

NEWS RELEASE

Wilfrid Laurier University



Contacts: Julia Ann Easley
WLU Information Officer
(519) 884-1970 ext. 2070

Cliff Bilyea
Director, Part-time Studies
and Continuing Education
(519) 884-1970 ext. 4103

April 5, 1991
017-1991

WLU to develop video conferencing system for distance education

white chalk on a blackboard and the mail-in correspondence course have come a long way. Now they're going to go even further....

Wilfrid Laurier University in Waterloo, a pioneer in video distance education, will introduce a conferencing system to allow distance education students to interact through video with other students and their professor.

The video conferencing system could be used in as many as three courses beginning this September.

The system for two-way interaction will enable the university to offer courses such as economics that need the support of visual communications and senior-level courses that require discussion of complex materials.

As a result of the system's implementation, WLU will introduce six new distance education courses over the next four years and complete course offerings to allow students to obtain a degree at a distance for the first time.

Cliff Bilyea, director of part-time studies and continuing education, said the system will advance the quality of Ontario's distance education and improve the student retention rate.

"The new video technology will provide greater flexibility for faculty-student interaction," he said. "A number of professors are eager to use it to enhance their current audio conferences."

The project is being supported by a \$147,000 grant included in the overall funding announced in February by the Ministry of Colleges and Universities.

The system would be capable of digitizing still video, slides, and documents, and then transmitting them by telephone to designated sites. It would also be able to transmit what a professor writes on an electronic board to another site and project it large enough to be read by students in a classroom there.

Laurier now draws its distance students together twice a term for audio conferences and provides the professor and each student with a microphone. Students are assigned to one of five sites within 100 kilometres: Waterloo, Brampton, Barrie, Collingwood, and Midland.

At the same sites, the university also offers other courses in which the weekly lectures are conducted by audio conference from any one of the sites.

Each year, more than 4,800 people pursue studies through part-time courses. Of those, 30 per cent take advantage of distance education courses offered through TVOntario, cable television, and videos for home viewing.

For 12 years, Laurier's Telecollege division has produced videos as an integral part of the courses offered through the university's distance education program. The production of 20 courses to date has involved more than 80 professors as hosts, members of an academic advisory committee, or interview subjects.

As well as the visual material used in the Telecollege courses, the university provides a resource binder with course notes, readings, reference materials, and assignments.

Laurier offers 32 credit courses through its distance education program.