

Technology Take-Off Conference: Achieving New Heights in Learning

On Thursday, November 3rd, "Technology Take-Off: Achieving New Heights in Learning" was held on the campus of the University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH at Hollaway Commons. A capacity crowd consisting of K-16 educators, and non-profit institutions experienced first-hand the power of video conferencing and Internet2 technology, and listened to a myriad of exciting speakers talk on the subject of enhancing learning through this technology.

Speakers included Lyonel Tracy, New Hampshire Commissioner of Education, who stressed, among other things, the importance of parents and teachers creating partnerships with kids to share how technology is being used. "We need to find a way to teach kids to use internet in meaningful ways," Tracy stated.

UNH Department of Education Chairman Scott Fletcher praised technology's inclusion in the classroom by stating that "technology helps breakdown barriers in the classroom. It also increases the capacity for students to learn through many unexplored perspectives."

An extensive presentation was exhibited by members of the Granite State Distance Learning Network (GSDLN). GSDLN consists of K-12 and non-profit groups who share valuable educational content through videoconferencing and high-speed Internet through the University of New Hampshire. Technology enhances access to content that otherwise would not be possible," said Kelly Clark, GSDLN Chair, New Hampshire Public Television. "For example, AP courses for students in schools that do not offer AP, virtual field trips to places like the symphony, the zoo, and other far away places, on-line professional development for educators. In addition, technology offers greater flexibility to the learner with on-line options and videoconferencing."

Ann Doyle and James Werle Internet2 representatives shared the benefits and uses of Internet 2 in the K-12 community. Those in attendance experienced a dance recital film clip during which live dancers shared the stage simultaneously with other dancers in a remote location displayed virtually on screens set up across a stage. Another clip focused on Megaconference Jr., the world's largest videoconference. School children participating from 29 US states and 7 countries around the world effectively shared their cultures with one another using high-tech videoconferencing equipment.

Conference attendees were also virtually transported to the depths of the Monterey Bay Marine Sanctuary Kelp Forest, where a diver spoke live via underwater videoconference while exhibiting several kelp forest residents, including a giant star fish, a crab and several underwater plants. James Chase and Todd Kent from the Seacoast Science Center arranged for this live presentation, and also answered questions about their facility in Rye, NH.

The conference also featured concurrent afternoon workshops which covered topics related to distance learning, including "Effective Videoconferencing to Improve Student Learning," (led by Sharon Sabol from GSDLN) "Technical Considerations for Successful Interactive Videoconferencing," (led by Doug Green, UNH Computing & Information Services) and "Science and Research Over I2" (led by James Koermer, Professor of Meteorology at Plymouth State University and Brian Calder from the UNH Center for Coastal and Ocean Mapping).

For more information on the Technology Take-Off Conference, please visit www.gsdl.org