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Interactive TV

increasingly becoming a knowledge partner to postgraduate students

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Stellenbosch University (SU) is increasingly being considered as the country's first and foremost user and developer of telematic learning - the harnessing of satellite technology to facilitate synchronic interaction between lecturers and students. Inextricably part of the institutional vision, is the mission of ITE to make Stellenbosch University more accessible to a geographically scattered student population. Interactive telematic education is therefore an intrinsic part of the quintessential focus of Stellenbosch University.



The Interactive Telematic Education Division (ITE) in conjunction with academic departments are currently serving almost 1 600 postgraduate students with approximately 400 hours that have been broadcast in 2007 from the Stellenbosch studio to 28 classrooms countrywide. Stellenbosch University lecturers present their lectures from the studio in Stellenbosch.

Postgraduate students in the various classrooms in nearly all parts of the country can watch the lecturer on a television screen and also eventually communicate verbally with the lecturer. Students in all the various classrooms can follow the conversation between the lecturer and the participating student and also actively participate in such discussion. This technology-assisted interaction bridges distance and adds to high-quality teaching and learning.

Since 2000 telematic-assisted education had, according to Prof. Tom Park, Co-ordinator: Telematic Education, seen more than 2 200 students, of which 251 were master's students, obtain their postgraduate qualifications at the University.

One very important objective is to enable postgraduate students to participate, through the University's virtual campus, in affordable, quality academic programmes at a leading South African university. It is for this very reason that the decision was taken to significantly upgrade the technology that is used for satellite-based interactive telematic education over the next few months. It includes various exciting and user-friendly technologies, for example cellphone and smart card technology installed in the ITE classrooms, and the erection of two additional studios on other Stellenbosch campuses. These studios will be linked to the studio on the main campus.

According to Prof. Park telematic education embodies the SU's Vision 2012, which, amongst others, has as objective to contribute to Africa's scientific, technological and intellectual ability. Prof. Park states that it is not just all talk and no action, as talks are currently under way with various universities in other African countries to establish knowledge partnerships on the telematic platform.

Hopefully this project will now finally afford Stellenbosch access to the rest of our continent and in so doing make our University an important knowledge partner in Africa.

New technology that facilitates broadcasting of programmes from our studio to the personal computers or television sets of students has also been tested successfully. This has now unlatched exciting new learning opportunities for students in remote parts of our country, who are simply too far to benefit from the existing classrooms.

Private companies are increasingly becoming dependent on the University's telematic facilities to establish cost-effective and functional communication networks in their respective working environments. In 2007 nearly 100 hours were utilised for just this purpose. Prof. Parks states that through this initiative, ITE has now also become a very real role player in the development of the emerging South African society.

An interesting development is that the University of South Africa (UNISA) is now using Stellenbosch University's interactive telematic technology to broadcast their programmes to approximately 30 000 undergraduate students. This synergistic partnership with UNISA affords Stellenbosch the added benefit of now having access to a number of UNISA-classrooms across the country in areas that the US would otherwise never have been able to reach.

ITE has already had requests from international bodies to offer some of the University's short courses abroad through telematic technology.

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