Duke University on iTunes U I Duke Content Server

Duke Digital Initiative

Home   **Faculty**   **Students**   **FAQ**   **Support**

Home › Profile

Featured Profile

Digital Audio Enhances History Course

Duke's East Campus Language Lab might seem like an odd place to find Prof. Trudi Abel's Spring 2006 class Digital Durham and the New South. As it turns out, it's the perfect place for her students to learn how to use a digital audio software application to produce research projects. The software, called Audacity, allows the students to piece together digital content gathered on their iPods.

"Students use their iPods to download and listen to audio such as Public Radio International's 'This American Life' and folk music recordings from the 1930s, and also use them to record sounds, interviews, and narrative that they gather in the field from local Durham-area history archives," Abel said.

The large capacity hard drive on the iPod, ideal for Abel's data intensive projects -- especially audio and imaging -- provides an easy way to share sound with students via uploading and downloading files, and helps students translate their academic work into publishable audio postcards or podcasts based on their individual research projects.

A student in Prof. Trudi Abel's class Digital Durham and the New South uses Audacity to create an audio postcard with digital content recorded on his iPod.

The training provided to her students in the Lab is key to their success with the particular technology used in the course, Abel said. "Training can be the weak link when experimenting with new technology in the classroom. It really helps to have the institutional support, not just here's the hardware and software, but here's some knowledgeable people to help your class become competent using that material."

Her students' keen grasp on digital audio has allowed Abel to move the students' focus away from how to use the technology itself and more toward digital audio as an art form to enhance curriculum. For example, she recently hosted independent radio producer Jennifer Deer who talked about what is involved in crafting an engaging audio piece. "She did a profile on a local North Carolina goat cheese dairy. You could hear the goats bleating in the background, the environmental sounds. It was wonderful to think about how a little sound can effectively move you from downtown Durham to a farm in Pittsboro," Abel said, adding that her students picked-up on how to write an effective script for their research project, how different audio pieces fit together, and how a good producer pulls everything together into a final audio presentation.

According to Abel, learning how to use the iPods and create audio pieces has helped to engage her students as well as given them additional life skills.

"When these guys go out into the workplace, it'll be a good thing for them to have the experience of creating such a complex technical piece based on research. It's another dimension of competence for the students to have," she said.

Duke Home | **Office of Information Technology** | **Center for Instructional Technology**