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VIDEOCONFERENCING AT NORTHWESTERN

Classroom discussions between instructors and students hundreds of miles apart, international research collaborations, and cross-country job interviews are among the dozens of ways videoconferencing is being used at Northwestern.

An average of 25 videoconferences take place each week at Northwestern, and demand for the service continues to increase, according to Gretchen Guo, videoconference service coordinator for Northwestern University Information Technology (NUIT). “We hosted over 100 videoconferences between September 1 and October 1, and fall quarter didn’t begin until September 21,” Guo said.

NUIT manages videoconferencing rooms at the Technological Institute, University Library (Forum Room and 2East Sony Lab) and Pancoe Auditorium on the Evanston campus, and at Wieboldt Hall in Chicago. Many University departments have their own videoconference sites, and desktop videoconferencing is becoming more widespread.

Videoconferencing allows Northwestern to co-conduct classes with other universities around the country, such as last year’s graduate-level class on Blast Design co-conducted with the New Mexico Institute of Technology. NU students have videoconferenced with classmates from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The technology enables international coursework and research collaboration, such as a graduate-level School of Communications course which connects students here and in Japan.

Faculty have used videoconferencing to collaborate on research projects with international colleagues. Videoconferencing has also been used to bring a variety of speakers, from business executives to Hollywood screenwriters, to the classroom. Cross-cultural video events are becoming more commonplace; Guo cited a recent French Education TV Conference with 12 universities in the U.S. and France and a conference on relations between the U.S. and Muslim World held via videoconferencing with Indonesia.
Last January, NU Professor Emeritus Irwin Weil (Weinberg College of Arts & Sciences) participated in a “very successful” videoconference with the Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow which involved faculty from eight U.S. universities. “I thought the video set-up was going to be unnatural. Instead, it was as if we were in the same room,” Weil said. The event was tied into the recent opening of the American Center at the Russian State University for the Humanities.

Other examples of recent teaching and research activities utilizing videoconferencing:

- The Chicago Microtechnology and Nanotechnology Community conference was conducted simultaneously in Evanston, Chicago and Tel Aviv.
- Students from the Institute of Quranic Studies in Jakarta, Indonesia conducted a joint workshop on U.S.-Muslim relations with Northwestern.
- A team from NU’s Feinberg School of Medicine collaborated with a medical research team at the University of Turku (Finland) and three biomedical companies in Europe.

The 2EAST New Technology Series for this fall includes a presentation on videoconferencing services from noon to 12:45 p.m. December 7 in the University Library Forum Room. Faculty can register at 2east.northwestern.edu.

More information about videoconferencing services at Northwestern is available from the NUIT Web site at www.it.northwestern.edu/videoconferencing. Questions can be directed to VidConference@listserv.it.northwestern.edu.