



News Release

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December 26, 2008

NR08123

NMCC Foundation awards first instructional technology endowment grant awards with funds raised through major gifts campaign

Aroostook County - When Northern Maine Community College and the NMCC Foundation launched their first-ever major gifts campaign in February of 2007, one of the goals of the campaign was to create an endowment to purchase instructional technology. Through the generosity of several donors that initial goal was accomplished and the Foundation has recently awarded the first grants to faculty and staff through the Investing in Innovation Fund.

The fund was designed to provide NMCC students with experiential learning opportunities utilizing industry standard equipment and technology that would, in turn, ensure area employers have a pool of highly qualified employees. Applications for the first round of grant awards were prepared by faculty and staff over the summer and early fall and submitted to a committee comprised of NMCC Foundation board representatives, and College faculty and staff members.

“We received seven applications from various academic departments and programs that represented a cross-section of the campus community,” said Jason Parent, director of development and college relations and executive director of the NMCC Foundation. “The committee very thoroughly reviewed the applications and selected two projects for funding in this cycle.”

The first funded project supports the work of the NMCC Academic Success Center. A total of \$600 was allocated to purchase three pieces of equipment that will support learning of students from across campus. A scanner and accompanying text-to-speech software will, according to Laura McPherson, Academic Success Center coordinator, provide an important resource to the College community.

“The goal is to help students who struggle with reading. The text-to-speech software will enable them to highlight text from a textbook or the internet, which using the technology, can be read to them in a natural voice. The voiced text can then be downloaded onto an iPod or MP3 player for the student to listen to repeatedly for learning and memorization. The technology will certainly help improve retention and will serve to help students better develop reading skills,” said McPherson.

In addition to assisting students with reading, McPherson will also make the new technology available to all students as a editing tool for writing to scan their essays, which can in turn be read back to them to allow them to hear any areas of their writing that might need to be strengthened.

Aside from the scanner and related conversion software, the Academic Success Center also received grant funding to purchase the electronic Rosetta Stone Spanish language learning program to assist students taking the foreign language course offered by NMCC. McPherson says the instructional software will help “fill the gap” for students needing assistance at times when a Spanish tutor is not readily available.

The second project funded through the Investing in Innovation Fund provided \$400 for the purchase of two DigiMemo packages that will be used as part of a pilot project in the Business Technology Department, and more specifically for the office administration programs.

The DigiMemo is a notepad and digital pen that allows everything written or drawn using normal ink on paper to be become digitized, without the use of a computer or special paper. The written notes can then be transferred to a computer. The technology also allows users to connect directly to a computer. The on-line mode automatically transfers the writing to the computer.

“We are looking to develop a new curriculum and course for next fall. The DigiMemo provides cutting-edge technology that will allow students the opportunity to transfer notes into digital text. The units would first be used by medical office administration students with plans to expand their use to other students in the future,” said Ann Osgood, business technology department faculty member, who along with her colleague Paula York jointly applied for the funding.

“In the work environment it is not always practical or possible to take a laptop computer to meetings. The DigiMemo allows you to take what appears to be traditional notes and saves the step of having to manually type them,” said York.

The Investing in Innovation Fund was developed through the “Campaign for the County’s College” in response to what area business and community leaders told NMCC officials regarding the importance of educating and training the County’s future workforce using technology that was reflective of what was being used in area businesses, as well as what technology would be needed moving forward. The fund was also created to address the fact that budget cutbacks and the rising cost of energy have created significant challenges in the area of funding instructional technology.

“The College continues to strive to maintain not only technical currency but technical innovation in instruction, which is hard to do in this age of waning budgets for doing so. Technology moves so quickly, and these innovation funds are aimed at encouraging the faculty to place the newest technology in the hands of the students as soon as possible,” said Alan Panches, NMCC vice president and academic dean.

Applications for the Investing in Innovation will be solicited annually from members of the NMCC campus community. As was the case recently, a committee comprised of two NMCC Foundation Board Members, two College administrators, four faculty members, and two staff members will review the requests for funding.

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The Northern Maine Community College Foundation recently announced its first grant awards from the Investing in Innovation Fund that was created through the “Campaign for the County’s College.” Taking a moment to look at the instructional technology purchased with the funds awarded are (left to right) Alan Punches, NMCC vice president and academic dean; Richard Engels, NMCC Foundation board chair; Ed Nickerson, NMCC Foundation board member and representative on the Investing in Innovation Fund committee; Paula York and Ann Osgood, business technology department faculty and grant recipients; and Laura McPherson, NMCC Academic Success Center coordinator and grant recipient.