

Education's Global Reach

Russ Colbert

The University of Notre Dame, in South Bend, Indiana, has for 2 decades offered Executive MBAs and other graduate programs through its Executive Education program. But 8 years ago, with the local graduate market in decline, the university knew it had to diversify its offerings to turn around that trend.

It did so in large part through distance learning and now has a potential student reach of up to 3,000,000 people worldwide. Students hail from cities across the United States—from Toledo to Nashville, New York to Green Bay—and from countries world-

wide, including Haiti, Costa Rica, Mexico, The Dominican Republic, Guatemala, The United Kingdom, China, and Chile.

Key to the program's success was its decision 8 years ago to utilize sophisticated yet easy-to-use two-way video conferencing technology, enabling real-time interaction of students and professors from all over the globe. Notre Dame chose video conferencing products from Polycom to meet those needs and make these two-way video classes possible. Program heads also found in Polycom a solution that would not distract from teaching and would give students a valuable learning experience.

"The expectations of Polycom's products have so far exceeded our goals that we have stopped paying attention to the ROI figures and shifted to quality measurements," says Bill Brewster, director of Internal Programs and Executive Education. "Polycom has 100 percent up time and has provided everything we required in terms of ease of use, equipment quality, routine maintenance, and quick turnaround."

Notre Dame administrators credit Polycom for its contribution to their program's success. "Polycom's systems have played an integral role in expanding our Executive MBA program and enabled us to offer a meaningful and seamless education experience to a broader audience of adult students," says

Leo Burke, associate dean and director of Executive Education at Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business.

TECHNOLOGY THAT WORKS

Specifically, Notre Dame selected Polycom's ClassStation™ solutions, which are designed for teachers, by teachers, for use within any environment and any application, including remote classrooms. Polycom's two-way video conferencing technology enables Notre Dame to expand the classroom across the world, achieving more educational equity and diversifying its program.

Students and faculty interact through the technology, and faculty have used Polycom to bring guest speakers and industry leaders from around the world into their classrooms to compliment their courses, greatly enhancing the educational opportunities for students.

Notre Dame has also spread the use of the two-way video conferencing technology beyond the classroom, extending its beneficial reach into other areas of university life. For example, at the beginning of every school year, the CEO of one of Notre Dame's corporate clients presents the annual welcome address for students, discussing issues companies face and challenges executives are up against. One year he could not make the trip to South



Russ Colbert, Sales Manager and Distributor, Polycom, Inc. and University of Notre Dame's Executive Education Program.
E-mail: Russ.Colbert@polycom.com

Bend because of weather constraints. From his home office, Notre Dame used Polycom to connect him via video for the presentation and question-and-answer session. Ever since, videoconferencing has been his preferred method of delivery for this special presentation; it saves time and travel expenses and highlights the effective use of technology for which Notre Dame's Executive Education program has become known.

Far more typical of the use of Polycom, however, is the day-to-day student and faculty interaction. Students are able to attend class from a variety of locations based on their business needs. These students have the ability to interact not only with the faculty member during live classes but also with students at

other locations in the system. These personal interactions create the impression of physical proximity when great geographical distances are reality. These interactions are lively and beneficial to all in bringing not only varying industry perspectives to the table but also varying geographical and cultural differences as well.

LOOKING AHEAD

Notre Dame's Executive MBA program leaders are committed to providing students and staff with only high-quality, seamless technology. Because of their confidence in Polycom, they are expanding the use of video conferencing technology globally while also extending the pro-

gram further in the nondegree arena by beginning to offer a variety of industry certificates.

As schools and universities embarking on similar tasks, Notre Dame administrators recommend a strong focus on ensuring that students and teachers are comfortable and that the technology effectively makes both feel like they are in a classroom—even if they are a continent away.

"Institutions looking to move into two-way video conferencing really need to hire someone with experience to integrate and choose quality vendors," Brewster says. "With a quality vendor and the extra effort, it has really made a difference."



Figure 1. Polycom two-way videoconferencing technology in a University of Notre Dame classroom.