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No Experience Required: Newsam Approaching Radio through Service Learning



Shawn Newsam

Professor Shawn Newsam, who specializes in computer science and engineering, didn't have any radio experience when he had the idea for a service learning course to start a radio station at UC Merced.

That didn't stop him.

"It makes a good service learning project that way," he said. "I can be more of a hands-off guide and let the students do the work."

UC Merced's radio plans have come a long way since Newsam first started talking about the project with a fellow faculty member. His service learning class has spent two semesters on long-term plans for how a campus radio station will proceed if they are able to get an FCC license – including technical specifications, a business and management plan and choosing appropriate programming.

It's a little different from other service learning classes, though.

"The usual service learning course has a client – a nonprofit organization or company the students can interview to find out what they need," Newsam explained. "Our client is the campus and the community."

The team has collaborated with the student-run Radio Club to produce two successful radio events. Most recently, they broadcast on Bobcat Day using a low-power transmitter that made music and interview programming available all over campus.

"The students seemed pretty excited that we could get the transmitter to do that," Newsam said, adding that his class did all the work to connect their computers with the

transmitter and with the roving reporter who walked around talking to different Bobcat Day exhibitors. The day's programming was simultaneously broadcast online.

"Each time we do an event, we seem to get better," he said.

They're also incorporating information they've gathered from other campus radio organizations. Last semester, they visited the campus radio station at UC Davis, and they still hope to make a trip to Berkeley to learn how radio operates there.

When the students present their end-of-semester results, they'll be able to share recordings of Bobcat Day programming as well as the progress they've made on their long-term planning, providing good evidence that UC Merced radio is indeed on its way.

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