Southern Utah University School of Continuing and Professional Studies

Rural university reaches beyond campus borders by integrating Adobe Acrobat Connect™ Professional into distance learning programs—meeting growing demand for education

Providing wide area educational resources
Students of all ages are fueling the growth for flexible learning alternatives—from employed professionals juggling work and family, to recent high school graduates. In Utah alone the influx of entering college students is projected at more than 150,000 beyond the current system enrollment. Arizona and Nevada—rapid-growth states bordering Utah—are already struggling to keep up with the demand for education.

Southern Utah University (SUU) is a comprehensive regional institution offering degree programs at the graduate and undergraduate levels as well as associate degree and applied technology programs. Located in Cedar City, Utah and contiguous to counties in Nevada and Arizona, the university serves 7,500 students with 232 faculty.

Recognizing that eLearning solutions are key success strategies for future growth and services, SUU’s School of Continuing and Professional Studies (SCPS) leadership needed to find a compelling and cost-effective way to deliver web-based classes in a virtual-campus context—the most viable way to increase student enrollment and tap new sources of revenue. The organization looked to its continuing education division to find a solution.

After eliminating other products that would not integrate smoothly or cost effectively with its existing broadcast learning infrastructure, SUU adopted Adobe Acrobat Connect Professional as part of its de facto distance education platform. “Acrobat Connect Professional carries us across state borders,” says Carl O. Ellis, dean of SCPS. “It enabled us to transform educational concepts of the future into current reality to meet the demands of a growing global market.”

Having started with a mere 140 students enrolled in early courses delivered via Acrobat Connect Professional, nearly 2,000 students in one graduate program alone are taking the opportunity to learn online. The multimedia aspects of web-based courses are contributing to student attention retention, increasing student success rates, and generally enhancing the learning environment, according to Ean J. Harker. “We want to gather students, not lose them,” says Harker, senior instructional technologist at SUU. “With Acrobat Connect Professional we can promote the concept of: Why go to college when SUU can come to you?”

Prior to adopting Acrobat Connect Professional, SCPS relied exclusively on Utah Education Network (UEN), the state’s interactive TV network, to transmit synchronous distance learning programs. UEN required a minimum of 15 students to justify the cost of activating a receiving site. Unlike the closed circuit broadcast TV system, the conferencing capabilities of Acrobat Connect Professional use the Internet for distribution. With nearly 98 percent of all internet-connected computers already having Adobe Flash Player installed, learners do not have to download applications or purchase additional software to access learning experiences being deployed via Acrobat Connect Professional.
Flexible deployment models

Based on the multiple ways in which users can interact in the media rich, real-time, Acrobat Connect Professional environment, SUU is building collaboration components into several of its blended and online learning programs. These include audio conferencing, video conferencing, file sharing, white boarding, and chat. Sessions can be recorded and archived at the instructor’s request and become available as searchable assets.

Using Adobe Presenter in combination with Acrobat Connect Professional, non-technical content experts can add audio narrations, animation features, and Flash animations to Microsoft PowerPoint presentations—easily producing multimedia programs that can be saved and exchanged as Flash files. Instructors produce Shareable Content Object Reference Model (SCORM) conformant content files called learning objects that interoperate seamlessly with a SCORM conformant learning management system (LMS). Results of student quizzes completed in Acrobat Connect Professional can also be exchanged with a SCORM conforming LMS.

Spanning educational gaps

SUU deployed a distributed Masters degree in Education program that uses Acrobat Connect Professional as part of the development and delivery platform. As SUU positions itself to bridge the education gap in neighboring communities, it is also actively responding to opportunities that bridge the diversity gap internationally. SUU is aggressively recruiting students from other nations as well as other regions in the United States while promoting faculty exchanges and study-abroad programs, forging partnerships with universities across the nation and across the world, and training its international partners to use technology.

Enhancing curriculum with Adobe software

In addition to using Acrobat Connect Professional in the continuing education division, faculty, students, and staff are leveraging the integrated power of many other Adobe software products, on and off campus, for desktop publishing, document management and sharing, photo editing, video, and more.

SCPS Instructional Designers use Adobe Illustrator CS2 to create vector graphics in support of curriculum for teachers and Adobe InDesign CS2 to produce registration and other forms for administrators. Additionally, instructional technology staff use Adobe Captivate, Adobe Presenter, and InDesign CS2 to create step-by-step tutorials, virtual workshops, DIY/printable support materials, and other learning objects.

Class notes, handouts, and resource materials are created using everyday desktop applications, converted to universal formats including Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF) files or, using Adobe FlashPaper, converted to Adobe Flash (SWF) files, and linked to curriculum. Images are optimized for web deployment or illustrated using Adobe Photoshop CS2 or Adobe Illustrator.

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CS2 software. “Adobe Dreamweaver is the backbone for us, from building the basic HTML document for an online course to the more complex organization of our online technical support materials,” says Harker. In terms of using video in course presentations processed by Adobe Presenter, Harker says that incorporating Flash video is taking a front seat in making subject matter more compelling.

Overall, the outcomes of using Acrobat Connect Professional, Adobe Presenter, and other Adobe products have greatly advanced the mission of SUU. Dramatic increases in student enrollment, a broader appeal to a wider range of learning types, dynamic, interactive course content, and wide area availability have helped SUU emerge as a leading innovator in distance learning in the western United States.

For More Information
www.adobe.com/products/acrobatconnectpro/