University Enhances Education with Collaboration Technology

George Mason University installs Cisco video solution to improve student, faculty, and staff engagement around the world.

Executive Summary

George Mason University

- **Industry:** Higher Education
- **Location:** Fairfax, Virginia
- **Number of Students:** Total enrollment is roughly 32,960

CHALLENGE

- Connect students, staff, and administrators internationally in real time
- Enhance university recruitment process and outcomes
- Bring in guest lecturers and industry talent to educational programs

SOLUTION

- Offered new solutions for technology team
- Enabled mobile learning and remote connectivity for students, faculty and staff
- Expanded academic and information technology resources

RESULTS

- Doubled educational and administrative meetings in less than one year
- Conducted nearly 200 recruitment interviews in less than one year
- Helped enable teleworking for faculty, staff, and administrators

Challenge

Education at George Mason University (Mason) in Fairfax, Virginia extends far beyond the university's campus. Mason's Office of International Programs (OIP) connects local students with countless learners around the globe to expand the reach of the university's offerings. In addition, Mason incorporates international guest speakers into several of the university's courses. Mason also has students who are government employees and deployed military with busy schedules and work-life conflicts. As it continues to grow, Mason places a priority on recruitment, looking to place top minds in well-targeted roles.

Together, these varied activities enrich Mason's offerings and make the university a truly international institution. To connect learners globally, work with varying students' schedules, and bring in talent to teach at the university, Mason needed a more interactive and nimble video and voice solution. As the demand for interviews and international course requirements increased, Mason also required more flexibility from its video and voice solutions, and its priority quickly became to improve collaboration and communication.

The university's Collaborative Video Technologies (CVT) team reviewed several desktop solutions for its Mac and PC operating systems, and while the school found acceptable options, none were flexible enough for Mason's international footprint. The university needed a video solution that could integrate with its existing architecture and work with other conference solutions deployed over the past few years.

To find the right solution for connecting its students, faculty, and staff, the university knew a video solution required not only logistical benefits, but also the capacity to provide innovations in coursework. Today, students learn and interact in a new way, and Mason did not want them to have to attend class in a traditional way. With this in mind, the CVT team looked for technology that it could leverage to prepare for next-generation learners and parallel a modern-day working environment.

Solution

In 2008, Mason's CVT team began the process of upgrading the school to a high-definition (HD) infrastructure. Converting to HD gave Mason an opportunity to re-evaluate other technology partnerships and vendors, since moving from standard to HD required updating a tremendous amount of equipment. This re-evaluation helped Mason broaden the solution review process, and more specifically determine what vendor might supply the right solution.

"We had to be playful and experimental in evaluating presence options," says Casey Campbell, Collaborative Video Technologies engineer at Mason. "As we progressed with interoperability on campus, we knew we needed a solution that could provide video quickly and easily from pretty much any location and on a range of devices."

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Casey Campbell, Collaborative Video Technologies Engineer, George Mason University

Campbell and the CVT team found that Cisco Jabber™, an interactive tool for presence, instant messaging (IM), voice, video, voice messaging, desktop sharing, and conferencing, offered the best video functionality to meet Mason's diverse needs. The ease of use coupled with the competitive price point lead the CVT team to integrate Cisco® Jabber into Mason's technical environment. Once Campbell saw how easily the solution integrated with the existing technology platforms, the usage of Cisco Jabber grew steadily.

"Initially, Mason purchased 25 Movi licenses to test the range and reach of Cisco Jabber," says Campbell. "We were thrilled with how many different devices we could get to talk to each other, and that we had uncovered such a big need we didn't know existed." After the technology was demonstrated at open houses, the growth of Cisco Jabber across Mason's campuses continued organically. As word of the tool spread, and more students became aware of its availability, the demand for Cisco Jabber increased.

"Many times faculty come into the ITU department and don't know what technology they need," says Campbell. "Now, when we explain what Cisco Jabber offers for meetings or classes, it exceeds our staff's expectations, and they are amazed at what we can put together for them."

Results

With the usage of Cisco Jabber, Mason has doubled the amount of administrative and educational meetings on its global campus in less than one year. "People are more in tune with video than ever; we have three campuses, and they are all experiencing the same growth statistics," says Campbell. "It's a combination of promotion, ease of use, and the power of collaboration. The usage is increasing as a coordination tool, and our class adoption has also increased."

Several courses on and off Mason's Fairfax campus are enhanced by the usage of Cisco Jabber. "We have a Virginia Department of Transportation graduate program that we teach outside Richmond," says Campbell. "This program has been around for a while, and now, we're using videoconferencing to connect with students in Montana. If students in Richmond are snowed in, they can still power-in with Cisco Jabber."

Many adjunct faculty, including diplomats and government employees, work full days before or after their classes. With Cisco Jabber, travel for these instructors is no longer an issue. Teaching remotely helps ensure that students don't miss a class and that these instructors are not prohibited by work conflicts. Many Mason staff members live in other states across the country. By teleworking, these employees can attend weekly meetings, staff gatherings, and one-on-one sessions quickly and easily.

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Product List

VIDEO

- Cisco Jabber

For Mason's OIP, Cisco Jabber has increased the scope of several courses. Many departments bring in international guest speakers who possess an expertise in their field. "Mason's OIP is engaging in a lot of programs with Russia and China now," says Campbell. "One of the largest benefits for faculty and administrators is that when they travel abroad, they can include our deans and provosts and have full participation in high-level meetings, which allows us to be more aggressive with promoting our programs internationally."

"The largest usage of Cisco Jabber, in terms of hours, user accounts, and support, is in the interview environment," says Campbell. Mason uses its new collaboration tool to recruit and interview candidates around the world, because it is able to search more broadly and reach a larger and better suited group of candidates by connecting remotely. "Without Cisco Jabber, we would have to have our first-round interviews held locally because of travel costs," says Campbell. "Over the last year, we've conducted nearly 200 candidate interviews over Cisco Jabber; one week we held as many as 35 interviews."

Next Steps

"Our next goal with Cisco Jabber is to triple our current usage in the next year," says Campbell. Last fall, Mason purchased an additional 150 Jabber licenses to increase the usage of the collaborative tool. "We continue to look at integrations and how we can improve upon interoperability with Cisco Jabber," says Campbell. "We won't stop testing and pushing the boundaries of where this technology can take us."

For More Information

To find out more about Cisco Jabber, go to: http://www.cisco.com/go/jabber.