were unanimous in their appreciation for having the opportunity to watch videos made by their classmates, regardless of whether they were seen as a podcast or through YouTube. When asked, "How did you feel about watching the videos created by your classmates?" students responded:

- They were creative and I got to learn how they made the video, so I thought it is good for future reference.
- It made the [final] presentation much more interesting, and made it easier to persuade the students about the topic.
- I enjoyed it very much and it's great to see what the other groups came up with for their videos.
- It was fun because I always access YouTube or other sites only to see music videos. I found other ways to use YouTube and podcasts. I want to make use of this chance and know more about YouTube and podcasts.

## 7 Cell Phones, iPods and PCs: Building Vocabulary Through Flashcards, Games, and Graded Reading and Listening Materials

This part of the project is an extension of the research and software development work of one of the authors. Combining previous work in the area of CALL (Browne 2004a, 2004b), with research on the importance of developing learner knowledge of high frequency vocabulary words (Browne, 2002),

and the importance of using graded reading materials with low level EFL learners (Browne, 1996, 1998), the author formed a company with several of his colleagues ([www.lexxica.com](http://www.lexxica.com)) to develop and offer free online EFL software for Japanese university students via their PCs, cell phones and MP3 players. The suite of programs are capable of accurately and efficiently assessing the learner's lexical size, identifying which high frequency words still need to be taught, and then teaching these words via a time-intervalled flashcard system, interactive vocabulary games, and extensive graded reading materials. Graded listening materials, as well as a variety of listening "flashcards" and vocabulary podcasts, are also under development.

Although there has not yet been much published research concerning the benefits of using graded listening materials, in action research studies reported by Patten and Craig (2007:40) at two primary schools and two junior high schools in the US where iPod Shuffles were introduced to encourage listening, writing and reading skills, "overall writing skills and vocabulary development [was found to have] improved...and one study reported a significant increase in comprehension skills..." We strongly felt that offering EFL learners recorded versions of graded reading content would be beneficial in helping them to develop their listening skills. These audio files can be listened to on cell phones, PCs (via a web browser or iTunes), or downloaded into any MP3 player.

Other initiatives have been bringing texts suitable for use as graded readers to educators and students. Balas (2005) describes some promising library-related podcasting projects. They include LibriVox ([librivox.org](http://librivox.org)), a project to record and freely disseminate podcasts of public domain books, and the Spoken Alexandria Project ([www.alexwilson.com/telltale/spokenalexandria.php](http://www.alexwilson.com/telltale/spokenalexandria.php)), which "aims to create a free library of spoken word recordings (both in the public domain and modern works for which permission has been granted)." At the time of this writing, the Web sites of both of these projects offer collections of recorded texts in a variety of formats that includes MP3. At the top of LibriVox's home page is the rousing phrase: acoustical liberation of books in the public domain.

Using the iPod's "Notes" feature it is possible to make text files available for viewing on an iPod, so readers can be downloaded to an iPod as text and/or audio files. Notes have been limited to 4000 characters, making it necessary for long files (book-length documents, for example) to be broken up into smaller ones. Ihnatko (2007: 185) describes the iPod eBook Creator ([www.ambience.sk/ipod-ebook-creator/ipod-book-notes-text-conversion.php](http://www.ambience.sk/ipod-ebook-creator/ipod-book-notes-text-conversion.php)), a Web site that automatically breaks up an extended text into a series of files readable on an iPod. This works well but breaks up the texts arbitrarily instead of at the heads of chapters or sections.

Of course, there are many more public domain documents available in text than in audio formats on the Web at such sites as Project Gutenberg ([www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org) and [www.gutenberg.net](http://www.gutenberg.net)) or



Archive.org, for example. However, gathering together a team of voice actors and finding the time to record audio versions of the texts is problematic. One possible solution for converting text documents to audio files rapidly is through text-to-speech software. Synthesized speech is becoming increasingly natural sounding and its speed and pitch can be adjusted to the level and taste of the learner. NextUp.com's TextAloud (from [www.nextup.com](http://www.nextup.com)) is a commercial text-to-speech utility for Windows, while Macintosh users can convert documents to iPod spoken audio using the Automator utility that comes with System 10.4 and later, as explained by Ihnatko (2007:186-190).

The author's project team is now developing "vocabcasts," which are audio versions of vocabulary flashcards. Once learners complete a 5-minute online vocabulary test, audio files for their unknown high frequency vocabulary words are automatically delivered to their device of choice (PC, cell phone or MP3 player) for review. Each vocabcast contains a recording of the word, its definition, a sample sentence, and a cloze sentence (all words are spoken except the key word, which the learners must say aloud).

Finally, we will offer "word-of-the-day" and "idiom-of-the-day" podcasts which are 2-3 minute explanations of important words and phrases by English teachers, written and recorded in simplified English in order to be useful to a wider range of EFL learners. These podcasts will be modeled after the engaging podcast "Grammar Girl's Quick and Dirty Tips for Better Writing" ([www.qdnow.com/grammar.xml](http://www.qdnow.com/grammar.xml)).

After two years of research, software development and extensive classroom testing, most of our programs are still in beta mode, but the response from learners (as well as teachers at the many academic conferences at which we have presented) has been positive. With many schools not able to afford adequate CALL facilities to accommodate all their students, we are hoping that since all of our programs and podcasts can be used on portable devices, teachers and schools will be able to utilize this modality as a new type of self-access center.

## 8 Final Reflections

We have found that although iPods and other MP3/4 players are highly popular among our student population, with the majority owning one, their use is generally confined to music playback, and students have limited exposure to podcasts. Even when told of the existence of podcasts highly relevant to course content, preliminary findings show that students prefer to access comparable content through YouTube, a technology that similarly democratizes the process of disseminating rich media, but offers popular features which podcasting lacks (as pointed out in student comments cited in Section 6).

Starkman (2007), in interviews with American students from elementary to high school level about

their use of technology, found that two of the things they desired most contradicted each other, and they used electronic technology to acquire both of them: the need for solitude and the need to connect. He identified their preferred tool for achieving solitude as the iPod. Presumably, YouTube would fall closer to the "need to connect" end of the continuum. Perhaps our students' hesitation in embracing podcasting indicates that they have already "typecast" the iPod as a tool for solitude and, therefore, do not care to see it used for social interaction (e.g., in dialogs among podcasters or between a podcaster and the listener/viewer). Despite the differences between YouTube and iPods in what the technologies emphasize in terms of the public versus the private and the visual versus the auditory, Aoun (2007) points out that:

...the podification and tubifying of popular culture corresponds to a desire to control the world we live in. We want to be the masters of our own domains. It is not insignificant that we feel in control when making that world more entertaining."

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## APPENDIX 1

### Survey on Mobile Technology and Learning

Sex: male / female

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Course: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Do you use a portable MP3 player (such as an iPod, iRiver, etc.)  
a) yes                      b) no (skip to question No. 5)

*Questions for those who answered "Yes" to No. 1. (questions 2-4)*

2. How long have you used it?  
a) less than 6 months  
b) between 6 months and a year  
c) about a year  
d) about two years  
e) about three years  
f) more than three years

3. Can you view photos on your MP3 player?  
a) yes                      b) no                      c) I don't know

4. Can you watch videos on it?  
a) yes                      b) no                      c) I don't know

5. Do you use iTunes to download/ listen to music or other audio/ video content – either on your computer or on an MP3 player?  
a) yes                      b) no  
c) I download from another site. (Please specify \_\_\_\_\_)

6. Do you subscribe to any podcasts?  
a) yes                      b) no, but I know what podcasts are  
c) no, what's a podcast?

7. If you answered "yes" to the previous question, what types of podcasts do you listen to most often?  
a) music                      b) news  
c) ones produced by radio stations featuring DJs' banter  
d) ones for English study                      e) specify other \_\_\_\_\_



# Faculty and Student-created Audio and Video Podcasts in an EFL Setting

8. Have you used Windows Media Player or RealPlayer to view videos or listen to audio files?  
a) yes                      b) no (skip to #10)  
c) I'm not sure (skip to #10)
9. Have you used the media players mentioned in No. 8 to practice your English listening comprehension?  
a) yes                      b) no
10. If you would be able to listen to course lectures or announcements, or other class-related content, on an MP3 player (such as an iPod), would you consider purchasing one?  
a) I have one already.      b) yes, I would      c) no, I wouldn't
11. Do you think it would be a good idea for the university to provide students with an MP3 player when they enter the university so that they can download and view materials (e.g., audio/video files) related to classes?  
a) yes                      b) no                      c) I have no opinion
12. Have you ever used a cell phone or PHS for study purposes (for example, using an iAppli to study vocabulary)?  
a) yes                      b) no      (skip to #14)  
c) I'm not sure (skip to #14)
13. How have you used your cell phone or PHS to study English?  
\_\_\_\_\_
14. Have your teachers ever sent you class-related announcements, homework assignments, or other course content to your cell phone?  
a) yes                      b) no (skip to #16)
15. What did you think of being provided with information in this way?  
a) I liked it                      b) I didn't like it (Why not? \_\_\_\_\_)
16. Which of the following can you do with computers/ the Internet?

	Can do well (√)	Can do (√)	Can't do (√)	Not sure (√)
Searching the Web				
Using Excel				
Using Powerpoint				

Making a homepage				
Using mailing lists				
Having computer chats				
Using Skype				
Formatting Word docs				
Listening to a podcast				
Creating a podcast				
Using Mixi				

Thank you for your cooperation in completing this survey. If you would like to receive a summary of the results, you may write your email address here: \_\_\_\_\_

[Note: "MP3 player" is used to refer to players that play audio only or audio **AND** video files, even though the latter would more accurately be referred to as MP4 players, in deference to popular usage.]

## APPENDIX 2

### Form for Reviewing Podcasts (example provided)

Title: [As it appears in the iTunes directory]  
 Length: [Range of lengths of the program episodes]  
 Subject: [Brief summary of the subject matter of the podcast]  
 Production: [The quality of the program from a technical standpoint]  
 Rating: [One star (\*) is "bad" and five stars (\*\*\*\*\*) signifies "excellent"]  
 Potential: [The potential of the podcast as a language learning resource]  
 Link: [The URL for the website associated with the podcast, if any exists]

#### Example:

Title	Morning Stories (WGBH Boston)
Length	13-14 minutes
Subject	Inspiring stories about ordinary people who are often doing extraordinary things. Good balance between intelligently conducted interviews and people speaking at length from prepared texts in their own words. In every episode the participants

## Faculty and Student-created Audio and Video Podcasts in an EFL Setting

	have something important to say and do so movingly. All stories tug at the heart strings, but not in a maudlin way.
Production	Excellent production standards/ supporting sound effects that don't distract and which provide necessary context
Rating	*****
Potential	Great. Wonderful variety of (mostly) American regional accents. Would be even better if transcripts were available.
Link	<a href="http://www.wgbh.org/schedules/program-info?program_id=1434912">http://www.wgbh.org/schedules/program-info?program_id=1434912</a>

### Template:

Title	
Length	
Subject	
Production	
Rating	
Potential	
Link	

## APPENDIX 3

### *A Study Tour to Oxford – Podcasts within a task-based approach*

#### [In class—using the video blog]

In pairs, one student will listen to an interview with Jessie and the other an interview with Tom, two students serving as residential advisors (RAs) at Hertford College, Oxford University ([http://web.mac.com/joseph\\_dias/iWeb/aogakupod/Podcast/Podcast.html](http://web.mac.com/joseph_dias/iWeb/aogakupod/Podcast/Podcast.html)). Biographical information about the RAs should be noted down while listening. After listening, partners will conduct a role play in which they take the parts of Jessie and Tom meeting for the first time at the college dining hall. In the course of the conversation, they should mention a bit about their background and interests; major area of study; experience being a residential advisor; and plans for their future. [If necessary, transcripts of the interviews can be reviewed before the role plays, but should not be used during them.]

#### [Follow-up for homework—using iPods or other MP3 players]

##### OPTION 1

Students download both podcasts to their MP3 players and listen to them at their own pace. They should write a journal entry about how they think studying at Hertford College might be different from studying in Japan, and the points they find

most attractive about studying at Oxford.

### OPTION 2

Have groups of 4 or 5 students select admissions-related podcasts offered at Hertford College's Official Web Site ([http://www.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/component/option,com\\_wrapper/Itemid,162/](http://www.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/component/option,com_wrapper/Itemid,162/)). Each student in the group must select a different video podcast which (s)he will watch for homework. [They feature talks given by the tutor for admissions, the principal, the JCR sports rep, etc.] In a subsequent class, the students get together in their groups and report/comment on what they learned about Hertford College.