

Transcript

00:00:00 Amy Palmer (BILT Digital Resources Officer)

Hi everyone, welcome back to the BILT Broadcast podcast. We are on episode 14 now and today's podcast we've gone kind of meta because this podcast is all about doing podcasts and specifically using podcasting your teaching. But before we carry on, I just would like our guests to introduce themselves, please.

00:00:20 Alvin Birdi (Professor of Economics Education and Associate Pro Vice Chancellor (Education Innovation and Enhancement))

OK, I'm Alvin Birdi. I'm a, I actually work in BILT, so I'm an insider. But I also teach a course, a Bristol future course on data. It's called inequality crisis and prosperity. At the moment although we're going to change the title and we use podcasts.

00:00:37 Christian Spielmann (Reader of Economics Education)

That's right, and my name is Christian Spielmann. I'm a reader in the economics department and I'm teaching on the on that course with Alvin together, and I've also used podcasts in some of my introductory economics lectures.

00:00:54 Amy Palmer

Cool and you're also a BILT fellow as well.

00:00:56 Christian Spielmann

That's right, how could I forget?

00:00:59 Amy Palmer

We're all in the BILT family here!

00:01:01 Alvin Birdi

Yes, this is an inside job.

00:01:04 Amy Palmer

OK, so I think it would be really helpful for everyone. First, if you just talk about how you both use podcasts in your Bristol Futures unit.

00:01:12 Christian Spielmann

Yeah, so uhm, we are using the podcast as a, well we called it the Sunday podcast because it goes live every Sunday and the idea is that we want to motivate the week ahead. So we want to say a little bit like what we are planning to do. In the week ahead and then we want to motivate the topics which we will be covering with some links to things which have happened recently in the world. So motivate what, what the week will be about.

00:01:50 Alvin Birdi

Yeah, and I and I the only thing I would add I guess, is that it allows us, because we're doing it weekly and it's so quick and easy to do, we can just incorporate anything that's happened in the news often even on that day so it can be really quite current.

00:02:03 Christian Spielmann

What we have sometimes done is if we, during the week met with someone who has done an interesting contribution to a specific topic, we've just recorded a quick interview and then used that for the podcast as well.

00:02:18 Amy Palmer

Is the podcast, is it essential for students to listen to it for the course or is it kind of an additional resource?

00:02:25 Alvin Birdi

Well it is, it is kind of essential really, because it orients, the thing about this course is that there are lots of different bits where we use multimedia, so we do a lot of teaching by webinar. There's lots of stuff on Blackboard and in the actual times that we meet, we tend to do work, you know, we tend to actually actively do work, so because there are lots of online materials, it's good to bring them all together, and so to orient people every week you know, so as to what to listen to, where to go and so on. So that's kind of the purpose of it, really. So it's a it's an important kind of map. And we do it as a podcast because it's easy. Podcasts are easy to listen to, you can you know 10/15 minutes you can listen to on the way to the university in the morning.

00:03:08 Amy Palmer

OK, and how, I don't know if you know this, but how, what percentage of students are listening to the podcasts?

00:03:15 Alvin Birdi

It's really hard to tell Isn't it?

00:03:16 Christian Spielmann

Yeah, so we don't have precise stats on that.

00:03:19 Alvin Birdi

The problem is that we, we make it available both in a streaming app and on Blackboard, and so we, we need to kind of do that sort of analysis, but I'm hoping everyone! (laughter).

00:03:37 Christian Spielmann

I think what we what we

00:03:38 Alvin Birdi

It's not hard work, right? Listening to a podcast.

00:03:40 Christian Spielmann

I think what we noticed is that some students, because it's recorded and it's accessible anytime they would listen to it maybe even after the week, which is a little bit worse than than at the start, because it's meant to kind of give some direction. But it's still valuable because you reflect on the week what you have done, and it brings these different ideas together and brings something from the real world in as well.

00:04:08 Amy Palmer

I think in the same way that replay is mostly used during revision. It's the same way of like it's a way to kind of recap what's been done.

00:04:16 Alvin Birdi

I mean the nice thing about podcasts, though, is because you can put them on a streaming app you know people subscribe, it just comes every, as soon as we release one on Sunday. It would just appear on people's phones, but we don't know how many people are doing that. So we need to kind of do some investigation. It's quite a new course at the moment.

00:04:32 Amy Palmer

yeah, what app do you use?

00:04:35 Alvin Birdi

Podbean, I think it's called, it's free.

00:04:41 Amy Palmer

I mean because we use, like we use Spotify to host this podcast and um, it's pretty good, but you need an account.

00:04:50 Alvin Birdi

Yeah, and so sorry if people can hear that humming in the background. What just happened is as soon as

00:04:56 Christian Spielmann

It's not us!

00:04:57 Alvin Birdi

As soon as we started recording this podcast. The person next door started washing their car with power jets.

00:05:04 Christian Spielmann

And we have a pretty good set up here, right? So our microphones are pretty high quality and they pick all this up!

00:05:10 Alvin Birdi

It's possible we might be able to reduce or get rid of that effect afterwards, but we'll see.

00:05:15 Amy Palmer

Microphones are too good!

00:05:19 Amy Palmer

OK, so I think it would be, on the note of microphones and things. How, how do you physically, how do you record a podcast, like what equipment do you need? How long does it take? How much planning is involved?

00:05:32 Christian Spielmann

I think there are many possibilities and you can really record a podcast very Low cost, low time, um. If you want to make it, well, more advanced and maybe nicer for the students. It can be a job which takes a lot of time, but if you wanted to keep things very simple, your smartphone is actually enough to record a podcast

00:05:59 Alvin Birdi

If you use a smartphone you can create an enormous increase in the quality of the sound just by sticking in a microphone, an external microphone.

00:06:08 Christian Spielmann

That's right.

00:06:09 Alvin Birdi

It's amazing how much difference it makes and then then iPhones or Android phones actually do a pretty good job, yeah, but if you just rely on the, phone inside the phone? Yeah, it won't be as good. The microphone inside the phone.

00:06:22 Amy Palmer

Is it expensive to get a plug in microphone for your phone?

00:06:25 Alvin Birdi

£10, £10 / £20

00:06:26 Christian Spielmann

Yeah, they're quite quite cheap, yeah?

00:06:29 Amy Palmer

Any you can recommend?

00:06:31 Alvin Birdi

I well, I mean there are very good companies like Rode and they produce quite cheap microphones for specifically for the iPhone and for and so, but you know they don't need to be particularly good. It's just the fact that you've got a microphone near your mouth makes an enormous difference.

00:06:51 Christian Spielmann

Yeah, and then there are apps like voice record things like that

00:06:55 Alvin Birdi

That's the best one.

00:06:57 Christian Spielmann

which you can use. Yeah, and that's not expensive either, right? You're not getting paid right for all this? Rode, Voice Record...

00:07:06 Alvin Birdi

No no, we're not sponsored!.

00:07:08 Alvin Birdi

Although if anyone would like to speak to us...(laughter)

00:07:12 Christian Spielmann

Yeah so, but that is kind of the low cost possibility and, and we, we use that as well. If, if we are out and about and meet someone and want to interview someone for a podcast, I would use just a plug in microphone and Voice Record.

00:07:26 Alvin Birdi

It's an important point this about interviews because one of the reasons we started doing this was because you can just bring lots of people into the course. You know you can just interview somebody. I mean, you've interviewed people just on when you've been out and about.

00:07:42 Christian Spielmann

Yeah, I'm, I'm, I met a BBC journalist from Bangladesh who I interviewed about inequality in Bangladesh and that's just pretty exciting. To bring this in depth personal knowledge into the classroom.

00:07:59 Amy Palmer

And you just met him and you were like...

00:08:02 Christian Spielmann

So I knew the person before.

00:08:06 Amy Palmer

I thought you'd just whipped out your microphone mid conversation!

00:08:11 Alvin Birdi

But and then also, of course you can do, you can record you know Skype calls and phone calls and just insert those into podcasts, so it's, so it's a way of, it's just a way of opening up the, the teaching process.

00:08:23 Amy Palmer

Yeah, and what about having students on your podcasts?

00:08:26 Alvin Birdi

It's a plan and we haven't yet done it, but I think I mentioned earlier. We also do webinars. I think it would be really nice to get students. I mean, one of the reasons actually that we do this. Oh, that person is finished, they're now polishing their car, I think, we won't be able to see in a moment, because of the glare!

00:08:47 Alvin Birdi

Students, it would be really, really good getting students into the webinars and the podcast, and I was saying that one of the reasons we started doing this really was because the assessments on this course we asked them to. You know the course is about analysing and understanding data and becoming comfortable with it. Enough to communicate it to others in, in an understandable fashion. So we ask people to do things like make short videos or blogs or podcasts. And you know, if you're if you're, if you're asking students to do essays, then that's easy because all academics write stuff. So there's already models of essays and how you write, but it's, if you're asking students to do podcasts and you're not modelling that. Or if you're asking them to do videos and you're not kind of showing how you might do that, you know it's there's something slightly false about that? So so in a way, it's kind of just. Just you know, showing that it's an important skill. It's a useful thing to be able to communicate in different formats.

00:09:46 Amy Palmer

OK, so maybe you would invite students onto the podcast this Sunday podcast, but also you may ask them to do a podcast as part of an assessment as well?

00:09:54 Christian Spielmann

Absolutely yeah, so we already do that with videos and.

00:09:57 Alvin Birdi

Yeah, Well, they have a choice don't they, they can either make a video or a podcast, yeah?

00:10:06 Alvin Birdi

Yeah, and then the other thing, the more comfortable you get with the technology, the more you don't worry about it because you can always take things out and clip bits and you know, add overdub and you, you know you can polish it as much as you like really and that gives that just makes you feel a lot more relaxed. And you don't always have to do that. It's just knowing that you could have done it.

00:10:25 Amy Palmer

I think as well as you can, if you see podcasts on Apple and Spotify and whatever and you, you don't realise how simple it is to do one I don't think. I think you, you don't think of it as just an audio recording, which seems a lot more simple, but actually they're exactly the same thing and it's just the way that they're uploaded that makes a difference.

00:10:44 Alvin Birdi

In some ways, audio is harder I think because you haven't got the prop, you know and you, you don't have slides or anything else that you know, it's just just sound and it can. It can seem quite empty. I think people find talking quite hard because gaps and silences seem really loud.

00:11:04 Amy Palmer

and long as well, yeah?

00:11:08 Christian Spielmann

I mean with, with the first podcasts I, I did I, I actually wrote a script, not word by word, but at, at least that I had a very clear structure where, where things go. Yeah, and that that does help. Do you do that?

00:11:24 Alvin Birdi

Yeah, and, and that does help to have a kind of broad sort of structure, because yeah, it's very easy. I mean, I'm, you know we're doing it now because this is a kind of live situation, but it's very easy to start saying things like um and er and you know and you stop, and that doesn't sound good when it's recorded, unless it's a sort of a live situation.

00:11:41 Christian Spielmann

But Amy will get all these out of the recording, so I'm not worried.

00:11:47 Amy Palmer

Some people as well.

00:11:49 Amy Palmer

I'm not saying it's easy, but some people are really good at rambling on as well, and then they just go down some random rabbit hole!

00:11:55 Alvin Birdi

What are you saying, Amy?

00:11:58 Christian Spielmann

Who are you talking about?

00:12:02 Amy Palmer

OK, So what? What sort of feedback have you had from students about the podcasts?

00:12:06 Alvin Birdi

Well, when, when we set up the course we asked a lot of students. It's interesting actually we, the podcast format came from students saying that it would be quite a nice format to use because it wasn't on our radar at all, and so students in focus groups that we ran before setting up these courses said that actually, it's quite a nice format because you don't have to be stuck in front of a screen. You can, you know, it's mobile. You can listen to a podcast anywhere.

00:12:30 Amy Palmer

Was that specifically about the Bristol features unit, or just generally in?

00:12:34 Alvin Birdi

These focus groups were specifically about, yeah.

00:12:35 Christian Spielmann

Was at the very beginning right before the course was developed.

00:12:38 Alvin Birdi

Yeah, we did focus groups in every faculty in the university and asked various questions and that that was kind of one of the things that came up a few times is that it's a nice format because it's just flexible and different.

00:12:52 Amy Palmer

Yeah, well, I don't think any of my friends don't listen to podcasts. It's such a badly worded sentence! But you know everyone I know listens to podcasts and they're becoming more and more mainstream and things, so why not use them for learning?

00:13:07 Christian Spielmann

And obviously, sometimes there are very good podcasts, which you can use, which are out there already. You don't have to produce them all yourself. But there is a personal touch if you have actually produced them.

00:13:23 Amy Palmer

OK, cool, so is there something about it being unit specific, the podcast, that that makes it successful?

00:13:30 Christian Spielmann

I think it helps. I think it's not the only reason why it's successful, and I think you can also use well produced podcasts which just relate to your topic, but.

00:13:41 Christian Spielmann

What makes it special I if it's unit specific, is that you you can actually put whatever you talk about or whoever you interview into context related to the unit.

00:13:52 Christian Spielmann

So you can say, "oh remember, we talked about ABC last week and this is I talked to an expert

00:14:02 Christian Spielmann

about exactly this topic" and it gives this very clear link.

00:14:07 Christian Spielmann

Between what we do in the course and the expert opinion or what's happening in the in the news, and I think that's beneficial.

00:14:14 Amy Palmer

Yeah, educationally then what are the benefits?

00:14:18 Alvin Birdi

Well, in BILT we've, and in organisations like BILT, we've got used to talking about active learning and getting away from a sort of didactic mode where you stand at the front of the class and you talk to your students and one of the, what we're finding actually in this course is that both the webinar and the podcast. The educational benefit of it is that it models dialogue, so we always do them together and we always do the webinars together. I mean, it's kind of a more in one way it's a more expensive way of teaching because you've got two staff or possibly even more people, but it's not very intensive for those people you know, so we can, so Christian and I can just be talking and we can ring someone up, or we can include someone else in the podcast so you get a lot of people in. But the really important thing pedagogically, I think, is that it models dialogue and so learning by a process of discussing makes people you know, get away from this idea that there's a font of wisdom and that you just have to kind of receive that and understand it and accept it all, and that you know learning happens because every now and then I'll say something and Christian will kind of butt in and say, so do you mean this and you know? And it does end up being a good sort of modelling of the way intellectual dialogue happens and nothing is simple.

00:15:32 Christian Spielmann

It's probably the question students would ask as well. So if I or you would say "oh, is that what you mean?" It's maybe that what the student thinks in that very moment, so that that's kind of helpful for learning, I think.

00:15:46 Amy Palmer

And it shows that academics ask each other questions as well as it's not just being students asking questions.

00:15:52 Alvin Birdi

Absolutely yeah. And this is what we want students to do in class is to talk to each other and question what we're saying, and question what we're giving them. And so, so I think it kind of, it makes a lot of sense educationally, I think, and it's quite, you know the dialogic format is also quite relaxing to listen to I think, you don't have to listen to 1 voice over and over again.

00:16:12 Amy Palmer

And so does it, speaking a bit more about active learning, does it mean that if you do the webinars and you do the podcasts outside of sessions, does that mean that in the sessions you have a chance to do more active activities If that makes sense?

00:16:25 Christian Spielmann

I think that's one of the reasons why you might want to include pre-prepared materials, be it a video or a webinar or podcast. In the workshops we would basically be not teaching at the students, but more guiding the students through material we would discuss with them. They would do stuff themselves and

we would support them. But doing the work they have to do in the workshops and so in a way we have flipping the classroom right?

00:16:59 Alvin Birdi

It's a kind of flipping we're just moving, but the thing I like about the podcast and the webinar format is that the stuff you move out of the lecture or classroom, because we don't really have lectures now we just have workshops, but the stuff you move out, you do in a more dialogic format as well, so it's not. It's not as if you move things out, and you're just kind of talking at students. The webinars are a bit more of a kind of presentation format, but even there we try to make it interactive.

00:17:30 Amy Palmer

And you have quite, well, actually, I don't know about this unit because I'm thinking, I'm trying to put myself in the mind of like an academic and maybe someone who taught chemistry, someone who teaches math where it's very content heavy, but this is more of a discursive unit, right?

00:17:47 Alvin Birdi

It's a doing unit.

00:17:48 Christian Spielmann

It's a doing unit. Yeah, it's not, it's not just talking. So it's actually a unit about data literacy in a way, and so students will use computer programmes like Excel to analyse data. So it's very hands on and it, it's not easy. There's some concepts which are actually like statistical concepts which students learn which are demanding. But you still, if I think if you teach these kind of concepts you, you still want to put them into context and where would they be applied. And why is that concept an important one to know? And that's where the podcast comes in.

00:18:31 Alvin Birdi

I mean the original motivation behind this was to try and raise data understanding skills across the student population so that people from a wide set of disciplines felt comfortable with data, and so that when people in the media and elsewhere threw data at them they weren't getting the wool pulled over their eyes. You know they could sort of critically appraise that, but more than that they could analyse it themselves. They could go away, download the data from a government website and just check you know, is this actually plausible or not? So they learn, they learn to become comfortable with data. They learn excel skills. They learn some basic statistical methods and they learn to communicate we hope. That's kind of what the course is about.

00:19:19 Amy Palmer

And I guess what the podcast is doing is for students, because this is a students come from all disciplines to take this unit, don't they? So I guess for students who may feel that they're not comfortable using things like excel and data, the podcast is a way to kind of break that barrier almost.

00:19:35 Christian Spielmann

Yeah, and maybe to show how relevant these skills are for, to understand the world we live in. So if we take the real world and the examples and they go into the podcast, then we have a good motivation why it's actually important to think about what a distribution is and what a distribution looks like.

00:19:57 Alvin Birdi

I think that's right. I mean the podcast is used to make the things come alive, isn't it, to give them relevance in real world significant.

00:20:03 Christian Spielmann

I mean we, we don't suggest that all lecturing or all teaching should be done only by podcasts. It's about the, it's about the set of, set of different things which you use, and there are particular aspects of learning where the podcast is just brilliant.

00:20:19 Amy Palmer

But all disciplines could use podcasts in their teaching.

00:20:22 Christian Spielmann

I think so.

00:20:23 Alvin Birdi

Yeah, I can't imagine you know it might be, I don't know some pure math or something might be difficult. But even you know it's, you know if you're doing, I don't know combinatorial group theory. I don't even know what that is, but something like that.

00:20:40 Christian Spielmann

But then there are so many books written about, like popular, popular books about mathematics and, and certain theorems, and I think you can tell stories about everything and that's what we do in a podcast we're telling a story, right?

00:20:55 Alvin Birdi

Yeah, I mean you know it, but it is it. It probably is important to realise that you know not every technology works in every context, and so they might, you know some subjects are more suited to this kind of medium.

00:21:09 Amy Palmer

Definitely. Do you use podcasts in your other modules? Do you teach other units?

00:21:15 Christian Spielmann

So I have used it last year for, for a couple of weeks in my introductory economics course and very much in a in a similar way that I had maybe an interview or which I wanted to share with the students and I just thought that it's a good motivation. Which links to a topic, and so I would produce a podcast for that.

00:21:42 Alvin Birdi

And the other thing we do routinely every single week is we incorporate music into our podcasts too. To break it up, so we'll probably play out with the music in this broadcast mode.

00:21:48 Christian Spielmann

We do.

00:21:51 Amy Palmer

Yeah nice uhm. Well, I think we're pretty much cover. Is there anything else you wanna you feel like we've not covered that might be helpful.

00:22:00 Alvin Birdi

No, I think we've been comprehensive.(laughter)

00:22:04 Amy Palmer

OK, so if anyone would like to take part in one of the BILT broadcast podcasts, please get in touch with us at BILT-info@bristol.ac.uk and please subscribe to our podcast If you enjoyed it.

Bob Dylan - 'Subterranean Homesick Blues', plays at the end of the podcast.