



## The Star-Ledger

### With new technology, N.J. students reach peers abroad

Over 50 colleges linked to world videoconference network

Sunday, December 16, 2007

**BY ANA M. ALAYA**  
**Star-Ledger Staff**

On a recent morning, students at Rider University watched a 52-inch LCD television screen showing a college classroom in Cairo filling up with students dressed mostly in T-shirts and jeans, though several young women wore headscarves.

At the same time, the Egyptian students from the American University in Cairo could see and hear their American counterparts at Rider, kids wearing jeans and shirts with Greek fraternity letters.

Bringing together these students from two different continents and many backgrounds was a new high-tech videoconference technology gaining popularity at schools across New Jersey.

NJEDge.Net, a higher education nonprofit group, operates a fiber-optic network that connects more than 50 colleges and many public schools to Internet 2, an international super computer network that can blast data through cyberspace more than 100 times faster than commercial Internet.

"It brings the world into the classroom," said George Laskaris, executive director of NJEDge.Net, a consortium of the state-funded New Jersey (University and College) Presidents' Council. "We're connected 24 hours a day."

NJEDge.Net receives most of the roughly \$5 million it needs each year to operate the network through dues and fees from 53 colleges.

The "Global Village" class at Rider's Lawrenceville campus is an example of how the network allows students at New Jersey colleges and many K-12 schools to collaborate with others around the world.

At Rider, it was anthropologist and adjunct professor Roberta Fiske-Rusciano who had a vision of connecting her students to their peers around the globe after the United States invaded Iraq and Afghanistan.

"I was trying to teach a course called the social construction of global society," Fiske-Rusciano said, "and at that point it was extremely obvious to our students that America had lost any kind of popularity, the U.S. was under heavy criticism and less respected and students felt very isolated."

Using the NJEDge.Net network's videoconferencing tools, Fiske-Rusciano has linked her classes to students in Dresden, Germany; the West Bank, Beirut, Lebanon, and now Cairo. Her students exchange ideas about serious topics ranging from the roots of terrorism to how to lessen the gaps between rich and poor nations.

"I hope these students ... are transformed in some way," Fiske-Rusciano said. "It's another worldview that they are experiencing and that's very precious."

#### **OTHER USES**

The network isn't just a learning tool for undergraduate students, however.

At the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, David J. Foran, a professor of pathology

and radiology, uses the network to share software with researchers at other universities that allows them to control a robotic microscope over the Internet.

Recently, an organ transplant pathologist for the university used the technology to study an organ that was to be used for transplant surgery. It could potentially save pathologists valuable time during a transplant emergency if they can study the organ from their home.

Montclair State University uses the network to train faculty with instructors from Oregon. And Fairleigh Dickinson University is using it to provide videoconference classes at its new campus in Vancouver, Canada, as well as its campuses in Teaneck and Florham Park.

NJEDge.Net also links Internet 2 and college programs to public schools. Third-, fourth- and fifth-graders from about 100 schools have chatted via videoconference with Montclair University scientists doing research in a Panamanian rain forest on about everything from ants to medicinal plants.

Also, in Montclair, Mt. Hebron Middle School students got to speak with NASA scientists without leaving their classroom. Passaic Valley High School organized a 24-hour videoconference with links to Pakistan, India, Israel and the United Kingdom. They also partnered with the New Jersey Performing Arts Center for online cultural exchanges.

"Our goal is to change the way instruction is delivered in a digital world," said Maria Narciso, a Montclair Board of Education member who has worked with Montclair University and NJEDge.Net to bring more technology to the public schools.

Last month, NJEDge.Net announced it will collaborate with William Paterson and Rutgers universities, using a \$1 million grant, to create a statewide digital archive of streamed video for New Jersey's colleges, K-12 schools, libraries and cultural institutions.

The new portal will allow professors to videotape, store and share lectures, or use clips from movies, artwork or historical archives for their lessons.

"It's a new generation," Laskaris said. "We're seeing runaway success with YouTube and online education. Students are demanding video and music and we really need to do a better job of packaging instructional materials so that it's in a form that students want to see."

Carol Kondrach, associate vice president for information technologies at Rider University and chair of NJEDge.Net's advisory group, said most colleges would not be able to afford the same quality technology the network offers without NJEDge.Net, which negotiates wholesale rates for 53 colleges.

"I think that the power of NJEDge.Net has been realized by some folks who are early adopters of technology," Kondrach said. "It has also been embraced by faculty who have a vision or a keen interest in enabling connections between two parties, whether it's two societies, or two research entities."

Susie Campbell, 20, a Rider student from Fairfield, Conn. who is in her second Global Village class, said it is "probably the most important class," she'll take in her college career.

"As a global multinational studies major you get to understand another culture in a completely different way," Campbell said. "Rather than just something in a textbook, you get hands-on, face-to-face contact with a completely different culture that you wouldn't normally ever get."

*Ana M. Alaya may be reached at [aalaya@starledger.com](mailto:aalaya@starledger.com) or (973) 392-4258.*

© 2007 The Star Ledger

© 2007 NJ.com All Rights Reserved.