

The Education Connection: French-Canadian Universities Share Courses Through Videoconferencing

About the National Network for French University Teaching

The National Network for French University Teaching (RNEUF) is a network founded by Universities outside the province of Quebec that teach in French (RUFHQ). The RNEUF is an interactive video, audio and data network to facilitate the sharing of courses taught in French. With this network, the RNEUF connects universities, colleges and schools throughout Canada, providing courses in French to students outside of Quebec. In addition to the universities, most French elementary and secondary schools in Canada, as well as some provinces' French community centers, use the network for educational and administrative purposes.

The Challenge

Language Barrier Imposes Educational Problems

Many Francophones, individuals belonging to a population using French as its first language, reside within the province of Quebec. Outside of Quebec, the Francophone population is dispersed in cities and towns throughout the remainder of Canada. Since the population is scattered throughout the country, many universities and schools have only a small number of French speaking students. As a result, many educational institutions have been unable to offer these students a competitive curriculum since many courses were not available in French.

“In order to give Francophone students a complete and thorough education, it was necessary that schools and universities share their classes,” explained Don

McDonnell, project manager for the University of Ottawa. “For example, one school had several students who needed to take a math course, but had no French speaking math teacher. We needed to find an effective and reliable way to meet the basic education requirements for these students. The goal was to create a high-quality learning environment for the students by adding asynchronous video, audio and data to enhance synchronous Web courses.”

The Solution

TANDBERG Connects Educational Institutions Across Canada Through Videoconferencing

After evaluating several distance learning technologies, the RNEUF chose videoconferencing, due to the technology’s interactive nature. In addition, since the network would encompass a vast number of schools and universities, many with little or no technical support, it was imperative that the solution be easy to use and highly reliable. Heritage Canada, the federal government department financing the distance education project, gave RNEUF member, the University of Ottawa, the responsibility for evaluating, purchasing and installing the videoconferencing systems.

“The University of Ottawa worked closely with the local schools and universities evaluating systems to find the one that best met their requirements. Since videoconferencing would be used to teach small groups of five to six students at each site, we began to focus on set top systems,” said McDonnell. “After a rigorous evaluation, we chose the TANDBERG 800, as it contains the best functionality compared with any other set top system in the market.”

Since the first installation in 1999, the University of Ottawa has installed TANDBERG systems in 91 locations. The network now connects many universities, secondary and elementary schools in Canada, and facilitates dozens of classes each day. RNEUF members have seen immediate and

significant benefits from the use of distance learning. For example, students that previously could not meet their educational requirements at schools and universities are now offered an array of courses to choose from via videoconferencing. Also, since courses are now offered in French, Francophones have access to a variety of credited classes at a number of universities across the country.

“The network has really provided Canada with the opportunity to educate more people than ever before,” explained McDonell. “Of course, there is also the cost-saving benefit of sharing courses among schools, but that was just an added bonus. It was more a question of dire need - there really was no other way to get these classes to students.”

Future Plans

Due to the benefits Canadian schools have seen from TANDBERG's videoconferencing solutions, the University of Ottawa has received requests to install TANDBERG systems in an additional 12 to 15 sites. This implementation is expected to be completed by the end of 2002.

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