

Niigata Seiryō and 12 Other Niigata Universities Use Videoconferencing System to Conduct Partnership Project

LifeSize Used for Niigata Intercollegiate Project Leveraging Video Communication to Surmount Geographical Hurdles

Organization

Niigata Seiryō University, Niigata, Japan

Niigata Seiryō University is a private Japanese university based in Niigata Prefecture that specializes in nursing and welfare fields and opened its doors to students in 2000. Its Faculty of Nursing, Social Welfare and Psychology is comprised of a Department of Nursing and Department of Social Welfare and Psychology, but in addition to the specialized education provided in each department, the university aims to cultivate an understanding of the need for integration between nursing, healthcare, welfare and psychology, and to provide its students with all-round practical capabilities.

Niigata Prefecture boasts 25 universities, junior colleges and colleges of technology, and while these institutions of higher education differ in their size, location and educational content, they all need to take steps to attract sufficient students to fill their ranks and train people capable of carrying Niigata Prefecture into the future even as Japan's birthrate declines and its population ages, and more and more of the shrinking pool of high school students seek higher education opportunities in colleges outside Niigata. Moreover, the results of a 2007 survey conducted to investigate how Niigata Prefecture high school students view nursing as a career pointed to the possibility that Niigata might face a shortage of nurses moving forward, revealing as it did that only 6.5% of respondents were interested in a career in nursing, and that only 60% of those wanted to go on to work locally.

In 2007, an expert committee established by Niigata Prefecture advised that its institutions of higher learning should, instead of trying to tackle such problems independently, "join hands loosely to address these issues together" by leveraging the merits of scale resulting from such collaboration. As a result, Niigata Seiryō University applied as representative for Niigata to the Strategic University Partnership Support Project launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) in 2008 to support the creation of university consortiums by public and private universities in a particular region. A plan titled "Contributing to Regional Development through Mutually Beneficial Intercollegiate Partnership on Short-Term and Comprehensive Measures to Secure and Train Human Resources for Niigata" that was submitted by Niigata Seiryō was approved by MEXT, and a total of ten Niigata-based public and private universities and junior colleges joined forces to create a partnership structure for implementing measures to nurture local talent.



CHALLENGE

The colleges participating in the partnership project were scattered throughout Niigata Prefecture, making gathering in the conventional manner for meetings difficult, and creating demand for a videoconferencing system that would surmount geographical hurdles.



SOLUTION

Seamless remote conferencing with HD quality video and sound delivered by a 9-unit LifeSize Room videoconferencing solution.



RESULTS

Use of LifeSize Room enabled savings in travel time and costs, and a previously unfeasible new level of partnership between universities. The universities are now exploring ways of applying the system to distance learning and other purposes.



Challenge

Niigata is the fifth largest of Japan's 47 prefectures. Long in its north-south axis, with much mountainous terrain, it is also a region of very high snowfall in winter. The most distant universities are separated by over 160 km as the crow flies, with travel between them taking over two hours on public transport. Busy university administrators responsible for partnership implementation in addition to existing duties were concerned about the time required to travel between universities and the difficulty in coordinating the schedules of participants. Travel costs were also seen as a probable major impediment to creating the environment for enabling university personnel to easily meet in person to exchange information.



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– YASUSHI MIKAMI, IT MANAGER, NIIGATA SEIRYO UNIVERSITY



Solution

The universities decided to deploy a videoconferencing system in nine locations as infrastructure for surmounting adverse geographical factors. They began to investigate choices in May 2008, and after comparing the systems of various makers, decided in October 2008 on LifeSize™ Room® as a system that enables really true-to-life communication with its HD quality video and sound. Another reason that they chose LifeSize Room's HD quality is the promise it offered not only for videoconferencing, but also for conducting remote classes and so forth between universities moving forward.

The nine university sites are connected to a multipoint bridge located in Niigata Seiryō University. LifeSize Room's flexible bandwidth support keeps any impacts on university network bandwidth to a minimum.

"At first, we were worried about the burden of the system on university network bandwidth, and were, before deployment, planning to control bandwidth use, but there's been no such need," says Yasushi Mikami, who is in charge of Niigata Seiryō University's IT systems and oversaw the videoconferencing system deployment. "Also, several of the universities hosting the videoconferencing terminals are on 1 Mbps ADSL connections, and so have only very limited bandwidth resources, but connections haven't broken, and I've been amazed at the clarity of both video and sound even under such circumstances. LifeSize's codec technology enables high resolution visuals even with low bandwidth, and I've found it really outstanding."





Results

The LifeSize HD videoconferencing system that went into operation at Niigata Seiryō and nine other Niigata universities in December 2008 not only saves each institution approximately \$330 USD per meeting in travel expenses, but has also enabled a previously unfeasible new level of partnership between the universities through monthly and other regular meetings. Achievements in the first year of the intercollegiate partnership thanks to the higher level of communications born between the universities and related facilities include the joint holding of events for high school students and active use of the system to exchange information on measures to combat novel influenza and prepare for disasters. The partnership that started with ten colleges has also expanded to 13 colleges.

“Differences in size, specializations and regional characteristics had made partnership between different colleges difficult up to now,” says Tomonori Furuyama, who proposed and planned the deployment of the videoconferencing system as the Niigata Seiryō University administrator in charge of the intercollegiate partnership project. “In the future we hope to make even greater use of the videoconferencing system not only for intercollegiate administrative meetings, but also for other activities to raise the quality of our institutions and their teaching and administrative personnel. More specifically, we’re thinking of activities such as joint administrator training sessions, joint open classes and other jointly arranged distance learning activities.”

The HD quality of the LifeSize Room videoconferencing system appears to be opening the way to a greater diversity of uses than conventional SD systems would allow.



Niigata Seiryō and 12 other Niigata Universities leverage video communication to surmount geographical hurdles.