



Jimma University expands syllabus and distance learning with Polycom video conferencing solutions



CASE STUDY

User:
Jimma University

Country:
Ethiopia

Industry:
Higher Education

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Background

Based in Ethiopia, Jimma University (JU) is a public institution of higher education established in December 1999 by the amalgamation of Jimma College of Agriculture (founded in 1952), and Jimma Institute of Health Sciences (established in 1983). The two campuses host over 20,000 students.

Challenges

As Ethiopia's first community-oriented institution of higher learning, JU has seen continuing growth in student intakes since its establishment. This growth demanded an expansion of teaching staff. Like many other developing countries, Ethiopia faces critical scarcity of teaching staff and skilled resources. This lack of skilled resource has resulted in university facing issues of delayed Semesters and Exams, late academic year, higher cost of teaching and related administration issues.

Solution

However, lacking the resources and the funds to transport lecturers or students on a regular basis, JU sought to realize a more cost-effective solution. In 2008, it decided to implement a comprehensive visual communication network that would allow them to communicate with other universities/governmental departments and conduct video lectures. Polycom was selected as the supplier.

According to Melkamu Dumessa, the University's Head of External Relations, when the University approached vendors, they based their selection primarily upon the quality of the product and the experience of the solution provider. It was on these criteria, added Dumessa that "Polycom outweighed all the other brands" and ultimately chose them to provide a comprehensive VC network.

In collaboration with FVC's team and its local Authorised Polycom Reseller, Africa Connect Ethiopia LLC, JU deployed Polycom's HDX9004 executive collection in 5 classrooms in its first phase. This system offered flexibility in terms of audio-visual integration, powerful functionality, future-proof technology and all the functions a video conference system should have.

JU also deployed Polycom's RMX2000 Real-time media conference platform to allow for multipoint conferencing with other campuses and connect more than 10-12 classrooms at the same time, thus expanding the universities capabilities for distance learning. Jimma University expands syllabus and distance learning with Polycom video conferencing solutions.





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“The system’s installation and integrating [it] with the university network initially created complications,” said Girum Ketema, the Director of the ICT Development Office at Jimma University. “However, with the kind cooperation of FVC and its local partner, the problem was overcome and the university’s staff were trained in the operation and maintenance of the system.” In addition, JU invested in Polycom RSS™ 2000 Centralized server to record and stream to students across the network and the Video Media Center™ (VMC™) 1000 to edit classroom material, syllabus etc and to develop an e-library for future reference.

Result

With this installation, JU can now be linked to 9 other universities of the country through a VPN network called ETHiopian Education and Research NETwork (or EthERNet), which is used for video conferencing. Prior to the installation of Polycom’s solutions, JU was using a system based on solutions from ZTE, China. According to Ketema, the quality of the previous system in use was poor, and hence they considered using Polycom’s solutions instead.

“The Polycom video conferencing systems are already connected to the university’s VPN network. We are currently considering interlinking our networks within the WOREDA¹ system, in order to expand our reach for distance-education students. I believe, among the major advantages of setting up the system, JU today not only saves time and money, but is also able to regularise schedules, syllabuses, and classes,” added Ketema.

Ketema continued, “The new system is absolutely fantastic and provides incredible video and voice quality for our users. Aside from allowing external professionals provide lectures via visual communication, the system has also brought unexpected benefits for the university, enabling us to expand our distance education program and offer short term training courses to the general public.” Meanwhile, according to Ketema, the new Polycom video conferencing system has already been used to broadcast the university’s graduation ceremony and the student research symposium to different locations within the university’s campus.

There are also future designs for the network. The University plans to deploy the system in five more classrooms this year (2009) and expand its syllabus to take advantage of the new systems’ capabilities. Ketema elaborates that the university plans “to expand the VC system to cover the entire university including new buildings”, although the time at which it becomes a reality is of course dependent on the university’s facilitation priorities.

¹ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Woreda>

