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## Tracking Hannibal with Imagination Instead of Images: Podcasting Satellite Maps to a True Audience

Like so many others, Stanford University has been experimenting with podcasting of individual lectures, series and entire courses in the past few years. An initial public lecture and subsequent course on Hannibal were selected for trial run last year and the results were encouraging. The first trial podcast lecture in this Hannibal series was “How Hannibal Crossed the Alps.” The rationales were as follows.

First of all, it was decided the podcasting topic should be aimed for popular draw and the podcasting demand response should be gauged against such a test control. If the simultaneous public lecture drew well but podcast demands were low, then the experiment would likely be unsuccessful. The public lecture drew 500+ in attendance from within the Stanford community and the well-educated local community as well.

Second, it was necessary to not only provide the usual literature review and assume some prior audience familiarity, but to especially engage the live audience and the future podcast audience with as many new but clear methodolgies and unique approaches as possible in order to enliven the intellectual atmosphere with fresh ideas. In this case advances in geomorphology and paleoclimatology were part of the lecture. Where speculative hypotheses were raised, reasonable probabilities for abandonment needed to also be raised and addressed. In short, innovation must not only be in the medium but also in the content.

Third, while the public lecture used images, it was important that images never drive the lecture, as this could too easily undermine the auditory nature of the podcast where potential future listeners could not see the referent photos, maps, etc. If source text passages from Polybius or Livy, for example, were to be on screen for viewers, they would also need to be read aloud for the solely listening audience. It was critical that the lecturer always keep in mind the rule to describe with words: if a needed Alpine vista photos showed snowlines across rocky landscapes, it was critical to verbally describe the same detail as closely as possible. In some ways, requisites of 1940's radio broadcasting before the advent of television were very much applicable to an audio podcast.

In summary, the experimental control of popular live attendance was gauged in a few months against the podcast demand on iTunes University. There was synch: the demand on the iTunes University format has been subsequently very high. International podcast reviews of the public lecture have been favorable and the podcast demand for “How Hannibal Crossed the Alps” has surprisingly remained in the top tier (ranked 1-10) for over six months. It is our belief, however, that the topic of Hannibal is what drew an audience in the first place, but our consensus that podcasting is a viable future “free” medium has only been greatly reinforced. The enhanced ability to reach an exponentially broader audience at any moment chosen by the individual has yet to be maximized.

**URL:**

**<http://deimos3.apple.com/WebObjects/Core.woa/Feed/itunes.stanford.edu.1374259372.01374259374>**