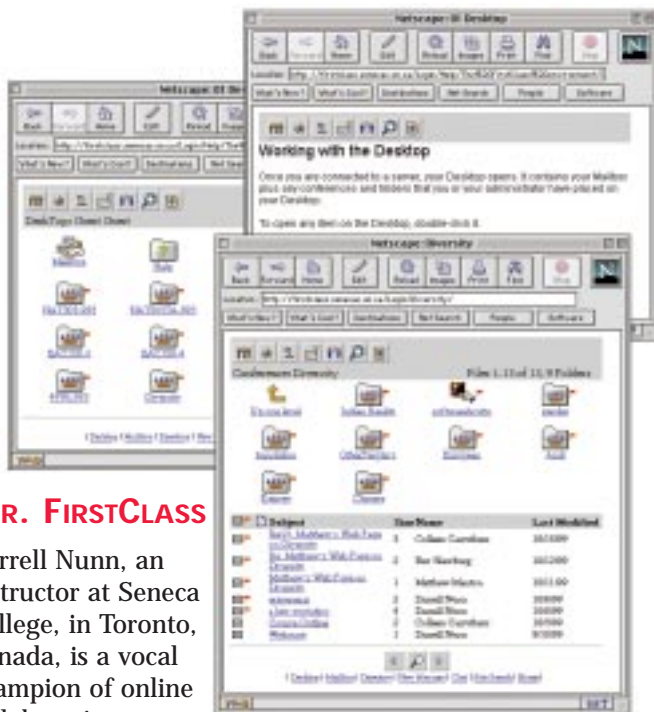


Educators Get Together in FirstClass Online Conferences



MR. FIRSTCLASS

Darrell Nunn, an instructor at Seneca College, in Toronto, Canada, is a vocal champion of online collaborative learning. He has taught more students and more diverse subjects using FirstClass Intranet Server — an integrated collaboration/communication groupware solution from MC² — than any of his colleagues at Canada's largest community college.

When Seneca launched a strategic plan to increase technological delivery to its 100,000 students on 5 campuses, Darrell leapt at the opportunity to take collaborative teaching online with FirstClass' asynchronous, conference-based shared learning tool. In April 1999, at the recommendation of Dr. Tony Tilly, Seneca's VP, Darrell received the Innovative Excellence award at the 10th annual international College Teaching, Learning and Technology conference in Jacksonville, Florida. "They don't call me Mr. FirstClass for nothing," he enthuses.

EDUCATING THE EDUCATORS

What's the best way to improve the quality of education? Educate the educators.

In today's world of rapidly changing educational needs, teachers have to continually update their knowledge, learn new curriculum design and development, and refine their delivery skills. In 1993, Professor Michael Kompf, of Brock University in St. Catherines, Ontario, Canada, recognized this need and initiated a program in Adult Education, in the faculty of Continuing Education.

The new venture partners Brock University with the Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology (CAATs) — most prominently with Seneca College — and with TVOntario (TVO), the province's educational television network. Led by Seneca's Centre for Teaching and Learning, the joint committee developed a Bachelor of Education in Adult Education (BEd in AE) Degree Program and a Certificate in Adult Education Program, designed around core courses in the foundations of adult learning, curriculum theory and design, and instructional strategies. Both the degree and the certificate are offered as distance education programs, presented at a community college location.

The initiative is primarily an outreach program for community college faculty and staff as well as for private industry trainers across the country. It also involves creative collaboration with TVO to develop a distance learning model using videos. The courses are designed by professors in the Faculty of Education at Brock University and delivered on 22 campuses across the province by on-site facilitators from Brock and community colleges. Print materials are used, along with TVO's videotapes, which feature expert guests as well as the zany talents of Toronto's Second City Comedy Troupe. Adult educators — many of whom work in business and industry — are enthusiastic about this new way of learning.

TAKING THE DISTANCE OUT OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

Darrell Nunn and Elizabeth Wright had taught the in-class version of the AE program at Seneca College and were ready to take it online. They lobbied for the use of FirstClass, and when Michael Kompf gave his full support, they developed and facilitated the online program.

"We felt that FirstClass was best suited to our needs because of its ease of use. Even people new to online learning find it easy to use," says Liz, who teaches part-time in Brock's Faculty of Continuing Education.

With its accessibility, scalability, user-friendliness and cost-effectiveness (due to easy downloading and offline capabilities), FirstClass has proven to be the ideal tool for the facilitation of collaborative learning.

Liz has been instrumental in launching the pre-pilot program in two of the AE foundation courses. Like many educators using FirstClass, Liz was thrilled to find that her curriculum was not overshadowed by time-consuming, costly technical challenges.

FirstClass® User Profile

Educators Get Together in FirstClass Online Conferences

Darrell has been using FirstClass not only in the AE program, but also for many years in his day courses in English and General Education at Seneca College. His entire course material — including exams and discussions via FirstClass' chat feature — is online. The conferences (public folders for building shared knowledge) constitute FirstClass' collaborative space. And that's where all the learning takes place!



Q & A

Where does Mr. FirstClass use FirstClass?

In the office, at home and at the cottage.

Where do his students use FirstClass?

In classrooms, in the Information Commons, at home and anywhere else they can connect to the Internet.

Do students like online courses?

They love them!

THE PROMISE OF SENECA@YORK

- a 270,000 sq. ft. Advanced Technology facility
- a joint venture between Seneca College and York University
- accommodates more than 3,000 students
- boasts a 21st century Learning Commons
- enables business partners to test and demo high-tech products
- architect: Raymond Moriyama



CONSTRUCTING KNOWLEDGE VIA CONFERENCES

When Darrell started using FirstClass, he didn't want to duplicate in-class methodology; instead, he wanted to explore the advantages online teaching had to offer. At first, he relied on a central administrator to build his conference structure. Then he took over and hasn't looked back since. He likes the lateral flexibility of FirstClass conferences and the fact that they encourage even shy students to go public. With FirstClass, students create online communities of learners by sharing resources, ideas and analyses. They research, publish and discuss online. Darrell acts as the facilitator, assessing and evaluating each student's contribution. Many of his students have told him that before going online they had never "spoken up" as much in class as they have in FirstClass conferences. Class participation has never been so rewarding.

CONTACTS

For more information on Seneca College, please visit www.senecac.on.ca

For more information on FirstClass-based online courses at Seneca and Brock, please contact:

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