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For Release with Photo

A professor at West Virginia Northern Community College has appeared before students and faculty of a college in India to share her expertise with instructional podcasting, an option which Indian educators are just beginning to explore.

Dr. Purnima V. "Pam" Sharma, professor of physics/mathematics at Northern, spoke before a group of nearly 250 students and faculty members at DAV College in Chandigarh, India.

Sharma helped to spearhead use of podcasting, a combination of the words iPod and broadcasting, at West Virginia Northern, which received funding to purchase the needed computer technology and to train faculty members in its usage. The technology makes it possible to design instructional material available in digital audio and video formats that can be downloaded to MP3 players, including the popular iPods. In addition to Sharma, Donald Poffenberger, professor of criminal justice at Northern, also is involved in podcasting.

Sharma received an invitation from the Department of Professional Studies at DAV College to speak at the institution during her visit to India earlier this year.

"The faculty members were impressed with how we are using the podcasting technology in an education environment in our country," Sharma said. She added that many of them wanted to know detailed information on how iPods can help students with disabilities, something with which Sharma is particularly familiar since she has been teaching online courses for the last 10 years.

According to Sharma, "Accessibility of instructional material in both audio and video formats, the portability and repetitive capabilities of iPods and MP3 players, not only addresses the needs of students with physical disabilities but also helps students with different learning styles, learning capabilities and learning abilities."

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Sharma said her presentation in India lasted for nearly 90 minutes. During her presentation she fielded faculty questions on the use of new technology in distance/ Web-based education. In addition, the faculty questions revolved around online teaching such as "how do you maintain interaction with students; how do you get/provide feedback." She said they also wondered about the time commitment in developing podcasts as well as copyright issues.

Her presentation was covered by Indian media. An article in the newspaper, The Hindustan Times, reported, "It's time for Indian universities to wake up or they will lose their distance learning and online students to universities abroad." The article quoted Sharma as agreeing "that in India the distance education is still seen below the classroom education but she says things are changing fast and it's time that Indian universities should change designing of their programs to make it acceptable by the end users."

The article in another newspaper, The Chandigarh Tribune, said Sharma "explained that podcasting... provides an inexpensive mechanism to level the playing field for all kinds of students."

In explaining the new technology in India, Sharma said she discussed the learning environment; that the technology brings a change from being test based to being application based. "The learning part for the students becomes something they take with them," she told her counterparts in India.

Sharma concluded, "We are fortunate that WVNCC is poised to provide world-class technology-based distance education courses that even some of the larger universities in the country are just now beginning to explore."

Nameline for pix of woman holding plaque:

Dr. Purnima V. 'Pam' Sharma