

R·I·T

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RESORTS
CHOCOLATE WORLD

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The Campaign's final year



Associate Director of NTID's Center on Employment John Macko says using his videophone decreases the chance for misunderstanding.

Learning the hi-tech way

Classrooms at NTID are taking on a new look and faculty is giving rave reviews.

Each of the 10 updated rooms feature a new computer with access to the Internet, a videophone, video projection, DVD/VCR, updated visualizers, white boards spanning 24 feet (some with "smart-board" display, write and print capabilities), updated FM systems for assistive devices, speakers with surround sound, sound boards on the wall for acoustical balance, and a separate monitor for those with special visual needs.

"Previously, the student with visual needs would have to wait to receive large-text notes from the class," says Stephen Campbell, NTID's Technology Support Services director, who plans to update 12 more classrooms. "Now, the student can actively participate."

Sharron Webster, assistant professor in the math and science department at NTID, taught statistics for the first time in an updated room, and is thrilled about all the extra tools.

"Generally, most students enjoy the benefit of receiving information two ways: they see it and hear it, which emphasizes and reinforces the information," Webster explains. "But for students with hearing loss, providing information visually becomes an even more critical component for comprehension."

Some rooms feature "smart boards," which look like white boards, but, with a

push of a button, any text or image can be saved and printed for reference.

Sending overhead projectors straight to the land of obsolescence, the new visualizers provide incredible clarity at highly magnified levels.

Using the technology is easy, she says, but Webster admits she was a little intimidated at first.

"I'm the type of person who finds technology kind of overwhelming," she says. "There are three different remote controls, which was confusing at first, but the training made my apprehension disappear."

What if the technological novice gets stuck in the middle of a class?

A new help request system puts those worries to rest. Webster, who is deaf, uses the videophone to call the help desk. (Two years ago, NTID installed 500 videophones donated by Sprint in the dorms, apartments and offices for deaf and hard-of-hearing students, faculty and staff.) Professors can communicate via sign language or voice with the help desk.

On the job technology

John Macko, associate director of NTID's Center on Employment, regularly uses his videophone to talk with students, employers and colleagues.

As a hard-of-hearing person, he says technology improvements have definitely increased opportunities since he graduated from college in the early 1990s.

Shortly after he interviewed for a job

after graduation, Macko went camping with friends in Michigan. During that camping trip, the employer called at his parent's home in New Jersey to set up a second interview. Macko's father had to call friends in Michigan, who then drove to the campsite to give Macko the message.

Today, with two-way pagers, easy Internet access and increased capabilities, communication is instantaneous, making it possible for employment and social opportunities never before possible.

"Unlike e-mail or TTY's, videophones allow fast communication where you can read the other person's expressions," he says. "The risk of miscommunication or misunderstanding is greatly reduced. While I sit in my office, I'm having face-to-face communication with people in other offices, companies or states. Because of these technologies, hearing loss is not the barrier it used to be."

Center of Excellence

Because of its extensive experience and knowledge with deafness, technology, science and engineering, RIT is uniquely positioned to establish the Center on Access Technology in Deaf Education.

Leading that effort is James J. DeCaro, director of Postsecondary Education Network International and former NTID dean.

"We are establishing a collaborative research, development and implementation support network that will include RIT faculty, researchers from other universities, industries, professional organizations and access service providers," says DeCaro, who expects the center to be making major strides by mid-2006. "Many new technologies can be customized for deaf and hard-of-hearing people's needs. We'd like to work with business and industry to build accessibility features into the design, instead of doing retrofitting after the fact."

The ultimate goal, DeCaro explains, is enhanced access to classroom, laboratory and associated experiences, and unencumbered access to overall personal, social and co-curricular realms of the educational environment for people who are deaf or hard of hearing.

Stay tuned — or networked.

As technological innovations continue at breakneck speed, RIT's National Technical Institute for the Deaf will be there, breaking down whatever barriers remain.

Karen Black