

iTunes U Coming to a Campus Near You?

David Brian Williams
CMS Technology Chairperson
Draft for the March 2006 *College Music Society Newsletter*

Copyright 2006 © David Brian Williams

Many of us in college music have been grappling with issues surrounding digital delivery of music, both for listening activities for students in our courses, and for downloading and copyright concerns for student and faculty music listening in general. RIAA's aggressive legal actions have made us acutely aware of the copyright issues. The attractiveness of the Web and digital music files have motivated us to look for easy methods to deliver listening experiences to our students. Added to this mix is the use of the Web for sharing and promoting our music recitals, concerts, and lectures.

WebCT and Blackboard with MP3 or other forms of compressed music files provides one creative solution for some of our classroom needs. In the past year new terms like blogs, podcasts, RSS feeds, DRM, tethered downloading, and the like (a brief glossary of terms appears below), has opened up new options. All of these sound exciting but are daunting nonetheless when it comes to understanding the technology required for implementation. Also in the news is Penn State University's Napster program. PSU purchased a campus site license for Napster so their students could freely download copyrighted music tracks that were legal while they remained students or paid per track or album for the tunes.

Enter stage right, Apple Computer's "iTunes U." Leveraging the popularity of their iPod music players and their iTunes music store, Apple is making the technology and the interface of its iTunes service available to campuses free of charge. Apple claims to have some 70% of the download music market share and reported 14 million iPods sold in the last quarter of 2005 alone. The iPod devices and the iTunes music service is cross platform, accessible to Mac and PC users alike. When I workout at our campus recreation facility, I notice iPods of many varieties strapped to the arms of many of our students. I find the iPod useful for audio books and podcast recordings as well as my accumulated 14.4 days (3682 tracks) of music recordings. With the new video iPod, video tutorials, movies, TV shows and documentaries, and slideshows of photos can be viewed from this portable device as well.

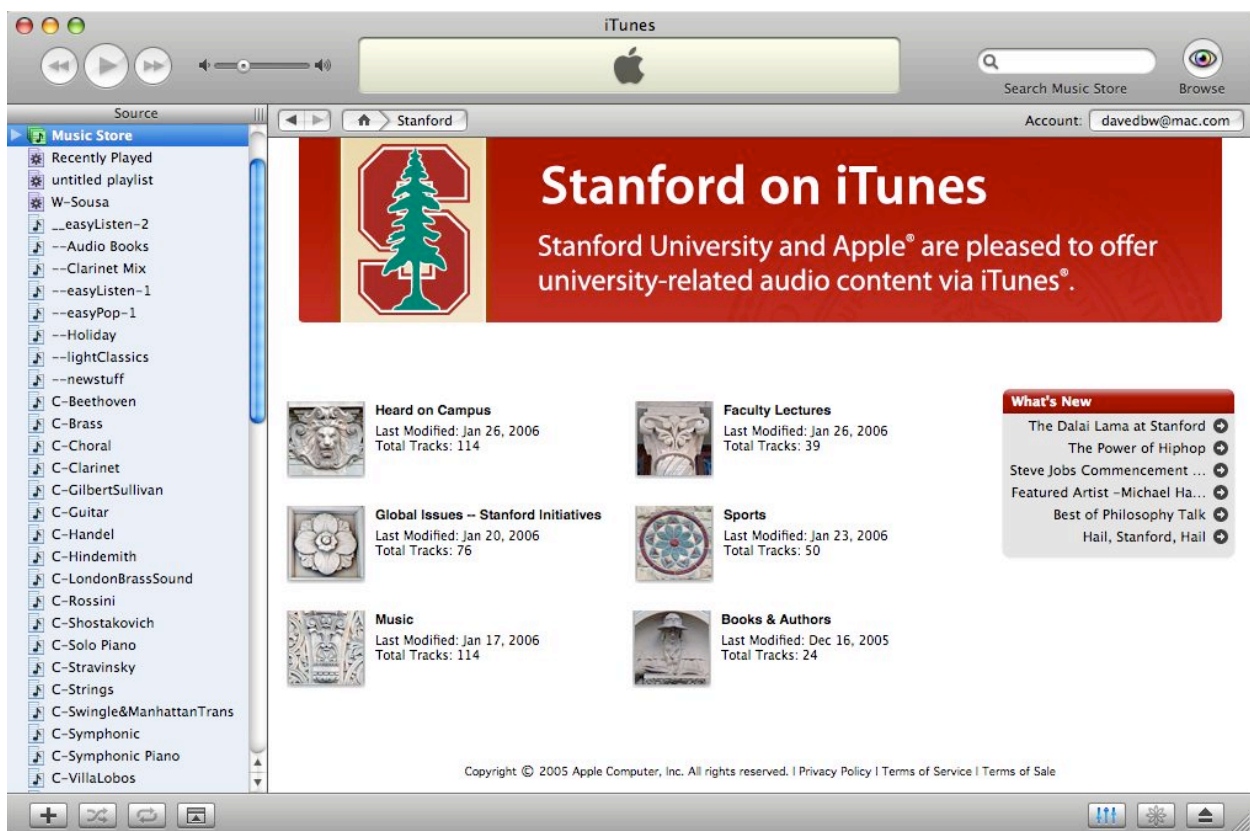
What is iTunes U?

Based on a quick study for this article, iTunes U is a version of Apple's iTunes Music Store that can be customized for a college or university. A screen shot of the "Stanford on iTunes" implementation is show here. Note the mix of materials that can be delivered: class and faculty lectures, sporting events, news broadcasts, recitals and concerts, or just about anything your imagination can create for delivery through this channel. Three different access points to your custom iTunes U are possible: (1) material for the general public, especially alumni and prospective students; (2) material that is only available to registered students, faculty, and staff; (3) and materials accessible

through Apple's commercial iTunes music store for purchase by individual tracks or complete albums of recordings (iTunes does not have a monthly subscription option like Napster).

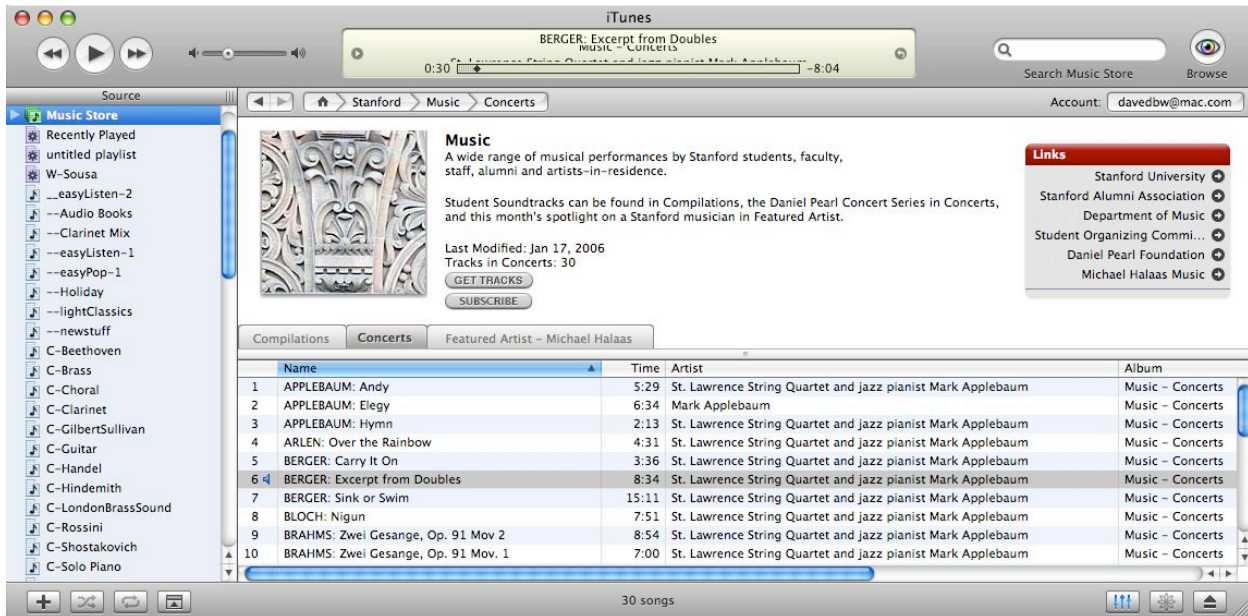
How does iTunes U work?

After googling on the Web and chatting informally with various contacts, here's how iTunes U appears to work for a campus or campus unit—your school of music, for example, might implement the service, but not your entire campus. The iTunes-U server is maintained at Apple but your college network staff works with Apple to establish access controls for your students, faculty, and staff. You can customize the visual appearance to create your own personal design just as Stanford did for "Stanford on iTunes." Your campus or program decides who will have administrative access for uploading recorded materials. I have not seen how this works, but my guess is that maintaining the iTunes U site and materials should be an easy task not requiring a lot of technical savvy; we will need to see how this plays out as more colleagues get experience with the system.



The iTunes-U is a free, hosted service from Apple. The only "cost" I can see is campus staff time to setup the service and to create and provide materials for uploading. Should you require students to purchase commercial tracks or albums from the iTunes store, then that would be an expense to them. The service is completely cross-platform for PCs and Macs and listening/video materials can be audited from any web browser. Having an iPod device enhances the portable and personal nature of the experience by

permitting easy downloading and listening or viewing anywhere, including from the treadmill at the workout center, the car traveling, or from a comfortable coffee shop.



Who has tried iTunes U?

It appears from my research that iTunes U has been tried at schools such as Brown, Duke, Drexel's School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Missouri's School of Journalism, University of Michigan's School of Dentistry, and Stanford. Stanford has concert and recital recordings available from their site.

In an e-mail exchange with Dr. Jeff Titon, professor of music at Brown University, he shared experiences from his participation in a pilot iTunes-U project for a graduate ethnomusicology field experience and a course in American roots music. As Jeff indicated to me, "In one of my classes we used the iPods with iTunes as a delivery system for music listening assignments. The students found it convenient to listen to their assignment on their iPods, while the iPods were particularly helpful to them during their (in-class, open-book) midterm and final exams. In my graduate ethnomusicology fieldwork seminar, we used the iPods in an applied ethnomusicology project, teaming up with a local Native American community to make a radio program featuring their traditional music, which was then podcast over Apple's site."

Some of the music that students used for listening activities was purchased from the Apple iTunes store; the remainder of the listening materials were created by Jeff and uploaded to the iTunes U server.

What can music programs do with iTunes U?

First and foremost, the iTunes U service offers a campus or music program another alternative to add to our repertoire of solutions for the legal downloading of copyrighted music materials. Beyond this, many applications are readily apparent: recitals, faculty lectures, and concert programs for the public and your alumni; listening experiences for

music classes of either music tracks instructors provide or tracks the students purchase from the iTunes music store; recordings or all or part of class lectures; and short informational videos for student orientation, and messages and training for selected groups like prospective students and parents.

There are other applications to consider as well. The iTunes store has a little-known resource where anyone can create and post their own iMix; this is a list of tracks you've selected from the iTunes store to create your own album or mix of music. An instructor might create an iMix as a course requirement much like textbook materials. Students would pay for the tracks they download and use, typically 99¢ a track. A studio instructor could post an iMix of recordings of solo literature for students to study. Or, an ensemble director might post the tracks for the concert repertoire for the semester. One should be able to link to the iTunes U resources directly from course material in Blackboard and WebCT. And, furthermore, PDF files and text documents can be downloaded and read from student iPods.

Creating materials for the iTunes U site could also become an integral part of the instruction much as it did for Jeff Titon's ethnomusicology class where the students created the recordings or, in Jeff's case, the podcasts, and published them online. Should a music program want to take the next step, they could create their own music label and explore developing a relationship with the iTunes Music Store for commercially distributing their music productions.

The latest version of the iLife software suite (that comes with the purchase of a Macintosh computer or an upgrade purchased at academic pricing) has very user-friendly tools for creating blogs and podcasts that could be distributed through an iTunes-U implementation. Three colleagues and I experimented the other night with an informal video conference between Alabama, Hawaii, and Illinois, using the built-in iChat tools and iSight cameras on our Mac's. We could see and hear all four of us simultaneously and, using the new podcasting tools in GarageBand, record our conference. The software automatically inserted screenshots of our images in sync with the audio as each of us spoke. When done, we just selected the option to upload the podcast to a server. And, this was done with the commodity Internet, not Internet 2!

Well that's all you wanted to know, and hopefully more, about the recent publicity on iTunes U. I'm certain more details and experiences will surface over the coming months as a few more CMS members get first-hand experience with this new resource. There are many options available for doing podcasts and publishing music listening experiences besides iTunes U; what this service seems to offer is opening up the familiar and easy to use interface of iTunes in a customizable form for use by our own academic programs in music—a service that is cross-platform and free.

To express your interest in adding the iTunes U service to your music program or campus, go to http://education.apple.com/itunes_u. We will devote time to this topic at the 8th annual CMS Music Technology Institute being held here in Normal, Illinois, this summer, June 3-8 (check www.cfa.ilstu.edu/cmscenter for more information).

Glossary

Blackboard: course management software providing support for grading, online test, assignment submission, electronic materials distribution, and the like. Similar to WebCT below; WebCT and Blackboard announced a corporate merger last year.

Blog: a “blog” is a journal or log maintained on the Web by a “blogger” and requires little or no technical expertise to maintain; a blog may have music and graphic images as well.

DRM: digital rights management; this is some form of coding built into purchased music downloads that permits the music to only be played from authorized or licensed computers or music players.

Gogglng: a popular use term describing the process of using the Google search service on the Web to search for just about anything from terms, to maps, to images, to items to purchase

Napster: one of the first music download services that served as the catalyst for many online music services to follow including iTunes; Napster now provides legal music downloads for individuals and campus-wide sites for PCs only, not Macs.

Podcast: to understand “podcasting” think “broadcasting.” Podcasts are audio or video broadcast uploaded in a digital form to the Web and people can subscribe to regularly scheduled sessions for listening, viewing, or downloading. The term “pod” comes from the use of iPods for downloading and listening to podcasts. Anyone can create a podcast!

RIAA: Recording Industry Association of America represents the interests of the record labels and producers in the USA and has been much in the news the past few years with their efforts to protect copyright interests for online music downloading.

RSS feed: Really Simple Syndication. This is the Web technology that makes it very easy for Web publications (like news sites and podcasts) to make their content accessible through other websites.

Tethered downloading: refers to music downloads that require some authentication process to be able to play the music; at Penn State, for example, music that students download for free is only playable while they are still registered or “tethered” to PSU as students.

WebCT: competitive course management software to Blackboard noted above.