



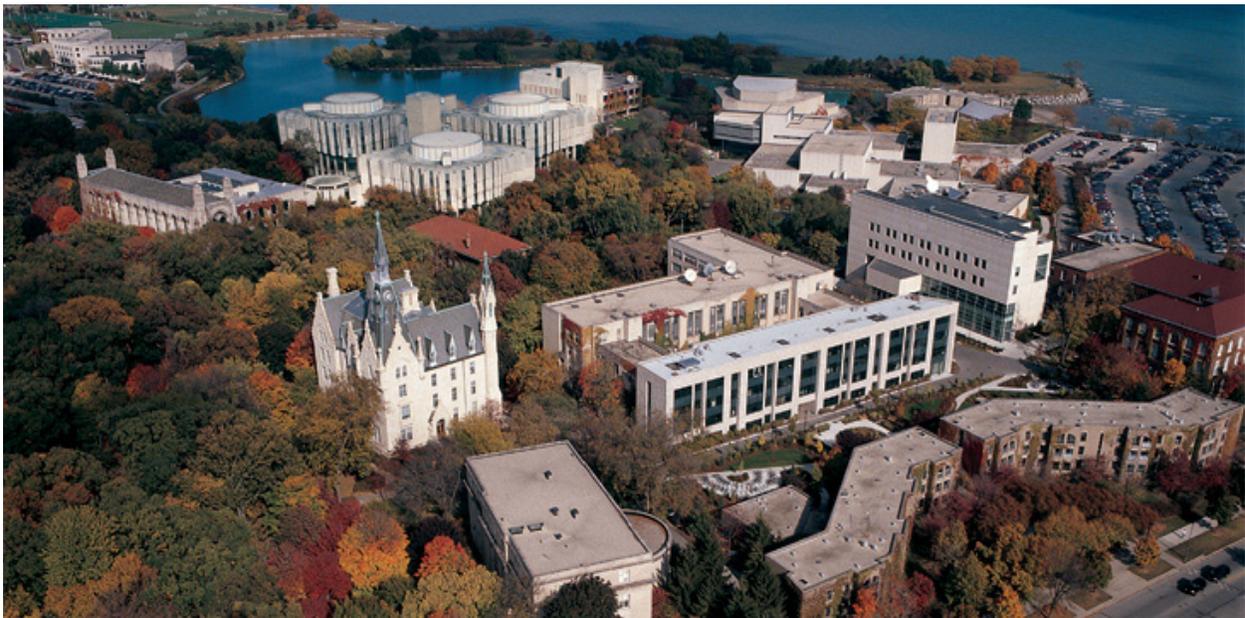
Northwestern University Grows Online Learning With PGI Audio-Integration



NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY



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Northwestern University (NU), founded in 1851 and headquartered in Evanston, Ill., comprises a student body of 21,000 attending from areas surrounding Evanston and nearby Chicago, as well as across the nation. To facilitate their rapidly evolving online learning programs, the research university uses a combination of independent learning and interactive audio and web conferencing sessions, which help them reach more potential students, increase engagement, improve student experiences and maintain high retention and graduation rates.

Departments like the School of Professional Studies offer degrees entirely online, which makes the university accessible to a wider variety of students. Others offer a mix of on-campus

and online learning, which helps ease commutes for students outside the greater Chicago area, as well as the schedules of full-time working graduate students. While students reap the benefits of better flexibility and productivity, NU maintains a competitive advantage by using technology to bring classrooms online.

“We reach students that otherwise wouldn’t have time or be able to reach campus, and we help them better communicate virtually, which is increasingly important to their professional futures,” Alyssa Dyar said, who helps transition and pilot new courses online for the School of Education and Social Policy, as well as orient students and faculty with new technology. “We’re seeing more universities doing the same thing.”



However, offering Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) only, the school's web conferencing tool left discussion-heavy, virtual classroom sessions without a critical component: reliable audio.

BUILDING A COMMUNITY OF ONLINE LEARNERS

"We want our online Northwestern students sitting at their computers wearing purple," dean of the School of Professional Studies once said about the future of online learning at NU. Since the piloting phase of NU's first online degree program, the university prioritized synchronous learning and two-way discussions over prerecorded lectures. Without connection and community, online learners may be prone to disconnecting and dropping out of courses.

"The challenge with synchronous online learning, though, is facilitating discussions that feel natural because that's essential to the content we teach," Dyar said. "Having webcams on and using headsets instead of speakerphones helps, but we still get background noise and people talking over each other, which keeps students from building relationships between peers and instructors."

Plus, students and faculty commonly experienced dropped connections on the VoIP-only web conferencing solution. Losing class time, momentum and opportunities to connect, NU needed an integrated audio solution to support synchronous online learning, better manage disruptions and guarantee seamless sessions.

After a large piloting phase within the central IT department, NU partnered with PGI in 2010 to implement GlobalMeet® Audio integration with

their web conferencing technology. Advanced audio control features within a single interface, a dedicated account team, 24/7 customer support and accommodations for NU's unique billing requirements put PGI ahead for audio integration.

SUPERIOR, HYBRID AUDIO UPGRADES WEB CONFERENCES

Many web conferencing solutions offer just that—web conferencing features—but not best-in-class audio. PGI has been a market leader in audio conferencing for nearly two decades.

GlobalMeet Audio offers superior, hybrid audio call quality with options to connect via VoIP, dial in or dial out. The solution provides security built for the enterprise, adds more robust functionality like "Mute All" and does it all within the web conferencing technology's native interface and controls, so hosts and attendees don't feel like they're navigating multiple solutions.



"The PGI integrated audio solution is pretty flawless. Students just type in their phone number, it pops up and there's not a lot for them to do. If someone can't get the code right, dialing out is really quick."

—Alyssa Dyar

Even when traveling abroad, NU students always have access to online courses because PGI offers expansive global coverage and mobility. While VoIP requires students to have a microphone to connect, speak and participate, PGI audio integration allows participants to call from any phone or mobile device for greater accessibility.



“We’ve really taken advantage of the integrated features. Being able to see who’s talking within the web conferencing interface is really helpful for identifying where background noise is coming from,” Dyar said, who often joins online classes as a facilitator to handle technical issues. “We encourage students to stay muted until they’re ready to talk, but if they don’t, I can mute them from the web conference without interrupting.”

GLOBALMEET AUDIO SUPPORTS ONLINE LEARNING GROWTH

Online learning ensures customers—students—don’t outgrow universities’ businesses. According to the Online Learning Consortium, college enrollment is expected to double by 2020. Online learning is a viable solution to accommodate the influx without flooding physical classrooms. Larger percentages of tech-savvy generations are also expected to be working, living off campus and continuously learning after 25; thus, 70.8 percent of universities feel online learning is critical to their long-term business strategies.

DID YOU KNOW:
About 12.5 percent of college students (21,147,055) enrolled exclusively in distance education in 2012, and 13.3 percent participated partially online.
Source: National Center for Education Statistics

As a part of NU’s long-term online learning strategy, GlobalMeet Audio:

Enriched Online Student Experiences: Prior to engaging with PGI for a hybrid audio solution, participants experienced occasional lapses in

audio if they weren’t connected to high-speed, wired Internet or didn’t have enough bandwidth to support VoIP. By optimizing connectivity with VoIP alternatives, NU improved online student experiences. Minimizing errors and maximizing opportunities for dialogue, the school provided a critical medium for relationship building, increasing commitment and comprehension.



“Students don’t have the Internet speed we have at Northwestern to ensure they stay connected on VoIP, and even on our university Internet, occasionally web conferences disconnect. But on a phone, our students never lose the conversation. It’s a really nice safety net.”
—Alyssa Dyar

More Value From Existing Investments:

Improving conversations without switching solutions, NU realized more value from their web conferencing technology with minimal additional investments of budget and resources. “We thought about using other audio options, like VoIP, from both a cost-saving and simplicity standpoint, but the audio integration really makes a huge difference in the quality of the call and the consistency through the session,” Dyar said.

Increased Versatility for Wider Uses: With better technology and reliable audio conferencing, NU found additional uses for their investments: expanding online orientation and information sessions with prospective students and connecting with remote and traveling faculty. “We always have faculty working from home or at a conference, so we use PGI audio to connect



them to our two-hour, monthly staff meetings,” Dyar said, who sets up meetings for instructors in the School of Education and Public Policy.

Better Adoption, Better Acceleration:

GlobalMeet Audio takes little time for setup and maintenance, which drives better adoption among faculty. Integrating PGI audio into a web conference is a simple process, and PGI offers 24/7 support and online consumer communities, which Dyar uses to quickly learn more about the features. Since it’s so user-friendly and glitch-free, instructors spend more time transitioning to online teaching formats than managing the technology, accelerating pilot programs. “Transitioning classes to online courses requires some adjustments for professors, but having integrated audio helps keep the technical errors down so they can focus on learning how to facilitate better online conversations,” Dyar said.

That ROI will continue to increase as online programs expand and as NU adopts synchronous audio-integrated web conferencing for more components of the online student experience.



“Audio integration is something I’d recommend to anyone offering synchronous online courses. I imagine VoIP quality would be exponentially worse for large classes especially. The more participants you have in a session, the more important that audio conferencing line becomes.”
—Alyssa Dyar

Northwestern University’s Success

Challenge

Northwestern University needed hybrid audio conferencing integration to get more value out of their VoIP-only web conferencing technology for synchronous online learning programs.

Solution

GlobalMeet® Audio integration from PGI added reliable dial-in and dial-out options and advanced call control to optimize live online learning.

Results

With reliable connectivity, more options to connect and user-friendly audio conferencing, the school improved online student experiences and grew their community of online learners.

ABOUT PGI

PGi is the world’s largest pure-play provider of collaboration software and services. PGI’s unified collaboration platform empowers business users and teams to connect, share ideas and manage projects with the simplicity and everywhere-access of the latest cloud technologies. PGI has a global presence in 25 countries, and its award-winning solutions provide a collaborative advantage to nearly 50,000 enterprise customers, including 75% of the Fortune 100™. In the last five years, PGI has helped over a billion people worldwide connect, collaborate and get work done—in teams, large groups and one-on-one. For more information, visit PGI at pgi.com.

