

Podcasting in legal education

Faculty of Law | Departments of Public Law & Mercantile Law

Programme: Criminal Law 171, Administrative Law 411 & Mercantile Law 471

Lecturer: Prof Geo Quinot gquinot@sun.ac.za

Blended Learning Coordinator: Ms Alma Coertzen almac@sun.ac.za

Learning activity:
Podcasting

Learning technology:
PowerPoint, Prezi

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Context

Background

The lecturer conducted a study in which he tracked the use of podcasts as a teaching/learning tool in three modules in the Faculty of Law between 2012 and 2014.

Intended learning outcomes

The aim in all the modules was to shift basic explanations with a high knowledge transfer objective to the podcast and out of the contact session so that the contact session could be utilised largely for teaching/learning activities aimed at the development of higher-order competence. In the context of legal education, this essentially meant that explanations of key concepts were done via podcasts and that contact sessions were used to engage in active problem solving activities and advanced theoretical questions. The design was thus premised on the basis that students had to engage with the podcasts before attending class.

The challenge

The reasons for adopting a different approach in the form of adding podcasts differed somewhat for the various modules but, in all three instances, the lecturers' main aim was to free up more time during the contact sessions for engagement aimed at the development of higher-order thinking skills, such as problem solving. Other reasons included that this would allow more time during the contact sessions to focus on the most difficult questions as opposed to issues that students could master by way of guided self-study and that it would create a permanent learning resource for key concepts that the students could refer back to throughout the course.

Advantages associated with the integration of technology

The basic principle underlying the use of podcasts in the three modules was the same. In all the instances, the podcasts constituted learning activities additional to the contact sessions. The podcasts were thus not simply recordings of classes made available to the students after the contact sessions. The use of podcasts was thus aimed at a blended learning design, which combined in and out of classroom activities to form a coherent whole and which relied strongly on information and communications technology in doing so.

Student overview

The three modules included in the study were Criminal Law 171 (offered to first and second-year law students in all the Law programmes), Administrative Law 411 and Mercantile Law 471 (both offered to fourth and fifth-year LLB students). In total, about 1 440 students were exposed to these podcasts over the three-year period.

Learning and assessment activities

Educational approach

The study of these practices used a combination of questionnaires completed by the students and interviews with the relevant lecturers. The aim of the study was primarily to test the perceptions of both the students and the lecturers of the use of podcasts in the manner outlined above. This aim was premised on the findings of the meta-study by Baeten, Kyndt, Struyven and Dochy (2010), which concluded that perceived contextual factors were key in promoting deep learning.

Learning activities

In most instances, the students were required to view or listen to a podcast before a contact session. The learning activities in the relevant contact session consequently relied on the work covered in the podcast. For example, a problem would be discussed in class, the resolution of which relied on the work dealt with in the podcast. In Criminal Law, the students were routinely required to complete an online quiz following the podcast.

Learning environment

Learning setting

Podcasts were uploaded on SUNLearn, where the students could access them directly, mostly in the form of mp3 or mp4 files.

Technology resources

Despite the similarities in the aim and approach of the uses of the podcasts in the three modules, the actual designs of the podcasts differed significantly for the three modules. Different software was used to create the three podcasts; only audio was used for one of the podcasts, whereas video was also used for the other two. The two with video used either PowerPoint slides or Prezi presentations combined with audio or concept maps with audio. In all the cases, however, the lecturers created the



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podcasts themselves with the use of the basic technology available (PC and voice recording) and thus without reliance on any professional video or audio production services.

Support challenges

Support was not considered a major issue for the students. While some of the students (14% of the respondents) noted that they experienced difficulties in accessing the podcasts, they mostly noted that they could easily resolve the particular problem, often with the help of a friend (40% of those who noted support challenges).

Studie-eenheid 1 / Study Unit 1

- Inleiding tot die Administratiefreg
- Bronne van die Administratiefreg
- Aard van die Administratiefreg
- Administratiewe handelinge
- Introduction to Administrative law
- Source of Administrative law
- Nature of Administrative law
- Administrative action

- Bronne / Sources podcast
- Bronne toets / Sources test

Voltooi hierdie toets nadat jy na die aanbieding oor bronne gekyk het. Jy het slegs een kans en kan nie terugkeer na antwoorde as jy na 'n volgende vraag beweeg het nie.

Complete this test once you have viewed the presentation on sources. You have only one opportunity and cannot go back to answers once you have proceeded to the next question.

- Voorgeskrewe materiaal / Prescribed material
- PowerPoint
- AH oefening / AA exercise
- AH vrae / AA questions

Indien jy nog enige vrae het nadat jy al die materiaal rakende administratiewe handelinge bestudeer het en die oefening voltooi het, stel dit gerus hier.

If you still have any questions after you have studied all the materials on administrative action and have completed the exercise, please put them here.

Figure 1: Screenshot of SUNLearn that shows the overall online design of the module

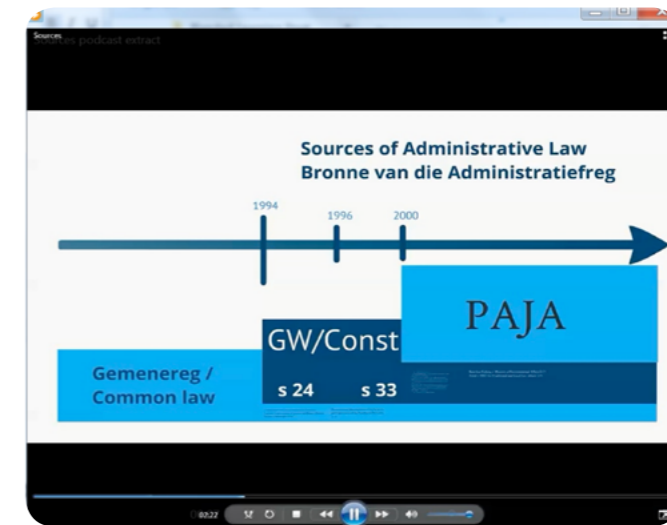


Figure 2: Screenshot of a podcast

Student experience

Student feedback on the learning experience

Student perceptions were largely positive. The overall response to the question about the value that podcasts added to their studies was overwhelmingly positive, with 63.6% indicating above average value or higher and another 26.4% indicating average value. This is reflected in the chart below.

Rate the overall value to your studies of the law podcasts you have listened to this year. (450 Responses)

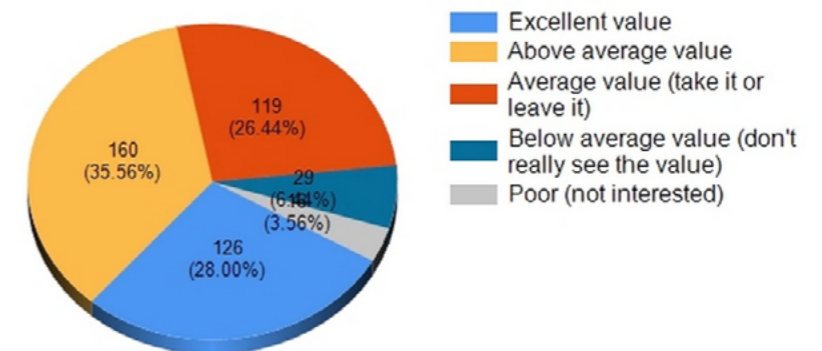


Figure 3: Student feedback



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The written feedback typically included the following comments:

"I prefer the podcasts especially with regard to the more difficult concepts. It allows me to pause and rewind and listen again to what was said and in that way I can grasp concepts in my own time and not feel lost as I would if it was merely said in class."

"You can listen to it repeatedly & go back to things you would have missed in formal lectures. You can also listen to it at a time that suits you & plan it around other obligations & responsibilities you have."

Some of the key benefits that the students indicated included the control that the podcasts gave them in adjusting the speed of their own learning and the flexibility to engage in learning activities at a time and space that suited them best. One of the most interesting remarks in this regard in response to the question, "What are the main advantages of podcasting from your perspective?" was the following:

"Being able to pause and rewind & listen when I am in the best mood."

General Opportunities

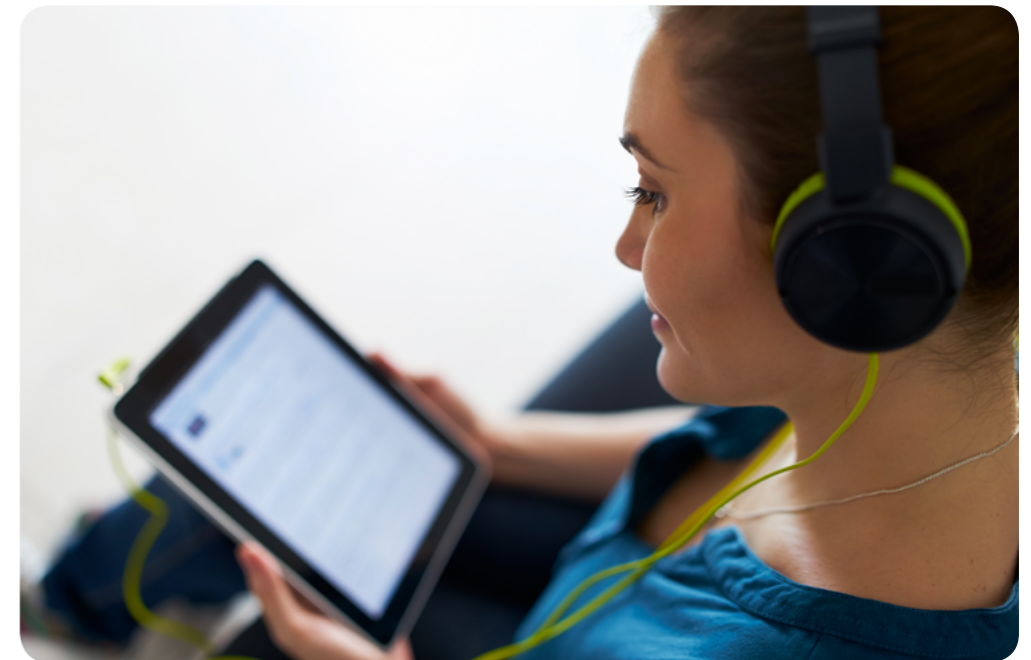
Common lecturer perspectives included the turning to podcasts as a way to "get students to work", to "shift the least interactive parts out of contact time" and to flip the classroom. The lecturers experienced their experimentation with the podcasts to achieve a blended learning design as largely positive. Although all noted that the creation of the podcasts was extremely time consuming, all indicated that they intended to continue using podcasts. One useful approach that emerged from the interviews was the suggestion to transition to the use of podcasts over a number of years by recording explanations given in class in a given year and using that recording in subsequent years as the out-of-classroom podcast. This would reduce production time and an effective library of podcasts could also be created over time.

Challenges

One of the lessons that emerged from the survey is that the students may spend too much time on transcribing the podcasts so that the podcasts

simply become another text rather than an engagement with the primary study material. Some of the students complained about the large amount of time that it took to transcribe the podcasts fully, although other students noted that the podcasts helped them to create accurate and complete study notes and to grapple more thoroughly with the material over an extended period of time, resulting in better learning. A typical comment in this respect was the following:

"Takes time but allows you to make better notes and while taking notes [it] already assists in learning as you [have] already gone through [and] understand work so [it] assists learning. Studying is almost revision then." These experiences (and others) highlighted the need for lecturers using podcasts to spend some time "training" their students on how to use the podcasts as a learning tool. As with all forms of teaching/learning activities, it should not be assumed that students will instinctively and automatically know what to do and how best to utilise the resource. Some guidance from the lecturer is essential.



Advice

The lecturer's advice would be not to overthink it – just to start somewhere and experiment. This will, in time, bring lecturers to a practice that is optimal



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for them and for their students. In particular, lecturers should not be intimidated by technology. There is no need to use advanced software or any special hardware when just setting out. Starting with what is available and keeping it simple would be advisable.

The following are some general points that the lecturer has learned over the years in using podcasts:

- Keep the podcasts very short and to the point – it does not work to place full 50-minute lectures in single podcasts.
- Integrate the podcasts with all the other activities in your module and explicitly show your students the added value that they will derive from the podcasts.
- If you use a lot of podcasts, take this into account when you assign your students other work, such as readings and exercises. Remember that listening to podcasts is an additional activity and you cannot simply add this to your modules without allowing time for it in the overall design in terms of the relevant number of credit hours available within the module.
- Explicitly teach your students how to use podcasts in your modules. This includes telling them what you expect them to get out of the podcasts and how they should approach them. Do not assume that all students will instinctively know what to do with podcasts.
- Avoid creating large file sizes when recording podcasts. Remember that students may not have the best (or fast) internet access and that huge files could be a stumbling block for them. Keeping podcasts short and avoiding many large, high-definition images help to keep file sizes down.
- Build up a library of podcasts over time that you can use repeatedly. This makes the investment in time creating them more than worthwhile.

Other concluding thoughts

The overall conclusion of the study is that the use of podcasts in the

targeted modules in the Law programmes seems worthwhile in that it creates a positive perspective on the part of both students and lecturers about the overall teaching/learning environment. The carefully and deliberately designed use of podcasts seems an effective way to assist in flipping the classroom and promoting more active and deeper learning in legal education.

