

On the information highway

UNBC is on the leading edge of technology

As the first completely new university to be built in Canada in 25 years, the University of Northern British Columbia has been able to install leading-edge technology into its Prince George campus. An important component of the University's integrated voice, data, and audio-visual system was showcased on Monday.

"UNBC is leading the pack by having fibre optics into the infrastructure," says university spokesman Rob van Andrichem.

Dynacom is the audio-visual part of the system, which was designed and implemented by BC Tel Advanced Communications. Based in Indiana, Dynacom is a leader in applying multimedia technology to the classroom environment. Although Dynacom systems have recently been installed in four Lower Mainland high schools, and a few American universities, the UNBC application is the most advanced to date. Twenty-three kilometres of fibre-optic cable has been laid throughout the Prince George campus, and the UNBC system has established a number of firsts, including:

- UNBC is the only university in North America to have fibre-optic cable servicing every classroom and laboratory.

- UNBC is the first university to have an integrated voice, data, and audio-visual system, that is run entirely on fibre-optic cable throughout its core campus.

"The chance to be a world leader is rare, but UNBC has had



Wired: Les Watkins of B.C. Tel shows off the heart of the audio-visual system, which allows students greater flexibility in how they can learn. ROB BIRON/FREE PRESS

the vision to create a state-of-the-art communication system on the campus," says Michael Chiu, UNBC telecommunications supervisor.

"Simply put, there is no other Canadian university with this kind of technology. We've designed a system which will help the faculty teach, and help our students learn."

BC Tel Advanced Communications was awarded the majority of a \$2.3 million contract in early 1994 to design and implement the integrated voice, video, and data system.

The heart of the audio-visual system is a video "head-end" room located in the Library, where all of the audiovisual equipment is housed. Panels located in every classroom and laboratory allow the instructor to control the sources located in the head-end room.

Other capabilities of the system include "broadcasting" activities in any one area of the campus to anywhere else on campus, and a message service which transmits information on student clubs, exam schedules, etc. to the social areas on campus.

New funding plan not generating much excitement

Starting in 1995 funding for education will be calculated by using what the provincial government calls a 'simpler' system, which will provide \$8.5-million to compensate rapidly growing districts. The superintendent of the Prince George School District, however, doesn't think the education system up here will reap any benefit.

Jim Imrich says he's not optimistic, even though the details remain to be fleshed out. "The early information that we have certainly doesn't indicate that we're going to in any way benefit from that funding. In fact, we'll be just holding our own because that \$8.5-million presumes that districts where there's this great influx of population have some kind of special operating costs related to that.

"Personally, I'm not convinced that's a legitimate argument but it certainly does not apply to Prince George."

The details are expected in the new year but Mr. Imrich expects the story to stay the same. "I presume we'll eventually hear early in the new year when we actually get our own school district information that's going to let us know where we're at," says Mr. Imrich.

"Until we actually see some of this translated into real action in the next budget which is for 1995-96...it's going to be hard for us to know."

Education Minister Art Charbonneau says the new system means general operating grants will be managed by both the ministry and the school district.

He says the province will "establish the overall budget and policy for education, and districts will be able to individually decide the best methods of delivering services and responding to the needs of students in their communities."

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