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UM launches classroom technology upgrades

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UM LAUNCHES CLASSROOM TECHNOLOGY UPGRADES

MISSOULA –

The University of Montana took the first steps of a seven-year plan to install high-tech teaching tools in nearly all of its 160 classrooms this summer.

A dozen classrooms were equipped with new presentation technology capabilities before the start of fall semester. Twenty-plus classrooms will be equipped during each of the next six years.

"We recognized that our classroom technology was not consistent with the kind of education we want to offer here at The University of Montana," said Royce Engstrom, UM provost and vice president for Academic Affairs. "Our faculty have been developing really effective technology skills, and we've encouraged that. Now we need to provide the classroom technology to put those skills to use."

Each high-tech classroom has a standard suite of equipment, including a networked computer, a Blu-ray Disc player, a document camera and other audio and video capabilities.

Randy Gottfried, manager of UM's Presentation Technology Services and project manager for the installations, said the standardization of equipment allows for more efficient training, monitoring and maintenance of the systems, and better usability by faculty.

"Professors can go from one classroom to another and know what's going to be there," Gottfried said. "Our goal was a system that doesn't impede teaching."

Sean O'Brien, who directs a new film studies option in UM's English department, is teaching courses in two of the newly equipped classrooms this fall. She is impressed with how user-friendly the technology is and appreciates the consistency in the two rooms she uses.

"With no training, I walked right in and figured it out," O'Brien said. "Last year I taught in three different classrooms with three different systems. It was really confusing."

Stephen Yoshimura, associate professor in communication studies, said the technology in the classrooms gives him multiple ways to present information and makes classroom time more efficient.

"Without technology, I would have to erase and rewrite concepts on a whiteboard," Yoshimura said. "With technology, I can assess students' knowledge about course content and quickly review previous slides and images."

Each classroom installation costs about $12,700 for equipment and labor. A team made up of individuals from Information Technology, the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Library and Administration and Finance worked to develop the plan to finance it with existing student fees.

Engstrom said, "In today's world, if we're not using state-of-the-art technology, we're not giving students the education they need, and we're not providing the faculty members the tools they need to teach.

"I'm just delighted that we were able to make this work without charging the students any new fees or significantly affecting anybody's budgets."

A Web site has been created to provide progress reports on the classroom technology project. The site is at http://www.umt.edu/classrooms.

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