

The Challenge and Situation

Located in Barrie, Ontario, Canada, Georgian College is a mid-sized community college that serves approximately 25,000 full-time and part-time students. The demographic make-up of the student body is ever changing. As the average age of a student rises and more students are employed as a result, the students have new and pressing educational needs.

Students of Georgian College were demanding a more interactive way to achieve course credit — 66% of the students own personal computers, more than half have experience using the Internet and corresponding via e-mail, and 30% indicate a preference for taking a course over the Internet. Students frequently mentioned their difficulty reaching their professors. Additionally, the administration needed a resource to offer a variety of options for completing mandatory coursework each semester to suit all degree plans.



The Solution

FirstClass Intranet Server (FCIS) was the tool used to eliminate problems.

Using FirstClass Intranet Server, the college delivers online courses where students can access classes from anywhere at any time. FCIS lets students and teachers communicate, and students can now reach professors more easily. Features offered with FCIS such as message history, searching capabilities, message threading, ease of file attachments, option to unsend a message, privilege groups, individual permission, ease of administration, and student published Home Pages, combine to improve the teaching and learning at Georgian College.

"FirstClass has been our 'classroom' for the last three years. Every morning, we login with our students and do our work. At day's end, we logout and go home with no worries about the system. It's that simple," said Professor Kathryn Cook, M.Ed., and Professor Trevor Davies, M.Ed. at Georgian College. "The application is rock solid and the ease of administration makes it possible for teachers to control the online learning environment without involving network administrators, or monopolizing the time of help desk staff."

Cook and Davies started with one online course 1995. Today, teachers take an active role in administering more than 20 courses on the FirstClass network. The FirstClass client is used for online classes and by students to participate in online discussions.

Students use the Home Page folder to save and build on class assignments over the course of a semester. Students now publish their Home Page folder on the Web. The subject related conferences and sub-conferences feature of FirstClass makes it easy to structure online discussions, to keep the courses message base manageable and meaningful for more than 200 students.

The Results and Benefits

"To help our online students succeed without face-to-face interaction, we need a first-rate computer conferencing system — FirstClass. It's the interaction between students and teachers that makes our distance education courses work," said Cook. "There's so much hype these days about interactive web pages — Javascript, animations, forms, etc. — but in our experience as online teachers, the interactivity between students and teachers is central to the success of an online course. Person to person communication is 'real' interaction and what FirstClass is built to do."

Unlike videoconferencing or computer-managed learning that requires students to use on-campus computer labs, students can access and participate in class activities any time or any place using their personal computers. Campus research has shown that students believe teachers and peers are more accessible in computer conferencing courses than in traditional classroom settings. The human interaction between students and teachers using FirstClass makes distance education courses work. With FirstClass, students have improved their computer skills and the ability to learn a computer-mediated form of communication, both essentials in today's workplace.

The Georgian's FCIS system is teacher-directed, allows for student-moderated conferences and increased learner control. Students are now using the Home Page outside of their mandatory classwork.

Visit Georgian College online today at <http://online.georcoll.on.ca>