

Linking professors with their students: LectureTools acquired by Echo360

November 8 2012

A University of Michigan startup company that bridges the gap between students and professors with technology was acquired today by Echo360.

LectureTools is a web-based student response, note-taking and inquiry system that turns cell phones, [iPads](#) and laptops into learning aids, allowing [students](#) in large lecture settings to more effectively interact with professors.

Echo360 is a Dulles, Va.-based [education technology](#) company specializes in [active learning](#) tools. Financial terms of the deal were not disclosed.

"Echo360 selected LectureTools because it embodies how outstanding innovation can address an urgent teaching need, measurably improve the learning experience, and do so through a smart and efficient technology solution," said Fred Singer, CEO of Echo360.

Perry Samson, the Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of Atmospheric, Oceanic and Space Sciences and the developer of LectureTools, said the deal means the Ann Arbor-based company would play a significant role designing an active [learning platform](#).

"As part of this deal, the LectureTools group will expand significantly in Ann Arbor with a focus on integrating the multiple tools that research says can help improve student participation and engagement," Samson said.

Samson will continue teaching at U-M while serving as Head of Education Innovation at Echo 360.

"This is a huge opportunity for Ann Arbor to play a significant role in the delivery of online courses and to improve the environment for face-to-face courses," Samson said. "By joining Echo360, we can deliver the benefits of LectureTools technology to more than 500 universities around the globe quickly and easily."

Samson and a group of former students cofounded the Weather Underground, which sold in the summer to the [Weather Channel](#). LectureTools also sprouted with a dedicated group of recently graduated U-M students including Jason Aubrey, Bret Squire and Sharanyan Ravi. Aubrey, cofounder of LectureTools, joins Echo360 as a product manager.

"It is a testament to the quality of students at the University of Michigan that these businesses have flourished," he said.

Samson said the deal could give LectureTools broader reach for in-class activities, with tools for use outside class. Notes taken either in class or during the playback of a podcast, for example, will be synchronized. And work in or out of class will be tied to the students' textbooks or files that the instructor uploads.

Through the LectureTools technology, students can rate their comprehension slide by slide and the instructor can see the feedback in real time. They also can ask questions that teaching assistants can answer online as the lecture continues. Answered questions become anonymously visible to the entire class, and they're saved into an archive of student inquiry. Students can type notes right in the system, alongside the instructor's slides. And they can bookmark certain slides for later review.

Together, these features create a central place for students to access all of their study materials, which can help them stay organized and engaged, developers say.

To get off the ground, LectureTools received support from both the National Science Foundation and the U-M and utilized resources from U-M's TechArb business incubator and worked extensively with U-M Tech Transfer's Venture Center.

"We're pleased for LectureTools, one of our 2012 classes of U-M startups that was nurtured by both our Venture Center and the TechArb student accelerator," said Ken Nisbet, executive director of U-M Tech Transfer. "We've already been in conversation with Echo360 about ways the University could assist to further their growth potential in Ann Arbor."

Provided by University of Michigan

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