

# The iPod lecture circuit

The first time I heard about cyber-learning, I was applying for an economics teaching job at a university in Denver in 1998. I was offered a position in their new e-MBA program, drawing students from around the world to an online version of their business school. In accepting, I became part of the cyber-learning revolution that intrigues me still.

On-line teaching was appealing to me from the beginning. While I lacked the opportunity to know my students face-to-face, I didn't miss "dressing for success" or commuting. I worked different hours each day, depending on my kids' schedules. Occasionally I met with students on the phone, and led on-line discussions of economic and business issues in my around-the-earth classroom. My decision was prescient in another way. We ended up returning to California within a year, yet I was able to keep my teaching job.

Technology changed year after year: from video lectures to on-line streaming video, from spot-checking essays for plagiarism to a web-checker called "Turnitin"; from group emails to blogs and Wikispaces.

Years later, still teaching, I signed up to take my first on-line course through my alma mater. The creative writing class was moderated by an emeritus English faculty Professor Nancy Packer. There were perhaps fifteen or twenty of us in the class; all alumni or friends of Stanford, Yale, and Oxford. Professor Packer provid-



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ed detailed individual feedback.

While those early alumni cyber classes cost students a few hundred dollars, the model that has taken hold with adult learners is listening in on a plethora of university lectures without the costs and benefits of participation. Michelle Quinn, writing for the Los Angeles Times, reported recently on this new lecture circuit bonanza. "By making hundreds of lectures from elite academic institutions available

online for free, Apple is reinvigorating the minds of people who have been estranged from the world of ideas." For some, this latest advance has revolutionary implications.

Since the lectures are free, they are open to anyone who can access the technology. Instead of making a major commitment to stop-out for years to earn a degree or even forego evenings for a semester to take a course, you can dabble in as many or as few as you desire.

You might discover your intellectual homebase and then decide to make major the necessary life changes to work for a degree, or you might just understand better your children's, friends', or coworkers' interests. And while the cost of personal computers is still a stretch for some, the cost of an iPod (or MP3 or any player device) is a small fraction of that.

There are some downsides. It is possible for a little bit of knowledge to be dangerous. One lecture absorbed while flying along 101 does not a scientist or

a philosopher make. A lot of dabbling may not leave a listener ignorant, but it could give him a false sense of intellectual security.

Another downside is the potential danger of multitasking, especially when one of those tasks is driving. The Times article profiled a trucker, Baxter Wood, a devoted student of a Berkeley Professor's course on existentialism. "For me, driving and listening are bound together like space and time," said Baxter. iPods are hands-free, so are possibly safer than cell phone use while driving. But studies show that it's not busy hands that make cell phones a danger on roadways, it is a distracted mind.

Time will tell how much tweaking the legal system will require to keep our roadways safe. All California drivers will be required to use a hands-free device for cell phones beginning July 2009.

I count it one of my life's blessings that I don't have a long commute. For me, the cyber learning revolution will be complete when I can listen to lectures while exercising, particularly while swimming.

When I've tried out that technology, I'll pass it on the old-fashioned way: the newspaper.

*Karen Telleen-Lawton's column is a mélange of people, nature, events, and observations transporting the reader around the world and back to Santa Barbara. Her writing can be found at [www.CanyonVoices.com](http://www.CanyonVoices.com), including excerpts from her book, *Canyon Voices - the Nature of Rattlesnake Canyon*.*

## CRAIG

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this documentary takes you behind the scenes at the ultimate canine carnival.

**The Wheels on the Bus:** Mango's Big Dog Parade. Roger Daltrey of The Who lends his voice talent to the award-winning children's adventure where Mango and Papaya help a little doggie

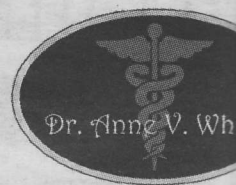
who missed his ride to the parade on State Street.

The last movie will be among those shown at AppleBox, a free family film festival for children during the mornings of the two weekends that bookend the festival, Saturday January 26 and Sunday January 27 and on Saturday February 2 and Sunday February 3 from 9 am until 10:30 am. The program will

enable children to see movies that are not easily accessible in a festive, entertaining and supportive environment.

For more info on the films and schedules go to [www.sbiff.org](http://www.sbiff.org) [www.edhat.com](http://www.edhat.com) and look for the Film Fest links.

*Craig Smith's column appears every Wednesday in the Daily Sound.*



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