

# Can you hear me now?

## TECHNOLOGY KEEPS LINES OF COMMUNICATION OPEN BETWEEN CAMPUSES AND AROUND THE GLOBE

It used to be a 55-minute flight or a five-hour drive between Kelowna and Vancouver campuses when UBC faculty and staff needed face time to discuss issues and projects. Time consuming, expensive, and a definite toll on the environment, that campus-to-campus commute model has now changed for the better.

Technology has made staying in touch as easy as flipping a switch. And UBC has embraced several innovative video communications tools, not just to save travel time, but to help lessen the carbon footprint made by air and highway treks.

Todd Zimmerman, Senior Manager of Media and Classroom Services for information technology at UBC's Okanagan campus, says there are several options from vendors like LifeSize, Cisco, Vidy, and Blue Jeans that make it possible to virtually link people anywhere in the world.

"We can now connect people quite easily. No matter what type of remote site they are working from, we can link just about anybody at any time."

In the past, it was often difficult to integrate different communications systems. However, that has changed, says Zimmerman.

"Given the cost of investing in these technologies we were often forced to have all participants use a single system," he says. "Now we have options that allow each participant to join in with the technology that best matches their environment."

This means high-definition cameras and multiple displays may be active at one site while another uses a single display or even simple audio, and all from different manufacturers.

So when UBC's fourth-year nursing students head off to Zambia or Ghana each spring, they can connect with faculty at the Okanagan campus via Skype, Google Talk, Vidy, or other software on their hand-held devices even from remote villages.

"Thanks to investments by UBC and technology partner WestGrid, we have both the technology and the highly qualified personnel available to help determine the best solution," says Zimmerman.

Advances in synchronous technology have also made the delivery of UBC's Southern Medical program (SMP) possible.

UBC has been able to increase enrolment in the province's only medical school by using a "distributed education" model—where students in Kelowna, Prince George, Vancouver, and Victoria, participate in interactive, simultaneous lectures, explains Anthony Knezevic, UBC's Senior Manager for Collaboration Technology.

The SMP admits 32 new students each year as part of the overall distributed doctor of medicine class of 288. The students learn in custom-built lecture theatres in the Reichwald Health Sciences Centre and videoconferencing technology is used throughout their four years in the undergraduate program.

"Videoconferencing has certainly differentiated our medical program," Knezevic says. "We continue to rank among the top medical programs in Canada, and with the ability for students to attend and learn in different ways, enrolment has increased."

Videoconferencing in education is the new norm and Zimmerman notes that many UBC employees have tapped into the technology in non-curriculum usage, such as independent lectures, defence of a thesis, peer conferences, and research projects. On the Okanagan campus there are 35 rooms equipped with video conferencing equipment.

Zimmerman suggests the way of the future is already here.

"The technology is very well accepted at UBC," he says. "We have a young faculty and administration group, and they recognize this is the way to communicate while at the same time it's a great saving of time and money." ●



Media and Classroom Services Senior Manager Todd Zimmerman