

---

*Today's News*

Wednesday, January 9, 2008

## Thanks to YouTube, Professors Are Finding New Audiences

By [JEFFREY R. YOUNG](#)

Forget Lonelygirl15, YouTube's 2006 online video phenom. Professors are the latest YouTube stars. The popularity of their appearances on YouTube and other video-sharing sites may end up opening up the classroom and making teaching—which once took place behind closed doors—a more public art.

What's more, Web video opens a new form of public intellectualism to scholars looking to participate in an increasingly visual culture.

One Web site that opened this week, [Big Think](#), hopes to be "a YouTube for ideas." The site offers interviews with academics, authors, politicians, and other thinkers. Most of the subjects are filmed in front of a plain white background, and the interviews are chopped into bite-sized pieces of just a few minutes each. The short clips could have been served up as text quotes, but Victoria R. M. Brown, co-founder of Big Think, says video is more engaging. "People like to learn and be informed of things by looking and watching and learning," she says.

YouTube itself wants to be a venue for academe. In the past few months, several colleges have signed agreements with the site to set up official "channels." The University of California at Berkeley was the first, and the University of Southern California, the University of New South Wales, in Australia, and Vanderbilt University soon followed.

It remains an open question just how large the audience for talking eggheads is, though. After all, in the early days of television, many academics hoped to use the medium to beam courses to living rooms, with series like CBS's *Sunrise Semester*, which began in 1957. Those efforts are now a distant memory.

Things may be different now, though, since the Internet offers a chance to connect people with the professors and topics that most interest them.

Even YouTube was surprised by how popular the colleges' content has been, according to Adam Hochman, a product manager at Berkeley's Learning Systems Group. Lectures are long, after all, while most popular YouTube videos run just a few minutes. (Lonelygirl, the diary of a teenage girl, had episodes that finished in well under a minute. Many other popular shorts involve cute animals or juvenile stunts). Yet some lectures on Berkeley's channel scored 100,000 viewers each, and people were sitting through the whole talks. "Professors in a sense are rock stars," Mr. Hochman concludes. "We're getting as many hits as you would find with some of the big media players."

YouTube officials insist that they weren't surprised by the buzz, and they say that more colleges are coming forward. "We expect that education will be a vibrant category on YouTube," said Obadiah Greenberg, strategic partner manager at YouTube, in an e-mail interview. "Everybody loves to learn."

To set up an official channel on YouTube, colleges must sign an agreement with the company, though no money changes hands. That allows the colleges to brand their section of the site, by including a logo or school colors, and to upload longer videos than typical users are allowed.

The company hasn't exactly made it easy to find the academic offerings, though. Clicking on the education category shows a mix of videos, including ones with babes posing in lingerie and others on the lectures of Socrates. But that could change if the company begins to sign up more colleges and pay more attention to whether videos are appearing in the correct subject areas, says Dan Colman, director and associate dean of Stanford University's continuing-studies program, who runs a [blog](#) tracking podcasts and videos made by colleges and professors.

In many cases, the colleges were already offering the videos they are putting on YouTube on their own Web sites, or on Apple's iTunes U, an educational section of the iTunes Store. But college officials say that teaming up with YouTube is greatly expanding their audiences because so many people are poking around the service already.

"It's one thing to try to invite people to your own site; it's another thing to be riding the YouTube train," says Michael J. Schoenfeld, vice chancellor for public affairs for Vanderbilt, where views shot up after the videos hit YouTube.

T. Mills Kelly, an associate professor of history and art history at George Mason University, says that the Web-video trend brings a welcome check on the teaching process. "It introduces a certain level of accountability for what happens in the classroom," he said on a recent episode of the university's Digital Campus podcast.

Mr. Colman, of Stanford, said that when professors have their lectures recorded—either for an audio podcast or a streaming video—it can improve the quality. "Any time someone knows they're being taped, they'll make sure they're giving a fairly refined lecture, and that certainly can only help," he says.

It remains to be seen, however, whether videos will lead colleges to weigh teaching more heavily in the tenure and promotion process.

One of the Internet stars at Berkeley is Marian C. Diamond, a professor of anatomy and neuroscience who has taught for more than 40 years. Since the university started uploading her lectures to YouTube, she has been getting fan e-mail from around the world.

A woman in New York City wrote to say that she downloads the lectures and watches them while commuting on the subway; a fitness student in Australia uses them to supplement the college anatomy class he is struggling with; a high school student in the United Arab Emirates watches because he hopes to one day become a doctor.

"I respond to every one of them," Ms. Diamond says of the e-mails. That means more work, but she has no complaints "For a teacher, you couldn't ask for anything better."

## **New Players**

YouTube isn't the only game in town for educational videos, of course. Besides Big Think, which boasts as an investor Lawrence H. Summers, former president of Harvard University and former U.S. Secretary of the Treasury, there is also FORA.tv. That site, which calls itself "the thinking man's YouTube," streams lectures and debates featuring noted scholars and intellectuals (think a hipper, Web-based version of C-Span).

FORA.tv recently started forming partnerships with colleges and universities as well, to offer recordings of campus talks via the service. So far about a dozen colleges—including American University, Berkeley, and the New School—participate. Brian Gruber, founder and chief executive of FORA.tv, said that the site's audience is a quarter of a million viewers per month and is growing at a rate of 20 percent per month.

On their own, a few professors have tried to craft Web videos that will appeal to a popular online audience.

Two professors at the University of Minnesota created a 3-D animation explaining a mathematical concept, and attracted more than 1 million views on YouTube. And Michael L. Wesch, an assistant professor of cultural anthropology at Kansas State University, made a video about Web 2.0 that drew more than 400,000 views. He says Web video offers a new way for scholars to communicate, noting that he wrote a scholarly article about the same ideas he put in his video, but that the article might be read by only a small number of scholars.

"It's easier than people think," Mr. Wesch says of making online videos. "The thought process is very different, which I actually think can be very valuable. I mean we think a lot about how to present our work in writing, and I think when you shift into thinking about how to present this work visually, it actually forces you to think through things in new ways."

---

[Copyright](#) © 2008 by [The Chronicle of Higher Education](#)

[Subscribe](#) | [About The Chronicle](#) | [Contact us](#) | [Terms of use](#) | [Privacy policy](#) | [Help](#)

Use YouTube target audience tools to find the people who matter most to your business. Learn more about YouTube's video targeting tools. People come to YouTube to laugh, learn and dig deep into the things that they care about, from cooking and car repair to software and extreme sports. And because we know what our viewers care about, we can help you connect when it counts. Use our audience tools to find the people who matter most to your business on YouTube. Reach potential customers based on demographics like age, gender and location, as well as interests, life events and more. Learn about targeting. 2B. More than 2 billion users sign in to YouTube every month and more than 1 billion hours of video are watched every day. #1. Those audiences hold the promise of monetization down the line, especially as COVID-19 hopefully abates, and the advertisers and sponsors hopefully return. So if you're a YouTube creator, expect some pain in the short (and maybe even mid) term. But don't miss out on the opportunity to grow your audience despite the crisis, putting yourself in position to emerge stronger down the line. It's also the perfect time to start a new YouTube channel. The boost in traffic and the world's need for new content is driving a ton of watch time and subscribing. With a new channel, you can't monetize through ads until you reach 1,000 subscribers and a watch time threshold anyway. Print: Thanks to YouTube, Professors Are Finding New Audiences -Ch Thanks to YouTube, Professors Are Finding New Audiences. Article. Jeffrey R Young. Forget Lonelygirl15, YouTube's 2006 online video phenom. Professors are the latest YouTube stars. The popularity of their appearances on YouTube and other video-sharing sites may end up opening up the classroom and making teaching "which once took place behind closed doors," a more public art. What's more, Web video opens a new form of public intellectualism to scholars looking to participate in an increasingly visual culture. One Web site that opened this week, Big Think, hopes to be "a YouTube for ideas." The site offers interviews with academics, authors, politicians, and other thinkers. New posts New resources New profile posts Latest activity. Members. Learn how to grow your YouTube audience from top-rated social media experts and YouTube stars. Whether you're interested in learning about YouTube marketing, or growing a popular YouTube channel, Udemy has a course to help you boost your YouTube following. [www.udemy.com](http://www.udemy.com). How To Create A Tribe Of Raving Fans With Live Streaming Broadcasts. Brand New Over-The-Shoulder Video Series On How To Quickly & Easily Launch Your YouTube Live Streaming Today. Do you want to captivate people's attention? Recently trying to learn about youtube! Thanks for sharing! You must log in or register to reply here. Share